

Chinese Parents with Gay or Lesbian Children: Reflections, Experiences, and Family Relationships

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A thesis presented to

Western Sydney University

In fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

February 2022

Acknowledgement

There are many people whom I would like to thank for their contributions, both directly and indirectly, to this thesis. First of all, I would like to thank the School of Education and Western Sydney University for offering me the opportunity to write a PhD thesis. To my supervisory panel, my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja, and co-supervisor, Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman, I am extremely grateful for your patience and assistance, for consistently providing me with helpful feedback and encouragement throughout my thesis project. I would also like to thank my editor, Justine McNamara, with her professional expertise in copyediting, for helping me make my thesis look tidy and neat. Additionally, I would like to thank all of my participants who shared their stories with me in this study. I am grateful that they came forward to impart their experiences in order to amplify the voices of parents of gay and lesbian people in Chinese society and share the realities of managing family expectations as a young gay or lesbian person in China. I also would like to thank my partner Kandice Xincheng Cai for always being there to support and encourage me ; and my friend, Jin Lori Li, who spent many nights with me discussing the work of Foucault and Butler. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents; when everyone said to them: “a daughter does not need to study that much”, they continued to support me, both financially and emotionally, throughout my four-year PhD journey. Without their tremendous understanding and encouragement over these last four years, it would have been impossible for me to complete this thesis.

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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(Signature)

Table of contents

list of Tables	VII
List of Figures	VIII
A Glossary of Terms	IX
Abstract	XIII
Chapter 1 An Overview of Same-Sex Attraction in Chinese Society	1
Introduction.....	1
Same-Sex Attraction in China Prior to the 21st Century	6
Same-Sex Attraction in Ancient China (Prior to the 20th Century)	7
The Republican Period (1912 to 1949)	12
Morden China (1949 ~ 1999).....	14
Same-sex attraction in Contemporary Mainland China (from the 21st Century)	18
Other Influences on the Discourses around Same-Sex Attraction	20
Filial Piety	21
Binary Gender Roles and the Links to Chinese Gay Men and Lesbians	23
Yin-Yang and Heteronormativity	23
Hegemonic Masculinity and China’s Preference for Sons	25
Socially Ignored Lesbian Relationships	27
Cooperative Marriage.....	29
Low Visibility of Same-Sex Attraction in Mainland Chinese Society.....	32
Schools.....	33
Health Services	35

Media.....	35
Legal Discrimination	38
Conclusion	40
Chapter 2 Review of Literature	44
Introduction.....	44
Parents’ Reactions Towards their Child’s Coming Out	45
Coming Out to Parents in Western Contexts	47
Coming Out to Parents in Chinese Contexts.....	54
Chinese Gay Men, Lesbians, and the Family	55
The Impact of Filial Piety on Chinese Same-Sex Attracted Population.....	60
Chinese Parents’ Response to Their Child’s Sexuality	65
Coming Out to Parents in Chinese/Asian American Families	67
Coming Out to Parents in Hong Kong and Taiwan.....	71
Coming Out to Parents in Mainland China	74
Conclusion	81
Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework.....	83
Introduction.....	83
Discourse, Subjectivity, Identity, and Power	84
Discourse and Subjectivity.....	85
Power and Knowledge.....	89
Discipline, Surveillance, and Regulation	91
Cultural Extension of Social Discipline: Chinese Concept of Face	96
Heteronormativity, Invisibility, and Silence.....	99

Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Schools.....	101
Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Media.....	103
Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Families.....	104
Feminist Critiques and Extension of Foucault’s Work.....	107
Human Agency.....	109
Gender Performativity.....	111
Intersectionality.....	117
Conclusion.....	118
Chapter 4 Methodology.....	120
Introduction.....	120
Feminist Research Methodology.....	121
Positionality in Feminist Research and my Positionality.....	125
Taking Reflexivity into Account as a Feminist Researcher.....	131
Research Design.....	134
Undertaking In-Depth Interviews.....	134
Using a Semi-Structured Interviewing Approach.....	136
Undertaking Voice-Only Interviewing.....	137
Interview Schedules.....	139
Participants.....	141
Hard-to-Reach Populations.....	143
Sample.....	145
Research Process.....	147
Recruitment.....	148

Data Collection	152
Ethical Considerations	156
Data Analysis	158
Transcribing and Translating	158
Thematic Analysis	159
Conclusion	162
Chapter 5 Parents' Initial Reactions Towards Their Child's Coming-Out.....	164
Introduction.....	164
An Overview of Parent's Initial Reactions to Their Child Coming Out.....	166
Parents' Immediate Reaction: Denying the Child's Sexuality	168
Believing Same-Sex Attraction is a Disease or a Psychological Problem	169
Looking for Treatment.....	172
Other Avenues of "Conversion"	175
Believing Same-Sex Attraction is the Result of Emotional Immaturity.....	177
Being Same-Sex Attracted is Misbehaviour or a Bad Habit	179
Being Same-Sex Attracted is a Result of the Other	184
Being Same-Sex Attracted is "Just for Fun"	185
Believing the Child was Just Joking.....	189
Parents' Immediate Reaction: Sexualising Same-Sex Attraction.....	192
Parents' Immediate Reactions: Intersections with Different Subjectivities	195
Intersections with Generation and Traditional Education	196
Intersections with Access	200
Intersections with Gender	208

Conclusion	213
Chapter 6 Parents' Shifting Perspectives on Their Child's Same-Sex Attraction	215
Introduction.....	215
Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Parents' Self-Blame.....	216
Lack of Masculinity in the Family.....	217
Failing to Provide the Child with Sufficient Sex Education	223
Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Embarrassment and Concerns about Face	225
Parents' Difficulties in Facing Others.....	226
Parents' Actions in Face-Saving.....	230
Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Parents' Concerns about Their Child's Life	232
Fear of Social Discrimination Against the Child	232
The Double Discrimination Experienced by Lesbians in China	235
Parents' Insistence on the Necessity of Opposite-Sex Marriage.....	239
Compulsory Reproduction and Parents' Concerns for their Child's Future.....	242
Lack of Confidence in the Chinese Aged Care System.....	246
At the Time of the Interview: Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Sexual Orientation	248
An Overview of Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Sexuality at the Time of the Interview	249
Resistance: Overturned Prejudice, Acceptance, and Support.....	250
Increasing Exposure to, and Contact With, Same-Sex Attracted People.....	250
Improved Parent-Child Relationship	253
Changed Attitudes Towards Their Child's Future Life	254
Passive Tolerance and Compromise	256
Continuous Rejecting and Silencing (Silent Violence)	259

Conclusion	262
Chapter 7 Conclusion	264
Introduction.....	264
An Overview of the Study.....	265
Key Findings.....	267
Limitations.....	274
Implications	275
Recommendations	277
For Medical Institutions.....	277
For Educational Institutions.....	278
For Media	279
For Government	280
Future Research in the Field.....	281
Final Thoughts	285
References.....	286
Appendix A Interview Schedule.....	336
Appendix B Recruitment Advertisement Content	340
Appendix C Participant Information Sheet	344
Appendix D Consent Form.....	364
Appendix E Ethics Approval Letter	369

List of Tables

1. Demographic Details of Participant Group 1: Parents of Gay and Lesbian Adult Children
..... 146
2. Demographic Details of Participant Group 2: Adult Gay and Lesbian Children..... 147
3. Details of Social Media Platforms for Participant Recruitment in the Research ... 151

List of Figures

1. *Logical Network Diagram of Literature Review on Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Coming Out in Mainland China*viii

A Glossary of Terms

Coming out. This is a term that refers to the disclosure of one's non-heterosexual orientation to others. Throughout this thesis, this term will refer to the coming out of gay sons and lesbian daughters to their parents, and also to the coming out that parents undertake when they disclose their child's non-heterosexual orientation to their friends or to other relatives in the extended family.

Face. This term refers to "mianzi" in mandarin Chinese, which is a complex cultural concept, similar, yet never equivalent, to dignity, personal reputation, social image, and a sense of honour (J. Wang, 2016). Face is importantly connected with one's identity in China (Fischer & Tangney, 1995; He & Zhang, 2011).

Heterosexual/heterosexuality. Heterosexuality refers to a romantic and/or sexual attraction between individuals who are the opposite sex and will be used to explain individuals who are attracted to people of the opposite-sex. It is important to note that I personally criticise the binary system of sex, however heterosexuality is a term which the system of sex has binarized pre-determinedly.

Homosexual/homosexuality. Homosexuality refers to a romantic and/or sexual attraction between individuals who are the same sex, and was first translated into Chinese as

“tonglian’ai” in 1920, “Tong” literally means “same” or “homo” and *“lian’ai”* indicates “love.” However, the term subsequently became *“tongxinglian”* with “Xing” referring to “sex” and *“lian”* referring to “love.” Despite the fact that same-sex activities can be commonly found in ancient Chinese society, same-sex attraction was never a noun used for describing one’s identity in ancient China. In other words, there was no term to describe same-sex sexual orientation in China until the term “homosexuality” came from the West to China in the early 20th century. However, compared to heterosexual/heterosexuality which has been always positioned as the “normal” sexuality in society, the terms “homosexuality” or “homosexual” have increasingly become redundant in the West as the word is very medical and pathological, and carries problematic meanings which are much outdated (Peters, 2014). It is still commonly used by the media in China even though Chinese gay and lesbian people do not like using the adjective term “homosexual” (in Chinese: tong xing lian) to refer to themselves (Wu, 2003). Instead, Chinese gay and lesbian people are more likely to use “gay¹”, “lala/les²”

¹ The English term “gay” is in popular usage in Mainland China, but this term is predominantly used in relation to gay males.

² *Lala* and *Les* are both widely known Chinese slang terms for lesbians (Kam, 2012; Lo, 2020) and is in popular usage by lesbians in Mainland China.

or “tongzhi³” to refer to themselves. In this thesis, the term “homosexual”/ “homosexuality” will be only used to refer to associated legal dimensions in China since 1920 and in some participants’ quotations. Further, this term will be used with quotation marks throughout the thesis to indicate that it has some limitations.

LGBTQ/LGBT/LGB. This is an abbreviation which stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer”⁴ (and sub-groups within the community, as indicated), and will mainly be used in the background chapter and literature review chapter where I refer to people, or a community, of sexuality diversity.

Same-sex attracted. This term refers to people who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or pansexual. Despite that same-sex attracted and “homosexual” can be both used to refer to individuals who show same-sex sexual orientation and can be both translated

³ *Tongzhi* meant comrade originally, but this term has been quite commonly used for same-sex attracted individuals to refer to each other in Chinese-speaking societies (X. Wang, 2019).

⁴ The term “queer” is a word that traditionally has had negative connotations, such as “strange,” “perverse,” “odd,” and so on (Nielson, 2019). However, in recent decades, this term has been reclaimed and empowered as a positive identity word for referring to those who identify themselves as not heterosexual and/or outside of the traditional gender binary of male/female.

into “tong xing lian” in Chinese; “homosexual”/ “homosexuality” has increasingly become redundant in the West as the word is very medical and pathological. As this thesis is written in English, I will use the term same-sex attracted throughout to refer to individuals who have same-sex desires.

Sexuality diversity. This term is inclusive of all the diversity of (non-heterosexual) sexual orientations or sexual identities, without specifying a particular identity label.

Straight. This term is used sometimes as a synonym for heterosexual.

Abstract

Research from diverse contexts has shown the process of *coming out*, or disclosing a non-heterosexual subjectivity, can be a difficult, fraught experience for many (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Pistella et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2020; Tamagawa, 2018a, 2018b; Wei & Liu, 2019; Wong & Tang, 2004). The limited research to date on “coming out” in mainland China has primarily focused on the reflections of same-sex attracted individuals, highlighting how cultural norms can contribute to the marginalisation of identities of same-sex attracted sexual identity and add complexity to the process (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Kam, 2010; Lo, 2020; Ren et al., 2019; Xuan et al., 2019). While existing research has certainly advanced the conversation on this topic, virtually no research has explored the voices of *parents* of gay and lesbian people in mainland China and the ways in which their child’s coming out affected their lives and the parent-child relationship.

Understanding parents’ perspectives on their adult child’s sexuality is important. Firstly, it aids in appreciating the factors that might explain their struggle to accept their child’s sexuality, including the influence of dominant discourses of heteronormativity and familial responsibility in China. Additionally, these perspectives draw attention to the current tensions between more traditional Chinese cultural restrictions related to parent-child relationships and resistance to this dominant discursive power by younger generations.

In order to explore this phenomenon more fully, this doctoral research used, in the main, feminist post-structuralist and Foucauldian concepts (Foucault, 1978, 1991; Weedon, 1987), as well as related theoretical and cultural concepts. These include, but are not limited to, Butler's (1990, 1993a) notions of gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix, as well as the Chinese cultural concept of *face*.

Two groups of participants (*parents* of gay or lesbian adult children and gay and lesbian *adult children*) were recruited via online advertisements through targeted social networking groups. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Chinese mothers and 13 Chinese self-identified gay men and lesbians living in mainland China who were between 20 and 30 years of age. For parents, the interview was about their child coming out to them and the perceived ramifications of this; for the adult children, the interview focused on their reflections on their parents' reactions to them coming out. Each interview, conducted using the WeChat platform, explored parents' attitudes and behaviours, both initial and shifting, towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation; how they negotiated their relationships with extended family members or friends in relation to their child's same-sex attraction; and the parent-child relationship after the child's coming out. Thematic analysis was applied to the transcribed interview data. This technique helped to identify and analyse themes that emerged in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2009; Theron, 2015), including parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's coming out as well as relevant philosophical theories and cultural concepts.

Findings indicate that, initially, most parents expressed denial of their child's sexual orientation, followed by attempts to identify a "cause" of their child's same-sex attraction. Different kinds of prejudice and discrimination prevailed in parents' explanations of their experiences. In terms of parents' initial reactions towards their child's sexuality, it was found that the parents' knowledge about same-sex attraction was very limited and the belief in compulsory heterosexuality, which is highly influenced by traditional Chinese culture, remained deep-rooted. Additionally, findings highlighted Chinese parents' insistence on opposite-sex marriage and reproduction. However, rather than being focused on having grandchildren out of a more traditional Chinese demand for family continuity that has been highlighted in a number of existing studies (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Chou, 2000, 2001; Wong & Tang, 2004), parents in this study appeared more concerned about their own child being lonely and uncared for in their older years, due to their lack of confidence in the Chinese aged care system. The Chinese cultural concept of face was shown to play an important role in influencing parents' relationship with others with respect to their child's sexuality, as having a gay or lesbian child tended to make parents feel ashamed. Nevertheless, it is still encouraging to see that a small number of parents in the study changed their attitudes and started to support their child, resulting in a reported improvement of the parent-child relationship post-disclosure. However, in most families, passive tolerance, continuous rejection, and silencing on same-sex topics were reported.

Findings from this work point to the connection between increased societal visibility and recognition of sexuality diversity and an increase in parents' uncertainty, fear and

disappointment within the parent/same-sex attracted adult child relationship. While some narratives communicated stagnant and negative relationships that seemed as if they could not be repaired, others highlighted the growth and change that were possible with increased exposure to affirming information about sexuality diversity. Accordingly, a number of recommendations emerge from this work. First, exposure to and visibility of sexuality diversity in educational institutions should be increased, such as including knowledge of sexuality diversity in school curriculums and textbooks; this will not only improve individuals' recognition of sexuality diversity, but will also help prevent homophobic language and behaviour. Second, all types of gay "conversion" therapies in the medical and clinical service system should be banned, to clearly address the point that same-sex attraction is neither a disease nor a psychological problem that can be cured. Third, there should be an increase in affirming content related to sexuality diversity in the media. Finally, relevant legislation and policies should be established to acknowledge and protect the social rights of same-sex attracted people within society. Such moves could not only help to normalise same-sex attracted individuals and reduce homophobic discrimination and stigma, but also could improve the well-being and self-esteem of both same-sex attracted individuals and their parents.

Chapter 1 An Overview of Same-Sex Attraction in Chinese Society

Introduction

According to a nationwide survey which explored social attitudes towards sexual and gender diversity that was launched by the United Nations Development Programme in Beijing, despite mainland China being home to the world's largest population of gender and sexual minorities, the public visibility of people from gender and sexual minorities remained extremely low (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Only 5% of LGBTQ Chinese people living on the mainland had disclosed their diverse sexuality or gender identity to their family, friends or colleagues (United Nations Development Programme, 2016, p. 6). In keeping with these findings, many scholars have shown that, for Chinese same-sex attracted individuals, disclosing their sexuality to their parents is their most difficult challenge in life compared with coming out to friends or cousins (e.g., Chou, 2001; Sun et al., 2006; Shieh, 2010; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020; Wei & Cai, 2012; Zhao et al., 2016). China's deep-rooted cultural ideology, which embraces the social expectations of traditional opposite-sex marriage and familial continuity (Bie & Tang, 2016; Kam, 2010; Liu & Choi, 2006; Ren et al., 2019; Wong & Tang, 2004), is likely to blame for individuals' fears of parental rejection or disappointment.

In recent decades, both Chinese and international scholars have increasingly investigated same-sex issues in Chinese society, including general attitudes within society towards

sexuality diversity, and the experiences of gay and lesbian people. Scholars in the field have also noted the influence of culturally specific restrictions in relation to sexuality in China (Chou, 2001; Kong, 2016). Many have pointed out that the dominance of religious oppression in Western societies in relation to sexuality and, in particular, sexuality diversity (e.g., Harari et al., 2014; Potoczniak et al., 2009; Schnoor, 2006; VanderWaal et al., 2017) may not fully apply to the Chinese context. In China, religion is not a powerful force against same-sex attraction (Chou, 2001; Kong, 2010, 2016). Rather, it is China's unique cultural and political factors at specific historical times that have shaped the construction of, and perceptions about, same-sex attraction in Chinese society, and which have provided Chinese LGB civil rights movements with a totally different trajectory compared to that in the West (Chou, 2001; Kang, 2009; Kong, 2010, 2016; Liu & Ding, 2005; Martin, 2010).

The cultural norms reflected in traditional Chinese and Western histories leave important legacies, albeit in different ways, for the experiences of same-sex attracted people, and potentially affect the ways that parents perceive their child's disclosure of same-sex attraction, which is also the focus of this thesis. Hence, in order to contextualise this thesis, this chapter starts with an overview of China's historical movements, both social and political, from ancient Imperial China to contemporary Chinese society. However, it is important to note that Chinese culture and history are complex. This thesis cannot thoroughly detail same-sex attraction across the full trajectory of China's history; rather, a general cultural and historical background with respect to same-sex attraction is provided, attempting to concisely

present relevant contextual knowledge that illustrates the shift in discourses around same-sex attraction within the social discursive system at different times in China.

Prior to this, it is important to address the importance of the study. Previous research exploring homoeroticism and the experiences of same-sex attracted individuals in China has focused on three main areas of study. The first of these involves examination of documents and other media, including analysis of Sinophone homoerotic literature (e.g., Chiang & Heinrich, 2014; Liu, 2015; Martin, 2006; Moran, 2016), independent gay films (e.g., Yue, 2012; Zhou, 2014), and historical archives (e.g., Kang, 2009; Wu, 2003, 2004). The second main area of study is associated with pathology and public health, focusing on HIV, sexual safety, and psychological problems in sexual minorities (e.g., He et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2018; Koo et al., 2014; Wen & Zheng, 2019). The third area focuses on the experiences of same-sex attracted individuals in contemporary mainland Chinese society, mainly focusing on perceived social discrimination (e.g., Liu & Choi, 2006, 2013; Suen & Chan, 2020), coming-out experiences (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Kam, 2020; Wang, 2021; Wei & Liu, 2019), and experiences of entering into a cooperative (“fake”) marriage (e.g., Lo, 2020; Ren et al., 2019; Xuan et al., 2019). Among these three areas of investigation, a great deal of research has centred on same-sex attracted people’s considerations of and struggles with disclosure to their families, yet there are no studies that investigate the parents of these individuals. The small amount of information available about parents of Chinese same-sex attracted adult children is from independent news media writing about informal chats with these parents (T. L. Liu, 2018). In such cases,

information about parents' experiences was obtained through the reflections of their same-sex attracted adult children rather than coming directly from parents.

Hence, to contribute to addressing this gap, this thesis explores the experiences of this under-researched group in mainland China: parents of gay and lesbian adult children. As bisexual people and those with non-binary gender identities are more invisible in Chinese society than gay and lesbian people (Gray, 2014; Jin et al., 2020; Zhao & Huang, 2019), and they are also less likely to come out to their parents than gay men and lesbians (Jin et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2016), participant recruitment of such participants would be difficult. Hence, this thesis only focuses on parents of Chinese gay men and lesbians. Moreover, it is important to note that gay men's and lesbians' experiences are not universal, and nor are those of their parents. Each parent's different experiences have impacted their reactions towards their child's same-sex attraction and how they view sexuality diversity within society; and each gay and lesbian participant's different experiences have also impacted how their parents reacted in relation to their sexuality as well as their parent-child relationship.

Specifically, this research involved interviews with both gay and lesbian adult children and their parents, and the aims of this research were to answer the following research questions:

- What are Chinese parents' initial and shifting reactions towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation after their child's coming out?

- How does the parent-child relationship change, if at all, during the months and years after the adult child has come out?

With these two questions in mind, a third sub-question was woven into these two central analyses:

- How do Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian child negotiate their relationships with extended family members or friends in relation to their child's same-sex attraction?

It is worth noting that understanding parents' perspectives about their adult child's sexuality is important and this is also the significance of the current thesis research. Firstly, it aids in understanding the factors that might explain their struggle to accept their child's sexuality, including the influence of dominant discourses of heteronormativity and familial responsibility in mainland China. Additionally, these perspectives draw attention to the current tensions between more traditional Chinese cultural restrictions related to parent-child relationships and resistance to this dominant discursive power within younger generations, highlighting individual agency. With this knowledge, it is surmised that more parents of same-sex attracted adult children could stand up and support their children and help to promote the normalisation of sexuality diversity in contemporary Chinese society.

In order to better understand Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's same-sex attraction, and to provide a context for the study, this chapter provides an overview of same-sex attraction in Chinese society. The next few sections will address how discourses of same-

sex attraction are positioned within ancient, modern, and contemporary Chinese society, commencing with an introduction to Chinese traditional culture, particularly filial piety and Yin-Yang ideology, and how these have affected same-sex attracted people. Next, the contemporary social product of “cooperative marriage” (e.g., a heterosexual-appearing marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman) will be explained to further highlight family pressure on Chinese same-sex attracted individuals. Finally, the low visibility of same-sex attraction across China’s various central societal institutions, including schools, medical services, and the media, will be addressed, followed by a discussion of current knowledge about institutional discrimination against Chinese same-sex attracted people. This reveals how same-sex attraction has been socially positioned within contemporary mainland China and its possible implications on Chinese parents’ reactions towards their child’s same-sex sexual orientation.

Same-Sex Attraction in China Prior to the 21st Century

Although most same-sex attracted individuals still hide their sexuality in contemporary Chinese society due to fear of rejection and discrimination (United Nations Development Programme, 2016), both historical scholars and sexologists have provided rich evidence that indicates same-sex attraction was common and relatively tolerated in traditional Chinese society, if not fully accepted (Chou, 1997, 2001; Hinsch, 1990; Kang, 2009; Ruan, 1991; Wu, 2003). Wu (2003) indicates that until the 13th century, China had been fairly open towards

all aspects of human sexuality. Analysis of historical writings has shown that people who engaged in same-sex behaviours were not viewed by most citizens in ancient Chinese society as conducting a crime or engaging in sinful or immoral activity, and these people were not punished by law (Wu, 2003). This stands in contrast to Western trajectories, which—during the same historical period—frequently penalised same-sex behaviours, both formally through the law and informally through social exclusion and marginalisation (Ruan, 1991; Wu, 2003). Although Chinese people may have gossiped or made comments about individuals who engaged in same-sex sexual behaviours, the historical literature rarely documents any legal or other concrete negative actions taken against them by the ruling classes (Chou, 2001).

Same-Sex Attraction in Ancient China (Prior to the 20th Century)

Given China's long history of imperialism, patriarchy, and classism (Bian, 2002; Menke, 2017; Sangwha, 1999), historical records have in the main recorded same-sex activities of upper-class males, including emperors, wealthy lords, and elites (Wu, 2003). Chou (2001) indicates that this tolerance of male same-sex behaviours was commensurate with Chinese power hierarchies; male same-sex behaviour was a common tendency among the elites of the past. For instance, anal sex between an emperor or an upper-class wealthy lord with a lower-class young man was widespread according to historical records (Fann, 2003; Liu & Ding, 2005; Wu, 2003). In other words, for a male emperor or a member of the wealthy upper-class elite, his sexual desires or entanglements with both women and young men were viewed similarly. Chinese historical archives have preserved an abundance of records which document same-

sex conduct of emperors and ministers during the Han Dynasty (the second imperial dynasty of China, 206 BC – 220 AD). Historical records show that nearly all emperors of the Western Han Dynasty⁵ had same-sex lovers (Wu, 2003). Similarly, “the History of the (former) Han Dynasty” (Wu, 2003, p.120) confirms the extraordinarily common tendency for same-sex behaviours among the wealthy classes of ancient Chinese society.

Chou (2001) argued that same-sex sexual behaviour was only judged as “wrong” or “taboo” when the social hierarchy was challenged; otherwise it was simply regarded as a representation and confirmation of one’s social power in society. Chou (2001) further emphasised that, compared to the West’s religiously motivated prejudice where all manifestations of same-sex desire were considered sinful and morally wrong, China’s history of same-sex attraction is distinct in that judgement was differentiated on the basis of class and sex. Thus, same-sex relationships between upper-class males were able to be established without being condemned or negatively judged in Chinese ancient society, though Chinese culture has never formally supported same-sex attractions or behaviours (Vitiello, 2011).

⁵ The Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) consisted of two separate periods: the Western Han or the Former Han (206 BC – 9 AD) and the Eastern Han or the Later Han (25–220 AD).

Accordingly, the term *same-sex attraction* was never a noun used for describing one's identity in ancient China—the concept of sexual orientation, which categorises people by the gender of the people to whom they are attracted, such as having a gay or lesbian identity, had never existed (Chou, 1997; Zheng, 2014). Rather, the term was used as an adjective, tending to be a social term rather than a sexual term, and representing only a type of behaviour (Chou, 1997, 2001). At this time, the concept of same-sex attraction was not publicly discussed or framed as a complex social issue or the basis of controversial debate, and little attention was given to exploring the “cause” of same sex attraction and behaviours (Wu, 2003). Furthermore, scholars have argued that ancient Chinese society had never classified people into binary categories based on their same-sex or opposite-sex attractions (Chou, 2001).

Rather, a number of allegoric and poetic terms used in the context of same-sex attraction were developed at this time and, importantly, these conveyed no sense of social discrimination or moral condemnation. These include terms such as “*Duan Xiu*” (cut sleeve) and “*Fen Tao*” (shared peach), and a few terms used to describe same-sex sexual acts between men, for instance, “*Hou Ting Hua*” (backyard flower) (Wu, 2003). These aesthetic expressions were all inspired, created and spread from real-life stories of historical romantic relationships between emperors or wealthy lords and their young male lovers (Hinsch, 1990; Wu, 2003). However, none of these terms were seen to represent facets of the individual's identity. Therefore, being same-sex attracted was more likely to be understood as an optional lifestyle in Chinese culture; that is, same-sex behaviour was not considered to be driven by people's nature and inherent sexual orientation, but by people's situational choices or

interests (Chou, 1997). Interestingly, even within this more “positive” framing, heterosexuality was still assumed to be the only “natural” sexual orientation by default, while same-sex attraction was viewed as a form of extra sexual “entertainment” that existed outside of heterosexual marriage. Although, as outlined, people who engaged in same-sex activities had never been severely punished in ancient Chinese society (Chou, 2001; Wu, 2003), it was nevertheless sexualised and positioned, in comparison to heterosexuality, as frivolous, inferior, and optional.

For centuries, same-sex sexual behaviours between men were a sort of “grey area,” rarely discussed or considered by the public (Chou, 2001). This is because, first, almost every person during that time got married and had children for the sake of family continuity, due to the essential requirements of marriage and procreation embedded in traditional Confucian ideology (Wu, 2003). Hence, as long as people had fulfilled their social obligations to their family, men engaging in same-sex behaviours rarely experienced social stigmatisation or moral condemnation from the public (Kong, 2016). Second, ancient China was also an extremely patriarchal society and class polarisation was obvious. Accordingly, it was not the place of common people to judge and interfere in the same-sex behaviours of the elite classes, as the strict classism in ancient Chinese society meant ordinary people had no rights to comment on the behaviours of upper-class people (Chou, 2001; Fann, 2003; Wu, 2003).

Unsurprisingly, given the sexist nature of traditional Chinese society, same-sex attraction and behaviours between females in ancient China has been largely ignored within historical

archives (Wu, 2003). This is because, in traditional patriarchal Chinese society, women were never treated as legal subjects and were rarely seen outside their homes (Gao, 2003). However, scholars have argued that it is precisely because women hardly ever stepped into the outside world and had little chance to communicate with society and even with the other sex, same-sex tendencies between women developed naturally and easily (Ruan, 1991). For instance, same-sex relations between maidservants in the imperial court or in wealthy families was one of the common female same-sex relationships in ancient China (Wu, 2003). Same-sex behaviours between Chinese females in ancient Chinese society likely existed, but there is a dearth of literature about such relationships compared to the relatively large amount of evidence about same-sex behaviours between Chinese males.

Academic researchers have also pointed out that due to the long-term invisibility and neglect of Chinese females' same-sex attraction and behaviours in the mainstream social culture, the general social attitudes toward lesbians have not evolved across the historical trajectory in the same way as attitudes toward gay men (Huang, 2017). Same-sex relations or conduct between two women has never been publicly illegal and is rarely openly judged, as these relations have never been identified as worthwhile attachments or actual social threats (Ruan & Bullough, 1992). Intimate attachments between two females have been commonly considered as being a reactionary response to violence or neglect by males or as resulting from a lack of males available for sexual encounters; that is, a compromised, second-best form of sexual relationships (Ruan & Bullough, 1992). In fact, Huang (2017) emphasises that

this lack of social recognition of lesbian relationships still remains in contemporary mainland Chinese society, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Republican Period (1912 to 1949)

In the mid- to late 19th century, the late period of the Qing Dynasty (the last imperial dynasty in the history of China), the national tolerance of same-sex attraction began to fade in mainstream culture because of the impact of modernity in China (Hinsch, 1990). Due to China's losses in most wars against the West and Japan (e.g., the First Opium War and First Sino-Japanese War), China became a semi-colonised country in the early 20th century (Kang, 2009). The national government, which was led by the Chinese imperial family, remained weak and rapidly lost control of the country, including customs and trade (Ladds, 2016). The nation fell into crisis immediately, and Chinese people were consequently treated as second-class citizens (Kang, 2009). During this time, Chinese people were shocked by the sophisticated weapons and munitions held by other countries and realised that Western and Japanese advanced technologies posed a serious threat. Accordingly, a series of "Westernisation" movements that encouraged people to learn Western progressive technology and knowledge were launched in the nation (Gao, 2004; Kang, 2009; Modongal 2016). Simultaneously, the sovereignty of the Chinese imperial family was overthrown, and the nation ended its long history of imperial eras with the establishment, from 1912, of the new government—the Nanjing Republican Government (Young, 1983).

As a result, Western ideologies related to sexuality and sexual conduct were also introduced in China, including terms such as “homosexual” and “homosexuality” (Kang, 2009). As mentioned before, terms that were used to describe same-sex sexual behaviours in ancient Chinese society were never considered to represent an individual’s identity, though they were very common in ancient China (Chou, 1997; Zheng, 2014); thus, terms such as “homosexual” or “homosexuality” used to represent people’s identity are actually relatively new concepts for Chinese people. According to one of China’s famous sexologists, Zhang Beichuan, “homosexuality” was first translated into Chinese as “*tonglian’ai*” in 1920, “Tong” literally means “same” or “homo” and “*lian’ai*” indicates “love.” However, the term subsequently became “*tongxinglian*” with “Xing” referring to “sex” and “*lian*” referring to “love.” Nevertheless, terms such as “gay” or “lesbian” are relatively modern words that have only appeared in more recent decades (Sun et al., 2006).

Same-sex attraction was pathologised as a mental disorder in the West during the early 20th century (Drescher, 2015; Kang, 2009). During that same time period (1920s to 1930s), a group of Chinese scholars and writers in urban areas began to actively and intentionally stigmatise same-sex attraction, viewing it as a disruptive social disease capable of corrupting the nation and threatening Chinese evolution (Kang, 2009). Nevertheless, these groups of people were not those who advocated Westernisation in the country; rather, they were cultural conservatives who persisted in preserving Chinese traditional Confucian culture because they believed this would save their nation. They stigmatised both male and female same-sex relations, even blaming the latter on Western-style women’s education (Kang, 2009).

According to their perspective, modern (Western) education was responsible for bringing new sexological terms to Chinese females, subsequently leading to increases in female same-sex attraction across the nation (Sang, 2003). Although same-sex conduct was never criminalised or publicly penalised during the Republican period (1912–1949), it can be seen that the official discourses and social attitudes towards same-sex attraction and behaviour had begun to shift, and burgeoning homophobic discourses had spread into the mainstream social culture.

Morden China (1949 ~ 1999)

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, mainland China experienced almost 30 years of isolation without any access to information from the West, as Western civilisation and capitalism were perceived as corrupt (Wehrfritz, 1996; Wu, 2003). Sex was strictly repressed during Mao's time (from 1949 to 1976), and same-sex attraction and behaviour was treated as a kind of deviance imported from the Western world (Wehrfritz, 1996).

As a result, information about same-sex relationships or behaviours from outside the country was rarely reported in China (Ruan, 1991), despite the fact that rights-based grassroots and political movements were occurring in various locations throughout the West. The few news stories or other information from the outside world with respect to same-sex attraction were limited to those that negatively described such relationships as evidence of social decline (Wu,

2003). It is argued by Chinese scholars that this period was the hardest time for Chinese same-sex attracted people, as they were entirely isolated (Ruan, 1991; Wu, 2003). In addition, the Chinese government started to persecute people who showed tendencies towards same-sex attraction. Beginning in the 1950s (Hung, 2011), suspected same-sex attracted people who engaged in same-sex sexual conduct were imprisoned (Hung, 2011). The situation was further aggravated during the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when suspected same-sex attracted people were sent to the country's labour reform camps for "re-education," publicly humiliated and tortured, banished to the rural countryside, or sent to psychiatric clinics for electric shock therapy (Hung, 2011; Wu, 2003). In extreme cases, some were even executed (Laurent, 2005), depending on the current political atmosphere and attitudes of the authorities (Wu, 2003).

In 1978, "homosexuality" was formally classified as a sexual disorder in the first version of the Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders (Wu, 2003). In 1979, the term "hooliganism" was first introduced in Article 160 of the Criminal Law. Practices other than traditional monogamous marriage, including extramarital affairs and premarital sex, as well as sodomy, were behaviours classified as hooliganism (Li, 2006; Wu, 2003). According to historical accounts, many males and a few females were punished due to their "hooligan" behaviours (Li, 2006; Ruan, 1991). Hence, at that time, same-sex attraction was a taboo and something people could not discuss publicly (Worth et al., 2019).

Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, “homosexuality” was viewed as either a mental disorder or a form of hooliganism, or both (Kong, 2016). From this point forward, it appears that the general social atmosphere and official attitudes toward same-sex attraction have continued to shift. Discourses surrounding same-sex attraction and associated behaviours became stricter and more negative, which contributed to the construction of social discrimination and prejudice towards same-sex attraction in Chinese society. Through this multi-decade timeframe, people’s attitudes towards same-sex attracted individuals were likely to be shaped by how same-sex attraction was constructed.

The Great Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and mainland Chinese society has continued to develop and change at a rapid pace. In the decades since the “Reform and Opening-Up Policy” was initiated by the Chinese government in 1978, much has changed in China’s economic, political, social, and cultural landscape (Yang & Zhao, 2015). The series of reforms has included agricultural de-collectivisation, the creation of a socialist market economy, and the enhancement of social mobility, modernisation, and internationalisation (Kong, 2010, 2016). Although these changes have led to some negative consequences, including intensified social conflicts and social inequality, they have also brought an emphasis on personal choice and consumption as well as reduced monitoring of personal life (Kong, 2016).

The opening-up policy has promoted the creation of new social spaces for romantic interactions for Chinese people, especially for young people (Jeffreys, 2006). Information from outside of China has become accessible to Chinese people; thus, values and norms

associated with intimacy and sexuality have been endowed with new meanings and Chinese people have come to have more freedom and private spaces to pursue sexual pleasure (Jeffreys, 2006). For instance, sex work and pornography have become visible and more developed. Moreover, practices of premarital sex or cohabitation before marriage have substantially increased, along with extramarital affairs and divorces (Xiao et al., 2011). At the same time, LGBTQ communities from Hong Kong and Taiwan have started to appear in modern cities in mainland China (Kong, 2010).

However, the social recognition of same-sex attracted people in the mainstream culture remains weak, especially with respect to same-sex relationships between females. Norrgard, a freelance writer and lesbian activist from Seattle who speaks Chinese, shared her story during her approximately 10 years of experience living in China around the 1980s. Norrgard (1990) claimed that she never met any women who identified themselves as lesbian during her stay in China. In Chinese society in the 1980s, same-sex conduct, such as sodomy, particularly between males was still illegal and positioned within hooliganism in the national law. This contributed to the invisibility of lesbianism in Chinese society and mainstream culture. A young friend of Norrgard in Beijing gave her an impressive example to demonstrate this ignorance about and absence of female same-sex attraction in China: two young women were arrested simply because they intended to register their same-sex relationship with China's official Marriage Bureau. This story appears to show that these two young women were never aware that female same-sex attraction was also taboo during that period, because it was simply not mentioned (Norrgard, 1990).

Despite this, since the late 1990s many significant social and political shifts concerning “homosexuality” have occurred. Hooliganism, as an illegal act, was removed from the law in 1997, evidence of decriminalising same-sex conduct. In 2001, “homosexuality” was also declassified as a mental disorder by the Chinese Psychiatric Association, indicating that “homosexuality” was officially de-pathologised (Wu, 2003). Same-sex topics have become gradually discussible; domestic non-government organisations which support gender and sexuality diverse individuals have also launched in mainland China, along with various online community forums (Kong, 2010). However, despite these online voices which support sexuality diversity, generally speaking sexuality diversity is highly censored by the government. While sexuality diversity is increasingly visible and able to be articulated, visibility remains low in China even today, as discussed later in this chapter.

Same-sex attraction in Contemporary Mainland China (from the 21st Century)

Since the beginning of the 21st century, China has become more globalised and international, with a rapid growth in the national economy. Accordingly, same-sex topics have been able to be more openly discussed in society; however, social stigmatisation and legal discrimination remain (Hung, 2011; Liu & Choi, 2006; Liu et al., 2020; Liu & Ding, 2005; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020; Wang, Yu, Yang, Li, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019).

It is worthwhile noting that the first official recognition by the Chinese government of the existence of gay men was in 2003, during the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic (Na & Detels, 2005). In order to prevent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infections, the government began to pay some attention to men who have sex with men. As a result, many domestic scholars began to explore same-sex issues, specifically with a focus on men, and with their work mostly positioned under the category of public health with a special focus on the risks of same-sex sexual behaviours (Kong, 2016). Although the AIDS crisis brought the gay male community into public view, it also brought stigmatisation and discrimination towards the community as the public started to link HIV closely with being gay. This strong association still has not been eliminated in today's mainland Chinese society (Sun et al., 2006).

At present, the Chinese Central Government's attitude towards sexuality diversity is largely to ignore its existence. In other words, the government tends to "turn a blind eye" to sexual minorities. Hung (2011) explained the "three-Nos" approach to describe the general national attitude toward same-sex attracted people in China. This is the "no approval, no disapproval, and no promotion" approach (Hung, 2011, p. 379). This means there is neither a form of legal recognition, nor specific laws to protect same-sex attracted people from social discrimination in the country (Hung, 2011). Hence, it can be seen that discourses around same-sex attraction continue to shift within society. However, while same-sex attraction has been officially decriminalised and de-pathologised, the visibility of sexuality diversity remains low within society. Such invisibility and silencing undoubtedly influences Chinese individuals'

perspectives towards same-sex attraction and same-sex attracted people. Therefore, understanding the historic trajectory of the discourses which surround same-sex attraction in Chinese society is important, as this knowledge helps to better understand Chinese parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation within this research project.

Other Influences on the Discourses around Same-Sex Attraction

To understand the historic trajectory of same-sex attraction in Chinese society, it is also important to note various culturally contextual influences on the discourses around same-sex attraction in contemporary Chinese society, including filial piety and the belief in compulsory binary gender roles. Hildebrandt (2019) argued that China's society remains traditional, and this is partly due to the influence of Confucianism. The concepts of family and filial piety continue to be deep-rooted in the mainstream culture, and the central societal values are clearly heteronormative ones, as evidenced by near-universal expectations of marriage and child-bearing (Eklund, 2018). In the next few sections, the concept of filial piety and family pressure on Chinese same-sex attracted adult children will be explained, followed by a discussion of the social expectations of binary gender differences and their impact on gay men and lesbians in China.

Filial Piety

Filial piety, which refers to the root of all morals and social values in China (Tsai et al., 2008), has a central ideology of opposite-sex marriage and family continuity (Eklund, 2018). Even if Chinese society has become more open to alternative lifestyles such as cohabitation before marriage, late marriage or divorce, the expectations of traditional marriage and procreation for family continuity remain strong, especially for traditional older generations (Hildebrandt, 2019; Kong, 2016). As a result, opposite-sex marriage and reproduction are framed as obligatory, otherwise a person is not seen as filial; to refuse marriage and child-rearing is regarded as immoral in traditional Chinese ideology (Hildebrandt, 2019; Liu et al., 2018; Shi et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). This stands in sharp contrast to the highly individualistic culture in the West, in which marriage and the decision to have children are framed as personal choices (Glenn, 1996).

Moreover, filial piety requires the younger generation to respect their parents (Tsai, 1999). Though scholars have pointed out that filial piety in China has shifted from children's complete obedience to parental authority to reciprocal support between the parent and their child (Q. Liu, 2018), data shows that Chinese parents still have substantial authority in their child's marriage, including when to get married and who to marry (X. Wang, 2019; Zhang & Kline, 2009). Such parental authority implies that Chinese same-sex attracted individuals will have difficulty in coming out to their parents, as they may disappoint their parents and violate their parents' expectations (Chou, 2001; Bie & Tang, 2016; Wong & Tang, 2004).

Furthermore, filial piety also emphasises children's duty to take care of their parents when parents become old (Liu & Huang, 2009; Zhang, 2016). However, due to the rapid social and economic development in mainland China, most young people from regional or rural locations leave their hometown and immigrate to urban cities. Such social change has resulted in a weakened role of family care (Han et al., 2020). The aged care system in mainland China has not been well-developed (Han et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2016) and most elderly people in China are still expected to rely on care from their family members as the first priority (Liu et al., 2016). Such pervasive ideas about children taking primary responsibility for the care of their parents have also influenced contemporary Chinese same-sex attracted adult children. That is, they may be encouraged and persuaded by their families to get married and have their own children in order to secure their own well-being in old age (Hildebrandt, 2019).

Hence, many scholars have consistently reported that it is family pressure rather than social discrimination, religious oppression, HIV issues or government repression, that has been the greatest challenge and the main barrier for mainland Chinese same-sex attracted people over the last few decades (Bie & Tang, 2016; Chou, 2001; Hildebrandt, 2019; Liu & Choi, 2013). In other words, due to family pressure, most same-sex attracted individuals in mainland China choose to conceal their sexual orientation from others and even conform to heterosexual life patterns, including getting married to a person of opposite-sex and having children. The fact that only 5% of LGBTQ people in China have come out to others (United Nations Development Programme, 2016) also resonates with this. Therefore, understanding Chinese parents' attitudes towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation is important; positive parental

reactions could enhance their same-sex attracted adult child's confidence and lead to improved self-esteem, while negative parental reactions could result in psychological trauma for these adult children and the concealment of their sexual orientation, which will be further discussed in the next chapter (D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2009, 2010).

Binary Gender Roles and the Links to Chinese Gay Men and Lesbians

It is worth noting that hegemonic heterosexuality not only positions heterosexuality as the only "normal" sexual orientation, but it also requires binary gender differences (Butler, 1990; Piantato, 2016; Ward & Mann, 2012). In China, the concept of binary gender differences has been traditionally deep-rooted. Thus, in this section, traditional beliefs about binary gender differences and how these link to people's attitudes towards gay men and lesbians will be explained.

Yin-Yang and Heteronormativity

As previously mentioned, Chinese traditional culture is highly influenced by Confucianism, and Confucian ideologies remain influential in people's social behaviours (Ahmed & Jieli, 2017). Apart from filial piety, which emphasises traditional marriage and reproduction, Confucians also believe that everything is composed of Yin and Yang (Yun, 2013). Yin and Yang are seen as two opposing principles in nature that maintain the harmony of social objects (Raphals, 1998); etymologically, the former refers to the shady side of the mountain, while

the latter refers to the sunny side (Rubin, 1982). In human interactions, Yin traditionally indicates women, femininity, and the subordinate while Yang traditionally means men, masculinity, and the ruler (Yun, 2013). When Yin meets Yang, human nature can be harmonious and balanced. In other words, human reproduction symbolises the compulsory combination of Yin (femininity) and Yang (masculinity) (Logan et al., 2019). Hence, the ideology of Yin-Yang underpins the essentiality of binary gender difference, opposite-sex marriage, and reproduction. Such ideas also inform the belief that heterosexual marriage is the only legitimate form for an adult romantic partnership in traditional Chinese culture, highlighting the value of marriage and the meaning of a family (Yun, 2013).

With the deep-rooted Yin-Yang philosophical ideology, the dominance of heteronormativity and the concept of binary gender roles has been further reinforced. According to traditional Chinese ideology, men and women are consequently socialised to act in accordance with their role in life (Xie & Zhu, 2009). Sons are expected to be “macho” and take responsibility to continue the family line while daughters are educated to be gentle and submissive, and to take up the burden of child-rearing as well as supporting their husbands (Xie & Zhu, 2009; Yang, 2010). This mainstream heterosexist ideology has had a huge influence on how, in general, heterosexual people imagine same-sex attracted people’s private lives and behaviours. Similar to stereotypes that developed within the West, gay men are often regarded within the conventional stereotype as interchangeable with straight women and are frequently labelled as more feminine and softly spoken, with an effeminate style of behaviour (Dunn et al., 2015; Hoang, 2019). Lesbians, on the other hand, are often depicted as more

“mannish,” such as sporting very short haircuts, wearing men’s clothes, or undertaking breast-binding (Fung, 2021; Martin, 2006). However, not every gay man behaves “femininely” and not every lesbian performs their gender in a traditionally “masculine” way. Such deeply ingrained stereotypes about gender roles are shaped by traditional Yin-Yang ideology and gender binarism; that is, one individual in a romantic/sexual relationship needs to be dominant and masculine while the other is expected to be subordinate and feminine. Such belief resonates with Butler’s (1990) work on the heterosexual matrix, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Hegemonic Masculinity and China’s Preference for Sons

As with many other parts of the world, in China, individuals who express their gender identity in ways that are not aligned with their socially expected gender performances are likely to be considered as deviant (Hoang, 2019; Zheng, 2015). This is because China, similarly to many Western societies, celebrates “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 2005, p. 77), which is defined as the “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). In other words, hegemonic masculinity assumes there is only one “right” and “appropriate” way to be a man, with all other forms of masculinity viewed as inferior. Within this hierarchy, gay men who are viewed as effeminate are at the bottom. As can be seen in most Chinese families, it is shameful for parents if their son loses his masculinity and behaves or speaks in a feminine

way, or seems feminine (Z. Li, 2020). Moreover, being called feminine or a “sissy boy” has abusive connotations within the mainstream ideology in contemporary mainland China (Wang, Yu, Yang, Drescher, et al., 2020) and those men who behave or speak in a feminine way are often devalued and negatively judged regardless of their sexuality (W. Wang, 2019; Zheng, 2015). However, it is important to note that hegemonic masculinity not only regulates men’s gender performance, with effeminate men and gay men considered as inferior to heterosexual men, but this concept also oppresses women, securing the dominant position of the husband or father in a familial organisation (Connell, 1987; Gough, 2006; Jewkes et al., 2015).

Hence, in China, as mentioned before, sons are expected to marry and have children to carry on the family line because only males have rights to inherit the surname of the family; daughters are expected to leave their original family home and move into that of their husband once they have married (Gao, 2003; Settles et al., 2013). In other words, a Chinese woman is expected to obey her father before she has married and obey her husband after she has married. Even in contemporary mainland China, the main social atmosphere still tends to communicate a preference for men and constructs women’s role as subordinate; most families continue to show favour towards sons over daughters, especially in rural areas (Liao et al., 2010; Sargeson, 2012).

Such preference for sons can be observed clearly from the seriously imbalanced sex ratio in China after the one-child policy was introduced in the late 1970s, which ceased only in 2015

(Fan et al., 2020; Zeng & Hesketh, 2016). The one-child policy only allowed each family to have a single child. Since daughters were considered to be of lesser value than sons, many urban families tried various means to ensure they had a son to secure their family's welfare, including strategies such as abandoning unwanted girls after their birth or having an abortion after a diagnostic ultrasound of sex determination (Zeng & Hesketh, 2016).

However, the one-child policy has also exaggerated the social and family pressure on Chinese males, as the only son of the family is positioned as the family's "only hope" and expected to take on all family burdens, including the responsibility for family continuity (Hildebrandt, 2019). This has potential implications for gay men who may not be able to fulfil the responsibility of family continuity (Liu et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2019). In other words, the single son experiences more family pressure with respect to their responsibility to continue the family line in Chinese families, as failing to achieve family expectations would be condemned as unfilial in Chinese culture (Shi et al., 2019). This goes some way to explaining why Chinese parents may have a difficult time accepting that their son is gay and may push their son to marry a woman and have children for the sake of family continuity (Bie & Tang, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2019).

Socially Ignored Lesbian Relationships

As previously explained, Chinese society emphasises binary gender differences and celebrates heterosexuality and masculinity. As a result, lesbians often suffer from double marginalisation

within Chinese society due to both their gender and sexuality. Huang (2017) noted that same-sex relationships between females are positioned by the dominant discourses in China as unreliable and difficult to maintain; this is because attachments between two women fail to be incorporated into the traditional family structure with its legal, economic, and reproductive standards (Huang, 2017). In other words, as mentioned before, Chinese women are traditionally expected to be inferior and subordinate to men, and financially and socially reliant on their husband (Qing, 2020; Xie & Zhu, 2009; Yang, 2010). According to Huang's (2017) anecdotal evidence, when most parents first realise their daughter is a lesbian, they are more likely to worry about their daughter experiencing an unreliable and unprotected (lesbian) relationship than they are to express homophobic and discriminatory attitudes about her sexual orientation.

Moreover, the public and societal visibility of Chinese lesbians is comparatively lower than that of Chinese gay men (Hung, 2011; Kong, 2016). Going as far back as ancient China, lesbians have never really received any formal social attention or public discussion (Huang, 2017; Ruan & Bullough, 1992). In contemporary mainland China, it is common for two girls to hold hands or hook arms with one another in public places. This kind of intimacy between girls is an element of Chinese culture (Ellis & Ellis, 2011; Lu, 2015) and does not signify a sexual or romantic relationship. Hence, even if a lesbian couple are holding hands on the street, people assume they are simply best friends (Lu, 2015) because it is automatically assumed that everyone is heterosexual and intimacy between two females is rarely seriously recognised (Huang, 2017).

Hence, in contrast to gay men in China, the predominant barrier for Chinese lesbians is not homophobia or immediate discrimination; rather, it is the lack of social recognition of their relationships. In other words, homophobic people often treat gay men as perverted, promiscuous, and mentally deviant due to their stereotypical and stigmatised associations with HIV or AIDS (Sun et al., 2006); yet, for lesbians, homophobia is more likely to manifest in Chinese society as silencing and devaluing their relationships, with people viewing feminine lesbians as only temporarily same-sex attracted (Fung, 2021). These sex-based differences may have implications for parental reactions to their child's coming out as lesbian or gay.

Cooperative Marriage

As mentioned above, due to social and cultural expectations, same-sex attracted individuals in mainland China, particularly gay men, may suffer much more familial pressure to marry and have children than their counterparts in the West (Bie & Tang, 2016; Cheng, 2016; Hildebrandt, 2019). Such pressure has not only resulted in increased difficulties for Chinese same-sex attracted individuals in coming out to their parents, but it has also led to a number of other social phenomena. Wei and Cai (2012) argued that, in order to conceal their same-sex sexuality from parents, many Chinese gay men have either entered into heterosexual marriages by marrying heterosexual women without telling the partner about their sexuality or they have entered into a cooperative marriage. This term refers to a “fake,” arranged form of heterosexual marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman.

Although gay men marrying unwitting straight women has been widely condemned as immoral and unethical and has been referred to as “marriage fraud” (Zhu, 2018), estimated data from 2016 indicates that nearly 14 million Chinese gay men have married unsuspecting heterosexual women (Cheng, 2016, p. 3). Among these gay men who have married heterosexual women, some may adhere to a heterosexual lifestyle and suppress their same-sex desire, whereas others may have a secret same-sex relationship outside the marriage (Wei & Cai, 2012). However, discussions of heterosexually married lesbians remain limited (Zhu, 2018), which may reflect how lesbians are still largely socially ignored in contemporary Chinese society (Huang, 2017).

Nevertheless, due to individuals’ increased fear of their real sexuality being discovered by their straight partner, cooperative marriage has become the optimal way for Chinese same-sex attracted adults to hide their sexuality and fulfil social and family obligations at the same time (Lytton, 2017). In the last few decades, the cooperative marriage market has flourished (S. Y. Wang, 2019). This heterosexual marital relationship only aims to fulfil social and family expectations and sometimes includes reproduction. However, cooperative marriage relationships are commonly asexual; thus, in most cases, any child is produced through assisted reproductive technologies (Liu, 2013). According to data from the cooperative marriage dating website ChinaGayLes.com, there were only approximately 500 known cases of cooperative marriage in 2004. However, in 2018, the number of these married couples had increased to more than 100,000 (S. Y. Wang, 2019). Such increased numbers of couples engaged in cooperative marriage also suggests that this is being normalised and universalised

in contemporary Chinese society, further reinforcing heteronormativity within Chinese society (Huang & Brouwer, 2018).

Therefore, no matter the circumstances, the fact is that many Chinese same-sex attracted individuals have to hide their sexuality and show publicly that they are following a socially expected heterosexual lifestyle (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). These actions not only maintain the invisibility and silencing of same-sex attraction, but they have also simultaneously led to a number of social problems. These include potential domestic violence within cooperative marriages, problems related to child-bearing in cooperative families, and the psychological problems experienced by unwitting straight women/men who marry same-sex attracted individuals (Tsang, 2021; Wang, Wilson, et al., 2020; Wang, Yu, Yang, Drescher, et al., 2020; Zhu, 2018).

As can be seen, the deep-rooted ideology supporting opposite-sex marriage and family continuity in contemporary mainland China not only has an influence on same-sex attracted individuals' quality of life and well-being, but it can affect their heterosexual counterparts' personal life and well-being (Tsang, 2021; Wang, Wilson, et al., 2020). Moreover, it is important to note that in today's mainland Chinese society, same-sex couples are still not entitled to get married, and it is also unfeasible for Chinese same-sex couples to have children through assisted reproductive technology (Lo, 2020), an issue that will be further explained in a later section in this chapter. As a result, entering into a cooperative marriage or entering into a traditional marriage without disclosing one's non-heterosexual status has become

almost the only way to comply with social and family obligations concerning marriage and family lineage.

Low Visibility of Same-Sex Attraction in Mainland Chinese Society

Previous sections have explained issues around filial piety and compulsory binary gender roles in Chinese culture, highlighting how family expectations put pressure on Chinese gay men and lesbians. In the next few sections, the ways in which same-sex attraction is acknowledged across different institutions in Chinese society will be explored. This information will not only highlight Chinese individuals' typically limited exposure to sexuality diversity but will also highlight the fact that being same-sex attracted or having a same-sex attracted child is highly likely to make an individual more vulnerable to social discrimination and prejudice. Hence, individuals' lack of exposure to sexuality diversity alongside widespread social discrimination against same-sex attraction also has implications for parental reactions to a child coming out as lesbian or gay. As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, Chinese society's attitudes towards same-sex attraction tend to be uninformed (Hung, 2011; OutRight Action International, 2020). As a result, sexual minorities are largely silenced and even discriminated against across various institutions in contemporary mainland Chinese society; these institutions include, for example, schools, hospitals, the media, and legal systems (Liu & Choi, 2006; Suen & Chan, 2020; United Nations Development Programme, 2016)

Schools

In schooling, information related to sexual minorities and gender diversity is not mentioned in sex education, school policies, or teaching practices (Kwok, 2016; Leung et al., 2019; Wei & Liu, 2019). Sex education, called “puberty education” in China, has been adopted in all middle schools since the early 1990s. However, due to the fact that sex has always been stigmatised as a somewhat negative and shameful topic through the influence of Confucianism and traditional Chinese ideology (Meston et al., 1998; Tseng & Hsu, 1970), sex-related topics or products are often regarded as morally sinful and dirty for many Chinese people, especially the conservative older generation (Xiao et al., 2011). Certainly, the content of sex education in schools remains quite superficial and fails to meet students’ real needs, including increasing their ability to protect themselves from sexual harassment and sexual assault (Gao & Mathews, 2019). Studies relating to the impact of education on same-sex attraction are hard to find, likely reflecting the fact that even studies on heterosexual sex education in mainland Chinese schools are very limited (Li et al., 2017), let alone those which include sex education content with specific reference to sexual minorities.

In addition to the absence of content related to same-sex attraction in schools, homophobic language and behaviours remain tolerated in contemporary mainland Chinese schools (Wei & Liu, 2019). Without sufficient exposure to knowledge about same-sex attraction, heterosexuality is likely to be viewed, by default, as the only “normal” sexual orientation in society. As a result, discrimination and prejudice against same-sex attracted students tends

to be aggravated; this is reflected in these students' higher tendency to suffer psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts (Huang et al., 2018; Wang, Yu, Yang, Li, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019).

Additionally, even though same-sex attraction has been officially de-pathologised in China since 2001 (Wu, 2003), in some psychology textbooks same-sex attraction is still described as a mental or sexual disorder. More importantly, these psychology textbooks are being used in Chinese universities (Chen & Ji, 2021; McDonell, 2016; Wee, 2020). In 2017, in order to seek changes, a student sued a publisher for pathologising same-sex attraction in textbooks; however, the case was not heard by the court until 2020, and the court rejected the lawsuit (Chen & Ji, 2021). Such a response, indicative of institutional discrimination, reflects the country's ignorance with respect to same-sex attraction, and such ignorance is also a form of institutional discrimination. This is deeply problematic, as universities represent authority and professionalism, and people are expected to obtain their knowledge from university (Jongbloed et al., 2008). The proliferation of such misinformation would not only increase prejudice and stigma against same-sex attracted people, but also encourages young people who are same-sex attracted to feel ashamed about their own sexuality, which could result in negative consequences for their psychological well-being and further decrease their desire to self-disclose (Huang et al., 2018; Wei & Liu, 2019).

Health Services

The health care system is another place where sexual minorities are largely silenced and discriminated against. According to estimations (Wu, 2019), over 90 medical centres and hospitals across China continue to offer therapy to “cure” same-sex attraction. Suen and Chan (2020) found in their study that same-sex attracted people in mainland China are still likely to be encouraged by mental health care centres to have counselling therapy to change their sexual orientation. People in medical institutions continue to pathologise same-sex attraction, suggesting that training in understanding and supporting gender and sexuality diversity in medical settings may also be absent in Chinese health care systems. Furthermore, it is important to point out that if conversion or counselling therapy for same-sex attraction continues to remain legal in medical care settings, this clearly suggests to the public that same-sex attraction is a psychological problem and can be cured through therapy; such a framing likely further underpins public discrimination against same-sex attracted people.

Media

In addition to educational institutions and the medical system, the media is another platform where the social rights and the lives of same-sex attracted people are virtually invisible (Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014). As people may have limited or no direct contacts with same-sex attracted people due to the low visibility of same-sex attraction in society, the media plays an important role in shaping people’s attitudes towards same-sex attraction (Tu & Lee, 2014).

Chang and Ren (2017) found that only a very few articles from mainstream Beijing newspapers over the previous decade were about same-sex attracted individuals. The limited articles related to these themes depicted gay men and lesbians in stereotypical and highly stigmatised ways. Gay men and lesbians were often portrayed as being violent, and gay men were particularly stereotyped as promiscuous. Gay people were also rarely interviewed by mainstream newspapers, with the very small number of gay men interviewed focusing on their regrets about being gay (Chang & Ren, 2017). This supports the contention that despite mainland Chinese society having developed rapidly and becoming more open to the world, discourses around same-sex issues are still largely silenced and marginalised. That is, same-sex attracted people are likely to be the targets of social stigma and discrimination in the public domain, given the prevailing discourses of immorality and perversion which surround their romantic and sexual relationships.

In keeping with this current reality, Bu (2016) has reflected that being gay in China would be no problem as long as a person is (only gay) online. This is because traditional media outlets, such as television, print newspapers, or books, are always censored; exposure to positive images of sexuality diversity is quite limited and suppressed (Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014). However, in contrast to conservative traditional media, cyberspace tends to be more liberal and diverse, with an increasing amount of positive information about sexuality diversity and featuring the voices of LGBTQ people. Not only has this increased online visibility brought Chinese LGBTQ people confidence and comfort, online social media has also become an effective platform for LGBTQ activists and LGBTQ organisations to challenge traditional

heteronormative values and fight against stereotypical stigmatisation of same-sex attracted people in public discourse (Hung, 2011). As a result, in lieu of formal education, traditional media representation, or informal public conversation on the topic, most Chinese people first learn the term “homosexuality” from the internet, as the opening-up policy has brought the importation of Western culture through movies, magazines, and music into China (Ning & Poon, 2021; Sun et al., 2006).

Recently, the Chinese government has increased its censorship and regulation of online content (Ho, 2009; Marr, 2021; Shaw & Zhang, 2018). Ho (2009) found that LGBTQ-related online accounts or websites were usually short-lived. Moreover, the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) in China announced guidelines on film censorship standards in 2010 and updated and added additional guidelines in 2016. In NRTA’s updated statement, “homosexuality” was classified as restricted, and positioned alongside other content that “express(es) or display(s) abnormal sexual relations or sexual behaviours” (Shaw & Zhang, 2018, p. 273), along with “incest, perversion, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual violence” (p. 273). In 2021, NRTA further banned “sissy” and “effeminate” men appearing in any media, as they were classified as “abnormal aesthetics” (Marr, 2021). Moreover, in the last few years, many LGBTQ accounts run by university students have been blocked and then deleted from social media platforms without any warning (Gan & Xiong, 2021; Marr, 2021). Such actions reflect that the Chinese government may have started increasing censorship and oppression of same-sex attraction, making societal movements towards equality for gender and sexuality

diverse individuals more difficult, while also sending strong messages about what is socially acceptable and what is not.

Legal Discrimination

As can be observed from the above discussion, although “homosexuality” has been decriminalised and de-pathologised for decades, same-sex attraction has continued to be pathologised and stigmatised across many elements of Chinese society. In legal systems, same-sex attracted people are also subject to legally sanctioned forms of discrimination (Hung, 2011; Zi, 2019)

Despite many countries in the world having legalised same-sex marriage, same-sex marriage has never been legalised in mainland China (Zi, 2019). Additionally, even if same-sex couples register their relationship abroad, their marriage is not recognised in China and they remain, for legal purposes, single (Liu, 2020; Zuo, 2019). However, it is still encouraging to see that the government announced a new form of relationship recognition in 2019, which is called legal guardianship. Although this kind of recognition was not established particularly for same-sex couples, it still allows same-sex couples to register and become each other’s legal guardians. Once registered, same-sex individuals have legal rights to make decisions in relation to medical emergencies and their partner’s personal property (Ketchell, 2019; Zi, 2019). Nevertheless, same-sex couples can only be registered as friends, rather than spouses, to receive this legal recognition (Ketchell, 2019).

Moreover, while same-sex couples are (assumed to be) non-reproductive, they are not permitted to adopt children in China. China's Centre for Children's Welfare and Adoption (CCCWA, 2017) only accepts applications from heterosexual, legally-married couples and, since 2011, from single women who provide a statement that they are not same-sex attracted (CCCWA, 2017). Inter-country adoption by single men remains prohibited in China (Jones, 2017).

If a lesbian woman wants to have baby, she can either enter into a heterosexual marriage or cooperative marriage with a gay man or remain single and use a sperm donor or have unprotected sex out of wedlock. However, an unmarried mother in China is always socially stigmatised and discriminated against, regardless of her sexual orientation (Q. Li, 2020). Although mainland China has seen a dramatic liberation of sexual attitudes since the establishment of the opening-up policy in recent decades, and premarital sex or cohabitation between unmarried couples has become more common (Kong, 2016), unmarried motherhood remains taboo, especially among the older generations. For traditional Chinese parents, significant shame is brought to the family by an unmarried mother (Hu, 2020; Q. Li, 2020). Furthermore, single mothers are required to pay a large fine to the Chinese government in order to obtain a formal household registration (in Chinese: hukou) within the Chinese system, to access state schools, universities and state medical treatment (Fan, 2016). Because of the problems associated with non-registration, paying this fine is essentially compulsory for unmarried mothers. For Chinese gay men who do not engage in cooperative

marriage, becoming a parent is even harder, as surrogacy is banned in mainland China and is condemned as immoral in the mainstream social milieu (Cui et al., 2016; Tang, 2019)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an explanation of national attitudes towards same-sex attraction from ancient China to contemporary mainland Chinese society, highlighting the institutional, interpersonal, and historical reinforcement of heteronormativity. As can be seen from this chapter, prior to the 20th century, same-sex attraction was relatively tolerated in the Chinese society (Chou, 2001; Wu, 2003). However, discourses around same-sex attraction began to shift from the early 20th century due to social changes in the country (Kang, 2009). same-sex attraction was morally condemned, and even criminalised and pathologised, from the middle of 20th century after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (Hung, 2011; Kong, 2016; Wu, 2003). Likewise, people who demonstrated same-sex attraction or sexual behaviours were severely punished during that time (Hung, 2011). However, in the late 20th century, discourses around same-sex attraction continued to shift, and "homosexuality" was then officially decriminalised and de-pathologised at the beginning of 21st century (Wu, 2003). In contemporary Chinese society, the government's attitudes towards same-sex attraction remain quite outdated and uninformed (Hung, 2011; OutRight Action International, 2020) and China is still a traditional society which celebrates traditional marriage and child-bearing as core values (Eklund, 2018; Hildebrandt, 2019).

As research has demonstrated, the most difficult barrier to Chinese same-sex attracted individuals living openly is often their own family (Bie & Tang, 2016; Chou, 2001; Liu & Choi, 2006), as opposite-sex marriage and reproduction continue to be expected as a family obligation for all members of contemporary Chinese society (Hildebrandt, 2019). Moreover, the visibility of same-sex attracted people remains low in contemporary mainland Chinese society (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Across many social institutions in society, including schools, medical services, traditional media outlets, and even legal systems, appropriate acknowledgement of same-sex attraction is largely absent. Additionally, there is also no policy that recognises and protects the social rights of same-sex attracted people in China, and social discrimination against sexual minorities remains prevalent across many institutions (Hung, 2011; Liu & Choi, 2006; Suen & Chan, 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019). This context for same-sex attraction in Chinese society could undoubtedly have impacts on Chinese parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation.

In Chapter 2, a detailed review of the existing literature regarding parental attitudes towards their gay and lesbian children in both Chinese and Western societies is presented. The chapter includes a review of research studies that emphasise the importance of family values and the impact of filial piety on same-sex attracted people in China. As there is a dearth of research in China on these topics, this thesis draws on parallel research from the West is drawn on, not only to discuss some similarities with respect to parental experiences of a child's coming out, but also to highlight specific social and family pressures particular to Chinese same-sex attracted individuals and their parents. In Chapter 3, important theoretical and cultural

concepts are discussed, including Foucault's (1978) notion of discourses and power, feminist post-structuralism (Weedon, 1987), Butler's (1990, 1993a) concepts of gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix, the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and the Chinese cultural concept of face (Ho, 1976).

Chapter 4 presents the study's research design and methodology. As this research project explores the rarely heard experiences of Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian adult child in an effort to amplify voices from this marginalised and systematically oppressed group, the study is aligned with a feminist methodology. Thus, the methodology chapter begins with an introduction to feminist research approaches and follows up with an explanation of the research design, identified participant groups, and the interview foci. Further, this chapter provides a full explanation of the research process and discusses data analysis and interpretation.

The next two chapters, 5 and 6, report on the research findings and present relevant discussion of these. The former focuses on parents' initial reactions towards their child's coming out; it highlights the parents' belief in compulsory heterosexuality and demonstrates the invisibility of same-sex attraction within Chinese society. Chapter 6 explains parents' shifting perspectives towards their child's sexuality over a period of time after their child's disclosure and at the time of the interview, which further reveals Chinese parents' insistence on opposite-sex marriage and reproduction. The final chapter, Chapter 7, presents the concluding remarks, including a reflective overview of the study, a synthesis of its key findings,

and a brief discussion of the study's limitations, implications, and recommendations, and possibilities for future research in this field.

Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a general background to the broad history of same-sex attraction and life in mainland China. In particular, it focused on how same-sex attraction and behaviours have been framed from ancient to contemporary mainland Chinese society. In this chapter, the literature in this area is explored. It reviews the related work around the key research questions of this study as highlighted in Chapter 1 (see page 4 and 5) .

Since in China only a relatively small percentage of same-sex attracted individuals have come out to their parents (United Nations Development Programme, 2016), studies that explore parents' reactions towards their adult child's sexual orientation within the Chinese context are very limited. Thus, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research area and the gaps that exist, this chapter examines the literature pertaining to parents' attitudes to, and relationships with, their same-sex attracted child within both Western and Asian/Chinese cultural contexts. This broader scope will illustrate how a number of similar reactions of both Western and Chinese parents have been reported in the research; yet, importantly, the distinctive Chinese cultural constraints around family values that underpin parents' reactions to their child's same-sex attraction are also revealed.

Hence, this chapter starts with the literature on parents' attitudes towards their same-sex attracted child's coming out in Western social contexts. Next, the chapter examines literature

that pertains to what is currently known about Chinese gay men's and lesbians' experiences of coming out to their parents by firstly reviewing literature that highlights the importance of family values, particularly filial piety, in China, which may shed light on the difficulties for young people in coming out to their Chinese parents. Next, the chapter examines parental reactions towards their child's sexuality within Chinese/Asian contexts more broadly, including Chinese/Asian American same-sex attracted children coming out to parents, as well as exploring this phenomenon in similar cultural contexts to mainland China, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, it is important to note that due to the inaccessibility of libraries in China, I have been only able to access research published in English that is available in Australia. Figure 1, below, helps to understand the logical network of the whole chapter.

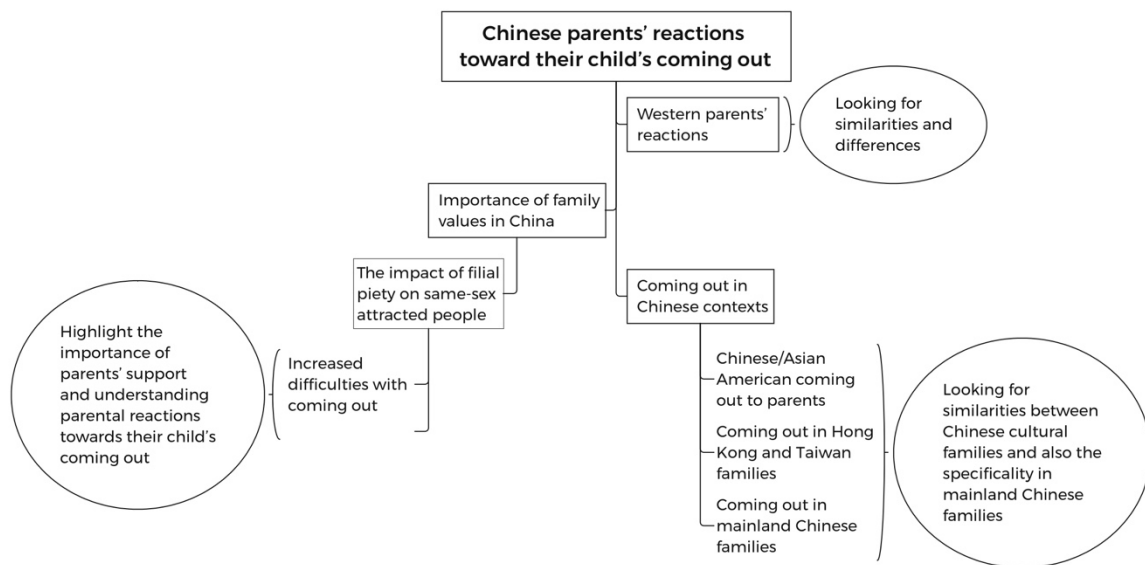
Parents' Reactions Towards their Child's Coming Out

Research from diverse contexts has shown the process of "coming out," or disclosing a non-heterosexual sexuality, can be a difficult, fraught experience for many (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2015, 2020; Bie & Tang, 2016; Chow & Cheng, 2010; Reed et al., 2020; Savin-Williams, 1989, 2001; Tamagawa, 2018a; Wei & Liu, 2019; Wong & Tang, 2004). Researchers in a number of countries have consistently found that coming out to parents is considered the most challenging part of the coming out process for same-sex attracted individuals (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Chou, 2001; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Dittrich, 2005; Klein et al., 2015; Kus, 1980; Russell & Fish, 2016; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996; Tamagawa, 2018a).

Despite this, coming out to parents is also the most important step in the process of coming out, and more and more same-sex individuals have decided to come out to their parents (Reed et al., 2020; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996; Tamagawa, 2018a). This is not only because coming out to parents is a process of self-acceptance, but also because a supportive parental reaction can further result in the child having a higher level of self-esteem, a lower tendency to suffer from psychological problems, better health, less family conflict and more cohesion (Bean & Northrup, 2009; Darby-Mullins & Murdock, 2007; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2010). In contrast, parental rejection has been associated with increased family crisis and a higher likelihood of depression, suicidal attempts or ideation, and an increased level of internalised homophobia (D'Augelli, 2002; Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2009, 2010). Hence, in order to promote supportive parental reactions, it is important to understand the factors that might influence parents' feelings about having a same-sex attracted child. In the following sections, the literature that has explored parents' attitudes and behaviours towards the child's coming out in both Western and Chinese cultural contexts is examined.

Figure 1

Logical Network Diagram of Literature Review on Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Coming Out in Mainland China



Coming Out to Parents in Western Contexts

Coming out to parents has been an historically important research area in Western academia; thus, abundant studies examining parents' reactions to their child's coming out can be

identified (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2015, 2020; Ben-Ari, 1995; Bean & Northrup, 2009; Cramer & Roach, 1988; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Griffin et al., 2016; Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Klein et al., 2015; Kus, 1980; Reed et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 1987; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996). Interestingly, Western researchers have consistently found that same-sex attracted individuals are more likely to disclose their sexuality to their mother before their father (D'Augelli, 2003; D'Augelli et al., 1998; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1990, 1998; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Moreover, coming out to the mother tends to be more direct, such as face to face, while coming out to the father is more likely to be indirect, for instance, via phone or letter (Ben-Ari, 1995; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1990, 1998).

Many studies have been conducted with same-sex attracted participants exploring reflections on their parents' responses to learning they have a same-sex attracted child (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2020; D'Augelli et al., 2005, 2008; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003); a comparatively smaller number of studies have collected data directly from parents of same-sex attracted individuals with regard to their responses to their child's coming out (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Conley, 2011; D'Amico et al., 2015; Fields, 2001; Goodrich, 2009; Huebner et al., 2019; Phillips & Ancis, 2008; Robinson et al., 1989). In this section, I mainly focus on reviewing studies which specifically investigate parents' voices with respect to the child's same-sex sexual orientation.

An early study by Robinson, Walters, and Skeen (1989) investigated the experiences of 402 parents of gay and lesbian children in the United States through survey questionnaires. In

their research, Robinson and colleagues highlighted a “five-stage grief process” (p. 59) to explain the progress of parents’ negative initial reactions when they learned their child was same-sex attracted to their later acceptance of their child’s sexuality at the time of their survey participation. This five-stage grief process consists of five different kinds of emotional reactions: “shock, denial, guilt, anger, and acceptance” (p. 66). In other words, parents initially felt shocked when they realised that their child was same-sex attracted, followed by denial of this information; subsequently, they started to feel guilty, not only because they believed it was their fault that their child identified as same-sex attracted, but also, because they felt some sort of guilt about having a same-sex attracted child. Subsequently, their sense of guilt turned into anger, followed by eventual acceptance.

Additionally, many parents in the study shared experiences of likening having a same-sex attracted child to the death of a child, which can be reflected as a fear of psychological separation; as one of the mothers reported in an interview, “I feared that I might lose him because I didn’t know or understand his lifestyle” (p. 68). Given the time period of the data collection (mid to late 1980s) is it unsurprising that 71% of parent participants in this research were concerned about their child catching AIDS. However, despite most parents in the study expressing an initial negative reaction to learning about their child’s sexual orientation, 97% of the parents reported eventual acceptance of their child’s sexuality. Robinson et al.’s (1989) landmark study offered the field a repurposed staged model of grief to understand parents’ reactions towards their child’s coming out. However, this research failed to explore the underlying rationale for or influences on parents’ reactions. In other words, the factors that

determined parents' earlier stage of negative reactions and their final acceptance remained unknown in this study.

Other early research by Ben-Ari (1995) also explored parents' perspectives towards their child's coming out. In this study, 32 gay and lesbian young adults and 27 parents of gay and lesbian children were interviewed. Most participants were recruited from support groups for sexuality diverse individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ben-Ari (1995) also investigated parents' reactions through a Parental Reaction Scale. This scale expanded upon Robinson et al.'s (1989) five-stage progression by adding three additional components to the stages of emotional reactions, with the scale's stages including: "shock, denial, shame, guilt, anger, rejection, acknowledgement, and acceptance" (Ben-Ari, 1995, p. 95). Both parents and children were asked to evaluate their parents' reactions in four time periods after the child's coming out: after the first week, after the first month, after the first six months, and at the time of the interview.

According to Ben-Ari's (1995) research findings, most same-sex attracted young adults had a fear of parental rejection before they came out. However, interestingly, both parents and children acknowledged increased honesty as the greatest benefit from the child's coming out, and many parents reported an improved relationship with their children at the time of the interview. In the first week after the child's coming out, many parents, regardless of gender, reported shock about their child's disclosure. During the first month after the child came out, many fathers reported that they were working towards acceptance of their child's same-sex

attraction, while many mothers were working towards recognising the fact that their child was gay or lesbian. However, 6 months after the child's disclosure, both parents had generally acknowledged the fact their child was same-sex attracted. At the time of the interview, most mothers stated that they had accepted their child's sexuality, while most fathers were just acknowledging the child's same-sex sexual orientation. This supports Spada's (1979) viewpoint that parental rejection and denial could diminish over time. Interestingly, in Ben-Ari's (1995) study, parents of a gay son reported having a more accepting attitude than those of lesbian daughters.

Moreover, Ben-Ari (1995) found out that fathers in the research tended to feel more guilty after the child's coming out than mothers. Ben-Ari also highlighted that those parents who had no direct contact with gay and lesbian people prior to their child's disclosure were more likely to experience shame, denial, guilt, and anger as measured by the Parental Reaction Scale. However, it appears that both of the research studies explained above explored parental reactions from a psychological position and simply classified parental reactions into different categories of emotions. The details of parental reactions as well as why those parents had such emotional reactions remained unclear.

A more recent study by Philips and Ancis (2008), which explored 17 parent participants' experiences of having a gay or lesbian child in the United States, also found strong emotional reactions, which was in line with findings of Ben-Ari (1995) and Robinson and colleagues (Robinson et al., 1989). In other words, shock and disbelief were prevalent among parents of

same-sex attracted children. Moreover, many parents also expressed concerns about their child's safety within a homophobic social environment. However, compared to mainly focusing on parents' initial reactions towards their child's sexuality, which was the focus of the aforementioned two studies, Phillips and Ancis (2008) moved the field of research further by exploring in greater depth parents' shifting behaviours and perspectives over time, post-discovery. In their research, Phillips and Ancis (2008) highlighted the importance of maintaining connections between parents and their child as well as seeking information and help from their local gay communities. Through gaining emotional support from both their child and local gay communities and realising their love towards their child was most important, parents learned to adapt to the news that their child was same-sex attracted. Many even started challenging heteronormative values within their own social circles, such as changing church affiliations, drifting away from friends who disapproved of same-sex attraction, or even becoming gay rights activists. Although Phillips and Ancis (2008) discussed a number of strategies to assist parents in their emotional journey from negative responses through to acceptance, it is notable that their sample was recruited via a local gay support community. Thus, their research results could be biased given that their participants were already at the stage where they were willing to engage with support groups specifically focused on same-sex attraction, thus excluding parents who were more resistant.

While these studies explored categorisations of parental responses, it is important to note that parental reactions are individual and are influenced by multiple contextual variables, including social tradition and religiosity. Newman and Muzzonigro's (1993) questionnaire

research with 27 gay male adolescents found that those who came from families that emphasised more traditional values were more likely to experience parental rejection and disapproval than those who came from less traditional families. Moreover, Savin-Williams (1990, 2001) found that older parents were more likely to express negative reactions towards their child's coming out compared to their younger counterparts, as younger parents may be more exposed to non-traditional cultural values and information around sexual minorities. Conley (2011) found that a lower education level of parents was associated with an increased level of disapproval towards their child's sexuality.

It should be noted that religion has always been an important variable that could influence parents' attitudes towards same-sex attraction in Western contexts. For instance, Finlay and Walther (2003) found that conservative Protestant denominations showed the most hostile attitudes towards same-sex attraction and behaviours, followed by moderate Protestants and Catholics. Within those who practice the Jewish faith, negative attitudes towards the same-sex attracted community are also present among some, with Orthodox Jews holding the strictest attitudes, prohibiting same-sex practices by religious law (Harari et al., 2014; Schnoor, 2006). Many researchers have also found that families who perceive themselves as more religious were less likely to show acceptance towards their child's disclosure (e.g., Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Potoczniak et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2010; Strommen, 1989; VanderWaal et al., 2017).

Coming Out to Parents in Chinese Contexts

The previous section examined parental reactions towards their same-sex attracted child's coming out in Western contexts. In this section, coming out to parents in Chinese cultural contexts is examined. Compared to many contemporary Western societies where same-sex marriage or civil union registration has been legalised (Varrella, 2021), the visibility of Chinese same-sex attracted people remains low and a majority still struggle with disclosing their sexuality due to the fear of potential ostracism and social discrimination (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Similarly, coming out to parents is also perceived as the most challenging decision for modern Chinese same-sex attracted individuals, as they fear disappointing their parents and experiencing parental rejection (Chou, 2001; Hu et al., 2013; Shieh, 2010; Sun et al., 2006; Wei & Cai, 2012; Zhao et al., 2016). As explained in Chapter 1, the main sources of pressure for Chinese gay and lesbian people are social and familial expectations that demand traditional opposite-sex marriage and family continuity (Bie & Tang, 2016; Hu & Wang, 2013; Kong, 2016; Xie & Peng, 2018). Therefore, there is a fear of parental or family rejection and disappointment once they come out to their parents (Bie & Tang, 2016; Kam, 2010; Liu & Choi, 2006; Ren et al., 2019; Wong & Tang, 2004).

The importance of religion in shaping people's attitudes towards same-sex attraction in Western contexts was alluded to above. However, mainland China, which is different from Western, Middle Eastern, and other Asian societies, is a less religious society, with nearly two-thirds of the population identifying themselves as atheist (Rich, 2017). Of the one-third

of the population who profess a faith, most are Buddhist (Valentine, 2018). However, many studies consistently support the idea that, compared to Christianity and Islam, Buddhists tend to have more tolerant attitudes towards same-sex relationships (Cheng, 2018; Suen & Chan, 2020; Sweet, 2007). Therefore, religion is likely not to be the main barrier for same-sex attraction in mainland China (Chou, 2001). The barriers against same-sex rights movements in China are mostly influenced by its strong traditional cultural pressure, which emphasises marriage and (hetero)family continuity (Bie & Tang, 2016; Hu & Wang, 2013; Kong, 2016; Xie & Peng, 2018).

Thus, in order to understand Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's coming out, it is important first to examine the literature that addresses notions of family values and parental power in Chinese culture. In the next few sections, I will start by examining existing studies which highlight the critical role of family in Chinese culture and how the importance of family values, particularly filial piety, has influenced Chinese gay men and lesbians' decisions about coming out to their parents. After that, studies which explore parental reactions towards their child's sexuality in the Chinese context will be examined.

Chinese Gay Men, Lesbians, and the Family

As mentioned before, compared to Western societies generally, the concept of family in China presents some culturally distinctive characteristics, present throughout history, that have a significant influence on an individual's personal life, especially in making decisions about

marriage and offspring (Li, 2005). Chou (2001) points out that it is difficult to consider a Chinese same-sex attracted person in isolation because an individual in China should never be discussed without their context of familial relationships. In keeping with this, Parke (2004) spotlighted three interdependent family systems: the parent-child subsystem, the marital subsystem between couples, and the sibling subsystem between siblings. In contemporary mainland China, the parent-child subsystem predominates the other two subsystems. This is because, first, marital relationships have always been viewed as secondary to the parent-child relationship in traditional Chinese culture due to the predetermined hierarchy between the child and the parents (Chang et al., 2004). Second, the operation of the one-child policy (1979–2015) resulted in most Chinese parents only having one child in their family; failure to acquiesce to this requirement resulted in being reported and potentially being issued with a large financial penalty (Li, 1995). With no siblings in most contemporary mainland Chinese families, the sibling subsystem is redundant. Hence, when investigating same-sex issues in contemporary Chinese society, the significant position of the Chinese family-kinship system and parents is non-negligible (Chou, 2001; Kam, 2010).

Blair and Madigan (2019) conducted a survey to investigate Chinese young adults' perceptions of dating or marrying someone without parental approval. Among the 954 college students that were recruited, including 561 young women and 383 young men, just 34% of all males and 21.4% of all females reported a willingness to marry someone without their parents' approval. Although Blair and Madigan's (2019) study focused only on college

students and the sexuality of participants was not analysed, their findings still reflect the fact that Chinese parents' power remains influential on adult children's personal relationships.

Researchers have argued that despite the swift economic development, urban construction, and internationalisation in mainland Chinese society since opening up in 1978, the critical role of family or parents in Chinese same-sex attracted individuals' coming out decision-making has not diminished (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Hu & Wang, 2013; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020). For instance, a recent study by Wang, Hu, et al. (2020) investigated public discrimination towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) population in mainland China. Among their 29,125 participants recruited from 31 provinces and autonomous regions, 2066 identified as lesbian, 9,491 as gay men, 3,411 as bisexual, 3,195 as transgender, and 10,932 as heterosexual. Their national survey measured discrimination from heterosexual participants as well as perceived social discrimination reported by LGBT participants. Several notable results are highlighted. First, although heterosexual participants in the study expressed generally tolerant attitudes towards LGBT individuals, they conveyed that they would find it difficult to accept their child if they identified as LGBT. Second, LGBT participants reported pronounced homo/transphobic discrimination particularly from family and social services, which resonates with the difficulties same-sex attracted people experience in disclosing their sexuality to parents. Third, lesbian participants were the most likely to disclose their sexuality to family members in this research while gay male participants were the least likely to do so. Approximately 75% of lesbian participants, 49% of gay male participants, and 54% of bisexual participants had come out to their family. However, it is important to note that, although

many lesbians and gay men reported having come out to their family members in this study, Wang, Hu, et al. (2020) did not specify the family member to whom this information was disclosed. In other words, lesbian or gay individuals in this research may have disclosed their sexuality to cousins, for example, rather than their parents. Moreover, whether their family members accepted their sexuality or not remains unknown.

Nevertheless, Wang, Hu, et al.'s (2020) research highlighted that gay men were more likely to hide their sexuality than lesbians, which was in line with previous findings by Hu et al. (2013). Hu and colleagues conducted a quantitative investigation of 152 self-identified LGB people in China in 2013, in order to investigate the impact of individuals' sensitivity towards different groups (e.g., family, friends and acquaintances) on the self-concealment of sexuality and its further influence on an individual's life satisfaction (Hu et al., 2013). Their survey data revealed that gay male participants reported greater concerns about being negatively judged or rejected by others and they were more likely to conceal their sexuality from family compared to the lesbian participants. Moreover, their data emphasised that not being able to disclose one's sexuality to the family had become the most critical stressor for same-sex attracted individuals in mainland China (Hu et al., 2013).

Another study by Liu and Choi (2006) also revealed the critical role of parents in participants' decisions about disclosing their same-sex orientation and behaviour. In their study, 30 Chinese men who have sex with men (MSM) in Shanghai were interviewed to investigate the sources of social discrimination and stigma MSM have faced. Interview analyses revealed that

participants feared being socially isolated due to their sexual orientation and were particularly concerned about being rejected by their parents. Many participants outlined how being same-sex attracted was considered shameful and that revealing their sexuality to their parents would lead to their parents and family experiencing a loss of face. As a result, most participants stated that they chose not to disclose their sexual orientation to their parents in order to both maintain their parents' reputation as well as to preserve their interpersonal relationship with their parents.

Zhao et al. (2016) also conducted research on Chinese MSM, investigating the relationship between non-disclosure of sexuality to parents and sexual risk behaviours. According to their face-to-face interview results with 295 MSM in China, only 21.2% of the gay male participants and 9.5% of bisexual male participants chose to disclose their sexuality to their parents. Compared to research on same-sex attracted individuals in Western contexts, Zhao and colleagues concluded that many fewer Chinese same-sex attracted individuals chose to disclose their sexuality to their parents (Zhao et al., 2016). Moreover, a large number of the participants in their research also expressed stress and anxiety from the intense pressure to get married and have offspring; the authors note that discontinuing the family line by being single and childless is perceived as unfilial in Chinese culture (Zhao et al., 2016). Zhou and colleagues' findings are consistent with findings from previous Western-based research that suggest that disclosing sexual orientation to family can provoke feelings of anxiety, as same-sex attracted individuals are often afraid of being rejected by parents (LaSala, 2010) or are

fearful of damaging the parent-child relationship by coming out (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

The Impact of Filial Piety on Chinese Same-Sex Attracted Population

As mentioned in Chapter 1, filial piety, which is viewed as the centre of traditional Chinese culture, is incredibly influential within contemporary Chinese society (Hildebrandt, 2019). Thus, it appears that Chinese parents' insistence on traditional marriage and family continuity is influenced by filial piety. Almost all Chinese children are educated to behave in a filial manner from a young age, either at school or by family (Zhu & Chang, 2019). Accordingly, pressures related to filial piety are one of the main sources of Chinese same-sex attracted individuals' struggles in accepting their own sexual orientation and choosing whether to come out to their parents (Hu & Wang, 2013; Ren et al., 2019). However, before explaining the impact of filial piety on Chinese same-sex attracted individuals, it is important to note that Chinese young adults, regardless of their sexuality, suffer social and familial pressure around marriage and family continuity (Ma, 2018).

Traditional Chinese values of filial piety can also impact on parent-child interactions in Chinese society. Researchers have pointed out that, compared to Western parents, Chinese parents are more likely to foster a child's interdependent behaviour, in order to reinforce their child's obedience and secure the adult's authority (Chao, 1994; Wu, 1985). As mentioned in Chapter 1, traditionally, Chinese society emphasises a hierarchy between

parents and children. Parents are always supposed to be more powerful and respected than their child (Huang & Gove, 2012). In the process of raising a child, either expressing warmth or withdrawing family love in interactions with the child is a common strategy that parents use to discipline their child (Wu et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2005). In other words, parents would show more warmth as a way of expressing supportive attitudes to their child, but when their child misbehaved, parents expressed less warmth or even used shame as a means of punishment (Chao, 2000; Wu et al., 2002). In general, reciprocal expectation is a crucial feature of the Chinese model of child-rearing. That is, parents have a responsibility to educate and discipline their child to behave “socially appropriately,” guide them towards a “correct path” and to obey and conform to social standards. At the same time, their child is taught and expected to be filial; that is, to be obedient and respectful to their parents (Xu et al., 2005).

Eklund’s (2018) study used a narrative analysis method to explore how urban Chinese young people negotiate filial piety in their relationship with parents, 25 university students (12 males and 13 females) from mainland China were recruited to participate in a semi-structured interview. According to Eklund’s (2018) results, *patrilineality*, the notion that “families reproduce along the male side of the family” (p. 297), and *patrilocality*, which means that “when a woman and a man marry, they settle with the husband’s family” (p. 297), remain powerful ideas within contemporary mainland Chinese society. In addition, although a son-centred ideology has become less explicit within Chinese families since the end of China’s one-child policy, participants’ descriptions of their family expectations still appeared to be highly gendered. For instance, one of the male participants in Eklund’s (2018) research

indicated that although his parents rarely pushed him to get married and continue the family line, he pressured himself to adhere to Chinese traditional culture. On the one hand, this male participant reflected how filial piety has been internalised in some Chinese young adults who believe entering heterosexual marriage and continuing the family line is a mandatory duty for every Chinese adult. On the other hand, the participant also alluded to the fact that men's stress on family continuity has been reinforced due to the one-child policy (1979–2015), because the single child has become the whole family's "only hope" to undertake all the burden of familial continuity (Hildebrandt, 2019).

A female participant in Eklund's (2018) research also shared similar feelings about gendered expectations or commitments to the family, stating that in traditional Chinese society, "in people's minds a son was regarded as your own child. A daughter was like raising someone else's child, since she would marry out one day" (Eklund, 2018, p. 301). This illustrates the more important position of a son within the family hierarchy. This finding echoes Hu and colleagues' research, wherein the gay male participants were more likely to conceal their sexuality from family than the lesbian participants (Hu et al., 2013). This is because sons, rather than daughters, are expected to take on the burden of family continuity in Chinese families and being gay violates these parental expectations. Another male participant in Eklund's (2018) study further pointed out that if a man had no wife, he would be judged as pointless, and his personal life would also be assumed to be deviant. As can be observed, Chinese males are not only socially expected to be tough, strong, and heterosexual, but they

are also expected to take responsibility for family continuity and to succeed in their economic capacity to support their family (Kong, 2020; Wang et al., 2019)

The importance of traditional values, including perceived parents' attitudes towards marriage and filial piety, in shaping same-sex attracted individuals' own attitudes towards their sexual orientation was reported in an earlier study by Hu and Wang (2013). In that study, 149 participants aged between 15 and 24 completed their survey questionnaire online. Among all the participants, 51 identified as lesbians, 18 as gay, 38 as bisexual, and 42 were not sure about their sexuality. According to Hu and Wang's results, the participants who had a higher level of filial piety tended to perceive their same-sex sexual identity more negatively. Additionally, these authors found that parents' attitudes towards traditional values can influence their child's perspectives towards their same-sex attraction. In their research, 57% of the participants agreed with the item, "My parents believe that one must get married" (p. 68) and 50% agreed with the item, "My parents believe that having children is a must-do once one is married" (p. 68). The more traditional the participants' parents were, the less positive attitudes the participants expressed towards their sexual orientation (Hu & Wang, 2013). These findings were also in line with findings from an earlier Western study by Newman and Muzzonigro (1993), previously outlined.

However, the Chinese value of filial piety has been renegotiated in important ways over time, and it has been suggested that fulfilling filial piety cannot be seen as complete obedience to parents' authority and expectations (Eklund, 2018). Different types of filial piety may reflect

differences in response to parents' expectations and therefore affect a same-sex attracted child's decision in their coming out (Liu et al., 2020). For instance, Yeh (1997) differentiated between two types of filial piety among Chinese families: reciprocal and authoritarian filial piety. The former focuses more on reciprocal respect and care between a child and their parents in terms of psychological and material support, whereas the latter emphasises more an absolute adherence to parents' wishes.

A recent paper by Liu et al. (2020) reported on their national survey of 1,453 Chinese lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants from different regions in mainland China. Their aim was to investigate the effect of filial piety on the relationship between perceived discrimination and internalised homophobia. Unsurprisingly, their findings revealed that, compared to participants who endorsed more authoritarian filial piety, participants who demonstrated more reciprocal filial piety expressed lower levels of internalised homophobia. This is because those who endorsed more authoritarian filial piety were more likely to conform to parents' expectations without resistance. In other words, due to parents' expectations around traditional marriage and family continuity, these same-sex attracted adult children tended to feel more negative about their same-sex sexual identity, and their internalised homophobia could be aggravated by social discrimination and stigma towards sexuality diversity.

Conversely, those who acknowledged more reciprocal filial piety were more likely to persist in their own standpoints when they experienced parents' disapproval or disagreement. This is because reciprocal filial piety encourages mutual understanding and support between

parents and the child. Additionally, researchers found reciprocal filial piety could protect participants from being influenced by negative social judgements, as these participants focus more on being themselves rather than completely conforming to others', including parents', expectations. Hence, participants who adopted beliefs of reciprocal filial piety in their families were also found to experience lower levels of internalised homophobia and a higher probability of disclosing their sexual orientation to family members or friends. As can be seen from the research by Liu and colleagues, different modes of parent-child interactions not only can affect children's willingness to disclose their sexuality to parents but can also influence how children perceive their parents' reactions towards their coming out.

Chinese Parents' Response to Their Child's Sexuality

Previous sections of this literature review examined the importance of family values, particularly filial piety which emphasises traditional marriage and child-bearing in Chinese culture. Accordingly, not only were the difficulties in same-sex attracted individuals' decisions in coming out highlighted, but also the importance of Chinese parents' perspectives towards same-sex attraction was revealed. As shown in this research, where Chinese parents were more open and supportive towards same-sex issues, their child suffered less from hiding their own sexual orientation and was freer from expectations to conform to hegemonic heterosexual life patterns. Previous international research has highlighted how parental acceptance is linked to improvements across same-sex attracted individuals' reported self-esteem, health outcomes, and family relationships (Bean & Northrup, 2009; Darby-Mullins &

Murdock, 2007; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2009, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1998). Therefore, as mentioned before, in order to promote supportive parental attitudes towards their adult child's same-sex attraction, understanding Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's coming out is critical.

Despite many Chinese same-sex attracted individuals choosing to keep their sexuality a secret from their parents, there are still a small number who decide to come out to their parents, even at the risk of facing parental rejection (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). In the following discussion, a handful of published studies that explore Chinese gay and lesbian people's experiences of coming out to their parents in Chinese contexts will be reviewed. However, because of the dearth of literature on mainland Chinese nationals coming out, this section also draws on studies conducted in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and within Chinese/Asian American families that share a similar cultural background (e.g., Huang et al., 2016; Li & Orleans, 2001; Wang et al., 2009; Wong & Tang, 2004). Research exploring cooperative marriage between gay men and lesbians (e.g., Ren et al., 2019; Xuan et al., 2019) that included information around Chinese gay and lesbian people's coming out experiences is also examined. This section begins with research on the experiences of Chinese/Asian Americans coming out to members of their families, followed by research that examines coming out to parents in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Lastly, I review gay men and lesbians' experiences of coming out to parents in mainland China, highlighting the similarities and differences between mainland Chinese families and other culturally Chinese families living elsewhere.

Coming Out to Parents in Chinese/Asian American Families

A recent study by Huang et al. (2016) investigated the experiences of second-generation heterosexual Chinese and Taiwanese Americans who have a gay or lesbian sibling. In this research, three Chinese Americans and seven Taiwanese Americans, aged between 20 and 30 years old who had been aware of their sibling's sexuality for over two years, participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Six participants shared experiences of having a gay brother while four participants reported having a lesbian sister. Seven out of 10 participants reported being the first person to realise their siblings' sexual orientation. Two of the participants stated another sibling was the first, and one participant reported the parents as being the first in family to find out.

Although Huang et al.'s (2016) sample consisted of the siblings of gay men/lesbians, the investigations also covered reflections on parents' reactions to their child's coming out. Chinese and Taiwanese American families often share the same cultural background with Chinese people in China, and since the participants in this research were all second-generation Asian Americans, their parents were from either mainland China or Taiwan, where Confucian cultural values remain influential in both societies (Yeh et al., 2013). Same-sex attraction and behaviour may be considered as deviant in their families, especially for those who endorse more traditional Chinese cultural values (Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Although nine of the 10 participants conveyed in the interview that their parents were aware of their sibling's sexual orientation, only three stated that their parents were supportive while six

stated that their parents reacted negatively; this changed the family relationship. These parents' negative responses included denial, disapproval, worry, and feelings of guilt about their child's same-sex attraction, with denial being the most common reaction. One of the participants reported that her father denied her brother's gay identity and strongly believed that her brother was convinced by someone to be gay; as such, he could "convert back" to being heterosexual. This father then pushed his son to date girls, and frequently introduced girls to his son, in order to change his son's sexual orientation. Another participant related her mother expressing worry about her gay brother in relation to AIDS and other diseases her brother might contract by being gay. Two participants also explained that their parents disapproved of their lesbian sister's sexuality as they wanted their child to be safe and happy. As these parents believed that being same-sex attracted is against the social norm, they worried about the hardships their child might experience because of their sexuality. Three participants reported their parents had a sense of guilt for their gay siblings, which reflected their parents' inner belief that being same-sex attracted is wrong. Additionally, four participants stated that their families avoided talking about same-sex attraction in general (Huang et al., 2016).

Huang and colleagues' (2016) research findings echoed earlier Western studies that explored parents' immediate reactions towards their same-sex attracted child (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Robinson et al., 1989; Savin-Williams, 1989, 2001). Nearly all data from this study were descriptive and focused more on parents' initial emotional reactions, without moving deeper to examine the evolution in parents' attitudes and behaviour towards the child's sexuality

over time. This work was somewhat limited because reports of parental reactions came through a secondary source (i.e., the siblings); specifically, the research was limited with respect to commentary on how parental attitudes may have been impacted by Chinese cultural values.

Earlier research by Li and Orleans (2001) explored narratives from five Asian American lesbians, including their reflections on their parents' reactions towards their disclosure of their sexuality. Through this focus group research, four participants reported that they came out to their parents and none received immediate approval or support from their parents. Two participants were asked to go to a hospital, as their parents believed being lesbian was evidence of a mental health issue. One participant stated that her mother felt that "she raised some kind of a defect of society" (p. 68), while another lesbian participant reported that her parents believed being lesbian was just a phase and she would "get over it" (p. 66) when she found the right man. Similar to findings from Huang et al.'s (2016) research, one of the participants similarly reported that her family stopped talking about same-sex topics. However, three of the participants mentioned the importance of family harmony and unity in Asian culture in the interview, and they all believed this cultural value would help their parents to finally accept their sexual orientation. Moreover, two of the participants mentioned their concern about judgements from other families, as having a non-heterosexual child brings shame and makes their families lose face (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of this concept). One of these participants reported being commented on in her cultural community (Filipino), while the other was asked to conceal her sexual orientation from people who were

outside of the immediate family to prevent the whole family losing the respect of others (Li & Orleans, 2001).

Although Li and Orleans's (2001) research was conducted 20 years ago, most of their findings are reflected in findings from recent research (Huang et al., 2016). This also suggests that Chinese traditional culture remains influential in overseas Chinese communities, as well as in mainland China. Additionally, despite these studies investigating Chinese/Asian American gay and lesbian people's coming out to their parents, these findings still provide some degree of help in understanding mainland Chinese parents' responses towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation. For instance, as can be seen from both studies mentioned above, silencing is a very common "strategy" in Chinese/Asian families to deal with their child's same-sex attraction. This could be a result of the emphasis on harmony in Chinese/Asian culture (Liu & Ding, 2005; Qi, 2018), as both parties—parents and children—may have been trying to avoid conflict and maintain the harmony within their family. However, researchers have argued that such silencing is another form of discrimination (Chou, 2000; Liu & Ding, 2005). Silencing the child's sexuality not only means no conversation around same-sex attraction between parents and their child, but also includes silencing the child's sexuality everywhere, including in front of extended family members, neighbours, or friends. Thus, in fact, this kind of silencing makes same-sex attraction and relationships even more invisible from the public view.

Coming Out to Parents in Hong Kong and Taiwan

Apart from a few studies on Chinese/Asian American gay men and lesbians, scholars in Hong Kong and Taiwan have also paid some limited attention to coming out processes by Chinese young gay men and lesbians. Research into this area began much earlier than in mainland China, as LGBTQ activism emerged earlier in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Kong, 2016).

For instance, one study by Wong and Tang (2004) investigated experiences of coming out and the resulting psychological problems experienced by 187 Chinese gay men between 17 and 35 years of age and living in Hong Kong. Results from their survey showed that, compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese gay men in this study came out, on average, about 5 years later. This may be because sexuality, especially same-sex sexuality, remains a sensitive topic in Chinese culture, and sexual exploration and sexual expression are not socially encouraged at a young age (Liu et al., 2017). It is worth noting that not every participant in this study disclosed their sexuality to parents. The results found that Chinese gay men were more likely to disclose their sexuality to friends and siblings rather than to their parents. This is not surprising, as Chinese gay men fear receiving rejection and disappointment from their parents. Wong and Tang (2004) also argued that, for parents, having a gay son indicates not only “a loss of a real son” (p. 155), but also results in the whole family being without descendants, as same-sex relations are (assumed to be) non-reproductive. According to their findings, having a gay son potentially overturns the traditional family structure and makes

parents feel ashamed and extremely sad, which was also reflected in Li and Orleans's (2001) research on Asian American lesbians.

There are also a few studies that explore gay men and lesbian's coming out experiences with their parents in Taiwan (e.g., Lin & Hudley, 2009; Wang et al., 2009). Wang et al. (2009) interviewed 32 Taiwanese gay men, aged between 16 and 42 years, and noted gay men's motivation for coming out is highly affected by their perception of their parents' attitudes towards same-sex attraction. In Wang et al.'s (2009) findings, parents often refused to accept the fact that their child was same-sex attracted. For these parents, being same-sex attracted was framed as a phase, or as a bad habit that only occurs at a young age and would naturally disappear when their child grew up. This resonates with Li and Orleans's (2001) findings on Asian American lesbians. Some parents in Wang and colleagues' (2009) study also assumed being gay was caused by their child being influenced by their corrupt friends which reflected, again, the fact that same-sex attraction and behaviours are highly stigmatised in both Chinese and Western societies (e.g., Dodds, 2006; Klesse, 2016; Sun et al., 2006). Wang and colleagues also noted some parents still attempted to encourage their child to marry after their child's coming out. It appears that parents believe that they have the responsibility to point out their child's mistake and help them "correct" it; that is, to change their child's sexuality and make sure they finally get married (Tan, 2011).

Mothers have also been the focus of research in this area. A study by Lin and Hudley (2009) explored Taiwanese mothers' reactions after realising their child was lesbian or gay. This is

almost the only research in Chinese contexts that explores parents' voices rather than collecting data on parental reactions through interviews with their same-sex attracted children. In their study, eight mothers in Taiwan aged between 45 and 63 years who had either a gay son or lesbian daughter aged 18 or over participated in the research interview. According to the findings, half of the sample stated that they felt shocked when they first realised their child's sexual orientation because they never thought their child would be gay or lesbian. Five of the eight participants expressed doubt or disbelief towards their child's coming out and asked the child whether they could change. Two mothers reported that they suffered from an emotional breakdown that lasted from 2 weeks to several months. However, on a positive note, all the mothers in this research reported that they had either implicitly or explicitly accepted their child's sexual orientation at the time of interview. Nevertheless, four mothers did express concerns that being gay or lesbian might hinder their child's success or happiness in life, as society was not friendly towards same-sex attracted people; this is in line with some parents' responses in Huang et al.'s (2016) research. Additionally, three mothers expressed their worry that the child might end up alone, and three mothers were worried that their child would not be married or have children of their own. However, no mother pushed their child to get married in the Lin and Hudley study.

Though Lin and Hudley (2009) only interviewed mothers in their research, six mothers apparently also shared the response of their child's father. Mothers reported that three fathers experienced almost the same reaction as the mother had, while two fathers quarrelled with their gay son after becoming aware of their son's sexual orientation. Another

father reacted quite intensely, deciding not to recognise his son when he found out his sexuality; consequently, the father and the son never talked again. It could be that fathers may react more negatively towards a child's coming out than mothers, as many (international) studies have shown similar results (e.g., Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Bebes et al., 2015; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 2001; Wisniewski et al., 2009). Such findings appear to reflect global trends which show that heterosexual males tend to hold more negative attitudes towards same-sex attraction than heterosexual females (Chi & Hawk, 2016; Davies, 2004; Keiller, 2010; Webb & Chonody, 2014).

Nevertheless, Lin and Hudley's (2009) research failed to provide detailed information about the process of mothers' acceptance of their same-sex attracted child, a particularly salient journey for mothers who reacted negatively immediately after their child's disclosure. Nevertheless, their research is almost the only study that has investigated parents' responses towards their child's coming out by interviewing parents themselves within a Chinese cultural context. Hence, this thesis goes some way towards bridging this knowledge gap.

Coming Out to Parents in Mainland China

Previous research on Chinese American lesbians and gay men (Huang et al., 2016) and Chinese gay men in Hong Kong (Wong & Tang, 2004) has indicated that same-sex individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to their siblings first. Moreover, siblings can also help their parents to accept their child's same-sex attraction (Huang et al., 2016; Wong & Tang,

2004). However, this strategy may not be applicable for modern Chinese young gay men and lesbians coming of age under the one-child policy (1979–2015), as previously mentioned. Therefore, gay men and lesbians in mainland China may encounter tougher challenges after coming out to their parents. The reasons for this are explored below. However, as mentioned before, there are only a few studies on parents' experiences of their adult child's coming out that explore their changing reactions, and almost no studies that explore mainland Chinese parents' reactions using reports from parents themselves. Hence, in this section, a handful of studies on Chinese gay men and lesbians' experiences of cooperative marriage will also be reviewed, as a few participants in these studies had come out to their parents and shared their related experiences. In terms of understanding their parents' reactions, such studies highlight the pressure experienced by adult children in China to please their parents and "save face", as will be explored below.

Bie and Tang (2016) examined the experiences of Chinese gay men's coming out through a narrative analysis of 60 self-reported online stories. Their results reveal several findings of interest. First, many participants shared experiences of suffering social and family pressures around marriage and family responsibility. However, surprisingly, these pressures triggered many gay men to come out to their parents to avoid entering into a heterosexual marriage. This contradicts the findings of earlier research, which has suggested that many Chinese gay men conceal their sexuality from their parents because of great social and family pressure (Liu & Choi, 2006; Wei & Cai, 2012). Second, Bie and Tang (2016) found that participants rarely reported their parents' full acceptance of their sexuality. Only two out of 60 participants

received full acceptance from their parents. These two participants stated that their parents were knowledgeable about same-sex attraction before their child came out, which reflects the influence of exposure to positive and affirming information about same-sex attraction on people's attitudes towards same-sex attracted individuals and their relationships (Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2001). Some of the participants reported being completely rejected by their parents. In extreme cases, homophobic parents even threatened to kill their son, as he was seen as "ruining" the family's reputation. Most of the online stories analysed by the authors reported passive tolerance from the parents of the participating gay men which is, "often the result of a compromise made by the sons to put on the appearance of heterosexuality outside of the immediate family" (Bie & Tang, 2016, p. 362). For instance, parents would explain to others that their son just did not want to get married at the moment rather than discussing his sexuality. This behaviour can be explained as a strategy to save face and avoid being ostracised or rejected by extended family members and resonates with previous research on Asian American lesbians (Li & Orleans, 2001). However, as scholars have argued before (Liu & Ding, 2005), this silent tolerance is actually another form of discrimination because it not only makes the oppressed sexual minorities silent but also erases their same-sex relationship from existence.

Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 1, many Chinese gay men and lesbians enter into a cooperative marriage to conceal their sexuality from parents as well as to fulfil their parents' expectations about family responsibility (Wei & Cai, 2012). However, research has consistently stressed that many Chinese young people have tried to come out to their parents

but were rejected and pushed to enter a cooperative marriage to save their parents' face (Kam, 2010; Lo, 2020; Ren et al., 2019; Xuan et al., 2019).

If gay men are pushed to enter into heterosexual marriage in order to fulfil their social obligations with respect to family continuity (see Chapter 1), lesbian women's experience of feeling compelled to get married is more likely due to their gender and the lack of social recognition of lesbian relationships. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in traditional Chinese culture women are expected to obey men for the span of their entire life (Cheng, 2018). Additionally, the financial gap between men and women in society is one of the country's existing social problems and one which has negatively influenced women's capacity for autonomy and financial independence (Iwasaki & Ma, 2020). This gap has resulted in the mainstream belief that marriage helps women to "attain upward social mobility" (Kam, 2010, p. 91).

Speaking to this issue, Kam (2010) undertook longitudinal field research with self-identified lesbians from 2005 to 2007 in the most modernised and urbanised city in China: Shanghai. She simultaneously conducted a smaller study based on her fieldwork to investigate those Chinese lesbians who married men. Kam (2010) interviewed seven lesbians; five were married and two were about to get married around the time of the interview. Although Kam (2010) did not note how many of her participants had come out to their parents, one of the lesbian participants shared her mother's reactions after her coming out. In her interview, she reported that she was still pushed to marry a man even though her mother had accepted her sexuality. This is because although being single is always better than being same-sex attracted

in mainland China, single women who are at a “suitable age” for marriage in China who remain unmarried are still highly socially stigmatised. Others would quickly put labels on these women such as being supposedly unattractive or unhealthy, or having personality defects. However, as China is a collectivist cultural society and an individual would never be discussed outside the context of their familial relationship (Chou, 2001), an unmarried “overaged” daughter would also bring shame and dishonour to her parents. That is, parents who have an unmarried overaged daughter are also likely to be stigmatised because parents and children are always viewed as an integrated unit.

A recent study by Lo (2020) also focused on lesbians’ experiences in mainland China, particularly exploring urban Chinese lesbians’ experiences in navigating relationships with their parents as a same-sex attracted adult child. In Lo’s (2020) research, 35 self-identified lesbian women in Beijing were interviewed. Among these 35 lesbian participants, only a few had disclosed their sexuality to their parents. One of the participants who came out to her mother explained her mother’s reactions in the interview. She reported that in the first 3 years after her disclosure, her mother never stopped calling the participant’s partner to ask her to leave her daughter. This mother also threatened her daughter with suicide. As a result, this participant finally decided to engage in a cooperative marriage with a gay man in order to save the face of her family. Another two of the participants in Lo’s (2020) study also came out to at least one of their parents. According to their recollections, both participants’ parents immediately expressed negative reactions towards the disclosure, including shock, disbelief, sadness, and anger. However, both participants shared their experiences of providing

information about same-sex attraction to their parents in order to help their parents adapt to the news that their child was lesbian, and they found that this worked. In other words, the importance of increased exposure to same-sex attraction and relationships to improve parents' perspectives towards their child's sexuality was again highlighted.

Xuan et al. (2019) explored the challenges experienced by Chinese gay men and lesbians as they negotiated issues related to their cooperative marriage with their parents. Their study included 10 gay men and 10 lesbians in mainland China, aged 27 to 39 years. The authors used semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis to understand their participants' experiences. Among the 20 participants that engaged in the interview, only two gay men and one lesbian disclosed their coming out experiences. One of the gay men disclosed his sexuality to his parents after he had entered into a cooperative marriage with a lesbian for 3 months. According to his explanation, his parents accepted him quite calmly because he had married, and thereby others would not comment about him behind their back. This complements evidence reported in other research that demonstrated that Chinese parents were likely to accept their child's same-sex sexuality once their child had married or divorced (Bie & Tang, 2016; S. Y. Wang, 2019). Another lesbian woman who came out to her parents stated that her parents still insisted that she should get married and pushed her to engage in a cooperative marriage with a gay man. This also resonates with some other informants' experiences in other studies (Kam, 2010; Lo, 2020).

Similar research by Ren et al. (2019) explored the experiences of 12 Chinese gay men and five lesbians, aged between 27 to 38 years, who had entered cooperative marriages. After conducting 17 in-depth interviews, data were thematically analysed using grounded theory. At the time of the interview, 14 of the participants were still married while three had been divorced. Seven of the sample had disclosed their sexuality to their family. This study once again highlighted the essential role of traditional marriage in Chinese culture and Chinese people's sensitivity to maintaining face. For instance, two of the lesbian participants shared similar experiences with the lesbian participant from Kam's (2010) study in that they had almost received acceptance from their parents regarding their sexuality, yet they were still encouraged and expected to enter into a heterosexual marriage, to avoid familial humiliation. According to one participant's statement, only having a heterosexual marriage would be viewed as "normal" and "socially appropriate," whereas having a "liberal" lifestyle, such as being single at a "marriageable" age, would be viewed by others as "abnormal." Within such an arrangement, in the meantime, their parents would hide their child's sexual orientation and the cooperative husband's sexuality. Two of the gay men in this study came out to their parents, however they both received intense rejection and discrimination from their parents. For their parents, same-sex behaviour was viewed as unhealthy and even criminal; thus, they were warned by their parents to "correct" their sexuality. Another gay man, who had disclosed his sexuality to his parents, decided to enter into a cooperative marriage in order to give his parents a grandchild to continue the family line. This is because, in Chinese traditional culture, "a successful heterosexual marriage and the birth of grandchildren are viewed as a

child's success and as a mark of filial piety" (Ren et al., 2019, p. 224). In other words, being same-sex attracted or being single at a marriageable age and having no children would both be considered as unsuccessful and "defective" in contemporary mainland Chinese society. In this situation, not only would the adult child be judged as unfilial, his or her parents would also be blamed for failing in their parental obligations, which consequently shames the whole family. Hence, Ren et al. (2019) concluded that in order to maintain face for the whole family, some Chinese parents are more likely to push their child to marry and have children to achieve the expectation of family continuity instead of showing their support and understanding of their child's sexual orientation.

Conclusion

The existing research in both Western and Chinese contexts illustrates that emotional reactions, including shock, denial, disbelief, and anger, are commonly found in parents' initial responses towards a child's coming out. Western researchers have also found that parents' disapproval diminishes over time and studies have highlighted the importance of increased exposure to knowledge of sexuality diversity and of maintaining connection with the child in the process of accepting the child's sexuality (Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; Phillips & Ancis, 2008; Savin-Williams, 2001). In Chinese contexts, traditional Chinese cultural values, particularly filial piety, which emphasise heterosexual marriage and child-bearing, remain influential in contemporary Chinese families. As a result, family or parents have become the

main barrier for Chinese same-sex attracted people to come out due to a fear of parental rejection and disappointment. Nevertheless, some same-sex attracted individuals in China do decide to come out to their parents, despite the risk of facing parental rejection. Silencing and passive tolerance in relation to a child's sexuality is very common in Chinese families. The former refers to parents keeping silent about the child's sexuality in order to avoid family conflicts and maintain harmony, while the latter refers to the child compromising in some way to gain their parents' tolerance. Such a compromise usually involves the child engaging in a cooperative marriage to save face for their parents.

Notably, most of the available research in Chinese contexts which addresses parents' reactions to their child coming out has been conducted using reflections from same-sex attracted people, illustrating that little research has explored parental reactions towards a gay or lesbian child's coming out through the parents' perspective. Moreover, there is almost no research that seeks to understand and explore these topics using relevant social theories. To date, no known research has investigated how Chinese parents' perspectives have been shaped or influenced by their culture, positioning cultural influence as a taken-for-granted fact. Hence, through interviewing both parents and young same-sex attracted people in China, the current project aims to explore parents' perspectives and behaviours after they became aware of child's sexuality, using a feminist post-structuralist theoretical framework and key Foucauldian concepts around power and discourse. In the next chapter, details of theoretical knowledge as well as cultural concepts that have been used to analyse the data in this research will be explained.

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a detailed review of existing literature in relation to parents' perspectives towards gay and lesbian individuals in both Western and Chinese contexts and highlighted how the importance of family values influences Chinese gay men and lesbians' decision to come out to their parents. As previously outlined, there has been little theoretical exploration in the existing literature seeking to understand how Chinese parents' perspectives towards their child's same-sex attraction are shaped or influenced by their culture. Accordingly, this chapter draws from a Western feminist post-structuralist theoretical framework, influenced by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault as a significant theoretical guide for this project. Hence, this chapter begins by first introducing Foucault's (1978) concepts of power and discourse. It then elaborates on the ways that these concepts have influenced the development of feminist post-structuralism and explores their intersections with individuals' subjectivity. Simultaneously, this chapter draws from the Chinese concept of face, which is considered as a product of the dominant discursive system operating in Chinese society and that functions as a means of either social reward or punishment, in order to lend cultural relevance to Foucault's (1991) notions of social discipline, surveillance, and regulation. In tandem, these concepts are used to explore national attitudes towards same-sex attracted people in Chinese society.

Additionally, the chapter explores how discursive power in relation to heteronormativity operates in Chinese schools, media, and families, alongside the impacts of heteronormativity and the lack of societal visibility of same-sex attracted people in China. Next, feminist critiques and extensions of Foucault's work are explored, highlighting the importance of human agency and intersectionality. Further to this, a number of Judith Butler's (1990, 1993a) related theoretical concepts, including the notion of a gender "binary," gender performativity, and the heterosexual matrix, are also defined to explore the deep-rooted belief in and adherence to compulsory binary gender differences in Chinese culture. Cultural concepts of the Confucian idea of Yin-Yang alongside Butler's contributions are used to help understand Chinese parents' feelings about their child's gender expression in relation to their child's same-sex sexual orientation and same-sex relationships. Overall, this chapter outlines how these theoretical perspectives and cultural concepts will be brought together to aid in understanding Chinese parents' reactions towards their gay or lesbian child's coming out.

Discourse, Subjectivity, Identity, and Power

Concepts such as *discourse*, *subjectivity*, and *identity* play an essential role in understanding notions of knowledge, power, and truth(s) as well as social and cultural realities (Foucault, 1978). Michel Foucault's (1978) concepts of discourse and power have facilitated the development of a number of contemporary extended theories including feminist post-structuralism (Weedon, 1987) and gender performativity (Butler, 1990, 1993a). These

theoretical concepts interconnect with each other and offer explanatory understandings and interpretations of individual and collective performances in society. Although Foucault is a Western theorist, his concepts of power and discourse and related perspectives can still be applied to understand same-sex issues in contemporary mainland Chinese society as well as the specific issues explored here: Chinese parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their gay and lesbian child's sexual orientation. Hence, in the following sections, each theoretical concept introduced above will be explained in turn, with a focus on how each can be applied in contemporary Chinese society to explain same-sex issues.

Discourse and Subjectivity

Since the 1950s, many scholars have argued that language does not only simply represent meanings (Rawlings, 2017). Rather, language itself can be understood as a type of social performance that constructs both social and psychological realities and also accomplishes social objectives (Willig, 2008). As Weedon (1987) notes, "social reality has no meaning except in language" (p. 34); that is, language reflects one's way of seeing the world. However, language cannot be perceived and interpreted without considering the social contexts which surround it, since specific social contexts create different social meanings for language (Rawlings, 2017).

One of the essential elements in understanding the role of language in constructing social and psychological realities is the concept of discourse. As Foucault (1978) conceptualises it,

discourse is a contingent social system that produces knowledge and meanings depending on specific historical and social contexts. Discourse is more than just language, as it consists of “social practices, forms of subjectivities and relations of power” (Garrett, 2004, p. 141). Foucault (1978) further pointed out that discourses are not only utilised to communicate, but they also produce meanings and subject positions, and constitute subjectivities. Discourses are products of power within a social order; they are carriers of power that prescribe rules that underpin particular knowledges and “truths” being formed and transferred in the discursive system (Weedon, 1987).

Discourses are in circulation everywhere in the social practice of our daily life, whether in their written or oral forms (Weedon, 1987). They are part of the foundational structure of institutions such as schools, hospitals, law courts, and families, as these institutions work to produce and transmit knowledges to social members. Accordingly, discourses constitute individuals’ perspectives and attitudes towards particular objects and social realities, and thus constitute their subjectivities (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987). Subjectivity refers to how an individual views and behaves in the world and their understanding of their own relationship with the world (Blaise, 2005). Furthermore, subjectivity “addresses and constitutes the individual’s mind, body and emotions” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Since discourses as a contingent social system are built upon specific social and cultural contexts, the discursive constitution of an individual’s subjectivity is also not static or inherently fixed (Gavey, 2011; Weedon, 1987). In other words, different social contexts empower different discursive

systems, and each historically specific discursive system forms particular knowledge and social realities which consequently result in constituting particular subjectivities.

Sexuality is one of the various subjectivities that can be constituted in different ways depending on the historical time and context (Rawlings, 2017). Foucault (1978) argued that sexuality is an historically specific construction and can be viewed as a primary locus of power. He claimed that, at the beginning of 17th century in the West, people were quite comfortable when talking about sex, and there was no need for undue concealment around the topic. However, from the 19th century topics around sex started to disappear from the public sphere and moved into the home, and sex/sexuality became defined as a means of reproduction. Discourses of reproductive sexuality, namely heterosexuality, have therefore become the dominant discourse around sexuality. In other words, heterosexuality has been constantly constructed as the only “normal” and “natural” sexuality within Western societies.

Such shifting discourses around sex and same-sex attraction can also be found in Chinese society, although differences from the Western context exist. As mentioned in Chapter 1, sexual attitudes were quite open and liberal in ancient Chinese society, and people who engaged in same-sex activities were not severely punished, condemned, or judged. This was the case until 1949 when the communist government began to position “homosexuality” as an imported corruption from the West and clearly expressed condemnation of it (Li et al., 2010). However, as mentioned earlier, same-sex attraction was relatively tolerated in ancient Chinese society because almost every person married and had children in ancient China.

Hence, in Chinese society, heterosexuality has been normalised and naturalised as “common-sense” knowledge and the default sexuality for centuries, through the repeated and ongoing practice of cultural values which highlight traditional marriage and child-bearing. Heterosexuality is therefore “unmarked”, taken-for-granted and acceptable so as to become unremarkable or unnoticed (Foucault, 1978). It is also embraced through various kinds of celebrations, such as weddings and anniversaries, which reaffirm the normalisation of heterosexuality and reinforce the solidity of heteronormative discourses.

While in ancient China same-sex sexual behaviours were not associated with a particular sexual identity, in contemporary Chinese society, being same-sex attracted is framed as an identity descriptor, consistent with much of the Western world (Zheng, 2014). As outlined in Chapter 1, given the relevant legal and structural limitations in China, many same-sex attracted individuals find themselves unable to engage in valued relationship and family modes, including recognised, legal marriage and parenthood. Being same-sex attracted threatens the cultural values of filial piety and is thus perceived as immoral and unfilial (Ning & Poon, 2021; Poon et al., 2017). In the process, as Foucault (1978) highlights, sexualities other than heterosexuality are simultaneously policed and surveilled and are also silenced and positioned as of lesser value and credibility than heterosexuality, being labelled as irrelevant or “abnormal” in contrast to heterosexuality. Thus, diverse sexualities are not only silenced and socially marginalised, but they are also closely watched and monitored by people within society (Foucault, 1978). Further details of this will be discussed later, in the section on Foucault’s notion of surveillance.

Power and Knowledge

According to Foucault (1978, 1980), it is important to note that power is not an entirely negative or violent concept that simply comes from a dominating class that always oppresses people in society. Instead, it is a productive network which is able to produce discourse and constitute knowledge (Foucault, 1980). "Power is everywhere," as Foucault noted (1978, p. 83); it is diffuse and operates at multiple levels. It comes from anywhere in our everyday life, including our daily discussions or interactions. More importantly, power is embodied in discourses and it is also constantly exercised within discourses. Foucault (1978) emphasised that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (p. 100). Thus, power that is embedded in the discursive system both facilitates and restricts individuals, as power constructs certain subjectivities as accessible, visible, and discussable. In other words, human beings are "made subjects" (Arney & Bergen, 1984, p. 4), where our ways of perceiving the world and behaving in society are produced in the power relations of a specific historical time.

Power, discourse, and knowledge always intersect. Power underpins the creation and circulation of the discursive system around certain knowledge and this discursive system also produces the effects of power (Ramazanoglu, 1993). However, there is never only one social discursive system; rather, there are rankings among discourses (Foucault, 1978). Individuals are surrounded by multiple discursive systems that often consist of contradictory meanings and conflicting knowledges about their social realities; these discursive systems are always competing, with some being celebrated and others silenced (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987).

Thus, rules and hierarchies are subsequently created, with certain performances becoming privileged or degraded according to dominant discourses; the former receive social celebration while the latter may be punished. In other words, discursive power constitutes individuals' perspectives and behaviours and constructs certain subjectivities as normative and others as non-normative. It is the particular discursive system that allows specific knowledge to be accessed and exercised, while other knowledges are repressed and silenced. Eventually, these knowledges perpetuated by the dominant discursive system become truths, or common-sense knowledge, communicating what is natural and normal. Despite this, it is important to note that there has never been a single "truth," as different truths are situated in different discourses; however, hierarchies do exist among these various truths, with some being more dominant than others and rising to ascendancy (Foucault, 1978).

Likewise, as Foucault writes, power does not simply flow in one direction from the top to bottom but, rather, is diffused everywhere within society. Additionally, power does more than simply repress. Instead, power "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance" (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). At the same time, discourses do not exist in a simple binary relation of power and powerlessness (Ward & Mann, 2012). In other words, people from subjugated social groups also have power. Power can be resisted and resistance coexists with power. As power is always spreading and coming from everywhere, "where there is power, there is resistance, not yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 95–96). Hence, discourses can also be challenged and reversed

to subvert the dominant power through the process of creating new discourses and producing new truths (Foucault, 1978).

Discipline, Surveillance, and Regulation

In Foucault's view, power functions through producing and disciplining members of society, and it is usually exercised as discipline by officials through various institutions (Foucault, 1991). These institutions include the law, education, media, hospitals, religion, medicine, the family, and so on. It should be noted that disciplinary power does not come from force, but rather it is exercised by surveillance. Foucault conceptualised modern society as governed by "disciplinary surveillance," consisting of various forms of control that manage and govern our social life and social bodies (Ward & Mann, 2012, p. 222).

Foucault's (1991) notion of surveillance can operate in three key ways that facilitate the exercise of disciplinary power; these are "hierarchical observation," "normalizing judgement" and "examination" (p. 170). "Hierarchical observation" is the most fundamental of the three, as it operates by requiring individuals to watch others in everyday life. Through this process, individuals survey others in terms of the standards that have been set by disciplinary power; however, at the same time, they also regulate themselves, monitoring their own performances by turning themselves into certain kinds of subjects since they know others are simultaneously watching them. For this mode of surveillance, Foucault used the term panopticon. A panopticon is a circular-shaped prison based on the work of Jeremy Bentham

(Foucault, 1991). A panopticon functions by placing guards on high towers in the centre of the structure, with a bird's-eye view of their prisoners, who are confined to a particular radius around the centre tower and easily monitored by the guards. This design was used to make prisoners conscious that their performances were always being watched, even if there were no guards there (Foucault, 1991).

As Foucault writes, societies function in similar ways; even if people are not being watched, they still believe their performances are being watched by a gaze from others. Hence, they regulate their own behaviours. This self-regulation not only enables surveillance that is permanent and automatic without its actual exercise, but also renders the person who exercises power unimportant. As Foucault (1991) notes "the exercise of power is not added on from that outside, ... but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact" (p. 176). In other words, disciplinary power emanates from within society, rather than coming from an authority or above; it comes from everywhere, circulates between people, and exerts influence at every level in society. Therefore, power is not simply a violent force from a sovereign; the effect of the panopticon requires less direct force but still regulates individuals' performances in society. In this situation, people are both productive and docile under this "disciplinary surveillance" (Ward & Mann, 2012, p. 222).

The second mode by which disciplinary power is exercised according to Foucault (1991) is "normalizing judgement" (p. 170), which operates through a system of rewards and

punishment. However, the boundaries of rewards and penalties are socially specific, as different social contexts have different expectations for their own standards and hold different disciplinary rules to underpin these standards. Hence, people's performances and their social bodies are categorised into *normal* and *abnormal* in terms of the "standard of normalcy" (Ward & Mann, 2012, p. 223). As Kirsch (2000) points out, categorising individuals with limited labels reflects how the dominant power constitutes the ways that people understand society.

Through the practices of judging and comparing individuals' performances of the self to a particular "standard of normalcy," those performances which fail to conform to, or deviate from, the standards are punished (Ward & Mann, 2012, p. 223). Through this process of social sorting and categorisation, those individuals who are perceived to be normal are more likely to receive social rewards while those people perceived as abnormal tend to be socially punished. Such social punishments can be observed in various ways within society, such as through educational tests, medical treatment, legislation, social exclusion, discrimination, and so on (Ward & Mann, 2012). For instance, as heterosexuality has always been constructed as the only normal and natural sexuality in society, same-sex attracted individuals have been pathologised and criminalised within both Western and Chinese societies; even today, public stigma and social discrimination against sexuality diverse individuals remain as tangible forms of social punishment. Hence, an individual's social performance and social body is shaped by discipline as to what is acceptable and what is not. In other words, discipline enables and restricts certain social performances. In order to maintain the "standard of normalcy,"

disciplinary power encourages people to perform in a normal way by offering social rewards and at the same time it corrects abnormal performances in terms of punishment in order to reduce deviance (Ward & Mann, 2012).

“Examination,” the third mode by which disciplinary power is exercised, is a combination of “hierarchical observation” and “normalizing judgement” (Foucault, 1991, p. 170). Through observing others in terms of the “standard of normalcy,” people examine themselves and others, positioning and categorising into those who are normal and those who are not. Those who are abnormal are deserving of punishment and need to be corrected.

The forms of surveillance illustrated by Foucault (1991) can be observed in contemporary mainland Chinese society as well. As outlined in Chapter 1, the majority of same-sex attracted individuals in China remain “in the closet,” hiding their real sexuality from others, including peers in schools, colleagues within workplaces, and members of their family (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Often Chinese same-sex attracted people either enter into a cooperative marriage with an opposite-sex, same-sex attracted person or try to conform and enter a heterosexual marriage (Liu, 2013; Wei & Cai, 2012). Hiding same-sex attraction and conforming to heterosexual ways of living, including heterosexual marriage, can both be viewed as a means of self-regulation. Despite the Chinese government’s official attitude towards same-sex attraction, the disciplinary power in relation to people’s sexuality is ensconced within society. Heteronormativity, which is defined as “a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all

other expressions of sexuality” (Robinson, 2016, p. 1), is one of the main “standards of normalcy” in contemporary Chinese society (Ning & Poon, 2021).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, despite same-sex attraction having been officially de-pathologised and decriminalised in China for over 20 years (Wu, 2003), the discursive power of heteronormativity is still active everywhere in Chinese society. Foucault’s concept of the panopticon (1991) is useful to consider Chinese individuals’ awareness of how same-sex attraction is positioned within society as compared to heterosexuality, and their understanding that their social behaviours are always being watched and examined by others. In Chinese society, as in many others, people understand that being openly same-sex attracted could lead to societal punishments, such as experiences of prejudice, stigma, and discrimination (Liu & Choi, 2006).

Such awareness is because, from a Foucauldian lens, coming out, which refers to “the process of constructing and disclosing a non-normative identity” (Kotze & Bowman, 2018, p. 1), may be seen as a means of confession (Foucault, 1978). Confession, which breaks the silence on certain types of discourses, is a way of creating new voices and truths (Foucault, 1978); thus, coming out challenges the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity within society (Kotze & Bowman, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2018). However, people who disclose their same-sex attraction to others become at risk of social discipline. Therefore, the potential fear of punishment, which is a product of the social system of power, induces individuals’ conscious behaviours of self-examination and self-regulation in relation to their sexuality; namely,

concealing their same-sex sexual orientation or conforming to a heterosexual life pattern. In the process, sexuality diverse people continue to be silenced and marginalised in society, thus reinforcing the discursive power of heterosexuality.

Cultural Extension of Social Discipline: Chinese Concept of Face

In order to add contextual relevance to Foucault's (1991) notion of surveillance as it applies within Chinese society, the Chinese concept of *face* is explored in this chapter. In Chinese culture and society, face has been used as a strategy to reward or punish certain language and activities, as gaining face can elicit glory and praise while losing face makes people feel ashamed and humiliated (Hu, 1944; Hwang, 1987).

Ho (1976) argued that it is hard to define what face is precisely. Face is similar, yet never equivalent, to dignity, personal reputation, and a sense of honour (J. Wang, 2016). However, it is undeniable that face is importantly connected with one's identity in China (Fischer & Tangney, 1995; He & Zhang, 2011). People feel "face gain" or "face loss" depending on their own attributes, such as personality, social status, education background, marital status, and sexual orientation. However, more importantly, people usually gain and lose face through verbal and behavioural interactions with others (Hwang, 1987). When perceiving negative comments from others on account of one's own activities, people feel ashamed, and this consequently results in face loss (Fischer & Tangney, 1995).

Face plays a critical role in Chinese social culture, both historically and today (Shan, 2005). As a collectivism-oriented society, people are more co-dependent and tend to have greater concerns about others' opinions than individuals from individualistic societies (Li et al., 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, individuals from collectivist cultures, including China, are more likely to be subject to the imperatives of face (Merkin, 2018; Triandis, 1988). However, it is important to note that face gain or face loss does not only work at the individual level in China (Jiang & Cova, 2012). An individual's attributes and behaviours represent the image and reputation of the group to whom the individual closely belongs. Thus, a child's activities have additional impact on their parents and extended family (Ho, 1976). In traditional Chinese ideology, parents are responsible for raising and educating their children until their children get married (Xu et al., 2005). Hence, a child's individual attributes reflect either positively or negatively on their parents'/ family's perceived identities and status (J. Wang, 2016). If the child does not excel or meet the social standards of "normalcy," it is highly likely that parents will be blamed for their unsuccessful parenting, discipline, and family education (He & Zhang, 2011). For instance, a Chinese father may feel an immediate face gain with others when talking about his son's superior educational background. However, he may also immediately lose face and feel ashamed or embarrassed about any "misconduct" by his son, such as when others find out that his child is same-sex attracted (or not married by a certain age) (Lin & Hudley, 2009; Ren et al., 2019).

Additionally, losing face not only makes people feel ashamed in front of others, but it also has the potential to make a person lose his or her favourable social image and established social

position (Jiang & Cova, 2012). Moreover, this person may be isolated or ostracised by other inner-group members as the shared group values are threatened (Han, 2016; Kim & Nam, 1998). Any type of bullying on the basis of one's sexual orientation or gender expression can be seen as a good example of this.

Thus, in order to maintain one's social image, social position, and interpersonal relationships with others, people watch their language and behaviour by making certain attributes silent and invisible in their daily interactions (Hwang, 1987; J. Wang, 2016). In this way, face is a social and cultural product of a power system and it works as a strategy to not only discipline people in the society, but also to underpin dominant discourses. As Chou (2001) found, the biggest problem for parents of Chinese same-sex attracted people was not the acceptance of their child being gay or lesbian, but how to face their relatives, neighbours, friends, and ancestors when they felt ashamed of, and frustrated at, raising a same-sex attracted child.

Hence, in this current study, face is an important concept that needs to be considered when exploring Chinese parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation. It seems likely that in order to save face, Chinese parents adopt various strategies to make their child look heterosexual, by silencing particular facts or conforming to the majority behaviour (Chou, 2000; Kam, 2010). The former can be seen from concealing their child's real sexual orientation and relationship with a same-sex partner in front of others (Chou, 2000), and the latter by demanding their child engage in a cooperative heterosexual marriage (Kam, 2010). However, both actions can be seen as a "strategy"; people regulate

themselves through silencing certain discourses around same-sex attraction in order to further avoid social punishments, such as the loss of face. In the process, discourses around heteronormativity are further strengthened.

Heteronormativity, Invisibility, and Silence

Scholars have noted that power requires certain levels of control over people's minds (whether conscious or unconscious), life processes, social bodies, and even sexual orientation (Ward & Mann, 2012). Due to the "standards of normalcy" mentioned above, identities such as heterosexual and same-sex attracted are subsequently created through discourses and cultural practices and these identities are utilised as labels to help people categorise each other and to highlight differences among people (Ward & Mann, 2012). At the same time, a hierarchical system is produced to rank these identities, with heterosexuality being celebrated and privileged while other sexualities are suppressed.

The previous section explained that heteronormativity is one of the main "standards of normalcy" in contemporary Chinese society. It has been suggested that heteronormativity is produced, as well as exercised, through dominant discourses of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Duncan & Owens, 2011), a term first coined by Adrienne Rich. In Rich's words, "compulsory heterosexuality" describes "the cluster of forces [in Western society] by which women have been convinced that marriage, and sexual orientation toward men, are inevitable, even if unsatisfying or oppressive components of their lives" (Rich, 2003, p. 12). Societal institutions

around us such as government, school, family, and the media are all constructed around the discourses of compulsory heterosexuality. One of the best examples to further understand this social phenomenon in contemporary mainland China is the fact that young Chinese people have both social and familial pressure to get married when they reach the most “suitable age for marriage” in the Chinese belief system (Kam, 2010).

In contemporary mainland Chinese society, dominant discourses position heterosexuality as the natural, default relationship structure, apparent through government legislation, which determines relevant laws, and through schools, political agendas, and families. Though many countries in the world have legalised same-sex marriage (Varrella, 2021), it remains illegal in China (Zi, 2019). Moreover, as outlined in Chapter 1, same-sex attraction is absent in school curriculums and there is neither social recognition or protection of same-sex attracted people in contemporary mainland China (Hung, 2011; Wei & Liu, 2019). This official marginalisation of same-sex attracted subjectivities can be seen as an intentional silencing of sexuality diversity by the state, marking these individuals and attempting to construct them as “non-existent” within society. Simultaneously, dominant discourses of heterosexuality are practised at an institutional-wide level every day, further obscuring the visibility of same-sex attracted people in China (Hung, 2011; Tu & Lee, 2014; United Nations Development Programme; Wei & Liu, 2019). Hence, Chinese people have very few opportunities to learn about same-sex attracted individuals (formally or informally) in a bias-free manner; through this continual process of silencing and the exclusion of sexual minorities from mainstream discourses, heterosexuality is being constantly exercised and further affirmed. This process

reflects how disciplinary power is embedded in dominant discourses and constructs people's knowledge through various institutional techniques; these dominant discourses assimilate into common sense knowledges and constitutes people's understandings of what is true and natural (Weedon, 1987).

Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Schools

In addition to legal and rights-based government advice, school—as a formal educational institution—is a place where dominant discourses, and their associated power, are produced and entrenched. Foucault (1991) argues that schools operate as instruments of disciplinary regulation, articulating standards and boundaries for un/acceptable behaviours and knowledges. Teachers not only transfer knowledge that reinforces the existing regimes of power; a so-called “responsible” teacher also offers rewards and punishments to regulate students' behaviours and ways of being in order to promote good students (To, 2006). In line with this, in Chinese schools, representations of same-sex attraction are absent in official textbooks (United Nations Development Programme, 2016), and Chinese teachers are often silent on topics related to sex and sexualities which sit outside of heterosexuality (Lin et al., 2016; Wei & Liu, 2019).

Moreover, homophobic language and behaviours are often tolerated within Chinese schools, leading same-sex attracted students to feel unsupported by the adults entrusted with their care (Fan, 2017; Wei & Liu, 2019). Homophobia, as defined by Weinberg and Weinberg (1972), refers to “the gratuitous fear and intolerance that heterosexual individuals feel about homosexuals” (p. 83). Homophobia functions as a form of social punishment, inclusive of physical and verbal violence, to penalise sexual nonconformity (Callaghan, 2014). Leaving homophobic bullying uncontrolled is another way of silencing and socially punishing same-sex attracted young people. Silence itself, according to Foucault (1978), consists of both the things one refuses to say, or that which one is forbidden to name. In Foucault’s (1978) words that describe silence:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. (p. 27)

In other words, same-sex attraction is visible and invisible simultaneously, and this is apparent in Chinese society. However, only specific forms of discourses around same-sex attraction are allowed to speak in the centre of the discursive system; that is, negatively biased content about same-sex attraction (e.g., homophobic language and behaviour) is highly visible, while information regarding the normalcy of sexual minorities remains marginalised and silenced.

This illustrates how rankings among discourses operate within the power system (Foucault, 1978).

Silence is a significant tool within the discursive system of schooling, as it operates as a strategy to underpin power in terms of signalling to people socially appropriate ways of speaking and behaving. At the same time, educators' tolerance of homophobic language and social marginalisation of students who fail to conform to prevailing gender norms is further evidence of a heteronormative discursive system, which normalises this type of bullying as "typical student behaviour" (Payne & Smith, 2013). In the process, the "true," compulsory, and correct essence of heterosexuality is re-affirmed.

Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Media

In addition to educational institutions, the media in modern societies plays a critical role in transmitting power and producing knowledges (Tu & Lee, 2014). In China, state-owned media operates as a means of propagating socially approved discourses on behalf of the government and represents same-sex attraction in certain ways (Huang, 2018). Through reporting certain content and presenting particular commentary, the media operates to affirm and reify particular ways of being while reinforcing dominant discourses (Kellner, 2003). This is critically important because, as previously discussed, these discourses proliferate within the mainstream media to construct people's subjectivities and knowledge by delineating the boundaries of ab/normal (Weedon, 1987). This can be seen in Chinese media by the fact that

queer communities are mostly invisible in the mainstream printed media, with only occasional reports appearing which connect gay men with violence and promiscuity, HIV, and social crimes (Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014). However, lesbians are barely visible at all, which resonates with the notion of Chinese lesbians' double marginalisation, explained in Chapter 1. In this way, official media not only helps to exercise powerful discourses to produce and underpin the normativity of heterosexuality, it also creates more conflicts and contrasts between the normative and the non-normative, marking the latter with more stigma and rejection (Huang, 2018; Tu & Lee, 2014).

Discursive Power of Heteronormativity in Chinese Families

Given the centrality of the family within Chinese culture, it is important to discuss how power is practised within the family and impacts of power on shaping Chinese people's minds and social bodies. Foucault (1991) suggests that family, as a social meaning, is never accidental or natural; rather, it is political and constituted in language. Hence, family may be not as influential as legal and educational systems, but it still reflects the perpetuation of how powerful discourses continue to be practised and how they are constitutive of people's subjectivities (Taylor, 2012). Family is a fundamental element of Chinese society; it shapes people's social values, influencing how people see the world (Tang, 1995). However, the family system itself is also a product of the state and its associated dominant discursive power, advancing discourses that celebrate socially approved values (Murfin, 1996). Taylor (2012) argues that family, as a traditionally sovereign system, "has been infiltrated by discipline and

co-opted by biopower in ‘supplementary’ ways” (p. 202). In other words, the family absorbs disciplinary power from dominant social discourses, and family members further circulate power in the family system and practise these dominant discourses to characterise members’ social position within the family.

Although children are not powerless and have agency (Macleod, 2015), parents usually hold more power over their child and this power imbalance tends to be sharper because of the influence of Confucianism in East Asian societies, including China, where filial piety is the root of all morals and social values (Tsai, 1999; Tsai et al., 2008). Filial piety allows hierarchies between parents (older generations) and children (younger generations), requiring younger generations to respect and obey their parents, whether in the way they behave or how they think. This further underpins Chinese parents’ discursive power in the family (Lin et al., 2016). Parental power functions in various layers in a family, and it tightly connects with socially defined “standards of normalcy.” This suggests that Chinese parents tend to believe that they have responsibility to educate and discipline their child in accordance with social norms (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005; Lam et al., 2020). Behaving in socially “appropriate” and expected ways are believed to be necessary for a child’s future achievements (Chen et al., 2010; Tan, 2011). Hence, dominant discourses around traditional marriage and child-bearing position these as obligatory for rearing children; in the process, parents discipline their child through various strategies in order to achieve normative expectations for their child.

Since the whole family is constituted around certain discourses, such as patriarchy and heterosexist values, these discourses in some way limit the child's way of seeing the world, as children explore knowledge from the discourses around them (Brown & Ogden, 2004; Willig, 2008). It is very common to see Chinese families celebrate a traditional family structure, inclusive of a father, mother, and (until recently) a single child (Shi, 2016; Shi et al., 2019) (see also information about the one-child policy in Chapter 1). In China, even heterosexual single-parent families and families with a double income and no children still suffer from social prejudice and discrimination because of their failure to conform to their familial duties (Q. Li, 2020; Wang, 2017), let alone same-sex couples who are essentially barred from legal marriage and raising children (CCCWA, 2017; Zi, 2019). Thus, conforming to the traditional family archetype engenders privilege and social rewards. As a result, it is not surprising that discourses which sit in contrast to heteronormative values hardly appear in informal family education or casual conversation (Lin et al., 2016; Wei & Liu, 2019). The absence of discourses around same-sex attraction within families reflects again how heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality, as well as binary gender responsibilities, are reinforced through practices of family discourses.

Additionally, the sovereign power of family interacts with disciplinary institutions such as schools, and they usually fully collaborate with each other in disciplining individuals' ways of being (Taylor, 2012). This can be seen in the case of parents sending their children to schools for both academic knowledge and moral education and schools disciplining these children into "normative" subjects that typically match the family's expectations. If children fail to

meet the social standards of “normalcy,” “it is often the family that hands them over to disciplinary institutions, consigning them to asylums or taking them to therapy and rehab” (Taylor, 2012, p. 205).

According to Foucault’s (1978) notion of power and discourse, as well as disciplinary power (Foucault, 1991), we can see how this plays out in contemporary mainland China specifically in relation to the position of same-sex attraction in society. From the public institutions of the legal system, media, and schooling, to the private institution of the family, it can be seen clearly how dominant discourses around heteronormativity have been continuously practised and how the power that favours particular social (e.g., heterosexual) groups and particular social values (including getting married and having children) is transferred and consolidated. In the process, heterosexuality is constantly constructed as the only “normal” and “natural” sexual orientation by default, while sexualities other than heterosexuality are constituted as “abnormal” and tagged with public stigma and discrimination (Ward & Mann, 2012).

Feminist Critiques and Extension of Foucault’s

Work

Although this discussion has focused on Foucault’s (1978) concepts of power and discourse, feminists have also critiqued Foucault’s notion of subjectivity on the basis that it has neglected individuals’ agency and resistance (Hartsock, 1989; McLaren, 2002). Weedon (1987)

notes that individuals have human agency and this allows people to choose what they want to believe and how they act. Agency also helps individuals negotiate their identities within different types of social relations. Hence, although Foucault's post-structuralist concept of power relations and a discursive system has offered feminists inspiration in thinking about women's social positions and their relations with men within the society (Ramazanoglu, 1993), two main critiques need to be mentioned here.

First, despite the fact that Foucault's approaches challenge the nature of social truths that position women as devalued, subordinate and, above all else, best suited to heterosexual domestic life as a mother and a wife (Weedon, 1987), Foucault himself did not consider the gendered female body or the power of women in his writings. His theories were presented as gender non-specific, never mentioning gender difference when talking about sexuality and, accordingly, neglecting distinctions in social bodies between differently gendered people (King, 2004). Foucault's neglect of women's bodies when considering notions of power and surveillance has encouraged feminist post-structuralists' critique and expansion of these ideas, with a focus on women's power, language, and sexuality (Gavey, 2011).

Second, as previously discussed, Foucault failed to acknowledge human agency in his theorising on power relations because he "allowed autonomous 'discursive practices' to become subjectless" (Caldwell, 2007, p. 770) even though he mentioned resistance (Hartsock, 1989; McLaren, 2002). According to Foucault (1978), individuals' subjectivities are socially constructed as products of power, an idea which enables an understanding of bodies as only

explained through truths that are socially produced; however, an individual is by no means solely materially or institutionally shaped (Walkerdine, 1990)

Human Agency

Weedon (1987) pointed out that it is the agency of individuals which provides opportunities for individuals to recreate new possible modes of subjectivity and redefine social realities. Further to this, feminist scholar Nancy Hartsock argued that knowledges that govern dominant groups in a society are partial and never fixed. She called these “situated knowledges,” as they are located in a specific time and space and will definitely shift depending on changes, such as influential historical events and shifts within the power of the authority (Hartsock, 1989, p. 28). Hence, these knowledges can be challenged for a more adequate account of social reality.

As Butler (1992) writes, the subject is never fully constituted; both the progress of social construction and the effects of power never cease at any given moment. Since power is always everywhere, at the same time, the subject is constantly being (re)produced. Power relations are always open to challenge and reworking, and therefore new subjectivities are reproduced (Weedon, 1987). In Butler’s (2003) words, social constitution “is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible” (Butler, 2003, p. 130). Therefore, individuals’ subjectivities and identities that have been socially constructed are actually critical preconditions of human agency. For

instance, although women have been socially constituted as subordinate to men and powerless, women themselves are able to reflect on the social inequality between genders through recognising how they have been marginalised within, and disempowered by, prevailing dominant discourses (Weedon, 1987). This realisation of being treated unequally encourages them to challenge social inequality. Thus, the lack of equality does not equate to a lack of knowledge (Hartsock, 1989); however, building knowledge of power and context helps marginalised individuals recognise how they have been denied privilege within, and erased from, the mainstream society.

Therefore, subjectivities are socially constituted but never determined; they are always flexible and unstable in a continuous process of redefinition, reconfiguration, and reconstruction. It is agency that enables individuals to either adhere to, or challenge, certain forms of pre-constituted subjectivities (Butler, 1992). Moreover, as Giddens (1984) notes, agency does not only give individuals a chance to resist or act subversively, but it must also include possibilities of making a difference. Thus, in light of feminist post-structuralist thinking, human agency represents unconstrained freedom, as individuals can constantly disrupt established discourses and recreate new possible ones (Butler, 1992, 2003; Weedon, 1987). For this research project, a feminist post-structuralist approach which extends Foucault's work on power and discourse and also highlights human agency offers a comprehensive understanding of how culture has shaped parents' reactions towards their child's sexuality and how these parents use their agency to both challenge and resist the discursive power of heteronormativity that exists within Chinese society.

Gender Performativity

Although the previous section has presented feminist post-structuralist critiques of Foucault's theoretical contributions, it is undeniable that his work has been highly influential on feminist post-structuralists' conceptualisations of gender, sexuality, and the body (Eguchi, 2011). One of the most famous instances of extended work is the application of Judith Butler's (1990, 1993a) theory of gender performativity.

Gender performativity, argues that gender and heterosexuality are socially and culturally constructed, through repetitive performances of norms and conventions associated with socialised norms and standards that communicate "appropriate" expressions of maleness and femaleness. Performativity is embedded in dominant discursive systems; in Butler's (1993a) words: "Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourses produces the effect that it names" (p. 2).

As mentioned before, heteronormativity is not only a belief that normalises and naturalises heterosexuality while suppressing other sexualities; rather, it also requires a binary sex system that celebrates the "naturalness" of gender differences, including normative masculinity for men and normative femininity for women (Butler, 1990, 1993a; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Hence, in modern societies, individuals' performances that most clearly conform to current standards of heteronormativity of the specific historical time are regarded

as successful and ideal; taken together, these promote a coherent and compelling identity within society. Moreover, heteronormativity is integral to the patriarchal system that privileges masculinity, as strictures of masculinity require men to be dominant and powerful while rules of femininity require women to be subordinate and weak (Lawrence, 2014).

In accordance with Foucault (1978), Butler (1990) argued it is language from a specific historical time that offers an open system consisting of constantly created and practised rules that decide what is culturally intelligible and vice versa. "Cultural intelligibility," in Butler's (1990) words, refers to "presumptions about normative gender and sexuality" that "determine in advance what will qualify as the 'human' and the 'liveable'" (p. xxiii). Hence, gender identity is a practice which reflects how culturally intelligible rules have been constantly exercised and reinforced. At the same time, an individual's gender expression is considered as a performance, which is encouraged by the attributes of cultural intelligibility that discipline our social bodies and lives (Borgerson, 2005; Tyler & Cohen, 2010).

Butler (1990) also regards discourses as productive of identities. She uses the concept of performativity to describe how both gendered acts and sexual desires are impacted by dominant discourses with respect to gender that encourage people to discipline their social bodies based on disciplinary societal regimes. More importantly, heterosexuality and gender regulation are inseparably interconnected, with the one always supplementing the other. For Butler (1990), gender, sexuality, and the body intersect to influence or construct the social reality of one's gender identity. For individuals who were born and grow up as a member of

a heteronormative society which celebrates binary gender differences, their bodies and behaviours are similarly regulated by the rules of gender norms. Thus, it is through creating compulsory binary gender differences and norms that one's gender identity becomes legible to others as a result of constant exercise of particular discourses and constant regulation (Butler, 1990, 1993a; Vipond, 2019). In this situation, people develop certain performances based on prescribed scripts of gender in their daily social interactions in order to conform to social and cultural expectations (Butler, 1990, 1993a; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

Moreover, Butler (1993b) further argues that, "gender is a kind of imitation"; she notes:

The naturalistic effects of heterosexualised genders are produced through imitative strategies ... The "reality" of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations ... heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself- and failing (p. 313).

This imitation process extends Foucault's (1991) ideas that human beings are always being watched by others in society and continue to monitor their own social behaviours to avoid social punishments. Thus, people learn how they should act and behave in society through communicated social and cultural expectations (Butler, 1990, 1993a). Imitating is also a kind of regulation, as individuals regulate themselves to conform to socially expected gender

expression. This implies that binary gender differences and regulations are accomplished through the practices of heterosexist values, as heteronormative social systems celebrate heterosexual attraction, coupling, and reproduction (Butler, 1990; Eguchi, 2011).

We can see how this also applies to both ancient and contemporary Chinese society. All discourses require people to speak and act from a gendered position (Weedon, 1987). As discussed in Chapter 1, China has favoured masculinity for centuries (Yifei, 2011); thus, binary gender roles, which position females in a passive, inferior, and submissive social place compared to males' superior ruler position, have been deeply ensconced in Chinese culture (Xie & Zhu, 2009; Yang, 2010). As addressed in Chapter 1, even if same-sex activities were relatively tolerated in ancient Chinese society, everyone fulfilled their social responsibilities, that is, getting married to an opposite-sex person and having children for the family line; as a result, same-sex behaviour was only seen as an optional lifestyle that never would threaten heteronormativity and binary gender differences in society (Chou, 1997). Further, compulsory binary gender roles are embedded in the discourses of the Chinese traditional philosophy of Yin-Yang (see Chapter 1). According to the philosophy of Yin-Yang, sex has to bring Yin (female/femininity) and Yang (male/masculinity) together in order to achieve balance and harmony (Shi, 2013). Thus, this philosophy celebrates binary gender differences, heterosexual relations, and family integrity (Roberts, 2019). Although Yin-Yang ideology is an ancient Chinese concept, it still influences contemporary Chinese people's thoughts and social performances, as evidenced in judgements levelled at same-sex attracted individuals for disrupting the cultural norm of Yin-Yang harmony (Bai, 2021; Zhang, 2018). According to this

philosophy, a same-sex relationship contains two elements of Yin or two of Yang which means they are considered to be imbalanced and disruptive to the harmony required for relationships. Furthermore, consistent with gender hierarchy, Yang is privileged over Yin (Rosenlee, 2006), as Yang links with the strength of men while Yin represents the weakness in women (Yun, 2013). Hence, it is discourses around binary gender differences, including discourses around Yin-Yang harmony, that gradually create social and cultural expectations for Chinese men and women. Such expectations not only constantly secure men's power within society, but also strengthen the normality of heterosexual relationships (Yun, 2013).

Moreover, Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory and her extended concept of the heterosexual matrix offers a useful explanation for the social discrimination directed at gay men and lesbian women, with the former always labelled as feminine or sissy (Chesebro, 2001; Eguchi, 2009, 2011; Hoang, 2019; Zhang, 2019) and the latter usually considered to be unattractive to men (Gilchrist, 2018; Ruan & Bullough, 1992). The heterosexual matrix is a tripartite system consisting of sex, gender, and sexuality, which refers to how people make assumptions about what they see based on heterosexist frameworks in society (Butler, 1990; Tredway, 2014). In Butler's (1990) words, the heterosexual matrix is

a hegemonic discursive/epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and

hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of
heterosexuality. (p. 151)

In other words, heterosexuality, as well as masculinity and femininity, are taken for granted as “natural” and “normal” expressions that originate from an individual’s biological sex (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). However, when one challenges the heterosexual matrix, people doubt the individual’s gender identities or gender expression. This can be seen in instances where gay men are assumed to be behaving in an effeminate manner, as people tend to assume that men who are attracted to men must be more like women (Zhang, 2019), and lesbian relationships are often assumed to be a reaction to violence or neglect by men or a compromised form of sexual relationships due to a lack of males; that is, it is assumed that women who are attracted to women must have experienced some harm from men, or simply do not have access to men (Huang, 2017; Ruan & Bullough, 1992). Likewise, Butler’s concept of the heterosexual matrix can also be applied to explain Chinese people’s belief in Yin-Yang harmony; that is, a man is expected to express more Yang characteristics and to form a family with a woman, who in turn is assumed to show more Yin expressions to achieve balance and harmony (Yun, 2013). When two Yang (gay men) or two Ying (lesbians) meet, the combination (same-sex relationship) is considered as imbalanced and needs to be corrected. Hence, for this research project, Butler’s (1990, 1993a) theoretical contributions of gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix offer a critical lens through which to better understand parents’ experiences of their child’s sexual orientation as well as their comments

about their child's gender expression after they became aware of the child's same-sex attraction.

Intersectionality

As Butler (1990) argues, the social reality of gender is not merely about gender; rather, it is an intersection of gender, sexuality, and the body. Similarly, it is important to note that gender is not the only factor that determines power relations, even though individuals are situated in patriarchal societies. Power itself operates in a field of relations which includes multiple elements of identity, behaviour, and appearance (Cannon et al., 2015). The term *intersectionality*, which was first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), illustrates how an individual's different aspects of identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, and so on are interconnected. Hence, intra-group differences among marginalised groups need to be taken into account. In contrast with multiracial Western societies, racial issues are not commonly discussed in China, since the nation is essentially a monoethnic society (Mrozinski et al., 2002). However, other aspects of subjectivity, such as place of residence (rural/urban), age (older/younger generation), gender, and sexual orientation may be of greater relevance to determine different life trajectories. This can also be applied to the research upon which this thesis reports. For instance, intersections between gender and sexual orientation could result in different parental reactions. As discussed in previous chapters, Chinese lesbians are more vulnerable to double marginalisation in society, for being both a woman and a same-sex attracted person (Kam, 2010); as a result, Chinese parents of

a lesbian daughter may react differently to those of a gay son. Moreover, place of residence can also intersect with age and sexual orientation and have an impact on parents' experiences of having a same-sex attracted child. Specifically, parents who have a same-sex attracted child and who live in rural China or a small town are likely to experience prejudice and stigma from others, as rural people are often more connected to and influenced by Chinese traditional values (Lu, 2011). As a result, it is expected that parents from rural areas would encounter more risks and pressure in terms of loss of face than those families residing in cities; this may be reflected in their responses towards their child's sexuality.

Hence, for this research project, an intersectional approach offers a broader understanding of parents' experiences towards their child's sexual orientation as well as the interplay in family relationships. There is no single element of identity that determines one's social perspective, position, or status; thus, each Chinese parent of a same-sex attracted child may have different experiences of their child's coming out due to their distinct social background and family structure. Chapter 5 presents more detailed information about how both intersectionality and subjectivity are considered, and how they operate as influences on considerations of parental reactions to their child's coming out/sexuality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a detailed explanation of the theoretical and cultural concepts that are used in this research. These include feminist post-structuralism (Weedon,

1987), which is influenced by Foucault's (1978) work on power and discourse, and Butler's (1990, 1993a) related theoretical concepts, including the notion of a gender "binary," gender performativity, and the heterosexual matrix. Although this thesis uses Western theoretical influences, this chapter explained how these theoretical approaches can be applied in understanding same-sex attraction in contemporary Chinese society. This is achieved by complementing these Western theories with an acknowledgement of Confucian ideologies and the concept of face, which is considered a product of social rewards and systems of punishment. As, to date, there has been little theoretical exploration of how Chinese parents' perspectives towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation have been shaped or influenced by their culture. This thesis is a deliberate move to better understand the experiences of coming out as same-sex attracted in China using both Western and Chinese theoretical influences, providing an important contribution to the research in the field. In the next chapter, a comprehensive explanation of the methodology used in this study, including the research design, recruited sample, procedures, and analytical methods will be presented.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework central to this study: feminist post-structuralism (Weedon, 1987), Foucault's (1978) concepts of power and discourse, and Butler's (1990, 1993a) theories of gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix, and how these can be extended through acknowledgement of the Confucian idea of Yin-Yang and the Chinese cultural concept of *face* to better understand same-sex attraction in Chinese society. This chapter presents the methodological approach taken within this study. It includes the research design, incorporating how recruitment materials were disseminated and how participants were enabled to participate in the study; information about the sample and recruitment processes; and the methods and procedures, including relevant ethical considerations. The final section of the chapter discusses how I analysed and interpreted the data, offering a detailed explanation of the thematic coding and categorising in which I engaged. However, to frame this research, the discussion first begins by introducing the feminist research approaches which guided this project, and then continues with a discussion of the importance of acknowledging my own positionality and the uses of reflexivity, which are central tenets of a feminist research methodology.

Feminist Research Methodology

Adopting a feminist methodology, I explore experiences of Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian adult child. This is a group whose voices are rarely heard, both generally within society, as well as within the field of sexuality diversity research. The intention of this project is to explore Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's coming out; in particular, the study aims to explore parents' initial and shifting attitudes and behaviours towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation, how they engaged with extended family members or friends as a parent of a same-sex attracted child, and the status of the parent-child relationship post-disclosure. Through the nature of this enquiry, this research is positioned as a form of resistance against a dominant discursive power, which positions same-sex attraction as "abnormal" or less-than.

The aims of this research—to amplify the voices of a marginalised and structurally oppressed group, in this case the Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian adult child—are aligned with feminist research methodologies, the purpose of which is to investigate understandings of information that is usually hidden, forgotten, or subordinated within society and/or mainstream culture (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Rayaprol, 2016). Feminist methodologies have been developed with the explicit aims of making women's experiences visible in the social sciences (Presser, 2005) and working towards eliminating existing power imbalances related to knowledge construction and embedded hierarchies, since traditional social theories have marginalised, overlooked, and distorted the significance of women's experiences (Campbell

& Wasco, 2000; Cislighi & Heise, 2020). Feminist methodologies take into account an approach that “neither dismisses nor denies structural factors but allows a range of voices to speak” (Lowe & Short, 1990, p. 8). Hence, in addition to recognising gender as a marginalising category, feminist scholars also give voices to other oppressed, often marginalised, identities based on sexuality, race, and/or class (Rayaprol, 2016). In other words, feminist scholars seek to amplify the voices and narratives of the socially marginalised, including queer people, people of colour, the less educated, or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, rather than reinscribe white, Western, male, heterosexual, middle class voices as the “norm” from which others differ (Ezzy, 2013).

Feminist researchers have noted that individuals who are from non-privileged groups are usually able to understand the perspectives and experiences from both the dominant groups and the oppressed groups within their communities (Krane, 2001). This is not only because of the dominance of the former’s perspectives, but also because marginalised individuals may be more aware of the rewards afforded to more privileged groups and their own marginalisation as a point of difference (Krane, 2001; Weedon, 1987). In contrast, people from socially and culturally advantaged groups are often blind to their own privilege and rarely interrogate the experiences and perspectives of oppressed individuals (Baldwin, 2016; Wildman & Davis, 1996). For instance, in contemporary Chinese society, heterosexual people, especially married heterosexual people, are viewed as “normal” (Ren et al., 2019), since the dominant discourses present within Chinese traditional culture emphasises the essentiality of family continuity and heteronormativity (T. Liu, 2019; Lo, 2020). Thus, (married)

heterosexual communities are privileged through various structural, political, and institutional methods, as outlined in Chapter 1. However, most Chinese married individuals are not aware of their privilege; instead, their heterosexuality is taken for granted, and made invisible by its “normality” (Ning & Poon, 2021; Wang, 2014). At the same time, due to the low visibility of sexual minorities in contemporary Chinese society (United Nations Development Programme, 2016), heterosexual Chinese people are rarely exposed to the experiences of individuals within queer communities, or their families. With this in mind, a feminist, emancipatory approach is viewed as being appropriate for the purposes and aims of this research.

Furthermore, traditional research methods tend to mostly favour and benefit the researcher, positioning the researcher as an “expert” in control of the research process and analysis (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Yost & Chmielewski, 2013, p. 246). In other words, participants in traditional research methods are expected to share their personal information and stories with the researcher(s) without any reciprocal information or relationship building. These modes of research have been critiqued because of the inherent power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (Yost & Chmielewski, 2013). Addressing this, feminist researchers have developed methodological approaches that acknowledge the importance of the researcher’s positionality and reflexivity and use this knowledge to attempt to dismantle the power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched (Deutsch & Strack, 2006; Domosh, 2003). Feminist researchers, thus, tend to allow for a more reciprocal relationship between the researcher and research participant through the promotion of openness around

research intent and use, and transparency of the research motive (Garko, 1999; Lawless, 2019; Philip et al., 2013). Hence, feminist approaches endeavour to decrease the power imbalance between the two parties and facilitate more mutual understanding and learning (Bondi, 2003; Cooper & Rogers, 2015; Moss, 2002).

In the current research study, I strove to enact these key feminist research tenets, in part, through the disclosure of my own experiences with participants during the interviews, where appropriate and natural to do so. In Jourard's words: "disclosure begets disclosure" (Jourard 1971, p. 27). In order to engender more openness and create less of a power differential during the process of data collection, I shared some of my own experiences as a Chinese woman who spent her childhood and young adulthood living in mainland China within a Chinese family. This type of mutual dialogue and involvement is viewed as promoting rapport and respect between the researcher and research participants and increasing participant comfort, particularly where the subject matter is more sensitive (Eide & Kahn, 2008). Of course, attention to the cultivation of a more reciprocal relationship did not mean that I disclosed my life story to my participants to gain credibility. I still had power, as the researcher, to guide the main direction of the conversation based on the prepared interview questions, to interpret and analyse the respondent's reactions, and to encourage them to continue to talk around the research topic. Further, as Hesse-Biber (2011) argues, being too familiar with research participants may create a situation where respondents unnecessarily disclose too much intimate information, potentially violating ethical principles of confidentiality. Hence, I

was careful to be balanced in the manner in which I built rapport and reduced the power differential between researcher and researched.

Positionality in Feminist Research and my Positionality

Feminist researchers have highlighted the importance of researchers clarifying their own positionality—or relevant experiences and understanding of the social world—in the process of the research (Leggett, 2018). Being aware of my positionality was critical for both me and my research participants, since distinctive personal characteristics and experiences not only allowed me to gain and analyse the information from familiar social groups of people in a more efficient and accurate way, but also led me to look at the data through a particular lens (Holmes, 2020). This was due to my “insider” position, based on some aspects of a shared biography with the participants that links tightly with the research aim (England, 1994); namely, to gain an understanding of Chinese parents’ reactions towards their child’s same-sex attraction. An explanation of my positionality is provided below.

Being a young Chinese female who has spent almost two-thirds of her life in mainland China, I am clearly aware of the mainstream social and familial attitudes toward same-sex issues in that context. These mainstream attitudes include the prevalence and normalisation of heterosexism, as well as the necessity of marriage and having children. Because of my lived understandings of the social environment in mainland China, I am more confident in my capacity to accurately understand participants’ stories about growing up as a Chinese gay

man or lesbian or having a gay or lesbian child in a Chinese family. In other words, I have an insider status because of my shared cultural understanding of Chinese parental expectations related to gender expression and sexuality and the unique challenges of coming out within this setting. Emotional interactions between me and the participants, including acknowledgement of my own sympathy/empathy for their experiences, added to my credibility as a researcher and facilitated our shared interpersonal relationship building over the course of the interviews, enabling greater candour and transparency (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Additionally, I hoped that the cultivation of trust within the researcher/researched relationship would help to enhance our connection, promote a sense of confidence and comfort, and enable my participants to feel more relaxed and connected to me and the project goals; this is of particular importance when the subject matter is personal and sensitive (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

As mentioned above, my awareness of my own positionality in relation to the participants is of critical importance for a feminist researcher as it reflects the limits of objectivity. It also demonstrates that feminist qualitative research is bidirectional; as Deutsch (2004) writes, "I am subject, object, and researcher. My participants are subjects, objects, and actors" (Deutsch, 2004, p. 889). Hence, I will further explain my own position within the research.

I consider my positionality as a post-structural feminist and a mainland urban Chinese woman who was born in an urban location. I am also a member of the educated middle class and have had experiences abroad (in the West) for almost one-third of my life. I adhere to

Foucault's theories of knowledge production—that there are no universal truths and our knowledge of and standpoints relevant to the world are all situated and constructed in terms of where we are positioned in terms of power and privilege and what information and perspectives we have been exposed to (Foucault, 1978, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2011; Krane, 2001; Weedon, 1987). In addition, my views are aligned with those of Weedon (1987) and Butler (1990, 1993a), who argue that gender expression and sexuality is socially constructed by the dominant discourses perpetuated by institutions such as schools, law, medicine, media, government, and even family organisations.

I was born in the 1990s, when China became more open due to the establishment of its Reform and Opening-Up Policy during the late 1970's. As a young child in China, I did not hear any terms related to sexuality, such as "homosexuality" or "heterosexuality" until I reached middle school age around 2008. My family and my school never mentioned these concepts, except on one occasion, when I was in high school, when my mother said that gay people were not normal and were disgusting. She even emphasised that bisexuality was much more disgusting because bisexual people are attracted to both females and males, thus their sexual life must be promiscuous.

The discourses surrounding me, whether through informal family talks or formal education in my younger years, highlighted the necessity and inevitability of traditional marriage and family continuity in everyone's life trajectory. Furthermore, my relatives from the older generations and my parents' friends are all married and almost everyone has their own child.

In my close family sphere, there is only one couple that does not have a child; however, my relatives have always talked about them with a certain amount of pity, with the implication being that they were unable to live “normally” and enjoy the happiness of having children. Similarly, when my relatives used to discuss an older, never-married woman in our neighbourhood, she was usually spoken about with a mixture of sympathy and ridicule, sometimes with an additional note—that she was a bit “abnormal.” My relatives’ attitudes used to make me feel that not having children is a misfortune and not getting married, especially for females, is shameful and abnormal.

When I was a child, my relatives used to ask me for fun, “What kind of guy do you want to marry when you grow up?” This is a very common question in China that older people like to ask young girls in their family. Before I had any understanding that discourse is power (Foucault, 1978), I thought nothing of this question. However, I now understand that these kinds of questions reproduce discourses that convey the dominant power. Every time this kind of question emerges in interpersonal communication, this can be viewed as a force which supports the dominant power. In other words, this simple question reflects the hegemonic heterosexism and the compulsory nature of heterosexual marriage in China. The message was clear: I am supposed to be a heterosexual person and I will get married when I grow up. Moreover, about 4 years ago, at a family dinner, when my mother was complaining to me that I did not have a boyfriend, I remembered my aunt saying to me, “You should do what you should do at your age.” This statement really made me feel uncomfortable; it made me feel like everyone has a predetermined script to follow and all the scripts echo the same play

with the same timeline: getting married at a certain age and having children at another certain age. However, it is not surprising to hear these messages from older generations. My mother and older relatives were born in an era where everyone was directed to get married and have children, not only because of the cultural emphasis on the value of family, but also because having children contributes labour for the economic development of the country (Zeng & Hesketh, 2016).

The dominant discourses which were present in my childhood and young adulthood also included clear messages about gender, including behaviours and ways of being associated with “proper” versions of femininity and masculinity. For example, teachers and relatives frequently repeated that “girls should be gentle” and that “gentle, proper girls cannot laugh loudly.” I can also remember that homophobic language or misogynistic language was used regularly within the schools I attended in China, accompanied by tolerance of this language by teachers and other school-based personnel. For instance, one of my male classmates in middle school was always teased and called a “sissy” simply because he had a high-pitched voice. He was tormented by rumours and was isolated during his middle school life, but no one, including his teachers, provided him with support or educated us about the seriousness of the homophobic discrimination and bullying underlying this harassment.

My experiences as outlined above reflect Foucault’s (1978) classic quote that “power is everywhere” (p. 93). When the mainstream social culture still tends to privilege both heterosexual, married people and individuals who adhere to their prescribed gender roles,

framing them as “normal,” this language helps to transfer power and spread particular “social truths.” These “social truths” are encouraged by the dominant authorities and institutions which results in a governing of people’s life processes and trajectories, their social bodies and even their sexual desires while facilitating a set of standards against which people judge and criticise each other (Ward & Mann, 2012).

Within Chinese culture, some of these behaviours can be explained by our collectivist cultural background that privileges sameness and conformity (Buggle, 2017, 2020; Fukushima et al., 2009; Oh, 2013). Sameness enables people to gather together and share the same ideology and lifestyle, and, as time passes, being the same as others indicates you are a “normal” and “natural” person who is “legible” and acceptable to members of a society. If you are different from others, people may gossip about you, slander you, assume you are a troublemaker, and start to reject and isolate you; such actions can be viewed as a form of surveillance, as outlined in Chapter 3. In other words, collectivism can limit the pursuit of unconventional ideas that challenge existing social and cultural concepts (Buggle, 2017). As a result, more and more Chinese people have hidden or lost their uniqueness in order to prevent themselves from getting into trouble (Fann, 2003).

Moreover, although my personal standpoints resist the dominant, heteronormative trajectory of getting married and having offspring to continue the family line, I respected narratives shared from my participants, even those who vocally objected to same-sex attraction and would not accept their non-heterosexual children. It was not surprising for me

to hear these resistant voices, as these reflected well how people's subjectivity, including their ideology and actions, has been constituted in the discourses available to them through their growth trajectory (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987). Throughout the data analysis process for this thesis, I also kept reflecting on my interpretation of the narratives my respondents shared with me, in order to help me reduce my own bias to minimum (Rowe, 2014).

Taking Reflexivity into Account as a Feminist Researcher

Within a feminist research paradigm, positionality is operationalised as reflexivity (Berger, 2015; Secules & Masta, 2020). The "work" of reflexivity requires that I critically examine my own background, attitudes, and experiences, looking for biases or standpoints that might impact the power relations within the research process, which may further affect data analysis and interpretation (Berger, 2015; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Thus, reflexivity is indeed a process of self-discovery and introspection that helps the researcher build new insights about the research question and seek strategies to improve the quality of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Hence, to address this concept, I needed to be always self-reflexive through the whole research process, as my subjective positions were always in a fluid state of being an insider, an outsider, or somewhere in the middle based on any given interview question or in the presence of any given interviewee (Brooks et al., 2014; Fasavalu & Reynolds, 2019; Flores, 2018). For instance, as a Chinese individual, I was certainly an insider when participants shared insights related to their cultural experiences; however, when

talking about specific social and familial experiences, I was often an outsider. This was particularly the case with participants from rural areas across China, due to people from rural China being more likely to conform to traditional Chinese expectations compared to those from urban areas, which further results in distinctive experiences that Chinese people from urban environments, such as myself, may find more difficult to understand (Lu, 2011). Hence, reflexivity helped to promote closeness in the relationship between myself and my respondents, while also enhancing credibility (Flores, 2018); simultaneously, a reflexive approach seeks to reduce researcher bias and encourage the discovery of unexpected perspectives and insights (Rowe, 2014).

In this research, due to the age gap between myself and the cohort of parent participants, as well as because of my extensive experiences living abroad, I have been exposed to much more knowledge about queer communities than the average older Chinese person and I consider myself to be more open and progressive. I personally view marriage and having a child as a personal choice rather than as a compulsory duty for individuals, which is almost the opposite perspective to many Chinese parents (Chou, 2001; Ren et al., 2019; Tan, 2011). Reflexivity enabled an understanding that both my own knowledge, as well as my participants' knowledge, is partial and situated (Jung, 2014). While these conflicting perspectives had the potential to create discomfort and tensions in the relationship between myself and the cohort of older Chinese parents, which could have negatively impacted the process and depth of data collection (Al-Hindi & Kawabata, 2002; Deutsch, 2004; Sultana, 2007), a reflexive approach enabled me to pause to examine my subjective positionality. With this in mind, I

tended to avoid voluntarily disclosing my own attitudes toward the queer community when I interviewed parent participants in case the interview would be negatively impacted, or even ended, as a result of disagreements between the two parties. Instead, I was inclined to devote more of my attention to the reason behind parents' assertions, by exploring what had influenced these parents persisting in their wish for traditional heterosexual marriage and familial continuity. Furthermore, as mentioned before, I strove to offer respect for all sentiments and experiences shared by my research participants, as I understand that individuals have a right to their opinions. Thus, my intention was also to build mutual respect between me and my respondents to make sure the interview proceeded smoothly (Sultana, 2007).

Additionally, I also adopted different lexical choices and ways of speaking when interviewing young participants and parents. During the conversations with young participants, I tended to use common mandarin Chinese mixed with English, neologisms, and internet slang to make dialogue more relaxed and humorous. A more relaxed and informal conversation mode with less stress encourages young adults to speak more and engage with the research question more deeply (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Knox & Burkard, 2009). However, in the interview with parent participants, I usually used honorific language and formal salutations to construct a respectful way of communication, as expected in Chinese culture. According to filial piety, as explained in Chapter 1, talking to people who are older in a more polite and respectful way is promoted as a virtue (Chow, 2009; Mehta & Ko, 2004); thus, people of older generations themselves might have been more willing to talk with me if my manners were in line with

expectations around general respect and deference. Moreover, as older people have history and a wealth of life experience, encouraging them to share more in the interview was also a way to encourage depth and richness in their research data.

Research Design

Feminist research methodology highlights the criticality of listening to people's voices and their experiences (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). In line with this, the technique of in-depth interviewing, which was employed in this research, allows for the sharing of information and promotes a rich understanding of lived experiences, thoughts, and ideas of particular socially and culturally oppressed groups (Hesse-Biber, 2011). In this research study, in-depth interviews were specifically chosen as the key method of data collection as they provided a deep and nuanced focus on the experiences of gay men and lesbians' parents within contemporary Chinese society.

Undertaking In-Depth Interviews

As previously noted, same-sex attraction and sex-related topics continue to be sensitive ones for Chinese people (Ning & Poon, 2021), and qualitative interviewing techniques are considered a suitable method for accessing information about sensitive topics (Elmir et al., 2011). The unique interactive probing question design within this approach allows participants' narratives to unfold, obtaining deeper information that aids in the investigation

of sensitive issues (Elam & Fenton, 2003). In-depth interviews aim to elicit rich information and understanding from participants' perspectives and experiences on a specific research topic (Ezzy, 2013; Milena et al., 2008). Thus, this method of data collection was considered the optimal research technique for this study given its aim of investigating the lived experiences of parents of young gay men and lesbians within contemporary Chinese society.

Additionally, due to the sensitivity of the research topic, it was appropriate to conduct individual interviews. First, discussing same-sex sexual orientation and sex-related topics more generally may elicit emotional reactions from participants during interviews, including anger, sadness, embarrassment, anxiety, and even distress (Labott et al., 2013). Second, due to the fact that same-sex attracted people in China are likely to experience more systemic and ongoing social marginalisation and, consequently, more mental health issues than heterosexual people (Lian et al., 2015; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019), it was likely that sensitive topics such as experiences of negative mental health or suicide ideation and attempts might be mentioned. Similarly, it was anticipated that participants might also share stories of domestic violence or divorce, since research has shown that the process of coming out in China can be associated with family disharmony (Bie & Tang, 2016; Wong & Tang, 2004). These issues are typically considered not only private personal or familial issues, but they are also often viewed as negative, or embarrassing, which could make participants fearful of potential discrimination and exclusion (Salaheddin & Mason, 2016), especially if discussing these issues with unknown people.

Hence, compared to other qualitative methods, such as focus group approaches, which gather a group of people to discuss a specific topic, the one-on-one interviewing conducted between myself and the respondents secured their privacy during the data collection process (Ransome, 2013). By opting for one-on-one interviews, rather than a focus group design, I hoped to reduce the possibility of participants providing socially acceptable responses due to self-consciousness within a group setting (Hollander, 2004; Ransome, 2013; Sim & Waterfield, 2019; Smithson, 2000). I also hoped this approach might promote participants' sense of confidence during the interview and reduce any potential nervousness or pressure which might be experienced within a focus group setting (Milena et al., 2008). As shown in previous research, individual in-depth interviews can promote participants' sense of the researcher's encouragement to disclose their ideas (Guest et al., 2013).

Using a Semi-Structured Interviewing Approach

Furthermore, in-depth interviewing often works best with a small sample rather than a large general population (Vasileiou et al., 2018). This is because this specific kind of qualitative research method focuses on meaning or "heterogeneities in meaning," investigating "how" and "why" a particular issue emerged (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162), rather than "hypothesis testing" for general social phenomena (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319).

Thus, in this research, in order to garner a thick, deep description of Chinese parents' reactions toward their child's disclosure of their sexual orientation, the research adopted a

semi-structured interview approach. This particular research technique employs frequent interactions between the researcher and the respondent where the researcher listens carefully to what the participant is saying and asks probing questions for clarification or additional details (Hesse-Biber, 2011). In particular, a semi-structured interview design resonates with feminist research methods, which promote more power balance between the researcher and the researched (Deutsch, 2004 Domosh, 2003). Thus, using semi-structured interview techniques, where I was able to tailor the questioning specifically to the contextual experiences of each participant (Krauss et al., 2009; Whiting, 2008), allowed me to explore the distinctive experiences and understandings of Chinese parents from different families.

Undertaking Voice-Only Interviewing

Interviews were conducted via an internet-based, voice-only interviewing platform commonly used in China: WeChat⁶. Although such interviews make seeing participants' visual cues such as gestures and eye contact impossible, after comprehensive consideration, voice-only interviewing was chosen as an ideal interviewing method for this study for the following

⁶ WeChat is a Chinese multipurpose app, consisted of messaging, audio calls, video calls, social media, and mobile payment (person-to-person direct payment) (Manners, 2021). WeChat has become the most popular social app in contemporary China. Almost everyone has a WeChat account to connect with friends (Iqbal, 2021).

reasons. First, it does not require participants to travel to a physical place to meet a person they have never met before. This may contribute to the reduction of nervousness and enhancement of participants' comfort and safety with disclosing their experiences to the researcher (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Trier-Bieniek, 2012); that is, if participants feel uncomfortable or simply change their mind and want to conclude the interview, it is much easier for them to withdraw from the study using the online platform than it might be in person (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Musselwhite et al., 2007). They might also feel more comfortable by being able to connect with the researcher from a space where they personally feel more relaxed and in control. Second, this technique helps respondents to disclose detailed experiences about sensitive topics without feeling uncomfortable, as the technology allows for additional participant privacy because their faces cannot be seen or later identified (Elmir et al., 2011). A third major advantage of using internet-based telephone interviewing was increased efficiency and access to a broad range of people from differing socio-economic classes, educational backgrounds, and residential locations in mainland China without travelling to different places. This opened up greater possibilities for diverse and rich data representation. In sum, using a one-to-one voice-only interview procedure allowed each participant to talk in a relaxing and protected situation, as the interview was conducted privately between the researcher and the participant (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Musselwhite et al., 2007; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Trier-Bieniek, 2012).

Interview Schedules

Interviews in this research were conducted with prepared interview schedules for the two participant groups: gay and lesbian (young) adults and parents of gay and lesbian adult children.

The interview schedule was developed to answer the following central research questions:

- What are Chinese parents' initial and shifting reactions towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation after their child's coming out?
- How does the parent-child relationship change, if at all, during the months and years after the adult child has come out?

Further, interviews were used to explore a third sub-question, which was woven into these two central analyses:

- How do Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian child negotiate their relationships with extended family members or friends in relation to their child's same-sex attraction?

Both Chinese and English versions of the interview schedule for each group of participants are provided in Appendix A. In practice, the interview schedules were used as a guide,

providing a clear set of instructions for me through predetermined open-ended questions (Bearman, 2019).

In this research, questions in the interview schedules for each group of participants were similar, as the main research aim was to better understand Chinese parents' perspectives about their child's non-normative sexuality and its influence on family and social relationships. The prepared questions in the interview schedule enabled me to proceed with the interview more smoothly and ensured my questions and participants' responses remained close to the research questions (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). For instance, such a guide allowed me to decide whether an answer from the respondent was worth following up and when to end a discussion and start a new question. If participants' responses were unrelated to my previously written question in the interview schedule, I would quickly know to stop the flow of conversation and start the next question to make the interview process more efficient. In this way, I was also able to conduct close comparisons between the respondents in the data analysis; as participants shared the same interview schedules, both the similarities and differences in participants' responses regarding the same questions could be easily observed (Punch, 2013; Young et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that these questions served as a guide only; as long as each predetermined question was covered, the order of the listing of questions did not need to be followed strictly and could change based on the actual process of the interview and the respondent's answer in those particular circumstances (Dunn et al., 2015). As a result, the

whole interviewing session remained an open space for both me and the respondent (Bearman, 2019; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Jamshed, 2014). The semi-structured interviews conducted in the research were not strictly controlled and tended to be more flexible, avoiding breaking the flow of the interview. Not only did this approach allow me to ask follow-up questions based on a respondent's answer that were not prepared in the interview schedule (Hesse-Biber, 2007), it also provided additional time to participants to contribute their own perspectives throughout the conversation (Jamshed, 2014).

Participants

To answer the research questions outlined above, two central participant groups were required: the parents of gay and lesbian adult children, and gay and lesbian adult children. This design allowed adult children's reports of the disclosure process to support those of their parents, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of parents' reactions towards their child's coming out. While the initial, ideal design included "matched" pairs of a same-sex attracted young adult and at least one of their parents, in reality this was not always possible. Some adult children's parents refused to participate in the interview. Thus, when hearing from a parent firsthand was not possible, due to a refusal to participate, interviewing young adult gay men and lesbians on their own about their experiences with their parents was used as an additional strategy to gain as much information as possible.

In terms of the two participant groups, the parameters of the first of these were restricted to Chinese people who self-identify as gay men or lesbians, aged between 20 and 40 years old, and who have been out to one or both of their parents for at least 3 months or more. The relatively broad initial age range (20–40 years) was intended to reflect a more diverse range of perspectives of Chinese familial attitudes on same-sex issues. However, it is important to note that in the actual sample the youngest participant from this cohort was 20 years old while the oldest was 30 years old. Kam (2010) noted that in traditional Chinese culture, the most “suitable” age for marriage is from 24 to 30 years old. Thus, the age range in the actual sample offered some advantage, as these individuals were approaching the most suitable age for marriage and may have been experiencing parental pressure to enter a heterosexual marriage and have children; engaging with this most “marriageable” group of individuals also allowed me to explore how such tensions had influenced parents’ reactions towards their child’s same-sex attraction.

The second participant group consisted of the parents of Chinese adult gay men and lesbians, typically aged between 45 and 70 years old. Again, participating parents’ eligibility hinged on whether or not they had been aware of their child’s sexual orientation for at least 3 months or more. The length of at least 3 months was required to allow parents to think through, absorb their child’s news and explore how this might impact their relationship with their child and members of their extended family, although acceptance time varies in different families (Ben-Ari, 1995; Spada, 1979). It was expected that some parents might have learned more about same-sex attraction after their child’s coming out (Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; Savin-

Williams, 2001); doing so might have further influenced their attitudes towards their child's sexuality and their relationship with their child and other family members.

The age range of parent participants was chosen to provide relevant boundaries for the sample, as these parents were all born prior to the establishment of the Reform and Opening-Up Policy in 1978 (see Chapter 1), when mainstream social attitudes toward sex were relatively oppressed and the discourses around same-sex attraction reflected that it was almost forbidden (Kong, 2016; Laurent, 2005; Wu, 2003). By contrast, young adults in this study were born after the establishment of the opening-up policy, when the social environment has become gradually more open (Kong, 2010, 2016). Additionally, parents from this specific age range experienced the Great Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976 (see Chapter 1). This is regarded as the most oppressive time for same-sex attracted individuals in China, who were subject to the severe social stigmatisation and the criminalisation of "homosexuality" as well as public persecution (Kong, 2016; Worth et al., 2017, 2019). The age-specific boundaries for this younger sample also helped to provide a sharp contrast to parents' attitudes and behaviours toward same-sex attraction.

Hard-to-Reach Populations

It is important to point out that both groups of participants in this research project are considered hard-to-reach populations. This refers to potential participants who are difficult for researchers to locate, approach, or engage with; they may also be termed "hidden

populations” who are socially and culturally disadvantaged and marginalised (Bonevski et al., 2014, p. 2). “Hidden populations” or hard-to-reach populations, including same-sex attracted people, often remain invisible in the mainstream culture and less may be known about them by most people in society (Gatlin & Johnson, 2017; Guillory et al., 2018). As explained in Chapter 1, the mainstream culture in contemporary Chinese society remains heteronormative, with very limited visibility of same-sex attraction (Hung, 2011; United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Thus, the pressure generated by heteronormative culture has a documented impact on Chinese same-sex attracted individuals and their parents. This includes impacts on their self-esteem, mental health status, and ability to live openly, due to fears of being discriminated against, socially marginalised, or even criticised and rejected by others (Bie & Tang, 2016; Chou, 2001; Liu & Choi, 2006; Ren et al., 2019; Wong & Tang, 2004; Xuan et al., 2019). Hence, these people may be concerned about the risk of double discrimination: that is, being discriminated against for being a part of socially disadvantaged group (the sexuality diverse community) and being discriminated against for speaking out about experiences of social disadvantage. As a result, it is difficult to collect information from such people, as they may refuse to share their personal stories with others. In simple terms, they are afraid of being found out and being identified as same-sex attracted or as a parent of a gay or lesbian individual. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, despite my best efforts, as illustrated below, and despite China having the largest LGBTQ population in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 2016), recruitment resulted in a relatively small sample size.

Sample

In total, eight parents (eight mothers, no fathers, and no parent pairs/couples) and 13 young participants (seven gay men and six lesbians) were recruited. Among all the participants, seven “matched” families were recruited and interviewed, consisting of seven mothers and seven children (five gay men and two lesbians). One mother participated in the research on her own because her child was unable to attend the interview due to their busy work schedule. In terms of the participation of fathers, according to these eight mothers’ explanations one mother’s husband had passed away, one mother was divorced, and one mother’s husband did not know about their child’s sexuality. Additionally, three mothers disclosed their husband’s reluctance to talk about their child’s same-sex sexual orientation and another two mothers disclosed that their husbands were busy and unable to participate in the interview. Hence, interviewing participants in couples was not possible.

Six young adults’ parents refused to participate in the study, with the most common reason given by their children being that their parents did not want to talk at all about the topic of same-sex attraction. Thus, two gay men and four lesbians were interviewed without collecting data from their parents. Seven young adults had come out to both parents while six young adults had only come out to their mother. Among these six young adults, one revealed that his father had died, thus disclosing to the father was impossible. Three adult child participants disclosed that they had a quite distant relationship with their father and rarely talked with him, thus they personally felt that there was no need to come out to their father. Another

two participants mentioned the particular difficulties likely to emerge if they came out to their father, details of which will be further explored in Chapter 5.

In order to protect the confidentiality of each participant to ensure that they would not be identified, pseudonyms were used. Additionally, only general descriptors for demographic details were used; for instance, each young participant’s exact age and place of residence was replaced with broader categories for both age (ranges) and place of residence (city/rural). Participants’ religious affiliations were not specified; rather, if an individual identified as personally religious, they were given a more general designation—“religious”—again as a method of protecting their confidentiality. Demographic details of each group of participants are displayed in Table 1 and 2 below.

Table 1

Demographic Details of Participant Group 1: Parents of Gay and Lesbian Adult Children

Interview	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Employment status	Location	Religious
1	Chang	female	50	full-time employed	rural	yes
2	Zhou	female	50	unemployed	rural	unknown
3	Chen	female	49	full-time employed	rural	unknown
4	Wang	female	46	full-time employed	rural	unknown
5	Liang	female	49	full-time employed	city	unknown
6	Sun	female	54	retired	rural	unknown
7	Gao	female	65	retired	city	yes
8	Lee	female	57	retired	city	unknown

Table 2

Demographic Details of Participant Group 2: Adult Gay and Lesbian Children

Interview	Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	Employment status	Location	Timeframe of being “out” to one/both parents
1	Hao	male	20–25	unemployed	rural	5 years
2	Jin	female	26–30	full-time employed	city	2 years
3	Yu	male	20–25	student	rural	10 years
4	Leah	female	20–25	student	city	2 years
5	Doris	female	26–30	student	city	10 years
6	Tao	male	26–30	full-time employed	city	7 years
7	Zoe	female	26–30	full-time employed	rural	7 years
8	Jia	female	26–30	student	rural	3 months
9	Kevin	male	26–30	student	rural	2 years
10	Qiang	male	20—25	student	rural	3 months
11	Wei	male	26–30	full-time employed	city	10 years
12	Jun	male	26–30	full-time employed	city	4 years
13	Fei	female	26–30	full-time employed	rural	10 years

Research Process

The previous section explained the details of each group of participants and the social characteristics that made them hard-to-reach. In this section, details of the research

procedure are provided, including participant recruitment procedures, the data collection process, and, importantly, the ethical considerations for the study.

Recruitment

To enable access to one of the most socially and culturally disadvantaged groups in Chinese society, recruitment strategies were employed which were targeted towards same-sex attracted young people and their parents. Given my location in Sydney, Australia, and my potential participants' location in mainland China, the recruitment process relied on purposive sampling (Barratt et al., 2015) via advertisements on the internet and snowball sampling (Parker et al., 2019) via word of mouth. This included advertisements in Chinese in WeChat chat groups of local LGBTQ non-government organisations (NGOs) (Chinese and English versions of this advertisement are provided in Appendix B) and sharing information in LGBTQ online social groups from social media websites. Additionally, the research plan was to recruit adult children first, considering they are likely to be more active on the internet than their parents, and then to encourage them to invite their parents to participate in the study. However, in practice, four out of eight mothers were recruited through the young adults, while three of them were directly recruited from the WeChat chat group "PFLAG" (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) China. One mother was recruited via word of mouth from another mother.

Since I personally knew two volunteers from local LGBTQ NGOs, one of them from PFLAG China, I sent messages to them on WeChat first and explained my research aim, asking if they could add me to their organisation's chat groups and post my advertisements. These WeChat chat groups of local LGBTQ NGOs served both LGBTQ people and those who support the LGBTQ community, thus posting advertisements directly into these chat groups was one of the most efficient ways to recruit participants for this research. After being added into these WeChat chat groups, I posted my advertisements directly by sending messages in the chat groups. People who showed interest in the study were able to add my WeChat account directly through the advertisements by simply clicking my WeChat profile photo. This process enabled participants to be "friends" with me on the WeChat platform for further connectivity, due to WeChat functionality parameters.

For those participants who came from online social groups from other social media websites, the main social media website I used was Douban. Douban is one of the most famous social networking services in mainland China. This service not only allows users to create reviews about films, books, and music, but it also hosts a number of social groups. Such social groups enable people to join and share their experiences with respect to specific subjects (Marketing to China, 2021). Therefore, these groups also help users to find other people who share the same interests with them. Some groups can be joined without any request by just clicking the "JOIN" button, while some groups need participants to seek permission from the group moderators. In order to post advertisements for this research, I joined approximately 50 social groups on Douban. Additionally, I posted advertisements on various groups on the Baidu

Tieba⁷ platform, which functions similarly to Douban groups. Moreover, I also tried Weibo, which is a social networking service similar to Twitter. On Weibo, I posted my advertisements on my Weibo webpage first and mentioned several local LGBTQ organisations' official Weibo accounts to help me repost, in order to gain more exposure. Key words of these groups or official accounts that were used as search terms are provided in Table 3 below.

⁷ Baidu Tieba, which means post bar in mandarin Chinese, functions similarly to forums. There are various bars (forums) on the platform, which allow people to post specific content in specific bars (forums).

Table 3

Details of Social Media Platforms for Participant Recruitment in the Research

Social media	Social functions	Key words
Douban (豆瓣)	Douban groups (豆瓣小组)	“gay men,” “lesbian,” “coming out,” “lala,” “tongzhi,” “LGBT,” “les”
Baidu (百度)	Baidu Tieba (百度贴吧)	“gay men,” “lesbian,” “coming out,” “lala”
Weibo (微博)	Tagging other accounts for reposting and sharing	“pflag,” “tongzhi,” “LGBT,” “lala,” “tongzhi”

Potential participants who showed interest in my research first contacted me either through the message box of the relevant social media platform or the email address which I left in the advertisement. After that, I was able to send them my WeChat ID for them to add me as a friend, enabling private conversation and file sharing. However, this is not like becoming a friend on Facebook, as users could still block their WeChat friends from seeing their posts, which might contain private details (further ethical considerations for this function will be provided later in this chapter). After connecting as friends with each potential participant on WeChat, an electronic copy of the Chinese version of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (Chinese and English version provided in Appendix C) for each group of participants was sent via an individual WeChat message. Participants were also informed that the researcher would be willing to answer any questions they had about the interview and the research project.

The PIS for each group of participants explained the general aim and purpose of the study, the expected length of the interview, as well as the benefits and risks of the project. Additionally, details of psychological counselling services were also provided in case the participant had an adverse emotional reaction to the interviewing process or felt afterwards that they required some support. When each participant finished their reading of the PIS and had all of their questions answered by me, an electronic copy of the Chinese version of the consent form (Chinese and English version provided in Appendix D) was sent via an individual WeChat message to each participant for them to read prior to the interview. While the university standard consent form template included a place for participants' signatures, participants were informed that consent would take place via a verbal process at the start of their interview in order to maintain their confidentiality. Moreover, the recruited participants were also encouraged to forward details of the project to other members of their social network who met the criteria for the research.

Data Collection

As previously mentioned, due to the sensitivity of same-sex attraction and sex-related topics in China and the hard-to-reach attributes of both groups of participants, interviews were conducted through the internet-based telephone service available through WeChat. Each interview lasted from approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and the duration of the conversation was based on each respondent's willingness to share their stories.

Before commencing the interview process with volunteer participants, I conducted two pilot interviews with individuals who met the same age/location criteria as the young adult respondents. These individuals were identified and recruited via word of mouth. Data from these two pilot interviews were not used in the final data analysis. The aims of the pilot interviews were two-fold: first, to evaluate the appropriateness of the interview schedule; second, to test the equipment which would be used to capture the interview audio. Although there was no pilot interview for parent participants, largely because of the difficulty in identifying individuals who were prepared to discuss these issues with me, as noted earlier the interview schedules for the adult children and the parents had some similarities. Accordingly, these two pilot interviews allowed for tests of the appropriateness and viability of the interview questions in terms of promoting the flow of conversation and the quality of data collection in preparation for the formal interviewing process (Majid et al., 2017). This test included whether every question could be understood, covered, and answered within the scheduled time. In addition, it also provided me with a chance to gain experience in conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews grounded in feminist research methodology, helping me experience the dynamics in power that were present within the relationship between me and my participants. Furthermore, through the pilot interviews I was able to examine strategies to alleviate the power inequality for the sake of creating a mutually trusting relationship, necessary for such personal and challenging conversations, such as using common mandarin Chinese mixed with English and internet slang to create a more

relaxed and light-hearted conversation mode and encouraging my participants to speak more in the interview.

For the formal interviews, participants were able to choose the interview date and time in order to provide a sense of control and comfort. The conversation was undertaken in a quiet room and the mobile speakers were loud enough to record with an external audio recorder. Each interview started with basic greetings and reading of the consent form by me to obtain each participant's verbal consent for their participation. Then, I read details of additional information to my participants to ensure participants had support in case of any psychological trauma resulting from my line of questioning, or even just to provide further information to them about their local LGBTQ community supports. As mentioned previously, these details were also provided to participants via the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix C). This information was provided again at the start of each formal interview to protect the participants in case they felt distressed or had an adverse emotional reaction to the interview due to the sensitivity of speaking about their family life and about potentially challenging relationships with family members. The information provided included contact details for: (1) a psychological clinic that is generally free in public hospitals for individuals holding health insurance cards; and (2) the free helpline services of local LGBTQ organisations. Participants were also told that they were able to delete or block the researcher via WeChat at any time and withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable, making further contact with the researcher impossible. Additionally, participants were also reminded at the start of the interview, as well as within the PIS form, that no information would be shared between

participating pairs of parents/adult children, to protect their privacy and safeguard their relationships.

After that, each parent participant was asked to describe their experiences when they first became aware of their child's sexual orientation as well as their age and rough location. Each young adult was asked to disclose their age and rough location and describe their first experiences coming out to their parents. Subsequently, the interview continued to discuss topics such as internal familial relationships and relationships with external family members (see Appendix A for the interview schedule in both Chinese and English). Further, since no fathers volunteered to participate in this research, participating mothers were also asked to speak about the reactions of their partners (fathers) towards their child's coming out. Throughout the interviews, other demographic information such as religion and employment status were sometimes discussed spontaneously, despite the fact that these were not compulsory questions for all participants.

As an additional point of data collection, I kept a journal as per the advice of Hesse-Biber (2011), noting initial ideas about general themes that reflected cultural and theoretical concepts emerging from the research. I also made notes about the improvements which could be made for forthcoming interviews. During interviews, I often discussed my interpretation with the respondents to check whether I had correctly understood what the respondent was saying. Likewise, this action also helped me find out the places where I under- or over-emphasised information, since "meaning is always negotiated between one's own

preconceptions and those within the horizon of the other” (Tate 1998, p. 13). This notetaking and interpretation checking process helped me reflect routinely on my emerging understanding of the data, offering me some preliminary data analysis that promoted further detailed analysis in later steps.

After the interview had been completed, each participant was paid 50RMB via the WeChat payment platform (equivalent to \$10 in Australian currency), provided by the university’s higher degree research funding, to compensate for their time and contributions. WeChat payment is an easy and safe payment method which is used widely across China and does not require participants’ personal details such as bank account number, real full name, or personal telephone number; thus, this method was seen to be the optimal payment method for this study, given ethical considerations. After each payment was provided to participants, I deleted their WeChat account, removing the friend connection on the platform and eliminating the possibility of further communication and contact without approval. This further protected the confidentiality and safety of both participants and the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

As per university policy, ethical approval for the project was obtained from Western Sydney University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to ensure the researcher followed the ethical guidelines set out by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The final letter of approval is provided at Appendix E. Many of these considerations have been

discussed as elements of previous sections and centred around protecting participant anonymity, safeguarding personal relationships, providing participants with resources to safeguard and protect their mental health, and ensuring participants were fully informed about the research and their rights as participants.

The platform used for recruitment, interviews, and reimbursement, WeChat, has a function called “Moments” through which people can share their photos or textual updates, similar in functionality to Facebook. In addition to some of the ethical considerations previously outlined, as a way of establishing additional boundaries in line with ethical considerations, at the start of the interview participants were encouraged not to share visibility of their Moments function with me, helping to further assure confidentiality. Moreover, apart from using pseudonyms to refer to each participant, discontinuous narratives have been used throughout the data presentation in this thesis, which is “a strategy frequently applied to research of a potentially ‘sensitive’ nature” (Ferfolja, 2008, p. 73). In this project, discontinuous narratives were considered important to prevent pairs of adult children/mothers from potentially recognising one another within this thesis or in any other resulting academic publications. Moreover, I also omitted any identifying information in data analysis and data presentation, as illustrated in the sample section.

Data Analysis

Rather than waiting until all data had been collected, I began the coding and analysing process after finishing the first interview. This is because the best practice across most qualitative research designs is to initiate data analysis when the first element of data is collected (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Corbin and Strauss (1990) have noted that if data analysis begins when all the data collection is finished, the researcher will have missed a lot of valuable information which can only be processed at the time of data collection. This is because the gap in time between an interview, transcribing, translating, and coding can result in memory bias in relation to environmental context issues that may further affect the interpretation of the data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). In addition, analysing initial data offered me an opportunity to evaluate and examine the interview schedule based on the information that had been collected from the respondents. In other words, through the process, I could update the prepared interview questions with any emerging new concepts. One example of this was related to noticing that the first few young adult participants indicated that they had not come out to their fathers; in response, an item regarding the reason for not coming out to fathers was integrated into the interview schedule.

Transcribing and Translating

Due to the duration and extensive scope of the interviews, the first step of transcription was to transcribe the recording of the interviews, which were conducted in Chinese, verbatim,

into text. This process of transcribing allowed me to undertake a close reading of the original data, gaining a full sense of each participant's account. After that, I translated the content into English. Through the transcription and translation, I was able to re-read the data and log some initial ideas. Since changes in the meaning of participants' language could occur during the process of translation, it is important to note that the researcher not only needed to translate the literal meaning of each word in the transcript, attention to how each word related conceptually in the sentence was also required (Squires, 2008). Conceptual equivalence, which refers to a conceptually accurate translation of the idea spoken by the respondent, is an essential component of translation for the researcher (Yang et al., 2008). Without conceptual equivalence, the respondent's intent would be altered, and this would result in increased discrepancies in the reliability and validity of the collected data (Usunier, 2011). In order to translate the concept accurately, I incorporated subject matter knowledge around the researched question and local (Chinese) contextual knowledge during the translation process. For instance, when participants were using euphemisms to refer to terms such as same-sex sexual orientation or sex education, I understood that such utterances represented the participant's reluctance to engage in, or their conscious silencing of, discourse around same-sex attraction and sex-related topics.

Thematic Analysis

After finishing transcribing and translating, I started the formal data analysis. The data was coded based on thematic analysis, which is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting

themes within the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). In other words, thematic analysis emphasises the meaning underneath sentences or paragraphs. The NVivo program was used to assist with the organisation of the collected data, which allowed for easy creation of codes and made the data and concepts readily searchable. I used this technique to identify macroscopic themes that emerged from the data, including: parents’ initial reactions and shifting perspectives towards their child’s coming out; parents’ interactions with extended family members or friends as a parent of a same-sex attracted child; and parent-child relationships post-disclosure. Applying my chosen theoretical framework, I sought to understand how parents’ reactions and parent/child interactions could be understood in terms of Foucault’s (1978, 1991) work on power and discourse, Butler’s work (1990, 1993a) on gender performativity and the heterosexual matrix, intersectionality, and underlying relevant Chinese cultural influences.

There were also two main steps in the thematic analysis of this research: inductive coding and deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The first step—inductive coding—allowed me to determine the meaning of each passage of the data and label these with semantic codes; the latter—deductive coding—involved working more closely and deeply with different semantic codes to interpret each code’s meaning alongside theoretical knowledge and relevant cultural concepts (Clarke & Braun, 2014). In other words, inductive coding focuses on themes directly from participants’ narratives, while deductive coding emphasises theoretical knowledges that can be applied to those themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). During the process of inductive coding, initial codes were generated across

all of the transcripts. These codes were tags or labels that helped me assign meanings to the collected information. Codes were allocated to information of various sizes, including particular phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs (Young et al., 2018). Afterwards, codes with shared similar features were grouped and merged, and these merged codes were then collated into potential themes. For instance, codes such as (1) looking for treatments online, (2) taking the child to hospital, and (3) referring to same-sex attracted people as patients can be merged into one theme: parents pathologising same-sex attraction. Next, I reviewed each theme to check whether the themes matched the coded extracts correctly. Then, these groups of codes were sorted and arranged into categories and subcategories with specific named labels, making links between respondents' information and relevant cultural concepts and theoretical knowledges. These links included, but were not limited to: (1) how Foucault's (1978) notions of power and discourse and Butler's (1990) gender performativity and heterosexual matrix are reflected in Chinese parents' reactions toward their child's sexual orientation; (2) how different aspects of subjectivity, such as place of residence (rural/city), age (older/younger generation), gender, and sexual orientation intersect with each other and operate in parents' experiences of having a same-sex attracted child; and (3) how parents' concerns about their gay and lesbian child reflect the Chinese concept of face as well as Foucault's (1991) notions of social surveillance, witnessing, and punishment.

In order to ensure the data analysis was rigorous, I kept reading and re-reading the transcripts and adopted a cyclical process of data reviewing and reflection on the theoretical perspectives and cultural concepts that emerged in interviews (Willig, 2008). In this process,

several specific words that the respondents chose to use to describe their experiences were also identified. These words included both explicit and implicit expressions, such as stigmatised terms that respondents used to describe same-sex attracted people in Chinese society, and blurred words or euphemisms that participants used to refer to same-sex attraction and sex-related discussions. This process not only allowed me to conduct a deeper investigation into participants' inner perspectives towards same-sex attraction as well as towards the LGBTQ community, but also highlighted the importance of discursive power in shaping individuals' attitudes towards certain social objects in the society (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987). In other words, certain discursive terms that an individual uses to describe an object reflect the way in which the object is constructed in each respondent's subjectivities; that is, the way the person has of seeing and positioning the object. Thus, these were extremely important, strong data that reflected particular thematic codes in the data analysis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explored the methodology that was adopted in this research through providing a comprehensive and systematic explanation of feminist methodologies and my engagement with this approach, as well as providing details about the research design, interview questions, sample participants, research procedures, and data analysis. In the next two chapters, a thematic analysis from all the interviews of participating parents and adult children will be presented to answer the main research questions. Thus, in Chapter 5, parents'

initial reactions towards their child's sexuality will be reported, while in Chapter 6, parents' shifting perspectives of their child's sexuality over a period of time after their child's disclosure and at the time of interview will be examined. These discussions are interlaced with data that illustrated how parents in this research negotiated their relationships with extended family members or friends in relation to their child's same-sex attraction. Relevant theoretical knowledge and cultural concepts outlined in Chapter 3 will be included throughout both chapters to help to further understand the experiences of participants.

Chapter 5 Parents' Initial Reactions Towards Their Child's Coming-Out

Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the methodological considerations and approaches adopted in the project, including a discussion of the project's feminist methodological approach, the associated research design, interview schedule, sample participants, research procedure, and approaches for a theoretically informed data analysis. Once again, this project seeks to respond to two main research questions, with a third sub-question woven into these two central analyses:

1. What are Chinese parents' initial and shifting reactions towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation after their child's coming out?
2. How does the parent-child relationship change, if at all, during the months and years after the adult child has come out?
3. How do Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian child negotiate their relationships with extended family members or friends in relation to their child's same-sex attraction?

Accordingly, a temporal presentation of the research findings was deemed most suitable. Thus, parents' reactions have been grouped into three main time periods and analysed within these: (1) their reactions at the moment that their child told them he/she was same-sex attracted; (2) their changing reactions between their first understanding of their child's

sexuality and the time period that followed; and (3) finally, their feelings about their child and the parent-child relationship at the time of interview. This chapter explores the first grouping of responses, parents' initial reactions, while the next chapter presents two main sections which cover, firstly, parents' changing responses and, finally, their feelings at the time of the interview. Data in the final group could be expected to be more "instinctual" as they represent participants' "live," "of the moment" perceptions as shared in the interview. As this study is concerned with how dominant discourses produce knowledges in relation to same-sex attraction, I employ Foucault's (1978) work on discourse and power, feminist post-structuralist theory which highlights human agency (Weedon, 1987), Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory, and the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as central lenses through which to understand and explore Chinese parents' experiences. However, it is important to note that, in this study, not every adult child participant had a parent participant, therefore I have included reflections from the adult children about their parents as well as those from parents themselves in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question. These data are interpreted together throughout both of my results chapters 5 and 6.

This chapter begins with an overview of parents' initial reactions towards their child's sexuality after their disclosure, followed by a detailed examination of these early parental reactions. Critically, Chinese parents' belief in compulsory heterosexuality, which is highly influenced by intersections with traditional Chinese education, age (older generation), gender (mother/father), and access to exposure to same-sex knowledges, is discussed, highlighting

the invisibility of discourses in circulation with respect to sexuality diversity in contemporary mainland China.

An Overview of Parent's Initial Reactions to Their Child Coming Out

According to parents' explanations provided through interviews, when parents first realised (or were first told) that their child was gay or lesbian, four out of eight parent participants expressed sadness; one parent felt both anger and sadness; one participant stated that she felt a bit disappointed; and four parents shared experiences of expressing shock. Additionally, three of the parent participants reported that they had an "emotional breakdown" (in Chinese: qíngxù bēngkuì) after their child's coming out. A further six out of the eight parent participants reacted with disbelief and denial to news that their child was same-sex attracted. Only one parent participant reacted quietly and calmly, with no crying or scolding, and reported that she accepted her child's sexuality immediately.

With respect to how they viewed their child at the time of their coming out, seven of the parent participants believed that their child's sexual orientation was not "normal"; two parents felt that their child was "sick," constructing same-sex attraction as a disease; three parents reported that they thought that their child had a psychological problem; and one parent believed that her child's same-sex attraction may have been influenced by some negative or unusual element of the family environment. All of the parent participants wondered whether their child's sexual orientation could be changed.

At the time of coming out, five out of the 13 participating adult children reported that their parents expressed sadness and had cried repeatedly. One adult child stated that her mother began to have sleep disturbances after their conversation. Three participants stated that their parents (one of the mothers; two of the fathers) became angry post-disclosure. Two participants reported that their fathers verbally abused them after they came out, with abuse focused on a denigration of same-sex relationships as solely sexual in nature. Additionally, 10 of the 13 adult children's parents expressed disbelief and denial in relation to their child's sexual orientation. Six adult children stated that their parents thought they became same-sex attracted for fun. A further four participating adult children stated that their parents wondered whether or not being same-sex attracted was a disease that could potentially be cured. Of importance for this discussion, all participating adult children reported that their parents asked them if their sexual orientation could be changed, so that they could identify as heterosexual.

Overall, as can be seen from the summary data from both groups of participants above, Chinese parents in this study found it difficult to accept their child as same-sex attracted and wondered if their child's same-sex attraction could be changed. According to the parents' initial reactions, two main themes were observed: denying the child's sexuality and sexualising same-sex attraction. Within the first theme, parents pathologised same-sex attraction as a mental illness, while also positioning their child's same-sex attraction as evidence of emotional immaturity, as a socially inappropriate behaviour, and frivolous. However, within the second theme, parents tended to reject and condemn their child, even

with verbal abuse, as same-sex attraction and relationships were viewed through a reductive lens, as a sexual behaviour rather than as evidence of romantic affection or sexual orientation. In the next few sections, details regarding parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation within these two themes will be explained, through a comprehensive analysis using relevant theoretical knowledge outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

Parents' Immediate Reaction: Denying the Child's Sexuality

As previously mentioned, the most common immediate reaction from Chinese parents in the current research was their refusal to accept their child's sexuality, which is also in line with the reactions of many parents of same-sex children reported in earlier Western studies (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; Robinson et al., 1987; Savin-Williams, 1990, 1998). In the early days after their child first came out, the large majority of parent participants (seven out of eight) discussed how they were focused on the identification of a particular "cause," or set of causes, that made their child same-sex attracted. These parents believed that if they found the cause behind their child's same-sex attraction, they would know how to treat and "fix" their child. Given the narratives presented by parents, their denial of their child's sexuality could be traced back to a number of potential explanations, including their lack of exposure to, and both conscious and unconscious prejudice towards, same-sex attraction and same-sex attracted individuals. These explanations are explored in the following sections.

Believing Same-Sex Attraction is a Disease or a Psychological Problem

One of the ways that parents denied their child's sexuality was by believing that same-sex attraction is a disease or some kind of psychological problem. Many participating parents indicated that when their child first disclosed their sexuality to them, they initially believed their child had some sort of sickness or mental health issue that could be cured. Evidence of this initial reaction can be seen from several of the parents' and adult children's quotes below.

Mother Liang, who has a gay son, explained her experiences after her son's coming out. In her words:

My son told me same-sex attraction [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian] is not a disease. I said, okay, if you said this is not a disease, I can probably believe you; however, this must be a psychological problem. There must be some problems with your mental health ... then we just argued the issue regarding whether same-sex attraction is a psychological problem for a while. (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Mother Lee, who also has a gay son, conveyed in the interview:

After searching for [information around same-sex attraction] such a lot, I still believed that [being same-sex attracted] was a disease, like a

monster. I said [to my son]: “You must change! I’ll pay whatever I can to make you change!” (Mother Lee, 57 years old, son came out to her about 4 years prior to the study)

In addition, one adult child participant also discussed her experiences of seeing her mother’s search history on her laptop. Zoe, who self-identifies as lesbian, explained:

My mother actually searched for something on the internet, but she didn’t tell me. I saw from her search history. Something very basic, such as, what is “homosexuality⁸”[in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian]? Can “homosexuality” be cured? Is “homosexuality” a mental health problem? She checked about these. (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

As can be seen from the quotes shown above, parents’ prior knowledge about same-sex attraction was very limited. As outlined in Chapter 1, “homosexuality” was removed from the list of mental disorders by the Chinese Psychiatric Association nearly 20 years ago (Wu, 2003).

⁸ I used the term “homosexuality” rather than same-sex attraction here because Zoe’s mother was pathologising same-sex attraction and the term “homosexuality” itself is medicalised and pathologised in English.

However, as can be seen from the above quotes, these parents were not aware of these social and medical shifts and continued to pathologise same-sex attraction as a psychological problem or disease. These findings are in keeping with contemporary research in China, which reveals that such beliefs are quite common amongst Chinese people (Burki, 2017; Chi & Hawk, 2016; Suen & Chan, 2020; Xie & Peng, 2018), and points to the fact that discourses around sexual minorities are highly marginalised and even silenced in the social discursive system in mainland China (Hung, 2011; Wei & Liu, 2019).

Mother Chen, aged 49 years old, who has a gay son who came out to her about 6 years prior to the study, used the term “homosexual patient” (in Chinese: tong xing lian huan zhe) to refer to same-sex attracted individuals (including her son) throughout the whole interview, including when she explained her initial reaction and current attitudes at the time of the interview. Although Mother Chen never clearly stated that she believed her son was mentally ill, her word choice, which may have emerged unconsciously, reflected how she positioned same-sex attraction as a medicalised disease or illness. Similarly, several parents and even some of the adult child participants also used the term “normal people” (in Chinese: zheng chang ren) to refer to heterosexual individuals throughout their interviews. Theory suggests that when individuals use stigmatising terms to refer to non-heterosexual people, the discourses of pathologising same-sex attraction and heteronormative discourses are practised and reinforced once again within the social discursive system (Ward & Mann, 2012; Weedon, 1987). As Foucault (1978) argued, the specific lexical choices that an individual uses to describe a social object reflect certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being

in the world. In other words, particular discourses and knowledges have been constantly practised and gradually embedded in individuals' subjectivity, which can further influence people's attitudes towards particular subjects within society (Weedon, 1987). As a result, people may gradually become less sensitive to homophobic language and accept it as normal, reinforcing discrimination and stigma against same-sex attracted people. This process of normalising pathologised discourses about same-sex attraction also represents one of the social means that society has adopted to punish and discipline those "socially deviant" individuals (Foucault, 1991; Weedon, 1987).

Looking for Treatment

Since some parents believed that their same-sex attracted child had a medically treatable illness or condition, a number of these parents also searched for treatments which would "cure" their child's sexual orientation. For instance, Mother Liang explained her experiences of looking for treatment with the help of her best friend. In her words:

I thought my best friend would find some treatments ... I asked whether she [her best friend] had found any hospitals that are able to cure my son's sexual orientation. She said, she found three hospitals and they all claimed they have curable cases, but she didn't suggest me going as their treatments were too horrible. I asked why, she said, that's too cruel. They used electric shocks on their testes. (Mother

Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Similarly, Mother Wang, discussed her initial reaction to her son's same-sex attraction within the interview. She had hoped to locate a treatment offered by a medical professional in order to "reverse" his orientation:

According to what I have read [information regarding same-sex attraction online], I'm not very sure. Well, that is something like electric shocks, but I really thought about finding a professional hospital, to find a super, super professional psychologist to talk with him [son], to see if he can reverse [her son's sexual orientation]. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

In the case of Mother Lee, she felt compelled to take her gay son to a hospital after he came out to her. As she stated:

I cried for a whole day at home on Saturday. On Sunday, I said, "Son, you can't be like that. I need to take you to the hospital."... I searched a lot of hospitals and finally we went to the psychology department at [names hospital]. (Mother Lee, 57 years old, son came out to her about 4 years prior to the study)

Despite the potential horrors that may be faced by lesbian and gay people whose parents seek treatment for their child's sexuality, it is also critical to mention that the doctor who Mother Lee met from the psychology department provided her with medically correct information. According to Mother Lee's explanation:

I said to the doctor, "My son is "homosexual"⁹ [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian], how could my son be "homosexual"?! " Then the doctor said, "What's wrong with "homosexual[ity]"? "Homosexual[ity]" is very normal. Some people are left-handed, some people don't eat coriander. You can't say they're not normal. I do hope you parents can sort this out in a suitable way." (Mother Lee, 57 years old, son came out to her about 4 years prior to the study)

Similar to the experience described by Mother Lee, Mother Wang disclosed that she and her husband also went to see a doctor, although they did not take their son with them. According to Mother Wang, they also met a medical professional who explained to them that being same-sex attracted is normal. It is very encouraging to see that the doctors who were

⁹ Here, I have used the term "homosexual"/"homosexuality" because this mother was pathologising homosexuality.

mentioned by participants in this research provided appropriate information in relation to same-sex attraction. As doctors' discourse represents authority (Fisher, 1984), their perspectives towards same-sex attraction can heavily influence lay people's attitudes towards sexual minorities, which can further underpin or reduce public prejudice and stigmatisation towards same-sex attracted individuals. Although these mothers were provided with medically correct information about sexuality diversity from their doctors, this does not mean that all doctors would provide such advice, as discourses which affirm and normalise same-sex attraction are rarely visible within China's mainstream discursive system (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). As Suen and Chan (2020) found in their study, recommending counselling therapy to same-sex attracted people to change their sexual orientation still exists within Chinese health care services. If stigmatisation and discrimination against same-sex attraction occurs within such a specialised, highly educated group of professionals, this is indicative of a broader lack of information within contemporary mainland Chinese society.

Other Avenues of "Conversion"

In addition to seeking medical treatment, research findings showed that other avenues of "conversion" were also sought by some of the parents, for the purpose of changing their child's same-sex sexual orientation. For instance, one young participant, Hao, reported his experiences of being taken to church by his parents after his disclosure. At the time of the research, Hao reported that he was suffering from mental health problems and taking

medication to support his emotional well-being. He reported that his parents believed that his same-sex attraction was a ramification of his mental illness and, thus, could change once he was feeling better. As a result, after being encouraged by their Christian relatives, Hao's parents took him to church in order to change his "dismal situation," as Hao expressed it, by learning about Christianity, praying, and speaking to the priests and other parishioners. In Hao's words:

We have some relatives who are Christian, and they recommended me going [to church], hoping I could be changed, my whole dismal situation could be changed ... well, it's just one of the strategies [that his parents used]. They didn't ask us [Hao and his parents] to embrace Christianity, they just recommended us going to church and see if they [people in church] can sort it out. ... We went to church eventually. We prayed. My parents prayed. My grandma also came with us, she also prayed. (Hao, male, came out to mother and father about 6 years prior to study)

Hao's case suggests that being same-sex attracted was not only seen as a by-product of mental illness for his parents, there was also a moral or guilt element to his sexuality. Moral condemnation of same-sex attraction is quite common in Chinese society (Poon et al., 2017) for various reasons, including a failure to fulfil filial piety (Steward et al., 2013) or due to same-sex relationships being stigmatised as perverse or promiscuous (Long, 2013; S. Wang, 2020),

which will be explained later in this chapter. According to Hao's explanation, his family sought positive moral influence on Hao through the church in the hopes of subsequently changing Hao's sexual preference.

Parents' initial positioning of same-sex attraction as evidence of illness or disease, as described above, reflects a widespread cultural belief that heterosexuality is the only normal sexual preference and that deviations from this represent some form of being unwell. The following sections explore the concept of emotional immaturity or stagnation, which was likewise apparent in parents' narratives and some adult children's reflections on their parents' reactions.

Believing Same-Sex Attraction is the Result of Emotional Immaturity

Some participating parents did not view same-sex attraction as a disease, but they nevertheless insisted that it was not "normal." This is because having a same-sex relationship is perceived as contrary to mainstream Chinese culture. For a few participating parents, being same-sex attracted was initially viewed in line with their perceptions of their child's emotional immaturity, and thus potentially changeable as the child matured; this was particularly observed in cases where the adult child came out to their parents before their 20s. There was an assumption, or hope, that these feelings of same-sex attraction could be outgrown.

Despite the fact that all participating adult children argued with their parents that they had been born same-sex attracted during their disclosure, their parents refused to believe them. Rather, the parents firmly believed that their child was unwilling, or too stubborn, to change because of rebellion, triggered by emotional immaturity. For instance, as Mother Liang stated in her interview,

My son told me being gay is not his choice, he was born that way and he can't change. However, I said, "Why can't you change? You just don't want to change! You're still very young. You can always change if you want!" (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Similar to Mother Liang's experiences, Mother Wang shared her husband's immediate attitudes towards their son's coming out. Mother Wang's husband believed that being same-sex attracted was only a temporary phase and would disappear when their son grew up and became emotionally mature. In Mother Wang's words:

He [her husband] is not like me, he just doesn't believe it [the fact that their son is gay]. He believed sexuality was able to be converted, after a few years, it [their son's sexuality] could be changed over. The child is still very young. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

According to Mother Wang's explanation, her husband believed that individuals will eventually become heterosexual and engage in an opposite-sex marriage regardless of their previous sexual encounters or relationships. Such a reaction reflects this father's belief that heterosexuality is the default sexuality. The next few sections explore parents' various reactions towards their child's sexuality, which can be thematically grouped under the general identified "cause" of their child's emotional immaturity.

Being Same-Sex Attracted is Misbehaviour or a Bad Habit

As indicated in the previous section, Mother Wang's initial response to her son's disclosure of his sexuality was that he had a psychological problem. She and her husband went to the hospital in order to seek professional guidance. However, since the doctor communicated that same-sex attraction is normal and not a psychological issue, her husband pivoted, viewing their son's sexuality as something that would automatically change when he matured further. Mother Wang, too, appeared to be influenced by this possibility. As she stated in the interview:

I'm wondering whether it's something on a whim or he [son] really has these kinds of thoughts [of same-sex sexual attractions]. I'm not very sure ... because, you know, my child is very innocent. He's not very emotionally mature. I'm also wondering if he could be better after maturity, probably these were just thoughts of this period of time. ...So

I was just thinking about the way I could communicate with him, and see how I can provide him with positive guidance. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

As can be seen in Mother Wang's excerpt, she viewed her son as not good enough at the time, hoping that he would "improve" and become "better" as he matured. In other words, she hoped he might learn to behave in a more socially appropriate way, namely being heterosexual, with the implication being that his same-sex attraction was likely due to her son's young age and inability to identify what is socially appropriate and what is inappropriate. This is also why Mother Wang would like to provide "positive guidance" to her son in order to elicit this change. Such a belief reflects the fact that being heterosexual is seen as the only normal and natural sexual orientation and normative masculinity for men and normative femininity for women are seen as the "naturalness" of gender differences (Butler, 1990, 1993a). In other words, sons are expected to date and marry (a female wife) while being same-sex attracted is seen as akin to misbehaviour or a bad habit, triggered by the child's curiosity, immaturity, or adventurous spirit at a younger age. Moreover, Mother Wang's words "be better" may have been spoken unconsciously; however, they represent how hierarchies exist within social discourses, where those pertaining to heterosexuality have always been celebrated while those relating to other non-hetero sexualities have been marginalised and deprecated.

Similarly, an adult child, Yu, shared his experiences with his parents, who tended to view same-sex attraction as a bad habit and a sign of immaturity. Yu stated:

They [Yu's parents] shouted at me: "Kneel down!" and I said, "There's nothing wrong with me, why do I have to kneel down?" That was the first time I argued with my parents. Then my father sighed and said, "Let's have a talk." We sat down and had a talk. They thought it [being same-sex attracted] was just similar to any bad habits or bad interests. ... They just told me, "You're still very young, you can change!". They said, "Everything [you did] is immature!" (Yu, male, came out to mother and father 10 years prior to the study)

Kneeling down is considered to be the highest sign of obedience in Chinese culture (CGTN, 2018). It was very common for people in ancient China to kneel down to their parents, teachers, the emperor, or any other person of a superior position in their social group (S. D. Liu, 2019). Additionally, kneeling is also viewed as an act that reduces an individual's dignity because it was associated with expressing apology or begging for forgiveness (CGTN, 2018; S. D. Liu, 2019). In today's China, kneeling to parents as a way to show either respect or apology still exists in traditional families (Leng, 2011; Teh, 2021). Yu's father's reaction not only reflects his belief that same-sex attraction is wrong, it also reveals the hierarchal order between parents and their child (Tsai, 1999; Tsai et al., 2008), parents' view of their child as immature, and how parents use their power to discipline the child.

It is important to note that, generally speaking, Chinese parents tend to believe that they have a responsibility to educate and discipline their child to be “well-behaved” (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005; Lam et al., 2020); that is, to behave in a socially appropriate way and fit into Chinese social culture when they grow up (Chen et al., 2010; Tan, 2011). According to the principles of filial piety outlined in earlier chapters of this thesis, one of the parenting practices in Chinese society is encouraging modest behaviours, which includes being humble, moderate, and socially conforming (Wu et al., 2002). China, as a collectivist society, emphasises group values and interests over individual ones (Bugge, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). Consequently, parental power over children is a central tenet of socially defined familial norms (Wu et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2005). Weedon (1987) argued that socially defined norms are viewed as necessary for a child’s future achievements, as conforming to socially defined standards and norms not only helps to achieve social rewards, but also avoids social punishments. In Chinese society, this extends more overtly to getting married to a member of the opposite sex and having children to continue the family line, in accordance with societal expectations (Hildebrandt, 2019). Additionally, as Chen (1998) points out, in traditional Chinese culture, “good” children are usually considered to be cooperative or what is termed “well-behaved,” as they know what the society expects them to be and thus work hard to achieve social approval. Hence, it is Chinese parents’ duty to raise a well-behaved child, as children and younger generations are usually viewed as immature and lacking in understanding of social norms (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005).

According to Foucault (1978, 1991), the act of discipline enables and restricts certain social behaviours, and punishments are adopted to correct “socially inappropriate” performances. In Yu’s case, kneeling down is the way that Yu’s father wanted to punish his son as this would affect the child’s self-esteem and make him feel ashamed. This suggests that Yu’s father was hoping to discipline Yu through punishment, making him realise that his performance (or enactment) of adult relationships, including being same-sex attracted, was inappropriate.

Importantly, the sharp contrast between Yu’s and his father’s perspectives on same-sex attraction illustrate that individuals have agency and that a child’s knowledges of sexuality has always been contested and reshaped through social practices (Robinson et al., 2019). Post-structuralists argue that an individual’s subjectivity is never fixed but is repeatedly socially constructed (Gavey, 2011; Weedon, 1987). In Yu’s case, his father viewed same-sex attraction as wrong and attempted to discipline him through punishment; however, Yu demonstrated his resistance and refused to take the punishment. Hence, it can be observed that not all people in contemporary Chinese society share the same knowledges or hold uniform attitudes. Yu’s resistance and personal agency helped him to create new possible modes of subjectivity and to challenge dominant power relations (Weedon, 1987). When Yu refused to kneel down and apologise to his parents, he was challenging the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity and resisting a number of discourses around heterosexism that predominate in Chinese (and other) societies, as well the as the power imbalance in parent-child relationship that is secured by Chinese cultural restrictions (Tsai, 1999; Tsai et al., 2008).

Being Same-Sex Attracted is a Result of the Other

As indicated, participating parents and adult children reflecting on their parents' initial reactions discussed their belief that same-sex attraction was a socially inappropriate behaviour that emerged when the (young adult) child was still too young to distinguish between right and wrong. Likewise, many parents also positioned their child as easily influenced, which was seen to be an element of their immaturity and which showed that they viewed same-sex attraction as a learned behaviour. For instance, Mother Lee reflected on the influence of others. As she explained: "I kept asking my son, how could you do this? Where did you learn this bad thing from?" Similarly, Mother Gao, aged 67 years old, with a gay son, highlighted her belief that her child's sexual orientation was the result of social learning, particularly from the influence of her son's partner. According to Mother Gao:

I just kept thinking that my child was not born to be gay. He must have been misguided by that boy [her son's partner] outside! ... I thought as long as that boy [her son's partner] could leave my son, he [my son] would then turn back to being heterosexual. (Mother Gao, 67 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Moreover, some of the adult child participants in the research also pointed out that their parents tended to believe their same-sex attraction was learnt from somewhere. For instance, Kevin, who came out to both parents about 6 years prior to the study, explained his mother's

reaction towards the fact that her son was gay: “My mum surely believed my becoming gay must be due to me having learnt something very bad from the internet.” Such beliefs represent parents’ lack of knowledge about the formation of same-sex attraction; that is, many parents viewed heterosexuality and heterosexual behaviours (e.g., heterosexual marriage or heterosexual dating) as innate and taken for granted, positioning same-sex attraction as learned and able to be chosen.

Being Same-Sex Attracted is “Just for Fun”

In addition to considering that younger people lack the ability to identify what is socially appropriate and what is socially inappropriate, the Chinese parents in this study were also likely to believe younger generations are more likely to make decisions to suit their own, frivolous interests (Ho & Kang, 1984; Qin et al., 2009). In line with this, several adult child participants shared similar experiences that illustrated their parents’ positioning of same-sex relationships or behaviours as “just for fun”. This can be seen in the adult child participants’ statements below.

After my coming out, she [mother] probably thought I was quite young at that time, and like many parents, well ... she just thought I was just trying many different kinds of relationships for fun and for curiosity you know? (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

My mum often said to me, “You need to think about your own future life, okay?” They [Leah’s parents] probably think I can have fun in whatever way I like now because I still haven’t reached my age for marriage. My parents said, “Now we don’t talk about this, we will leave it. She [referring to Leah] will get married when she reaches the age.” ... They also said, “You’re still very young, you just haven’t met enough people yet.” (Leah, female, came out to father and mother 2 years prior to the study)

My father used to say to me, you can have fun in whatever way you like now, however when you reach your age, the age when people should get married, you will get married eventually. ... My mother felt that we [Kevin and Kevin’s partner] were just having fun; we were not serious in our relationship. (Kevin, male, came out to father and mother 6 years prior to the study)

These parents’ beliefs that being same-sex attracted is “just for fun” not only reflect parents’ sense that being gay or lesbian is a choice, but also reflects their prejudice towards same-sex relationships, which they do not view as serious. This could be due to the fact that there is neither national legal recognition nor protection of same-sex relationships in mainland China (Hung, 2011), and the country does not recognise any overseas registered same-sex relationships (Zuo, 2019). Moreover, same-sex relationships are considered non-

(re)productive (without reproductive/assistive technologies), which is viewed in opposition to social and cultural expectations of family continuity in Chinese culture (Eklund, 2018; Hildebrandt, 2019). As a result, it is not surprising that these adult children's parents tended to believe that heterosexual relationships are considered the only serious and "normal" relationship in society.

Leah, one of the young adults quoted above, went on to explain that her parents did not have much of a reaction to her coming out, which she speculated might be because they believed, (similar to Kevin's father, discussed earlier) that she would eventually get married when she reached marital age. However, Leah's and Kevin's parents viewed same-sex attraction as a temporary phase, not because they had an awareness of sexuality as "fluid" (Laumann, 1994), but rather, because they viewed heterosexual marriage as the eventual, inevitable destination for all members of Chinese society, including their children. Such comments appear to be aligned with parents' beliefs that their child was in a same-sex relationship because they had not met the right opposite-sex person.

Doris, who identifies as a lesbian, explained that her mother held similar attitudes as Leah's and Kevin's parents, believing Doris became a lesbian because she had never had sex with men. In Doris's words:

We quarreled a lot. ... My mother believed that I was just too stubborn [about being same-sex attracted]. She always said, "Why not try to

change yourself?" ... And she always asked me, "If you met a nice guy, would you consider dating him? What if that guy would be very handsome and rich?" Well ... my mum just always believed I was too stubborn and thought I just don't want to try change myself. I told her, "I used to date a boy." Then she said, "But you didn't have sex with him!" (Doris, female, came out to mother 10 years prior to the study)

According to Doris's explanation, her mother thought Doris could become heterosexual if she had sex with a man. As explained in Chapter 1, lesbian relationships have been commonly considered as being a reactionary response to violence or neglect by men, or a compromised form of sexual relationships due to a lack of suitable males (Huang, 2017; Ruan & Bullough, 1992). Such beliefs both reveal ignorance about same-sex attraction between females as well as reflect the ideology of hegemonic heterosexism in contemporary Chinese society (Huang, 2017; Hung, 2011).

Additionally, suggesting Doris have sex with men to change her lesbian sexuality can also be seen as a way to express hegemonic heteronormative power in order to discipline same-sex attracted people to obey heteronormative social norms, including binary gender performances. As explained in Chapter 3, Butler (1990, 1993a) argued that both gender and heterosexuality are socially and culturally constructed, through repetitive performances of norms and standards that regulate individuals' expressions of maleness and femaleness. Butler (1990) agreed with Foucault's (1978) notion of power and discourse and further argued

that gendered acts, as well as sexual desires, are a product of dominant discursive systems. Hence, it is the dominant discourse of gender expression and heteronormativity that drives this mother to discipline her child's social body in terms of the disciplinary regimes.

Believing the Child was Just Joking

In addition to positioning same-sex attraction as misbehaviour due to their child's emotional immaturity and lack of correct guidance, a few adult child participants disclosed that their parents' immediate response was not to take them at their word, not believing that they were telling the truth about their sexuality. As Doris shared,

From the very beginning, she [mother] thought I was just joking. She felt like that I was a kid who hasn't grown up. She felt that I'm still emotionally immature, and I'm just very curious about new things.

(Doris, female, came out to mother 10 years prior to the study)

Jia, who identifies herself as lesbian, explained her mother's reactions in the interview:

My mum felt very strange after I came out to her. She didn't believe that I was a lesbian and didn't take that [coming out] very seriously. ... She said, "So how come this happened? We don't have such people [same-sex attracted people] in our family. Are you sure?" Then she felt this is probably a state that only emerges in schools. And she believed

that I've just spent too much time studying, and because my partner is older than me, she said, "It's very normal if you get on well with your schoolmate who's older than you." (Jia, female, came out to mother 3 months prior to the study)

Similarly, Hao, who identifies as gay, talked about his mother's dismissal of his disclosure. In Hao's words:

I spoke to my mum first, I said, "Mum, I'm attracted to boys ... I feel like that I'm quite attracted to boys ... some certain boys." Then my mum said, "Don't make yourself paranoid! Mutual affection happens to all same-sex friends. If you like a certain same-sex person, or you adore him, that is not called being attracted to males, that's not called 'homosexuality'¹⁰ [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian]." Well ... I think my mum probably didn't take my disclosure seriously and thought I was joking. (Hao, male, came out to mother and father about 6 years prior to the study)

¹⁰ I used the term "homosexuality" here to highlight that Hao's mother viewed same-sex attraction was negative, as a result, she rejected her son's same-sex attraction.

Both Jia's and Hao's narratives outline their parents' rejection of their child's same-sex attraction, refusing to conceive of an intimate relationship between two same-sex people as sexual. To their parents' minds, the child and the child's partner were simply good friends, while their relationship was only based on friendship or spiritual admiration, rather than being a mutually attracted couple. Such comments resonate with the aforementioned parental reaction that some parents believed their child became same-sex attracted for fun, as they refused to view same-sex relationships as serious.

Mother Liang also refused to believe her son at the very beginning when her son came out to her as a teenager. Reminiscent of Doris's and Jia's experiences with their mothers, Mother Liang also thought her son was jesting when he came out to her. Her husband had the same feelings as she did, and they both insisted that their son was too young to really identify what kind of person he was himself. In the interview, this mother explained:

[After her child's coming out] I just laughed, I think that's unbelievable, how could he be a gay man? My first reaction is ... I don't believe he's gay. He must be joking. I said to him, "You must have misjudged yourself!" He [her son] then said very seriously, "I know who I am." Then I asked him, "How do you define yourself as a 'homosexual'? It's impossible for you to be gay, you must change!" (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Such parental reactions resonate with findings from a previous study by Wang et al. (2009) on Taiwanese gay men's coming out experiences. In that study, after their child's coming out, parents tended to reject their child's individual autonomy and dismiss their disclosure as immaturity. This form of rejection again speaks to the power hierarchy between the parent and the child, reinforced by filial piety in Chinese culture (Zheng, 2016).

Parents' Immediate Reaction: Sexualising Same-Sex Attraction

The section above addressed the first overarching theme present in parents' and adult children's narratives with respect to parents' initial reactions to their coming out—denial and dismissal. Within these themes, parents pathologised same-sex attraction as evidence of mental illness, while also dismissing their child's same-sex relationship(s) as evidence of emotional immaturity, misbehaviour, and frivolity. These reactions provide evidence of dominant discourses which circulate in China, positioning heterosexual relationships as the natural, normal, mature, and socially appropriate life narrative for young adults.

The second central theme present within parents' initial reactions was related to another element of parents' reductive positioning of same-sex attraction: viewing these relationships as solely sexual, rather than as an expression of a deeper, personal connection or as a relationship with the potential to last in the long term. For parents with this viewpoint, same-sex attraction and same-sex relationships were minimised and essentialised to a sexual behaviour rather than endowed with a richer emotional connection. Such perspectives could

again be seen as a product of the discursive power system within society; that, as Foucault (1978) argued, the way of seeing certain objects is always socially constructed.

The excerpts demonstrating parents sexualising same-sex attraction were extracted from adult children's interviews. Hao pointed out his father's different perspective towards his self-disclosure compared to that of his mother (which was examined above). Hao explained that, although his father never asked him to kneel down or apologise for his behaviour, his father resisted talking about same-sex attraction with him and was more likely to use verbal discrimination to express his anger and discontent. In Hao's words:

He [father] cast a glance and said, "How can you be so dirty? ... I don't want to hear you mentioning that word [same-sex attraction] anymore." ... My father just thinks being same-sex attracted is very dirty and disgusting. When he heard the word, he felt like ... how can that person speak that word out of his mouth?! (Hao, male, came out to mother and father about 6 years prior to the study)

Hao's father's attitudes towards the gay community represent one form of prejudice against same-sex attracted people that positions same-sex attraction as being repulsive (Inbar et al., 2009). Feeling disgusted is one of the main negative attitudes people express towards same-sex attraction across the world, especially towards gay men (e.g., Crawford et al., 2014; Huo, 2017; Kiss et al., 2020; Morrison & Morrison, 2003). Olatunji (2008) found that those who are

more likely to show disgust towards same-sex attraction tend to hold more conservative beliefs about sex. Thus, same-sex practices are deemed as immoral and against the virtue of purity (Olatunji, 2008). Additionally, Hao's father's reaction towards his coming out may also be influenced by the globally recognised discrimination towards gay men that previous research has identified (e.g., Kiss et al., 2020; Long, 2013; S. Wang, 2020). Such discrimination considers anal intercourse between gay men as filthy and aligns gay men with HIV/AIDS; the latter further constructs a stigma surrounding the myth that all gay people, particularly men, lead a promiscuous lifestyle.

Similarly, Fei, a lesbian participant, also described evidence of her father's prejudice towards her same-sex attraction. As Fei stated:

When we talk about same-sex attraction, he [Fei's father] only thinks of sex. He feels "homosexuality" is disgusting. He doesn't think it's normal. He won't think of love or affection first when thinking about this [same-sex attraction]. My father always sees this community [of sexuality diversity] with prejudice. He always thinks this [same-sex relationship] is not a normal relationship that people could build with love. He feels like that is a relationship which only consists of body contact. (Fei, female, came out to father and mother about 10 years prior to the study)

According to both young adults' explanations above, same-sex attracted individuals and their relationships were sexualised by their fathers. In the process, it appears that same-sex attraction and promiscuity were conflated, and such parental comments may be aligned with other beliefs that same-sex behaviour is viewed as a form of sexual deviance. Thus, same-sex relationships are not considered as a "normal" relationship. In extreme cases, same-sex attracted individuals could be wrongly stigmatised as sexual offenders (Nakkeeran & Nakkeeran, 2018). Sexualising same-sex attracted individuals and their relationships is another way in which the dominant discursive system operates to regulate people's morality and behaviours (Foucault, 1978, 1991), as such defaming can be seen as a sort of social punishment for having a non-heterosexual orientation and relationships within society, making them morally condemned and rejected (Poon et al., 2017). In other words, it is the dominant discursive power system, which has classified and positioned same-sex attraction as unnatural, immoral, promiscuous, sexual, and opposite to traditional values, which elicits people's feeling of disgust and results in further prejudice and discrimination.

Parents' Immediate Reactions: Intersections with Different Subjectivities

A third higher-order theme that was present within parents' initial reactions to their child's same-sex attraction was related to the intersection of parents' different subjectivities which impacted these initial reactions. Scholars have argued that an individual's various social

characteristics and subjectivities tend to intersect with each other and result in certain outcomes rather than functioning independently (McCall, 2005; Steffensmeier et al., 2016); thus, parents' immediate reactions towards their child coming out in this research are considered in combination with their intersecting social characteristics, experiences, and perspectives. In this research, these characteristics include parents' gender, location (rural/urban), age (generation), and their access to knowledge about same-sex attraction. A consideration of how these different subjectivities may intersect and impact on parents' immediate perspectives in relation to same-sex attraction is explored in the sections which follow.

Intersections with Generation and Traditional Education

As explained throughout the thesis, discourses around sexual minorities are largely marginalised and stigmatised in China's dominant discursive system (Micollier, 2005; S. Wang, 2020). Consequently, within Chinese society, heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality flourishes and the normativity of heterosexuality is taken for granted (Suen & Chan, 2020; S. Wang, 2020). Compulsory heterosexuality, which was first illustrated by Adrienne Rich in the 1980s, operates as a form of social and sexual control through naturalising and normalising hegemonic (hetero) sexual relations in society (Rich, 2003). Within modern Chinese society, social norms that sit alongside the stigmatisation of the sexual other continue to provide clear evidence of the naturalising and normalising of heterosexual relationships.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, information about sexuality diversity continues to be absent from formal textbooks in contemporary Chinese schools (Wei & Liu, 2019). However, discourses of traditional Chinese values, including filial piety (a central tenet of Confucianism), have been readily embedded into formal and informal education in schools and families (Jia, 2016). This is because filial piety has been viewed as “the cornerstone of social morality and the fundamental origin of education” (Jia, 2016, p. 113). As mentioned throughout this thesis, filial piety underpins discourses around traditional marriage and family continuity (Eklund, 2018; Hildebrandt, 2019); thus, one of the main ways heteronormativity operates in Chinese society is through the deployment of discourses which reify both Chinese tradition and conformity to Chinese traditional culture. Previous studies have consistently documented that people from older generations in China tend to be more conservative and more likely to conform to traditional values than younger cohorts (e.g., Chesner, 2019; Faure & Fang, 2008; C. Li, 2020; Sun & Wang, 2010; Zeng & Greenfield, 2015). This is because of the significant social changes that have occurred in China over recent decades, including the Reform and Opening-Up Policy, the one-child policy, and rapid modernisation (see Chapter 1). As a result, younger generations have been provided with more access to notions of individualism and progressive voices (Faure & Fang, 2008). Additionally, researchers have found that individuals who show more adherence to traditional Chinese values are more likely to express negative attitudes towards same-sex attraction and relationships (Hu & Wang, 2013; Lin et al., 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that a majority of parents in this research experienced negative

reactions towards their child's initial coming out, as they are more likely to adhere to traditional Chinese values.

For instance, when Mother Wang and her husband went to the hospital and heard from the doctor that being same-sex attracted is normal, they explained to the doctor that "after all, we live in a Confucian society and we hold Confucian thoughts ... [to] carry on the family line, you know?". Mother Wang further expressed her perspectives of heteronormativity in the interview. As she explained:

When people were born, when they started to know about things, they've understood that ... I'm a girl, I have to find a boy to marry, or I'm a guy, I have to find a girl to marry. It's very normal, and nothing else needs to be considered, right? You won't ask yourself why you're like this, why do you think in this way or how you think. No, it's just very reasonable to not think about it and do it very naturally, right?
(Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

Other parents also expressed the influence of Chinese traditional culture on their perspectives of same-sex attraction. This can be seen in the selected quotes below:

Since we were born, we have always received a traditional education.
Therefore, we could only think of heterosexuality in our mind: a man

falls in love with a woman, they get married and have their family; this is what I always think about. I've never seen two men, or two women stay together. I never knew about that. So, if it's not a relationship between a man and a woman, that's perverted. In my mind, the sky is Yang, and the ground is Yin. Everything is composed of Yin and Yang. Yin refers to women and Yang refers to men. And only when Yin meets Yang, there can be family continuity. I told my son, every family needs Yin-Yang balance. If you and your partner are both male, that's too much Yang in your family. You must be Yin-Yang balanced. How could you two guys be living together and have a relationship? (Mother Gao, 65 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the interview)

Probably because we are traditional people, I think people's relationship should be formed between a man and a woman, this is called life. Life is having children and staying together [with your husband or wife] until you die. This is a kind of traditional concept of our Chinese people. This is also our traditional lifestyle. (Mother Chang, 50 years old, son came out to her 3 years prior to the interview)

As can be seen from the three mothers' narratives above, their ideas about what is traditional are directly related to their construction of the acceptability and validity of heterosexual and same-sex relationships. Traditional education in China is inseparable from traditional Chinese

culture (Gu, 2006), and what traditional culture celebrates is likely to be viewed as always “correct” and “normal.” Hence, it is the belief in Confucianism, which celebrates traditional (heterosexual) marriage, family continuity, and binary gender responsibilities, which has likely contributed to these mothers’ rejection of the child’s same-sex attraction. That is, any sexual practices other than monogamous heterosexual relationships are highly likely to be morally condemned (Poon et al., 2017) and denied, as they are not viewed as normal. The mothers’ narratives shown above reflect the ways in which heteronormativity goes unquestioned in modern Chinese society. Thus, alongside practices of traditional Chinese culture, discourses of heterosexuality continue to be dominant within society, while discourses around other sexualities remain marginalised and discriminated against.

Intersections with Access

As previously noted, an individual’s different subjectivities always intersect with each other and contribute to certain consequences. In this research, it is not only parents’ age or generation and traditional education that shape their reactions towards their child’s same-sex attraction; an individual’s exposure to same-sex knowledge is also important, as this could either reinforce or challenge parents’ prejudice towards same-sex attraction.

Mother Sun is the only parent in this study who reported that she had accepted her child’s sexuality immediately post-disclosure, although she also asked her daughter once if her same-

sex sexual orientation could be changed. In the interview, this mother explained her experiences before realising her daughter's sexual orientation. As Mother Sun stated:

Although I don't have much close contact with gay people, I know what kind of people they are. When my daughter was in her university age, she used to bring me to [underground] gay bars and some gay-related events. However, at that time she didn't clearly say she was a lesbian. I was also very curious about this community at that time, and I wanted to see how these people looked like. ... And I also had a colleague when I was in my 20s, that girl ... she was dating with another [female] nurse and we sometimes hung out together. Well ... at that time, people made comments behind their backs. However, so I've got the concept, I've known about same-sex attraction since that time. So, I accepted my daughter very naturally. (Mother Sun, 54 years old, daughter came out to her about 10 years prior to the study)

Mother Sun's experiences of having contacts with same-sex attracted people highlights the importance of exposure to same-sex attraction. The significance of access to same-sex attraction in people's attitudes towards same-sex attraction has been highlighted in both Chinese and Western studies (Baku et al., 2017; Cao et al., 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001). That is, people who have contact with the term same-sex attraction at an earlier age, or who are more familiar with knowledge about sexual minorities, tend to hold less prejudice towards

people from the sexuality diversity community (Cao et al., 2010) and express more acceptance of their own same-sex attracted children (Baku et al., 2017; Savin-Williams, 2001).

However, most parents in this research reported that they had neither knowledge of same-sex attraction nor contact with same-sex attracted people before their child came out. Thus, parents' difficulty in accessing knowledge about same-sex attraction and same-sex attracted people, in some way, limits the possibilities of their perspectives towards different kinds of relationships. Further, such lack of exposure to same-sex attraction intersects with their generation and beliefs in traditional culture, further reinforcing their belief in compulsory heterosexuality and strengthening their ignorance about and pre-existing stigma and prejudice towards same-sex attracted people. For instance, Mother Gao, who perceived herself as a person who has always "received a traditional education," further shared in the interview that she always assumed same-sex attraction only existed in the West before her son came out to her. She stated:

I never thought he could be same-sex attracted because I never came across that concept. At that time, before my son came out, I only knew there were gay people in the United States, but I didn't know at all there are also gay people in China. (Mother Gao, 65 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

According to Mother Gao's explanation above, her lack of access to knowledge about same-sex attraction reflects the fact that there was virtually no channel for Mother Gao to obtain exposure to, or increase her contact with, same-sex attracted individuals. This reinforced her belief in the non-existence of gay people in China.

Likewise, Mother Chang emphasised:

I feel like there are a lot [same-sex attracted people] in society now, but I really never heard of it before. Well ... I mean I know the term "homosexuality" [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian]¹¹, but I never really had contact with this group of people in my real life. I just wonder ... why there are so many [same-sex attracted people] outside [in society]? (Mother Chang, 50 years old, son came out to her about 3 years prior to the study)

Mother Chen conveyed similar thoughts in her interview:

¹¹ Here, I have used the term "homosexuality" because this mother was pathologising homosexuality in the interview.

Mother Chen: I've heard from his [her son's] high-school teacher that there are many boys and girls, that's what I realised later, but when he [her son] was in high school, I never thought in that way.

Researcher: Many boys and girls what?

Mother Chen: Just ... they're all "homosexuals" [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian]¹², a lot ... I was very shocked at that moment. I was wondering, how come there are so many of them in the society? (Mother Chen, 49 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

These two excerpts above both reflect these mothers' lack of access to same-sex attracted people, which partly has resulted in their disbelief in and denial of their own child's same-sex attraction. However, such lack of exposure to same-sex attraction could be the result of the fact that discourses around same-sex attraction are largely marginalised and silenced within the social discursive system, as mentioned in Chapter 3 (Hung, 2011; Wei & Liu, 2019). Such silencing also can be seen from Mother Chen's comments around same-sex attracted people above, where her initial avoidance of even uttering the word for homosexual(ity), reflects a silence that is also commonly observed in the daily discursive system in contemporary

¹² Same as footnote 11

Chinese society. As silencing illustrates the fact that only particular subjectivities that fit into certain ways are allowed to be spoken of and celebrated (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987), people's silencing of discourses related to same-sex attraction could not only be seen as a sort of social punishment for non-heterosexual sexualities, but might also reflect individuals' understandings of what can and cannot be spoken. Thus, the silencing of particular discourses could also be seen as a way of avoiding social punishment, including avoiding embarrassment (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). In the process, silencing same-sex attraction has been gradually normalised and universalised, and the invisibility of same-sex attraction within society has been strengthened, which further results in people's difficulty in accessing knowledge about same-sex attraction. Likewise, the power of discourses around heteronormativity continues to be reinforced, further naturalising parents' belief in compulsory heterosexuality.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, for individuals looking for positive or affirming information about same-sex attraction in China, the internet is one of their sole sources of such material (Bu, 2016; Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014). It may also be relevant to note that, given the dramatic social development in China in the last two decades, older people have been found to have more difficulties in adapting to the use of modern digital technology (Liu et al., 2021), and internet users are typically significantly younger and more likely to be living in urban areas (Xie et al., 2021; Xu & Huang, 2020). Moreover, generally speaking, people engage with media outlets that correspond to their own beliefs (Stroud, 2017). Thus, older Chinese parents, especially those from rural areas in China, are likely to have even less exposure to knowledge

about same-sex attraction than younger, urban people. Notably, while positive, affirming discourses surrounding same-sex attraction have been largely silenced within Chinese society, negatively oriented, (mis)information about same-sex attraction is highly visible in society, especially through media outlets (Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014). As a result, in addition to the influence of traditional cultural values of heteronormativity and parents' lack of access to knowledge of same-sex attraction, compulsory heterosexuality is additionally perpetuated through Chinese media, which overtly positions same-sex relationship as defective. As Mother Liang explained:

I thought gay people were very depraved, only those on drugs or criminals could be “homosexual¹³” [in Chinese: Tong Xing Lian] ... well, I’m not very sure where these stereotypes came from, but I assume they were from television or media ... sometimes when I watched foreign movies, there were some “homosexual” characters, and they were all homeless people, ruffians, or hooligans. That’s why I thought

¹³ Here, I have used the term “homosexual” because this mother was criminalising and stigmatising same-sex attracted people in the interview.

gay people were just like that. (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her 6 years ago)

It is interesting that Mother Liang explained that her stereotypes might have come from foreign movies. As outlined in Chapter 1, traditional media outlets in mainland China are strictly censored, and same-sex attraction was banned from screens in 2016 (Shaw & Zhang, 2018). However, Mother Liang's experiences imply that negatively biased scenes related to same-sex attraction in foreign movies are still accessible on screen in contemporary mainland China. Such findings again highlight the hierarchy between discourses around heterosexuality and same-sex attraction (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987); that is, discourses of heterosexual relationships are always celebrated and can be seen from everywhere in the society, while discourses of same-sex attraction are positioned as devalued and inferior. Moreover, discourses of same-sex attraction are not fully silenced and invisible; instead, those that have a negative bias are always visible within society, constructing public stigma and prejudice towards same-sex attraction. More details around this concept will be explained in Chapter 6.

Likewise, another adult child participant explained her parents' concern about her sexuality after she came out. Jin, who identifies herself as a lesbian, explained:

When I came out to her [mother], she told me immediately, don't go to clubs. Well ... actually I rarely go clubbing. However, you know,

because of the media, media likes to portray same-sex attracted people as promiscuous. So, I understand why my mum had such concerns. I felt it is quite funny when I heard her saying “don’t go to clubs.” ... Actually, I know she was worrying about my life, she’s concerned about promiscuity. (Jin, female, came out to mother 2 years prior to the study)

As highlighted above, the mainstream media in contemporary mainland China continues to portray same-sex attraction as abnormal, perverse, or linked to crime or HIV (Chang & Ren, 2017; Hung, 2011; Tu & Lee, 2014). Jin’s explanation of her mother’s concerns directly illustrates the power of heteronormative content in Chinese mainstream media and how this content could shape people’s attitudes towards, and impressions about, sexual minorities. In the process, subjectivities such as parents’ age, the influence of traditional values, and parents’ exposure to correct information about same-sex attraction intersect with each other, which further results in a reinforcement of parents’ beliefs in compulsory heterosexuality as well as their prejudice towards and discrimination against same-sex relationships.

Intersections with Gender

The above discussion illustrated participating mothers’ immediate reactions towards their child’s coming out and how intersectionality with generation, traditional education, and access affected their initial reactions. However, gender, as well as associated parental roles,

is another factor that may affect parents' immediate reactions towards their child. As noted previously, no fathers participated in this research. Despite this, many participating mothers spoke about their husband's reactions and attitudes and many participating adult children reflected on the challenges of engaging with their fathers around this topic.

As can be seen from material presented in previous sections in the earlier part of the chapter, fathers' attitudes towards their child's sexuality tend to be more aggressive and intense than those of mothers. Such findings are in line with results from previous research in Western societies (e.g., Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Cramer & Roach, 1988; D'Augelli, 2002; Savin-Williams, 2001; Wisniewski et al., 2009). Moreover, it is also important to note that not every young participant in the research had come out to their father, which is also consistent with Western-based research finding that gay and lesbian people are more likely to disclose their sexuality to mothers than fathers (e.g., Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1998; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). However, such decisions reflect the different parental gender roles and power imbalances between fathers and mothers in Chinese family structures. In Chinese culture, fathers have been traditionally expected to be the disciplinarian as well as the financial provider (Li & Lamb, 2015; D. Wang, 2020). In other words, the father tends to be more of an authority in the family. In the current study, such gender differences in parental roles were also reflected in adult children's decisions about disclosing their sexuality to their father; that is, practical considerations such as being expelled from the family, being cut off from financial support, or generally being punished

discouraged the adult child from coming out to their father. Evidence of this is provided in the excerpts below from adult child participants.

One of the participating adult children, Doris, explained her reason for keeping silent about her sexuality to her father:

Doris: Because my dad and my mum are totally different people. My dad is a super old-fashioned person, very conservative. ... My dad has a problem, though it rarely happened after I and my younger sister went to university. However, before we went to university, my dad showed a severe tendency towards domestic violence. He's a very grumpy person. That's why I told my friend, if my dad knew my sexuality, he might burn the whole neighbourhood.

Researcher: Did he beat you before?

Doris: Yes, he did. When I tried to stop him beating my mum, I was also beaten by him. So, I feel if I told him, my mum may suffer ... my father is that kind of typical male chauvinist. (Doris, female, came out to mother about 10 years prior to the study)

Doris chose not to disclose her sexuality to her father as a way to protect her mother from suffering further violence from her father. Doris refers to her father as "a super old-fashioned person," demonstrating that she thought being same-sex attracted was against conservative

and traditional ideologies. Hence, in an “old-fashioned” system, only heterosexual relationships that adhere to social norms are viewed as acceptable behaviours. However, the father is traditionally viewed as the disciplinarian in the Chinese family structure (Li & Lamb, 2015; D. Wang, 2020); in Dori’s case, it appeared that beating his wife and child was one of her father’s ways of showing men’s power and authority in the family. Such action reflects the global patriarchal culture, where men’s violence is normalised and used as a way to discipline partners and children (Humphreys et al., 2019; Perrin et al., 2019).

Another participating adult child, Jia, explained in the interview her reason for her reluctance to disclose her sexuality to her father:

Well ... my mum won’t do anything to me if I told her I’m a lesbian, but my father would definitely do something to me. You know, it’s my father giving me the money for my living expenses ... so I’ve never thought to tell him. But ... in the future, if I’ve become financially independent, my partner has also become financially independent, and we can both stay in here [the city in which she is now living and studying], have our own apartment ... well, at that time, I won’t be scared of anything if he knows about my sexuality. (Jia, female, came out to mother about 3 months prior to the study)

According to Jia's explanation, she was concerned about her father's withdraw of financial support if she disclosed her sexuality to him; consequently, if she becomes financially independent, she "won't be scared of anything." Such concern resonates with previous studies (e.g., Ho et al., 2012; Kam, 2012; Lo, 2020) on Chinese same-sex attracted people that have highlighted the importance of financial independence as a prerequisite for coming out; that is, financial independence helps to enhance and secure young adults' power to resist parental influence and exert autonomous control over their sexuality and relationships (Lo, 2020).

Additionally, Jia comes from rural China. Compared to urban areas, patriarchy in rural China is considered more influential, as people from rural areas tend to express more loyalty to traditional cultural values. Such stronger adherence to tradition has also led to a larger gender differential between men and women in rural places than in urban areas (Liao et al., 2010; Sargeson, 2012). That is, men are supposed to own more than women, both economically and in terms of authority. Thus, compared to families from urban areas in China, it appears Jia's father holds more financial and disciplinary power in her family.

In addition, people's access to information about same-sex attraction is considered even more limited in rural areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2016; United Nations Development Programme & USAID, 2014). The intersection of rurality, gender, generation, and people's access to information about same-sex attraction has made it more difficult and riskier for this lesbian participant to disclose her sexuality to her father. Such intersectionality

and derived difficulties also explain Jia's insistence on leaving her hometown and settling down in another city. Although in contemporary Chinese society people moving to urban areas for better chances and improved quality of life has become common, it is undeniable that urban migration has also created an opportunity for rural Chinese gay men and lesbians, particularly rural lesbians, to gain more control over their own life and pursue a more tolerant living environment (T. Liu, 2019).

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter illustrates Chinese parents' initial reactions towards their adult child's coming out. In general, parents in the study found it difficult to accept their child's sexual orientation when they first became aware of their child's sexuality. The parents' immediate reactions towards their child's sexual orientation could be indicative of Chinese people's insufficient knowledge of, exposure to, and subconscious prejudice and stigma towards, same-sex attracted people. These understandings have been formed in the heteronormative social discursive system in which they are situated. In the meantime, discourses of binary gender roles are also constantly practised to secure heterosexual relationships. Moreover, the findings have highlighted the influence of the intersections of different subjectivities, including parents' age (generation), access to knowledge of same-sex attraction, gender, and location, on parental reactions towards their child's coming out. In the next chapter, parents' shifting perspectives towards their child's sexual orientation over a period of time after their

child's disclosure, as well as their attitudes towards and quality of the parent-child relationship at the time of the interview, will be explored.

Chapter 6 Parents' Shifting Perspectives on Their Child's Same-Sex Attraction

Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis of Chinese parents' first reactions towards their child's sexuality when their child came out to them as same-sex attracted. It acknowledged the influence of the intersections with traditional Chinese culture, age, gender, and parents' access and exposure to affirming information about sexuality diversity in shaping parents' beliefs about compulsory heterosexuality and their initial reactions towards their child's sexual orientation. Likewise, the ways in which same-sex attracted people have been pathologised, sexualised, and discriminated against were also investigated.

This chapter analyses parents' changing reactions between their first hearing about their child's sexuality and the time period that followed and concludes with their feelings about their child and the parent-child relationship at the time of interview. As in Chapter 5, narratives from both parents and adult child research participants are used to create a fuller picture of parents' experiences of responding to and processing their child's disclosure of same-sex attraction. Hence, this chapter starts by analysing parents' shifting reactions towards their child coming out. This is then followed by an examination of their positions on opposite-sex marriage and reproduction. Evidence of Chinese lesbians' position of being doubly marginalised, as both women and as same-sex attracted, in relation to parents'

attitudes towards their lesbian daughters will also be discussed. This chapter concludes with an analysis of parents' attitudes towards their child's sexuality as well as the parent-child relationship at the time of the interview, highlighting the importance of increased education, exposure to information in relation to sexuality diversity, and contact with the sexuality diverse community for challenging the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity.

Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Parents' Self-Blame

As explained in Chapter 5, the Chinese parents in this research tended to believe that same-sex attraction is a socially inappropriate behaviour, and a number of parents attributed their child's attractions to their child's perceived emotional immaturity. Thus, some parents blamed themselves for what they thought of as their unsuccessful parenting, characterised by insufficient protection or lack of guidance for their child to conform to socially expected performances of sexuality and gender. As discussed, Chinese parents interviewed or described in this research believed that they had the responsibility to educate and discipline their child in accordance with perceived social norms, namely, being heterosexual and adhering to socially expected gender expression (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005; Lam et al., 2020).

In this research, two dominant themes within parents' reflections over the period of time after the child's disclosure can be observed. The first of these relates to parents' reflections on their child's non-conformity to binary gender performances; the second relates to parents'

reflections on their insufficient provision of sex education within the family. In the first of these, parents blamed themselves for not forcing their child to more tightly conform to traditional binary gender expectations which, they thought, resulted in their child's same-sex attraction. In the latter theme, parents believed that, due to insufficient provision of sex education, their child failed to receive the "correct" knowledge about (heterosexual) sex and sexual relations; this lack of knowledge contributed to the child getting their orientation "wrong". In this research, the parents of a gay son were more likely to reference binary gender roles; that is, these parents believed that a lack of masculine role models in the family led to their son's same-sex sexual orientation. Details of these shifting parental attitudes in relation to their child's coming out are explored in the next two sections.

Lack of Masculinity in the Family

As mentioned above, one of the parents' most common reflections was related to the child's binary gender expression. This group of parents still tended to believe that being same-sex attracted was indicative of something being wrong, or that a problem was occurring. They saw this as a result of their unsuccessful parenting or of their provision of a "defective" family environment during their child's younger, impressionable years. For instance, Mother Chen attributed her son's sexuality to her own family structure, which included "too many females," and also blamed herself for sending her child to dance classes. She explained:

I also reflected on myself. There are too many females in our home, my siblings' children and my husband's brother's child, they are all female. ... I told him [son]: "Look, your father was rarely at home. You've spent a lot of time with me; you were surrounded by females. I shouldn't have sent you to learn dancing." Sometimes when he practised at home, he danced like a girl, with scarf. ... He has probably mimicked some girl's dance movements in his childhood. I should have sent him to learn basketball and football. All he learnt in his childhood were those artistic things, such as piano, not like other boys who all play football or basketball. (Mother Chen, 49 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

Mother Chen's extract above reflects the stereotype that many heterosexual people tend to assume: only individuals who violate socially defined gender expression would be attracted to people of the same sex (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). Such thoughts also echo a global social stereotype that all gay men behave in an effeminate manner (Dunn et al., 2015; Glick et al., 2007; Hoang, 2019; Liu & Choi, 2006).

According to Mother Chen's explanation, she regretted sending her son to dance classes, as she considered dancing to be a potentially feminising activity, as compared to sports such as football or basketball. Gendering of various activities or pursuits, such as constructing sports participation as a masculine activity (Hsiu & Yueh, 2013) or dancing as a feminine activity

(Risner, 2014), has been previously demonstrated in the literature. Risner (2014) also further pointed out that people are highly likely to classify males who perform dance as effeminate. Such ideas perfectly reflect Butler's (1990, 1993a) notions of gender performativity, where individuals' gender performances have been socially constructed by social expectations; that is, people are socially expected to undertake particular activities and performances according to their biological sex, in order to further construct their maleness and femaleness.

Hence, it is the society as well as the culture that expects men to conform to hegemonic masculinity and to be heterosexual, in order to secure their dominant position within society (Wang et al., 2019); femininity and same-sex attraction are excluded. Mother Chen's reflections on herself also resonate with Butler's (1990) concept of the heterosexual matrix (see Chapter 3), which seeks to explain how people make assumptions about another's sexuality based on normative gender frameworks in society, where sex and gender are known.

Similarly, while Mother Gao initially felt that her son must have been misguided by his partner, in the weeks that followed her son coming out, she began to search for some familial causal explanation for her son's same-sex attraction.

I was also wondering whether it's because his father passed away too early. If his father was still there, he could communicate with his father [about sex] during puberty, as the child may feel embarrassed to talk with his mother ... and he might not have become like this [same-sex

attracted]. ... Well, I just wanted to find a cause, I just wanted to find out what has made him become gay. (Mother Gao, 67 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

Mother Gao wondered whether her son had become same-sex attracted due to his lack of a father during puberty. This suggests that she thought the father could provide “correct” guidance as well as an example of masculinity for her son. Mother Gao’s doubt about her son’s situation is quite similar to Mother Chen’s worries about her son’s upbringing in which she felt that there were “too many females at our home” and that this had negative consequences on her son’s sexuality. They both highlighted this idea that a lack of men or sufficient masculinity in the family may have made their son gay, constructing gay men as the result of exposure to effeminacy. Their comments point out a dominant discourse with respect to gender in China: men have to perform a highly “macho” heterosexuality, otherwise, less dominant, more effeminate forms of masculinity may eventuate in a gay identity. Additionally, it appears from their explanations that both mothers denied the child’s agency; that is, the adult in the family is assumed to be powerful and influential, while the child is viewed as being easily influenced and shaped by others. However, it is not surprising to hear such comments, as Chinese traditional culture emphasises the parent-child hierarchy as well as parents’ responsibility to discipline and guide their child to ensure the child conforms to socially expected norms and standards (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005; Lam et al., 2020).

Mother Wang also reflected on her son's gender expression and her own behaviours after her child came out. She felt extraordinarily confused about why her son, a 'manly' man, would become gay, as demonstrated in the transcript extract below.

Mother Wang: I kept thinking, which part I did wrong throughout my educating of him during childhood that made him like this? Everything in my child's life is quite reasonable, well ... very natural; so, I don't understand.

Researcher: What do you mean "quite reasonable and very natural?"

Mother Wang: Well ... just some kids, you know, some boys like wearing dresses, or like playing with girls. Just boys who behave like a girl, or those girls who behave like a boy ... you know, those androgynous people ... that's what I mean. But my child is not like that. My child is very manly. He's two metres tall. ... Just very normal, and he also does very well in school. He's very self-disciplined, very strong, you know. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

Mother Wang's statements again resonate with Butler's (1990) concept of the heterosexual matrix that has been mentioned above. This mother's quotes reflect the myth that is often held of gay men; that is, how can a person become gay and adhere to masculine traits at the

same time? This alludes to previously mentioned stereotypes that gay men are often positioned as equivalent to women in relation to heterosexual relations because they derive sexual pleasure from another male (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019). Additionally, when Mother Wang referred to her son as being “very self-disciplined,” she showed her belief that a well-disciplined child cannot be gay. As mentioned above, Chinese parents tend to believe that they have a responsibility to educate and discipline their child to be well-behaved (Chen et al., 2010; Lam, 2005; Lam et al., 2020; Tan, 2011); that is, to behave in a socially acceptable way, which includes being heterosexual. Thus, for Mother Wang, same-sex attraction was considered as a sort of socially inappropriate and deviant behaviour, which was, in her view, contradictory to her son’s positive personality characteristic of being self-disciplined. Mother Wang’s beliefs reflect how she positioned same-sex attraction. Such positioning again implies that within Chinese society discourses around heterosexuality are highly celebrated with social rewards, including being tagged as “normal,” “natural,” “well-behaved,” and “correct,” while sexualities other than heterosexuality are largely stigmatised and marginalised with social punishment, including moral condemnation, social prejudice, and discrimination (Foucault, 1978; Ning & Poon, 2021; Poon et al., 2017; Weedon, 1987)

As can be seen from the three parents’ quotes above, the social construction of binary gender is deep-rooted and is entrenched in people’s social life and behaviours, including their ways of disciplining their child. Such views have the potential to restrict a child’s interests and development (Rawlings, 2017), as shown within Mother Chen’s narrative. Additionally, such beliefs can reinforce discrimination against people who fail to conform to socially celebrated

expressions of (binary) gender identity and can serve to punish people who stray from socially defined “standards of normalcy” (Ward & Mann, 2012, p. 223). In other words, hegemonic masculinity, as a social and cultural product, operates to regulate men’s and women’s social bodies and gender expression in society (Thepsourinthone et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). In the process, an individual’s behaviour is constantly monitored to compel them to conform to socially constructed gender norms (Butler, 1990, 1993a; Foucault, 1991).

Failing to Provide the Child with Sufficient Sex Education

In keeping with their theory that a *lack* of something, such as proper masculine role models, contributed to their child’s same-sex attraction, one of the parents interviewed attributed her child’s same-sex attraction to insufficient sex education. Mother Wang, who consistently wondered, “Which part did I do wrong throughout my educating of him during childhood?” explained further in her interview:

Actually, I can’t find anything wrong, everything looks reasonable. However, just sex education, we never talk about it. In China, traditional families don’t talk about it all the time. However, when he [son] was younger, he also never asked ... we just did some superficial work. I’d rather say, we just didn’t do enough [sex education] in this respect. Apart from that, we never did anything wrong or

inappropriate. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

Mother Wang's excerpt above again reflects her inner belief that being gay is "wrong" and having a gay child is likely to be considered as a failure of parents, as they did not raise a "well-behaved" or "normal" child. However, as the topic of sex is quite limited or even non-existent in Chinese parent-child communications (Li et al., 2017; Steinhauer, 2016), many adult child participants in the research also stated that they barely received sex education in their family. Parents, including Mother Wang, may strive to keep silent on sex-related topics in front of their child in order to protect a child's sexual innocence (Robinson & Davies, 2015). This resonates with Western researchers who argue that some parents tend to consider knowledge of sexuality as "difficult knowledge" for children (Britzman, 1998; Robinson, 2013; Robinson et al., 2019). It is important to note that, apart from guiding their children, Chinese parenting style also emphasises protection; that is, ensuring a safe environment for their children (Wu et al., 2002). Additionally, Chinese parents are more likely to prefer that their children focus on academic studies rather than have any interest in sex, as the latter is viewed as exclusive to adults (Liu & Edwards, 2003); adolescents' interest in sex may even be seen as violating the standards of being a "good kid" (N. Wang, 2016, p. 9). Moreover, as mentioned in Chapter 5, same-sex attraction/relationships tend to be sexualised within society, even if the relationship is about partnership and romance. Therefore, in order to protect children's innocence, their access to knowledge that is positioned as sexual is highly restricted by adults. However, it is worth noting that such avoidance could also be viewed as a means of silencing

sexual minorities, thus excluding other sexualities from the dominant discursive system (Weedon, 1987). As a result, heterosexuality is constituted as the only normal sexual orientation in society by default.

Further, it is important to address that mother blaming is not rare in society across global contexts. Researchers found that mothers tend to blame themselves when their children engage in misbehaviours or when their children chose a lifestyle which goes against “social norms” (Jackson & Mannix, 2004). This is because mothers are socially expected to carry the burden of child health and child education and these socially constructed binary gender responsibilities have been deeply embedded in people’s knowledge. As a result, mothers are not only more likely to be blamed when their children misbehave, but they also tend to believe that this is their fault and that have made their child misbehave; in relation to this research, misbehaviour is enacted by being same-sex attracted.

Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Embarrassment and Concerns about Face

In the period following their initial reactions to their child coming out, parents started to have concerns about their face in relation to having a same-sex attracted child. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Chinese people are sensitive to saving face (Hu, 1944; Hwang,1987; Ren et al., 2019). Face functions as a means of either reward or punishment through saving or losing

one's face in daily interactions (Han, 2016). In Chinese culture, face can be gained or lost both at an individual and a group level (Hwang, 1987). In other words, having a same-sex child could not only make parents feel ashamed (Wang, Hu, et al., 2020), the reputation of extended family or group members, including relatives or neighbourhoods, could also be threatened (He & Zhang, 2011).

In this research, parents also showed their concerns about loss of face and expressed a willingness to discipline their child's behaviours to adhere to the prevailing social standards of "normalcy" to avoid those social punishments. Such action resonates with Foucault's (1991) notion of surveillance (see Chapter 3), representing how an individual's social life and body is managed and governed in society. In this section, parents' difficulties in facing others in relation to having a gay or lesbian child are discussed, along with explanations of their related actions to avoid loss of face.

Parents' Difficulties in Facing Others

Having a same-sex attracted child is viewed as bringing shame and dishonour to parents and their whole (extended) family (Wang, Hu, et al., 2020). Considering such threats, parents in this research continued to push their child to identify as heterosexual and to get married, in order to avoid "face loss." This can be seen in the following quotes from parents:

I'd rather say, if she [daughter] could find a man to get married to in the future, she would look better. A married woman will look better. That's it. In here [her hometown], if you have a daughter who doesn't get married, people will judge you and say bad words behind your back. Yes, people will comment on you. An unmarried woman is no good for the whole village and will be expelled from the village because an unmarried woman means misfortune in our village. (Mother Zhou, 50 years old, daughter came out to her about 3 months prior to the study)

In Mother Zhou's words, "look(ing) better" refers to the fact that her daughter would be more acceptable to others, in terms of her daughter's social image and reputation. However, it is interesting that Mother Zhou conveys that getting married would not only make herself, her daughter, and their own family look better, but also their village would benefit. People from rural areas in China are still likely to conform to "feudalistic superstition" (in Chinese: fēng jiàn mí xìn) and celebrate traditional social and cultural values, including patriarchy (Liao et al., 2010; Sargeson, 2012; Svensson, 2016). Mother Zhou's excerpt appears to illustrate one of the feudalistic superstitions that many rural people tend to believe (Fielding, 2008): "an unmarried woman means misfortune." As a collectivist society, Chinese culture prioritises group values and needs over individual values and needs (Prioste et al., 2015). Thus, the whole village could be potentially placed in disrepute because of this unmarried young woman.

While unmarried women are generally devalued and stigmatised in modern Chinese society (T. Liu, 2019), having a lesbian daughter can result in even worse discrimination and stigma in rural locations. This is because, as explained in Chapter 5, the gender imbalance in rural China is considered prominent, resulting in rural women being positioned as more inferior and passive than women from urban locations (Liao et al., 2010; Sargeson, 2012). Hence, it appears that another example of intersectionality of gender and rurality influencing parents' attitudes towards their child's sexuality is observed; that is, Mother Zhou tends to have potentially greater pressure around her daughter's lesbianism than might be experienced by urban parents. Thus, encouraging her daughter to get married is almost the only solution for their family to avoid further social punishment in the village.

Many mothers also highlighted their difficulties and feelings of shame in facing others, including family members, colleagues, and friends in relation to their child's sexuality. The quotes below, all reflect on the parents' experiences after a period of time had passed since their child had come out to them.

I've been sending messages on WeChat to him [her son] every single day for half a month; I was thinking of ways to persuade him [to change his sexuality]. Then I found persuading doesn't work. I started to say some harsh words, such as "You made me feel ashamed!" "I can't face your dead father and your forefathers even after I'm dead." (Mother Gao, 67 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

I don't think he's normal. ... How can I face my schoolmates, my colleagues, and my family? How come I raised such a son? Why is my son like this? (Mother Lee, 57 years old, son came out to her about 4 years prior to the study)

Actually, I didn't want to tell people about my son. I didn't want to tell others about this [her child's sexuality]. I didn't dare to tell this [about her child being gay] to anyone. I was afraid my child would get discriminated against. I was scared that people will laugh at me. (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

In China, losing face not only makes the person feel embarrassed, this person may also be ostracised or rejected by others, such as friends or extended family members, as a further punishment (Han, 2016; Kim & Nam, 1998). This is aligned with Foucault's (1991) notion of social disciplinary power within society: that individuals' social behaviours are always monitored and surveilled by others. Hence, as Foucault points out, dominant discursive power does not just come from the top down, from some sovereign authority; rather, it comes from everywhere and is immersed within society (Dunning, 2010; Foucault, 1991). In other words, family obligation, including opposite-sex marriage and family continuity, has been normalised and naturalised in Chinese society; likewise, social discipline to punish unfilial behaviours is also normalised and universalised (Ward & Mann, 2012; Weedon, 1987).

As a result, those who fail to conform to socially expected standards or norms are undoubtedly likely to be punished.

Parents' Actions in Face-Saving

One of the situations mentioned above indeed occurred in one adult child participant's family. Jun, who identifies himself as gay, mentioned how his mother gradually drifted away from her old friends after he came out. This was because Jun's mother was often asked about her son's personal issues, including whether he had a girlfriend or when he was going to get married. According to Jun, these questions made his mother feel stressed, as it was difficult for her to disclose her son's situation to others. Hom (1994) argues parents themselves go "into the closet" when their children come out to them, withdrawing from friends and family and hiding the truth of their child's sexuality. As explained above, many Chinese parents believe they have a responsibility to raise a modest child, who is socially conforming (Wu et al., 2002). These societal pressures can be so great that they force parents' social withdrawal, as can be seen in the case of Jun's mother, who chose to leave her old friends to potentially safeguard her family's reputation (face) or to protect her son from negative comments.

Moreover, another adult child participant in this research highlighted the compromise that he made between himself and his parents in order to save his parents' face. Tao, who identifies himself as gay, stated:

My father and my mother are both very traditional. They never tried to give up [changing Tao's sexual orientation]. They then arranged a lot of blind dates for me. I said to them, I'll go. I'll pretend that I'm attracted to girls in front of your friends and relatives. I won't make you lose face. The biggest compromise I have done is to prevent my parents from losing face. I understand that they care about face in front of their friends. I won't make them feel ashamed because they believe having a gay son makes them feel ashamed and lose face. (Tao, male, came out to mother and father about 2 years prior to the study)

Suppressing and concealing one's sexual orientation intentionally to save face is very common in contemporary mainland Chinese society. The ramifications of this could be considered as a form of silent violence and as a form of discrimination against same-sex attracted people (Chou, 2000; Liu & Ding, 2005). Such action could be viewed as a conformity to heteronormative performances and rules, because "when there is no hope of change, silence may exist as a form of resignation" (Bell et al., 2011, p. 136). Further, for Foucault (1978), silence consists of both the things people refuse to say or that which they are forbidden to name. Thus, it appears that discourses around same-sex attraction are marginalised and oppressed within social discursive systems. In the process, the visibility of same-sex attraction continues to remain low, and ignorance of the prevalence of this form of diversity could be further aggravated.

Over a Period of Time Post-Disclosure: Parents' Concerns about Their Child's Life

In addition to parents' concern about face-saving, many parents in this research mentioned their worries about social discrimination against their same-sex attracted child. Thus, in order to protect their child from being socially discriminated against and excluded by others, these parents continued to demand that their child change their sexuality. However, according to these research findings, parents of a lesbian daughter tended to show different concerns and worries from parents who had a gay son. Moreover, as parents explained their worries about their child's future life, their own beliefs about the compulsory nature of opposite-sex marriage and reproduction were further observed. These findings will be explained in the following sections, along with related theoretical analysis.

Fear of Social Discrimination Against the Child

The first type of child-related concern from parents was the potential for social discrimination against their child. As a result, and in an effort to protect the child from judgements or unfair treatment, parents continued to request that their child change. This is evident in interviews from both parents and adult children, as illustrated below.

I think I need to tell him [her son] that if you go on like this, if you don't change, you may encounter these troubles or anything even more

horrible than I've imagined, so you must change. Who will hire a gay man? Or you won't get promoted because you're gay; people may look down on you or do something behind your back, or even fire you. (Mother Liang, 47 years old, son came out to her about 6 years prior to the study)

This sexual orientation will definitely hinder his future development. I worry how people will see him [son] in society. But first of all, I'm worrying about his [mental] health. Those barriers in his future life, right? We are his parents, it's very normal for us to worry about these issues. ... When he suffers from pressure or barriers, he would be very distressed and depressed. (Mother Wang, 46 years old, son came out to her about 3 months prior to the study)

She [mother] said, you need to think about us. I worry about you. She feels that this path [being same-sex attracted] is full of difficulties in Chinese society, it [being same-sex attracted] will be very tough. People will look at you and judge you. She would also tell me particularly, don't come out to people around you. Don't let others know this [her daughter's sexual orientation]. (Doris, female, came out to mother about 10 years prior to the study)

It is not surprising that Chinese parents would have these concerns since same-sex attracted people still suffer greatly from various kinds of prejudice and discrimination in Chinese society (see Poon et al., 2017; Xie & Peng, 2018). There is neither a form of legal recognition of sexuality minorities, nor a specific charter of human rights or relevant laws to protect same-sex attracted people from discrimination (Hung, 2011). Social discrimination operates as means of social punishment and is a product of the dominant heteronormative discursive system to regulate people's social behaviour within society (Weedon, 1987). This sort of social discrimination is also a means of disciplinary power, indicating that individuals' behaviours are always monitored and witnessed. This has been entrenched and naturalised within society and has even been naturalised (Foucault, 1991).

Additionally, these interviews illustrate how certain knowledges related to sexuality diversity are universalised, while others continue to be silenced. In this research, while parents knew little to nothing about the realities of same-sex attraction (or how sexuality and sexual attraction function for same-sex attracted individuals), they knew quite a bit about the prevalence of social discrimination against same-sex attracted people and the various forms this would take. Parents in this research were keenly aware of the fact that their same-sex attracted child would be watched and judged within society and they sought to encourage conformity so that their child might avoid social punishments. However, such conformity could only result in greater silencing of same-sex attraction and continuous reinforcement of heteronormative discursive power within society. In the process, social discrimination against sexual minorities is further normalised (Foucault, 1991; Weedon, 1987).

The Double Discrimination Experienced by Lesbians in China

The section above mostly relates to Chinese parents' concerns for their gay son's future life; parents' concerns about their lesbian daughters seemed to be different. As previously mentioned, many Chinese people consider lesbian relationships to be unstable, because attachments between females fail to be incorporated into the traditional family structure with its legal, economic, social, and reproductive standards (Huang, 2017). Thus, Chinese lesbians may suffer double discrimination in society; specifically, for being both a same-sex attracted person and a female. In this research, evidence showed that lesbian participants' parents were particularly worried about their child's future life being difficult and challenging without a man, mainly due to the potential for financial difficulties. Leah related her parents' perspectives on her relationship.

Well ... mainly because you don't have a guarantee for your life because when you get married in China, it's always men who buy you houses and cars, isn't it? My parents said, there's no guarantee if you have a relationship with a female in China anyway, your future life will be full of difficulties. (Leah, female, came out to mother and father 2 years prior to the study)

Leah's parents' reported attitudes point to another dominant gender discourse in China—that it ought to be males who take financial responsibility, including for the purchase of

property (Yingli, 2020). This message, and its continued integration into Chinese culture, originated from traditional Chinese society, where women were not allowed to work and where daughters were viewed as the property of families (Wu, 2003). However, this messaging continues within contemporary society mainly because of the remaining wage gap between men and women in mainland China (Deng et al., 2019), reinforcing women's submissive position, creating additional financial pressure for Chinese men (Yingli, 2020) and, ultimately, securing binary gender roles.

Hence, it is not surprising that most Chinese people hold prejudicial views towards non-traditional families such as divorced families, single-parent families, and same-sex relationships (Chen, 2017; Xu et al., 2008). Many may assume that a family without either a man or a woman is considered to be incomplete and unbalanced. In Mother Zhou's view:

I told her [her daughter], it's not okay for two females to stay together.

How could it be a family without a man, right? If something happened in the family, if there's no man to stand out and protect you, what should you do? (Mother Zhou, 50 years old, daughter came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

Mother Zhou's comments about her child's same-sex relationship reflect her idea that men have to protect women. This reaction can be seen as a denial of women's autonomy, as women have been traditionally constructed as weak and submissive, and under the control

and care of men for the duration of their lives, either a husband or father (Xiao et al., 2011). This construction of binary gender differences for men and women not only secures men's social and familial position, but also underpins heterosexual relationships. As Butler (1990, 1993a) argued, it is the society as well as the cultural norms of femininity and masculinity that predetermine individuals' gender expression. In other words, social responsibilities have been predetermined for Chinese men and women to abide by as adults.

Zoe also explained her mother's perspectives towards her lesbian relationship:

My mum said, this [same-sex] relationship is not okay. On the one hand, she [her mother] feels it [the same-sex relationship] is not stable; on the other hand, she feels that it's easier to get into trouble if two females stay together. (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

Although Zoe's mother did not clarify further what she meant by "get into trouble," it is surmised that this mother was mainly worrying about experiences of financial hardship that might occur in a lesbian relationship. Statistics show that Chinese women only earn 81.6% of men's salaries (Chen, 2020), and this wage gap tends to be more pronounced in rural areas (Deng et al., 2019; Sargeson, 2012). As such, it is not surprising that a protective mother may be concerned that the financial difficulties a lesbian couple might experience could have the potential to destabilise their relationship and make it more difficult to resist societal stigma.

Further, as mentioned in Chapter 1, traditional marriage is still likely to be viewed as a way for women to “attain upward social mobility” (Kam, 2010, p. 91) and to secure their financial future through their union with a man. However, it needs to be pointed out that income inequality is also a product of patriarchy, which secures men’s power and heterosexual value. In other words, through the practice of the wage gap between males and females, men’s social and financial power within society is further reinforced, whereas women continue to be positioned and constructed as inferior and subordinate to men, both socially and financially (Lawrence, 2014).

Fei also explained her father’s attitudes towards her same-sex relationship:

He thinks it’s impossible for my girlfriend to fall in love with me. And my girlfriend looks very feminine. My father feels it’s impossible for that kind of girl to have a relationship with me, it’s impossible for that kind of girl to spend her whole life with me. My father said, what if she’s [Fei’s girlfriend] done playing with you? What if she leaves you and gets married when she reaches a certain age? (Fei, female, came out to mother and father 10 years prior to the study)

According to Fei, her father’s concern was largely that her girlfriend would leave Fei and marry a man. As Fei’s partner’s appearance is traditionally feminine, it was assumed by Fei’s father that she would be considered attractive to men, would herself be attracted to men, and

accordingly get married to a man eventually. Such perspectives resonate with global stereotypes about lesbian women (Fung, 2021; Sang, 2003) which suggest that women with normative (femme) femininity are only temporarily same-sex attracted. In contrast, female masculinity is considered as abnormal and is associated with a less variable same-sex attracted sexual desire and a lesbian identity (Fung, 2021). Such attitudes speak once again to the dominant, narrow gender discourses associated with same-sex attraction: only those who violate socially defined, mutually exclusive forms of gender expression are “truly” same-sex attracted (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019; Thepsourinthone et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). We can see that, in Fei’s case, her father’s comments about her partner perfectly reflect Butler’s (1990, 1993a) argument that women are socially expected to fulfil normative gender roles—to perform their gender as “traditionally” feminine (femme), to identify as heterosexual, to behave more passively, and to be subordinate to men (Thepsourinthone et al., 2020).

Parents’ Insistence on the Necessity of Opposite-Sex Marriage

Parents interviewed in this research, or discussed by their adult children, positioned opposite-sex marriage as a necessity. Jia’s mother revealed her attitudes towards heterosexual marriage when Jia discussed her same-sex attraction with her several weeks after coming out.

In Jia’s words:

She [mother] believes getting married with a man is necessary even if there’s no affection between you and your husband. Because she and

my dad are just a loveless couple, but they can still make a family. (Jia, female, came out to mother 3 months prior to the study)

Although it is quite sad to see that Jia's mother considers that marriage does not need to have love, in ancient Chinese society most marriages were arranged by parents, and people who married may have never seen each other before their wedding (Zhou & Xiao, 2018). In other words, most Chinese people married for reasons of practicality, including family continuity, and social and economic considerations, rather than pure love. Marriage was viewed as a bond linking two different families rather than linking two individuals (Ocko, 1991). Additionally, due to the inferior social position of women in ancient Chinese society (Gao, 2003; Xie & Zhu, 2009; Yang, 2010), it was impossible for them to choose their partner. Nevertheless, modern Chinese women have become more financially independent and capable of autonomy, and thus have more decision-making power in partner selection (Blair, & Madigan, 2016). According to Jia, her mother did not work outside the home and had stopped going to school as a teenager. Thus, it is understandable that her mother believed that marriage is more functional rather than dependent on love, since for Jia's mother, economic considerations would weigh much more heavily on her perception of Jia's need to marry rather than pure love.

In addition, Jia's mother's belief also alludes to the fact that a large number of same-sex attracted people (mainly gay men) in mainland China have entered into opposite-sex marriages to please their parents (Wang, Wilson, et al., 2020; Wei & Cai, 2012). There are

some parents who place more importance on the existence of a heterosexual marriage than supporting their child's own choice (Bie & Tang, 2016; Kam, 2010; Ren et al., 2019). In this research, some participating adult children also disclosed that their parents' intention was to push them into a cooperative marriage with an opposite-sex, same-sex attracted person, even if their parents had accepted the fact that the child's same-sex attraction could not be changed. For instance, Doris explained:

My mum hopes that I will get married eventually. This is definitely a better ending [of Doris's life] to her. She has realised that I am not able to change anymore [due to Doris's sexual orientation]. However, I have a gay [male] friend who's very close to me. We've known each other for over 10 years. Our families also know each other. When I was in the last year of university, my mother said to me, why not just have a cooperative marriage with your gay friend? (Doris, female, came out to mother 10 years prior to the study)

Zoe shared similar experiences to Doris:

My mum hopes I will get married because she wants me to have a child. She introduced a boy to me. We all know that boy is gay. My mum is very happy to encourage me to get married with that gay man. She said, "Don't worry. You will live on your own then anyway, but you

could have a child! You're a registered couple, he will take care of you anyway when you become old. Even if your female partner has gone, he still has responsibility to take care of you." (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

According to the two young lesbians' experiences shown above, it appears that parents may have little knowledge about the risks and complexities that may happen in a cooperative marriage or the hardships that could be brought upon a child who was born through cooperative marriage, including the child's psychological well-being. Instead, these parents emphasised simply the existence of offspring, which implies their belief in compulsory heterosexual marriage and reproduction. However, the parents' insistence on compulsory (traditional) marriage and reproduction also reflects the difficulties for same-sex couples who wish to have their own child in mainland China; that is, the only legitimate way to have children in contemporary mainland China is to get married to a person of the opposite sex. Such social constraints on childbirth again reflect the privilege of heterosexuality and traditional marriage within society.

Compulsory Reproduction and Parents' Concerns for their Child's Future

As can be seen from the previous section, the necessity of heterosexual marriage is inseparable from compulsory reproduction, which resonates with traditional filial standards that emphasise opposite-sex marriage and family continuity (Hildebrandt, 2019). However, in

this research, it is observed that, rather than being focused on having grandchildren out of a more traditional Chinese demand for family continuity, parents appeared more concerned about their own child being lonely and uncared for in their later years. For instance, Zoe explained her mother's ideas about compulsory reproduction in relation to aging:

My mother really wants me to have children. I personally don't want it actually. My mother believes only your own child can take care of you when you become old. This is her point: what shall I do when I become old? And she thinks nursing homes are not qualified and you may not have enough money to go to a nursing home. This is what my mum mainly worries about. So she hopes I will have a child to sort this out [the problem regarding who will take care of Zoe when she becomes old]. (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

Yu also explained his parents' shifting attitudes towards his sexual orientation. His parents initially believed that being same-sex attracted was equivalent to having a bad habit or unsavoury interests and could be outgrown or unlearned. However, after several years, they started to encourage Yu to have his own child. In Yu's words:

The most they've said is, how can you live in society if you keep being like this [a gay person]; who will take care of you if you don't have your

own kid in the future? These are what they're worrying about. I feel that actually they still internally hope that I will get married to a girl and have my own kid. They don't really care whether I'm attracted to men or women, they don't care. They just wish I could have company after they pass away. (Yu, male, came out to father and mother 10 years prior to the study).

Likewise, some other parents expressed similar feelings about their child's potential loneliness as the child ages:

What will she [daughter] do when she grows older without children? She will be very lonely ... that's why I said it [her daughter's same-sex relationship] is an incomplete family, right? A person who gets older needs company. ... I just hope she will have a child when she gets older, then she will not be so lonely. (Mother Zhou, 50 years old, daughter came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

Similarly, Mother Chen stated:

I just hope there will be someone who could stay with him [her son] when he gets old. At least, he won't feel too lonely. The child will look after him anyway, so he won't feel too lonely ... sometimes they could

have a call, at least he could have someone to talk to. (Mother Chen, 49 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

As can be observed from the quotes above, Chinese parents tend to view having children as necessary to secure one's comfort in later life. There is an old saying in Chinese culture, "Bring up children for the purpose of being looked after in old age" (in Chinese: *yǎng ér fáng lǎo*) (Shi, 2016, p. 1). Moreover, Chinese culture celebrates fertility, thus people traditionally believed that "the more children, the greater prosperity" (in Chinese: *duō zǐ duō fú*) (Shi, 2016, p. 1). This expectation that children will take care of their parents as they age along with the cultural expectations about fertility underpin the ongoing belief in compulsory heterosexual marriage and family continuity. Language does not simply represent meanings; as previously discussed, language can be understood as a type of social performance that constructs both social and psychological realities (Willig, 2008) and reflects our way of seeing the world (Weedon, 1987). Thus, these old sayings in China are also products of the discursive power system. Through the constant practice of the discursive power of these old sayings, child-bearing has been persistently normalised and viewed as a compulsory duty or something that will occur in each individual's life trajectory; otherwise, their old age could be threatened, in danger of being insecure or unprosperous. However, opposite-sex marriage is the prerequisite for having children in mainland Chinese society. Thus, in order to have a child (in a legitimate way) to ensure a secure old age, it appears that individuals must get married to a person of the opposite sex first. Through this process, the normalisation of marriage and child-bearing has been gradually universalised and taken for granted.

Lack of Confidence in the Chinese Aged Care System

According to Zoe's excerpt quoted earlier in this chapter, another possible reason for Chinese parents to encourage their child to have their own child is the parents' lack of confidence in the Chinese aged care system. In fact, many parent participants in this study expressed similar perspectives towards aged care facilities as Zoe's mother, as can be observed from evidence shown below:

A nursing home is definitely not as good as your own child. Basically, those who have children don't go to a nursing home. Look, your own child must be better than someone else. It'd be definitely better for your own child to look after you. (Mother Zhou, 50 years old, daughter came out to her 3 months prior to the study)

I never thought about aged care services. Apparently, the whole aged care system doesn't work in China. In China, the quality of the aged care system is not up to standard. (Mother Chen, 49 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

He [her son] said, [he will] just find a nursing home. Then I told him, people who live in the nursing home all have children, their children visit them every weekend, then no one would dare to bully or mistreat them [the elderly people]. Because if they got mistreated, their

children would sue you [the institution]. However, you don't even have a child; you don't even have a person to visit you. You won't be able to do anything about how others treat you. (Mother Gao, 65 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

Due to filial piety that requires adult children to take care of their aging parents (Lou & Ng, 2012), Chinese elder care has traditionally relied largely upon family members. However, due to the rapid social development and the establishment of the one-child policy (1979–2015) in mainland China, the average family size has been reduced, and urban mobility has resulted in more barriers for Chinese adult children to take care of their parents at home (Zhan et al., 2008). Furthermore, the aging population has become another challenge for Chinese society in the last few years (Ling et al., 2021). As a result, the government not only announced the three-child policy in 2021 (i.e., each married couple is now permitted to have three children; Tatum, 2021) but there is also an increasing demand for a professional aged care system (Zhan et al., 2008).

However, institutional aged care is still developing and can be expensive (Lu et al., 2017). Accordingly, not every family is able to afford such services. In addition, researchers have shown that older Chinese people still view their own children as their first choice for care (Lou & Ng, 2012; Warmenhoven et al., 2018). Thus, it appears that discourses of filial piety that require the younger generation's respect and willingness to take care of older generations has been gradually internalised and normalised within society. Such normalisation has been

reinforced by a number of practical restrictions on the Chinese aged care system, including the quality and cost of these services (Lu et al., 2017). This results in further reinforcement of discourses which reify compulsory reproduction for the security of one's future elderly life.

At the Time of the Interview: Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Sexual Orientation

The previous sections explored parents' changing reactions between their first understanding of their child's sexuality and the time period that followed. As can be seen from the thematic analyses above, in the space after their initial exposure to their child's same-sex attraction, parents in this research continued to: (1) try to identify a "cause" or event which led to their child's same-sex attraction; and (2) persuade their child to change, or even get married and have children. This section examines parents' feelings about their child and the parent-child relationship at the time of the interview, after they would have had some time to digest and reflect upon their child's sexual subjectivity. This section aims to see whether parents felt that their attitudes and behaviours had or had not differed or developed from those presented above and explores how parents were moving forward in their understanding and their relationship with their child.

An Overview of Parents' Attitudes Towards Their Child's Sexuality at the Time of the Interview

At the time of the interview, four out of eight parent participants reported that they had completely accepted their child's sexuality. Three parent participants showed implicit approval or general tolerance in relation to their adult child's sexuality, although they still expressed a wish that their child could change to become heterosexual, get married, and have children. One parent overtly stated that she was still unable to accept her child's same-sex attraction.

Of the participating adult children, at the time of the interview, four out of 13 young adults stated that at least one of their parents had fully accepted their same-sex attraction; five of the adult children reported that their parents showed implicit approval but still wished their child would get married to a person of the opposite-sex and have their own child. One adult child stated that his parents passively accepted his sexuality because he decided to have a cooperative marriage and have his own child through assisted reproductive technologies to fulfil his family obligations. Three of the young adults reported that their parents keep silent about their sexual orientation and have intentionally refused to discuss the matter further. Further details regarding parents' attitudes towards their child's sexuality at the time of the interview are explained in the next sections.

Resistance: Overturned Prejudice, Acceptance, and Support

As mentioned in Chapter 5, it appears that parents' negative reactions towards their child's sexual orientation were mainly due to their lack of exposure to, and contact with, same-sex attracted people. Without sufficient exposure and contact, parents' perspectives towards same-sex attracted individuals had been highly shaped by traditional cultural values, where believing heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation is the status quo.

Feminist post-structuralists argue that human beings have agency (Weedon, 1987). Thus, individuals in society also have power to resist the dominant discursive system through their agency (Davies, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Therefore, in order to challenge parents' prejudice and discrimination towards same-sex attracted people and relationships, it appears that increased contact with sexual minorities and associated knowledge building could make an impact (Ben-Ari, 1995; Fields, 2001; Lo, 2020; Savin-Williams, 2001). The following sections examine how agency is operationalised in parents' developed perspectives towards their child's sexuality.

Increasing Exposure to, and Contact With, Same-Sex Attracted People

In the current research project, all parent participants reported that their child shared information with them about same-sex attraction in an effort to familiarise them with same-

sex relationships. Of the adult children participants, ten out of 13 young adults reported their own experiences of actively sharing knowledge about same-sex attraction with their parents. The excerpts below show that a few parents shared the fact that, through contact with the same-sex attracted community, their prejudice towards same-sex attraction was gradually reduced. For instance, Mother Liang related her experiences of reading personal stories that were shared by same-sex attracted people in online social media groups.

I feel that these people are so real. What they've written online were their real-life stories, so touching. They are not criminals; they are also not hooligans ... they are not those kinds of people I imagined. Well, so my original perspectives towards same-sex attracted people, those stereotypes and stigma are suddenly destroyed. (Mother Liang, 49 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Mother Liang originally thought gay men were hooligans, criminals, and homeless people because of the media's biased portrayal of same-sex attraction. Hence, without real-life, interpersonal communication with same-sex attracted people, individuals like Mother Liang could be highly influenced by the heteronormative content that appears in the media. Therefore, as can be seen from Mother Liang's experiences, increased contact with same-sex attracted individuals is important for changing attitudes towards sexual minorities (Cao et al., 2010; Fields, 2001; Lo, 2020; Savin-Williams, 2001).

Mother Lee also shared the experience of how she changed her attitudes towards her son's same-sex attraction, as she explained:

After talking with a mother from PFLAG, I joined a parent group [a WeChat online chat group that is full of parents who have a gay or lesbian child] and I realised that my son becoming gay is not because he learned something bad from the outside. So, I want to know more about my child, know more about this community. I read a lot of books and searched a lot on the internet ... people look down on these children ... I think as a mother, I can't discriminate against my son. If I discriminate against my son, how could he live? I need to understand him. ... The most impressive thing for me is we lost three kids [she meant there were three young people who committed suicide]. Though they are not my own children, I just couldn't stop crying when I saw the news in the group. If their parents could understand them, how could they go that way? (Mother Lee, 57 years old, son came out to her 4 years prior to the study)

Mother Lee's excerpt suggests that she knew very little about same-sex attraction before her son came out to her, which resonates with Chinese parents' unlikelihood to be exposed to this information in their day to day lives and the difficulty, in general, with accessing affirming information about same-sex attraction in China (see Chapter 5). Her exposure to real-life

stories from this community aids in her understanding of the impact of discrimination and that this has a tangible, material impact on one's life; thus, her suggestion about the importance of parents understanding their child's same-sex attraction is worth noting. Same-sex attracted individuals are more likely to have depression, anxiety, and even suicidal tendencies due to the greater social and familial pressure they experience (e.g., Burton et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2018; Wang, Yu, Yang, Li, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019; Ybarra et al., 2015). However, many researchers have pointed out that family support can improve a same-sex attracted child's mental health status, through improved self-esteem and reduction in feelings of depression, suicidal ideation and attempts (e.g., Bean & Northrup, 2009; D'Augelli et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2009, 2010; Savin-Williams, 1998).

Improved Parent-Child Relationship

Additionally, those parents who explicitly showed acceptance and support towards their child's sexual orientation stated that their relationship with their child became much closer compared to the time before they came out to their parents. This finding is in line with previous research which concluded that increased family support can result in less conflict and more cohesion in the family (Ryan et al., 2010). With parents' support, children feel more comfortable with their own sexual orientation, which further reduces their internalised homophobia (Darby-Mullins & Murdock, 2007; D'Augelli, 2002). Moreover, it is noteworthy that Mother Gao had also disclosed her son's sexuality to other family members, including her siblings. She was the mother who used to believe that having a gay son made her "feel

ashamed” (Interview, Mother Gao). Such action shows her agency and her capacity to challenge cultural discourses related to face and the normalisation of heterosexuality; that is, she was resisting the cultural constraints around the sensitivity of face-saving as well as the social punishments for same-sex attraction.

Changed Attitudes Towards Their Child’s Future Life

A few parents also shared their changed attitudes towards their child’s future life, as they used to be worried about their child being alone without offspring. For instance, Mother Liang changed her mind after having a conversation with her son. As she recalled:

My son said, “I understand that you’ll have such worries, but what you’re worrying about doesn’t make any sense. You won’t be able to see my future, right? ... Why not do something meaningful and stop worrying about things you won’t be able to see? Don’t you trust me? I’ll fix my future life and I’ll definitely have a good future life.” Then I just stopped worrying about his future life anymore. Why do I need to worry about things that happen after 40 years? (Mother Liang, 49 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

Similarly, Mother Gao explained:

One day I just suddenly came around. I said to myself, don't worry about it anymore! The child is just around his 20s, there will be a few decades until he becomes old. At that time, the national aged care system is definitely going to be better than what it looks like now. (Mother Gao, 67 years old, son came out to her 6 years prior to the study)

When parents realised that the social situation will potentially have changed by the time their child becomes old, they stopped worrying about their child's future. As explained previously, parents tended to imagine their child's loneliness and the hardships their child may encounter in the future based on the current social situation in China. They asked their child to change their sexual orientation because they did not want to see their child facing discrimination in society; they warned their child not to come out to people around them to protect them from people's negative judgements; and they requested their child get married and have children to secure their child's old age. Undeniably, such actions from parents indicate parents' love for, and their desire to protect, their child. However, these "requests" to change may further reinforce the invisibility of same-sex attracted individuals in Chinese society. In other words, every time a same-sex attracted person compromises and conforms to traditional social expectations, they are inadvertently reinforcing the silencing of same-sex attraction and reducing the visibility of the same-sex attracted community.

As Foucault (1978) emphasises, power is productive and does not only come from above; rather, power is everywhere. In this research, same-sex attracted children reveal that they are different from those who are attracted to an opposite-sex person, which produces their own power, breaks the silence around sexual minorities, and offers an opportunity to increase the exposure of the marginalised community in the mainstream (Nieuwenhuis, 2018). In the process, these children are also creating a real, fully formed version of a same-sex attracted person for their parents who, historically (like most Chinese people), have only had a half-formed or unreal version of what a same-sex attracted person was like, due to a lack of exposure. Despite these positive outcomes, coming out may still result in social discrimination or rejection due to the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity. Coming out is important, as it conveys resistant power and could not only help to challenge parents' prejudices and stigma around same-sex attraction (Foucault, 1978; Kotze & Bowman, 2018), but also rekindle parents' sense of love, care, and protection for their children.

Passive Tolerance and Compromise

Despite the fact that some parents accepted their child's sexuality, most parents in this study showed either passive tolerance or continuous rejection and silencing of their child's sexuality at the time of the interview. Although most parents were encouraged by the child to access knowledge about lesbian and gay people, it appears parents mostly engaged in intentional avoidance or conscious refusal to understand same-sex attraction, according to adult children's interviews.

Bie and Tang (2016) used the term “passive tolerance” to explain most Chinese parents’ reactions towards their gay son’s sexuality in their study. Such passive tolerance, which they defined as “often the result of a compromise made by the sons to put on the appearance of heterosexuality outside of the immediate family” (Bie & Tang, 2016, p. 362), can also be observed in the current research.

Tao, one of the adult child participants in this research, who clearly stated his intention to have a cooperative marriage, said:

My father worries about people’s comments, such as, why doesn’t your son have a girlfriend? Why is your son still not married? He worries about people talking gossip. ... I told my father then, I will follow what you expect me to do. I’ll have a cooperative marriage... I’ll have my own child. I won’t make you lose face. However, I wish you could respect my decision. ... I promise you, I will get married and have children before I’m 30, but please leave me alone after that [after he finishes his “family obligations”] ... then he finally acquiesced [about his sexual orientation]. I think after I’ve got my own child, my father will just leave me alone. He won’t care whether I have got a partner or whether my partner is male or female. He will just pay all of his attention to his grandchild. (Tao, male, came out to mother and father 2 years prior to the study)

Although Tao was the only young participant in the research who clearly decided to have a cooperative marriage, Tao's decision reflects the dilemma for both parties. As Tao mentioned in his interview, his parents were "both very traditional". Thus, it appears that his parents expressed greater adherence to traditional values. Such adherence to traditional values is not only reflected in their view of traditional marriage and family continuity as compulsory, but also can be seen from their higher sensitivity around face-saving. As a result, family obligations as well as family reputation were considered more important in this situation than providing support and understanding to their child. Moreover, Tao's decisions to have a cooperative marriage and his own child also reflect his fulfilment of filial duty to his parents. That is, he was aware that his sexuality would bring dishonour and shame to his family and that his same-sex attraction was viewed as an unfilial behaviour to his parents. However, it should be noted that Tao's behaviour was not aimed at forcing his parents to understand and accept same-sex attraction; rather, he was striving to prevent his parents from further interfering in his sexuality. Hence, from a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987), such compromise is also a product of the heteronormative discursive power system which is operationalised through continual practices of the values of Chinese traditional culture. In mainland China, a married man would be naturally considered a "normal" and "successful" heterosexual person, keeping him as well as his family away from social punishments, such as judgemental comments (Ren et al., 2019). This is because his own sexuality would be subsequently hidden under the umbrella of his heterosexual marriage and his child.

Continuous Rejecting and Silencing (Silent Violence)

At the time of the interview, for many of the families discussed, the parents had become less likely to mention their child's sexuality again and even showed a conscious reluctance to talk about same-sex attraction. This is also the main reason why some parents refused to participate in the interview, as they refused to talk about their child's same-sex attraction again. Such reluctance in talking about same-sex attraction or related topics can be seen as a sort of continuous silencing and rejection. Compared to discussing the problem openly and finding a solution, these families tended to keep silent and "pretend nothing has happened" (Interview, Yu). As mentioned in Chapter 2, silencing is very commonly found in culturally Chinese families (Huang et al., 2016; Li & Orleans, 2001), as the traditional Chinese culture emphasises harmony, with people adopting silence as a way to avoid direct confrontation (Sundararajan, 2021). Nevertheless, according to some of the adult children's reports in this study, this silence has resulted in distant parent-child relationships in their families. This can be observed in other adult child participants' explanations:

Leah: They won't actively mention it [her sexual orientation] ... and I feel that we've had less contact since I came out ...

Researcher: What if you mention this topic to them?

Leah: They would become a bit upset. And after a few minutes they would say "Eh [sigh]! You do whatever you want." ... I will try to show

up less frequently in front of them. If they feel upset, just don't let them see me. Because I don't want them to be upset. (Leah, female, came out to father and mother 2 years prior to the study)

I feel that my relationship with my mum is not as close as before [she came out]. She would intentionally avoid talking about this topic [same-sex attraction] with me. For instance, sometimes I'd like to emphasise something about my partner. She would avoid continuing this topic with me. She would intentionally turn aside from the topic under discussion. And sometimes I'd like to introduce some LGBT movies to her, she would just avoid discussing that with me and start a new conversation. ...It's very obvious ... She just doesn't want to talk about this [same-sex attraction]. (Zoe, female, came out to mother 7 years prior to the study)

Sometimes I wanted to share some information [regarding same-sex attraction] with them, but I found they started to avoid this topic more. For example, sometimes I would say something [about same-sex attraction] in our WeChat group. Zero response. Before I came out, they would sometimes give me some response. However, now, zero response. I think they are avoiding this topic. They refuse to understand. If I requested that they give me a response, they always fudged or said, "Oh, I don't understand that. I don't understand what

that's talking about." (Qiang, male, came out to mother and father 3 months prior to the study)

Mother Wang also shared her experiences when she saw her child posting supportive content regarding LGBTQ rights on WeChat or saw her child wearing a pride flag badge. She explained: "When I saw that I felt so bad, I just feel that this is your own business, don't tell others ... though we don't discriminate, this is absolutely not something we need to promote, right?" According to Mother Wang's comments, this mother never regarded silencing as a type of discrimination or disciplinary power from discourses around heteronormativity within society. Foucault (1978) refers to silence as "the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers" (p. 27). Foucault (1978) further points out that there is no strict boundary between what is allowed to be said and what is not allowed to be said. This notion can be reflected in society, where negatively biased comments around same-sex attraction are always visible, while accurate information in relation to the normality of sexuality diversity remains invisible (Chang & Ren, 2017; Tu & Lee, 2014; United Nations Development Programme, 2016). This mother's perspectives clearly represent the fact that the discursive position for heterosexuality and other sexualities is never equivalent. That is, discourses of heterosexuality are allowed to be spoken of freely, anywhere, to always deliver the message that being heterosexual is normal; in contrast, discourses that endeavour to normalise sexual diversities are better to be silenced as they are "absolutely not something we need to promote" (Interview, Mother Wang).

No matter what kind of silencing gay and lesbian participants are experiencing, this is a product of a dominant discursive system and is used as a means to punish individuals who violate orthodox social norms (Foucault, 1978). Despite the fact that “homosexuality” has been decriminalised and de-pathologised in China (Wu, 2003), the government never publicly supports sexual minorities (Hung, 2011; Zi, 2019). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, traditional Confucianism emphasises harmony in interpersonal relationships (Sundararajan, 2021). However, this “harmonious” strategy to suppress people who fail to adhere to a heterosexual life trajectory is another form of violence (Chou, 2000; Liu & Ding, 2005), as explained throughout this thesis. Through discourses which silence the normality of same-sex attraction, individuals’ exposure to, and contact with, same-sex attracted people continues to remain low. As a result, social prejudice and discriminations against the community could become further normalised through the long-term practices of heteronormative discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter explored parents’ shifting attitudes towards their child’s coming out, both after a period of time since their child came out and at the time of the interview. It found that many Chinese parents continued to identify a “cause” which resulted in their child’s same-sex attraction. Moreover, having a same-sex attracted child was viewed as shameful and would result in loss of face, not only for parents but also for extended family members or even whole neighbourhoods. Interestingly, parents were aware that social discrimination against same-

sex attracted people exists within Chinese society. Thus, they expressed concerns about their child's future life and endeavoured to persuade them to change, get married, and have children, in order to protect their child from discrimination and suffering. Moreover, it can be seen from the research findings that Chinese parents in this research still tended to view (traditional) marriage and family continuity as essential. However, rather than being focused on having grandchildren out of a more traditional Chinese demand for family continuity, parents in this study appeared more concerned about their own child being lonely and uncared for in their later years, due to the parents' lack of confidence in the Chinese aged care system.

Nevertheless, as feminist post-structuralists argue, human beings have agency (Weedon, 1987), thus dominant discourses can always be challenged. In this research, it is encouraging to see that with increasing knowledge of and contact with the same-sex attracted community, a few parents gradually changed their perspectives and showed acceptance as well as support of their child. The parent-child relationship in these families was also reportedly better. However, in most families, passive tolerance, continuous rejection, and silencing were observed, along with a distant parent-child relationship. The next chapter concludes the thesis through summarising the key research findings, articulating the study's limitations, highlighting its implications, and offering empirically-informed suggestions for future studies

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine Chinese parents' reactions and attitudes towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation after their child's coming out. It aimed to amplify the voices from a marginalised and socially oppressed group—Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian child. However, due to Chinese parents of a same-sex attracted adult child being a hard-to-reach population, I endeavoured to gain more information about their experiences by also talking with adult same-sex attracted children and seeking their reflections on their parents' reactions and attitudes. This research is the first, to my knowledge, to comprehensively explore Chinese parents' reactions towards their gay or lesbian child's coming out through a feminist post-structuralist lens by interviewing groups of both Chinese parents and adult child participants. In this concluding chapter, a brief overview of each chapter's key points is presented, and then a number of broad conclusions are drawn as a result of the findings of the research. Next, the limitations of the research are identified, followed by some implications of the research and recommendations in relation to same-sex issues in contemporary mainland Chinese society. The final section of this chapter introduces ideas about future research that could be explored in relation to the current research area.

An Overview of the Study

The introductory chapter (Chapter 1) provided a comprehensive review of how same-sex attraction has been socially treated and positioned, from ancient China through to contemporary Chinese (mainland) society. Chapter 1 illustrated the shifting discourses around same-sex attraction in China. From being generally socially tolerated in ancient Chinese society, same-sex attracted people went through perhaps their darkest time period in the mid to late 20th century when same-sex attraction was criminalised, pathologised, and severely socially punished. In contemporary Chinese society, although same-sex attraction has been decriminalised and de-pathologised (Wu, 2003), public stigma and social discrimination remain pervasive (Liu & Choi, 2006; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020; Xie & Peng, 2018) and the visibility of this marginalised community remains low (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Thus, the discursive power related to the dominant position of heteronormativity has not diminished, as it is continually reinforced through practices of traditional Chinese cultural values, particularly filial piety that emphasises traditional marriage and family continuity. Hence, due to potential fear of perceived discrimination and rejection, only a small number of same-sex attracted people in mainland China choose to disclose their sexuality to others (United Nations Development Programme, 2016). Moreover, coming out to parents is considered the hardest challenge for Chinese same-sex attracted individuals (Chou, 2001; Liu & Choi, 2006; United Nations Development Programme, 2016).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's coming out, Chapter 2 reviewed existing research literature around the topic of parental responses to having a same-sex attracted child. Due to the dearth of literature on parental reactions in mainland China, I reviewed parental reactions in both Western contexts and other Chinese cultural contexts, including in Chinese/Asian American families and literature based on research about families in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, scholarly literature that examined the importance of family values and parental power in relation to a child's marriage and how filial piety may influence same-sex attracted people in China was also reviewed. In the process, the importance of understanding the reasoning underneath Chinese parents' responses in order to promote supportive parental attitudes towards their child's sexuality was highlighted.

Chapter 3 offered a presentation of the theoretical framework central to this study: feminist post-structuralism (Weedon, 1987), which is influenced by Foucault's (1978) notions of power and discourse. I also incorporated Butler's (1990, 1993a) theory of gender performativity and the associated concept of the heterosexual matrix. Notions of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) were also highlighted. Additionally, this chapter provided a comprehensive explanation of how these Western theories could be complemented with Chinese cultural knowledges, such as the Yin-Yang philosophy, the ubiquity of filial piety, and the concept of face, in order to build upon these Western theoretical lenses and contextually situate understandings of same-sex attraction within Chinese society.

Chapter 4 presented the research design and associated methodology for this research, including a comprehensive explanation of feminist research methods, which were adopted as the methodology for this study. My positionality, the interview schedules I developed and used, and the recruitment of participants were described. Finally, the procedures undertaken were presented, and the data analysis process explained, including translation, transcription, and the thematic analysis which was applied to the transcribed and translated interview data

Chapters 5 and 6 both presented findings resulting from the theory-led data analysis using the relevant theoretical and cultural concepts explained in Chapter 3. These two findings chapters and their associated thematic analyses were organised chronologically, with Chapter 5 focusing on Chinese parents' initial reactions towards their child's coming out, and Chapter 6 exploring parents' changing reactions between their first understanding of their child's sexuality and the time period that followed; how parents interacted with extended family and friends; and finally, their feelings about their child and the parent-child relationship at the time of interview. In the following section, several broad conclusions from the research are presented, highlighting the importance of this work.

Key Findings

This research highlighted the importance of the power of dominant discourses in China in shaping individuals' perspectives within Chinese society and revealed some of the ways in which discourses of particular social objects are marginalised or even silenced. However, this

research also underlined that different aspects of subjectivities or social identities, such as gender, age (generational differences), sexual orientation, and place of residence (rural/urban), never function individually; rather, they intersect with each other and operate in different ways in relation to parents' reactions towards their child's sexual orientation and experiences of being a same-sex attracted adult child in mainland China. Moreover, this research pointed out that dominant discourses could be resisted and that individuals have human agency to challenge dominant discursive power. The findings from this work demonstrated this through the few mothers who had accepted their child's same-sex attraction by the time of the research interview.

As discussed in the two findings chapters, most Chinese parents in this study felt it was difficult to accept their child as gay or lesbian. This reluctance was particularly prominent at the very early stage of realising their child's sexual orientation. At the beginning, when parents first became aware of their child's same-sex sexual orientation, almost all parents expressed denial and set about attempting to identifying a "cause" which made their son or daughter same-sex attracted. This is because these parents believed that once they found the reason behind their child's lesbian/gay sexuality, they could use various means to change their child's sexuality to a heterosexual identity. Moreover, both conscious and unconscious prejudice and discrimination towards same-sex attraction were found to be prevalent, at various points, among Chinese parents in this research.

According to parents' initial reactions, some parents viewed same-sex attraction as a disease or psychological problem and tried to find a treatment to cure their child. However, a number of parents believed that being same-sex attracted was a choice and the result of the child's emotional immaturity; this was especially observed in cases where the child came out to their parents before their 20s. For those parents, same-sex attraction was viewed as an inappropriate social behaviour, such as a bad habit or interest, which only emerges as a temporary stage during youth. Likewise, being same-sex attracted was positioned by parents as something in which their child engaged for fun or curiosity. Therefore, those parents believed that as long as the child received correct guidance and discipline, they would change to being heterosexual, or that their child's same-sex attraction would disappear when the child grew up. Other parent voices suggested that same-sex attraction was due to influences from other gay people. Moreover, many parents in this study demonstrated some form of rejection of same-sex relationships. Such rejection of same-sex relationships was observed through parents' sexualisation of same-sex attraction, assumption that same-sex relationships are unstable, and their belief that same-sex relationships are defective.

In terms of viewing the research phenomena through the lenses of previously outlined theoretical and cultural concepts, this research highlighted the influence of discursive power and social surveillance within particular discursive systems on constructing individuals' knowledge about certain social objects and groups of people. As can be seen from the findings, the influence of traditional Chinese culture, particularly the influence of filial piety, remains significant in contemporary mainland Chinese society, especially for parents from older

generations in rural areas. This is due to the ways in which traditional Chinese culture emphasises family (Chou, 2001), heterosexuality, opposite-sex marriage, and reproduction, which are always celebrated within dominant societal discourses in the society (Eklund, 2018; Hildebrandt, 2019). This has resulted in parents' belief in compulsory heterosexuality as well as what they expect from their child; that is, everyone is expected to be heterosexual, as being married and having children is considered to be a family obligation (Hildebrandt, 2019; Liu et al., 2018; Shi, 2016; Shi et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021). As a result, heterosexuality is positioned as the only "normal," "natural," "responsible" and "mature" sexual orientation in mainland Chinese society.

Additionally, this research highlighted the low visibility of same-sex attracted people across various institutions in Chinese society, particularly educational institutions and the media. This lack of visibility also meant a lack of exposure to or education about sexuality diversity, which has resulted in Chinese parents' lack of knowledge of how same-sex attraction functions as a legitimate form of sexual and romantic attraction. Further, both parents and adult children emphasised the fact that information from the media reinforced social prejudice and stigma towards same-sex attraction. Compared to heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships, which can be viewed across all facets of Chinese society, positive information around other sexualities is barely visible. This reflects how discourses of same-sex attraction are always marginalised and even silenced, while heteronormative discourses continue to be practised and reinforced (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1987). Therefore, in addition to the enormous influence of traditional Chinese culture, the insufficient exposure

to and contact with same-sex attracted individuals reinforced parents' ignorance about and prejudice towards same-sex attraction.

After a period of reflection following their child coming out, some parents in the research also blamed themselves for failing to provide successful parenting and an "appropriate" growth environment. Similarly, they continued to endeavour to identify a "cause" which resulted in their child's same-sex attraction. Analysis demonstrated that a lack of masculinity within the family was the major element of family life identified by parents. These parents thought that the lack of masculine influences within their family caused their son to fail to adhere to a socially expected form of male, binary gender expression, which further resulted in the son's same-sex sexual orientation. This, in some ways, revealed that gay men are still stereotyped as being highly effeminate (Dunn et al., 2015; Glick et al., 2007; Hoang, 2019; Liu & Choi, 2006). Parents' stereotypes of gay men also reflected the fact that they were still using a heterosexual standpoint to understand same-sex relationships, as binary gender roles are integral to heterosexual relationships. Additionally, one of the mothers also blamed herself for not providing her child with sufficient sex education, which she believed had resulted in her child's same-sex attraction.

The research findings also reflected how the Chinese cultural concept of *face* influenced parents' reactions towards their child's sexuality. Being same-sex attracted is still considered to be shameful for most Chinese parents. In order to avoid "face loss," some parents pushed their child to marry a heterosexual person or have a cooperative marriage with another gay

man or lesbian woman. Such parental actions reflected their belief in the necessity of opposite-sex marriage. Moreover, it was found that the belief in compulsory heterosexual marriage is seemingly inseparable from the belief in compulsory reproduction. This is because same-sex couples are unable to have their own child (without medical intervention or the ability to adopt), in contrast to their heterosexual counterparts (CCCWA, 2017). However, in this research, the data showed that family continuity is less likely to be the main reason for parents to encourage their child to have their own child; rather, Chinese parents expressed concerns about their child's future life as being potentially lonely and lacking care from significant others, and showed their lack of confidence in the current Chinese aged care system.

It is undeniable that parents in this study loved their children and wanted to protect their children from suffering hardship. Despite the fact that these parents had limited knowledge about same-sex attraction, they were aware of the difficulties that a gay or lesbian person may encounter particularly in relation to social discrimination and public stigma of same-sex relationships. Parents' worries alluded to the fact that there are multiple discursive systems, but only certain types of discourses are allowed to be spoken and can be centrally positioned (Foucault, 1978). In other words, in contemporary mainland Chinese society discourses of same-sex attraction are silenced and unsilenced simultaneously, with negatively biased voices being highly visible, while discourses around the normalcy of sexual minorities remain silenced. Prejudice towards certain groups of people is a means of social punishment and is a product of power relations (Foucault, 1991). In other words, people's ways of being, such as

their gender and sexuality, are always surveilled in society, with certain behaviours being celebrated while others are penalised (Foucault, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Parents realised that they and their child are always being watched by others, thus many endeavoured to persuade their child to conform to heterosexual life patterns, including heterosexual marriage and child-bearing. However, such persuasion is not only a way of showing parental protection of children to avoid social punishment, but is also a process of self-regulation (Foucault, 1991). In this process, discourses around the normalcy of same-sex attraction continue to be silenced, while discourses around heterosexuality and stigmatised discourses around same-sex attraction continue to be practised and strengthened.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that a small number of parents changed their minds by the time of the interview and fully accepted their child's sexuality. Such changes were attributed to efforts from both the adult children and the parents themselves. The research findings highlighted the importance of increasing the exposure to, and contact with, the LGBTQ community in supporting parents to accept their gay and lesbian child. As parents had limited opportunities for exposure to information about sexuality diversity or to have direct contact with same-sex attracted people, their attitudes towards same-sex attraction were mostly constructed by the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity within society, which positioned same-sex attraction as degraded, "abnormal," "unnatural," and "deviant." Thus, increasing knowledge of sexuality diversity and greater interaction with same-sex attracted people helped to overturn some parents' prejudice and discrimination towards same-sex attraction and increased some parents' understandings of their gay or lesbian child.

In line with this, participants from families in which parents showed support to the child all reported an enhanced family relationship.

However, most Chinese parents in this study remained unable to accept their child's same-sex attraction, even if their child had been out for a few years. In order to save parents' face and obtain parents' passive tolerance (Bie & Tang, 2016) of same-sex sexual orientation, one participant in this research ended up looking for another same-sex attracted person with whom to have a cooperative marriage in order to please his parents. This participant also revealed his plan to have a child with assisted reproductive technologies in the future in order to fulfil his perceived duty of family continuity. In most other family narratives in this research, parents' ongoing silencing and conscious conversation avoidance in relation to their child's sexuality was reported, alongside reports of increasingly distant parent-child relationship after the child's coming out.

Limitations

Despite the compelling findings of this study, some limitations need to be emphasised. Foremost of these is the small sample size of parents (N = 8) and the lack of fathers in the sample; this hinders the generalisability of the results with respect to Chinese parents' reactions towards their child's coming out. Since gay/lesbian people are a hard-to-reach population due to their low societal visibility within Chinese society (Gatlin & Johnson, 2017; Guillory et al., 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2016; Wu, Choi, & Chau, 2021;

Zhao et al., 2016), the difficulty of access for research is even greater for their parents. Experiences of having a gay son or lesbian daughter are presumably viewed as traumatic for most Chinese parents, especially for those who still feel that it is hard to accept their child's sexuality (AFP, 2017), further increasing the challenges of recruitment. Additionally, posting recruitment advertisements in online social media groups and chat groups likely meant that these could have gone unseen amongst an abundant number of other posts or messages. A larger and more diverse sample of parent participants to strengthen the richness and generalisability of the findings would be beneficial.

Second, although voice-only telephone interviews using an online platform have a number of advantages as outlined in Chapter 4, some non-verbal behaviours, including participants' facial expressions, hand gestures, and eye contact with the researcher (Knapp et al., 2013), were inaccessible. Non-verbal behaviours during the interview can either clarify or contradict language (Roter et al., 2006), which would further help to understand participants' hidden messages, and could result in enhanced validity of the research data.

Implications

As shown within the findings from this study, individuals' knowledge is situated and partial, based on what they have seen and learnt. Since no one's knowledge is fixed, people's knowledge and beliefs can always be challenged. As previously mentioned, although most parents demonstrated negative attitudes towards their child's same-sex sexual orientation

when they first learned of their same-sex attraction, there were still some parents who changed their mind and accepted their child. It is notable that these parents received external support and accessed factually correct information about same-sex attraction, which undoubtedly impacted their capacity to accept their child. This change in those parents is viewed as encouraging, as it delivers a message to every same-sex attracted person in contemporary mainland Chinese society; that is, it is possible for parents to understand and accept their child as same-sex attracted. In addition, this research illustrates that discourses around compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory opposite-sex marriage, and compulsory reproduction are powerful and predominant in contemporary mainland Chinese society. Yet, the research also demonstrated that these discourses are always able to be resisted and challenged.

Additionally, since individuals' experiences, both those of parents and of their same-sex attracted adult children, are inevitably variable due to unique intersections of the different aspects of their subjectivities or social identities, the research findings might, in some ways, engender some confidence in same-sex attracted individuals in China who are struggling with coming out to their parents. Likewise, the research findings could also provide inspiration to those parents who are currently experiencing difficulties in relation to their child's sexuality.

As mentioned throughout the thesis, silencing is another form of violence that suppresses the visibility of same-sex attracted people in society. Thus, in order to fight for more justice, equity, and recognition for sexuality diversity, the first step is to recognise and counter the

silencing and marginalising discourses around sexual minorities. In the next few sections, I provide some suggestions for promoting sexual equality in Chinese social institutions such as hospitals, schools, the media, and legal systems.

Recommendations

For Medical Institutions

As previously explained, when their child came out to them, some parents initially believed their child was sick; they thus sought out treatment on the internet in order to “cure” their child’s same-sex sexual orientation. Although two mothers mentioned doctors who had informed them that there was no problem with their child being same-sex attracted, another mother reported reading advertisements online from small clinics about treatments for “curing” one’s same-sex attraction; these treatments included electric shock. These advertisements and treatments are dangerous, as they not only provide false messages to parents that same-sex attraction can be cured, they also threaten same-sex attracted young people’s psychological well-being and physical safety (Denyer, 2017; Wu, 2019).

Apart from treatments, Suen and Chan (2020) also highlighted in their research that counselling therapy to change one’s same-sex attraction still exists in many health services in mainland China. There international moves to prohibit this form of “therapy” (Ilanbey, 2021;

Kelpie, 2021), and results from this thesis support the banning of conversion therapy in the Chinese context.

Another recommendation from this work is that relevant policies and academic knowledge which reference the inclusion and validation of same-sex attracted individuals be implemented within the medical profession. As professionals in the medical field, physicians' perspectives hold weight and discursive power; accordingly, it is essential that they promote fair, accurate, and inclusive information to individuals and families about same-sex attraction.

For Educational Institutions

Educational institutions are viewed as another important sector that contributes to the discourses that construct people's knowledge about certain objects and subjectivities. Participant narratives and the analysis of these can inform several suggestions for educational institutions. First, both school and university curriculums should be inclusive of same-sex attraction, at the level of both practice and policy. As mentioned in Chapter 5, one of the main barriers for Chinese people to challenge heteronormative values is the low visibility of same-sex attracted individuals and the lack of available, factually correct information within Chinese society. Without sufficient knowledge and affirmation of sexuality diversity, most Chinese people tend to assume that everyone is heterosexual by default. Thus, educational institutions could play an important role in potentially addressing this challenge. With increasing exposure to, and visibility of, same-sex attracted people, others are able to obtain

more knowledge and understanding about different kinds of sexualities. At the same time, discrimination, negative judgements, and bullying behaviours towards same-sex attracted individuals from heterosexual people could be reduced. The tendency for same-sex attracted individuals to experience internalised homophobia might also lessen. Therefore, as a result, same-sex attracted students' psychological well-being could be improved, including improved self-esteem and increased confidence (Burton et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2018; Wang, Yu, Yang, Li, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019).

For Media

As can be seen from the research findings, the media plays an important role in shaping people's perspectives towards same-sex attraction. However, although negatively biased content from the media could reinforce people's pre-existing stigma and prejudice towards same-sex attraction, the media is also a platform where such stigma and discrimination could be challenged by sharing positive information. Both groups of participants in this research reported that traditional media is still full of negative stereotypes towards same-sex attraction. Given the realities of the diverse social world in China and internationally, the media has a responsibility to boost the visibility of the LGBTQ community and to do so in a manner that is positive. In the last few years, LGBTQ characters can be found in an increasing number of films internationally, and many film directors also have started to represent stories of same-sex attracted people. It is suggested that more of these kinds of films could be shown in China, to further make the public realise that the community of sexuality diversity is already

a part of Chinese society and to validate and normalise the existence of this community and its members' relationships and families.

For Government

Finally, the government plays the most important role in promoting a social environment that is just and equitable because most institutions that are mentioned above are state-run and under control of Chinese government. It is suggested that anti-discrimination legislation based on gender and sexuality diversity could be established to protect same-sex attracted people (or other members of gender and sexual minorities), as there is currently no legislation to protect their rights in mainland China (Hung, 2011). As outlined in Chapter 6, Chinese parents clearly understand the prevalence of social discrimination against their same-sex attracted child; therefore, they encouraged their child to adopt a heterosexual identity in order to avoid such punishments in the Foucauldian sense. Hence, the establishment of anti-discrimination legislation is important, as this could not only help to protect people from sexual minorities against social discrimination and prejudice, but it could also highlight the existence of sexual minorities in society. In other words, anti-discrimination policy could be seen as another way to increase the visibility of sexual minority groups. If the government implemented legislation that recognised and protected sexual minorities, this would send a clear message to the public about the valid place these groups hold in society and would help ameliorate social and institutional marginalisation. Such government efforts could motivate

other social institutions, including schools, hospitals, the media, and social media platforms, to address and eliminate homophobic language and behaviours more effectively (Kwok, 2019).

Future Research in the Field

The current study has reinforced the fact that much remains unknown about the experiences of same-sex attracted individuals and their families in China. Accordingly, this chapter concludes with suggestions for further research in this field.

Firstly, Chinese fathers' voices need to be heard. As previously mentioned, the group of parent participants in this this research were all mothers. Despite that, the research was still able to obtain some information about Chinese fathers' reactions indirectly from the mothers' and the young participants' narratives. However, it would be better to interview fathers directly to increase the scope of the research data, particularly as Chinese culture emphasises gender-based parenting roles (Li & Lamb, 2015; D. Wang, 2020). Such research could explore how the traditional role of "father" has an impact on fathers' reactions towards the child's sexuality as well as the father-child relationship.

Second, there is almost no research which explores experiences of Chinese bisexual people, particularly Chinese bisexual women. Many scholars (e.g., Bie & Tang, 2016; Lo, 2020; Ren et al., 2019; Suen & Chan, 2020; Wang, Hu, et al., 2020; Wang, Yu, Yang, Drescher, et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019) have directed their attention towards exploring the experiences of same-sex

attracted people in Chinese society which is a good move towards examining sexuality diversity. However, in almost every existing study, experiences of bisexual people are explored alongside those of gay men and lesbians, as a part of the LGB community. In other words, the particular needs and experiences of the bisexual community have been neglected. Bisexual people have unique experiences and perspectives which may not be shared by gay men and lesbians, and many researchers have noted that bisexual people are likely to suffer more social pressure and mental health issues than their gay and lesbian counterparts (e.g., Chan et al., 2020; Hertlein et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2019; Warren et al., 2015). This has resulted in a lower tendency for bisexual people to disclose their same-sex sexual orientation (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Warren et al., 2015). Additionally, global stigma towards bisexual people is strongly tied up with attitudes towards promiscuity and non-monogamy, which has resulted in discrimination against bisexual individuals within the LGBTQ community (Callis, 2013; Klesse, 2005; Pistella et al., 2016). Hence, it is critical to take a further step from this research study by exploring Chinese bisexual young men and women's experiences of coming out to their parents. As argued in Chapter 5, Chinese parents tend to hold binary conceptions, categorising gender into only male and female and sexuality into only heterosexuality and "homosexuality". Thus, the concept of bisexuality as a sexual identity may well be more challenging for Chinese parents than for Western parents.

Third, it would be interesting for scholars to shift their attention to exploring the reactions and experiences of children of same-sex attracted people, rather than focusing on parents or siblings. As can be seen from this study's findings, some parents pushed their child to enter

into a cooperative marriage in order to have a child. Although in the current research only one gay participant clearly stated his decision to enter a cooperative marriage with a lesbian woman to have his own child through assisted reproductive technologies, existing social data estimates that the number of cooperative married couples had increased to more than a 100,000 in 2018 in mainland China (S. Y. Wang, 2019). For most gay men and lesbians, marriage is only the first step to pleasing their parents. Reproduction is considered as the unavoidable second step, as Chinese traditional culture tends to view marriage and reproduction as a near-compulsory combination (Tang, 1995). This thesis has shown that reproduction is still considered necessary by most Chinese parents, whether they desire this for their child's future companionship or for family continuity. However, children born from cooperative marriages in China have received little attention. In academia, information regarding experiences of children from a cooperative marriage is virtually non-existent. As existing research has pointed out, homophobic language and behaviours are still largely tolerated in Chinese schools (Wei & Liu, 2019), and society still holds prejudice towards children from single-parent or divorced families (Xu et al., 2008), let alone children from families that have been formed on the basis of a cooperative marriage. Therefore, the life experiences and psychological well-being of children from cooperative families is likely to be an important social issue that scholars may have neglected. Additionally, through exploring these children's experiences, the risks of cooperative marriage will be more clearly identified, which could prompt further reflection on the concepts and consequences of compulsory marriage and reproduction.

Likewise, children who have either a gay father or lesbian mother in heterosexual marriages also need more attention. Scholars have estimated that nearly 80% to 90% of gay men in mainland China have married heterosexual women (Lim, 2013) and, more importantly, these straight women were not aware of their husband's sexuality when they got married. In the last few years, researchers from the social sciences (e.g., Cheng, 2016; Tsang, 2021; Wang, Wilson, et al., 2020; Zhu, 2018) have started to attend to "tongqi," a word which can be translated from mandarin Chinese as the wives of gay men. However, there has been almost no research around children from these families. Hence, the voices of both tongqi wives and their children need to be heard to further highlight that these groups are products of the power of compulsory opposite-sex marriage and compulsory reproduction.

Finally, same-sex attracted youth or young adults from Chinese immigrant families in Australian society is another area that requires more investigation. When I was reviewing existing research literature, I found that there was almost no research that had explored the coming out experiences of Chinese Australians and their parents' attitudes towards their child's sexuality. Research in relation to the coming out experiences of Chinese or Asian same-sex attracted people in the West has been conducted predominantly in the United States. Hence, the experiences of Australian-born Chinese same-sex attracted people in coming out to their parents, particularly how Chinese Australian same-sex attracted people negotiate their same-sex sexual orientation within both cultures, is worthy of exploration.

Final Thoughts

In today's China, same-sex attracted individuals, as well as others who do not identify with a heterosexual identity, still face social discrimination, public stigma, and restricted legal rights and recognition; likewise, the censorship of LGBTQ-relevant activities has also become increasingly strict (Shaw & Zhang, 2018). Sometimes this can feel as if progress is being undone. A case in point: Shanghai's 2020 Pride Festival was cancelled without explanation (Burton-Bradley, 2021) and, more recently, many LGBTQ social media accounts were deleted on social media platforms, including WeChat (Gan & Xiong, 2021). Such actions reinforce the invisibility of sexuality diversity within society and make the voices of sexuality diverse individuals even less likely to be heard. However, there are still many "underground" websites and organisations in China endeavouring to promote the visibility and voices of the LGBTQ community, and to resist the dominant discursive power around heterosexuality. Hence, this thesis may, in some way, encourage more same-sex attracted people to stand up and come out bravely. Coming out and parental support of a same-sex attracted child's sexuality are important; increasing the frequency of these experiences could not only bring new voices to challenge the dominant discursive power of heteronormativity, but could also create opportunities for people to gain more exposure to, and real-life contact with, same-sex attracted people.

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Appendix A Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for parents

Can you tell me your son's or daughter's coming out story?
How did you feel when you first realised that your son/daughter is gay/lesbian?
What did you do, if anything, when you first realised your child is gay/lesbian? (Prompt: For instance, talk to your child about their experiences?)
What, if any, changes in the relationship have occurred between you and your child after his/her coming out? Can you tell me what happened to your relationship when you first realised your child's sexual orientation?
How did you deal with marriage related questions from relatives of the extended family after you initially realised that your child is gay/lesbian; for instance, if they ask you "Has your son/daughter got married?" "Does he/she have a girl/boyfriend?"
It has been a period of time since your child came out, so can you tell me what have you done during this time related to your child's sexual orientation? Prompt: For instance, have you tried to learn more about sexual minorities?
What do you think about your child's sexual orientation now? Are there any changes in your attitudes and behaviours so far?
What, if any, are the changes in your internal family (nuclear family) relationship?

Interview schedule for adult children

Can you tell me your coming out story? How long did you prepare for your coming out and can you describe your feeling and your parents' attitudes when you were coming out to your parents?

What did your parents do, if anything, when they first realised that you are gay/lesbian?

(Prompt: For instance, talk to you about your experiences?)

What changes in the relationship have occurred between you and your parents after your coming out, if any? Can you tell me what happened to your relationship when they first realised your sexual orientation?

How did you deal with marriage related questions from relatives of the extended family after your coming out to your parents at the beginning; for instance, if they ask you "Do you have a girl/boyfriend?", how did you answer the question?

It has been a period of time since you came out, so can you tell me what have you done during this time with your parents in relation to your sexual orientation if anything?

Prompt: For example, have you tried to seek help from local LGBTQ organisations or have you tried to provide more LGBTQ knowledge to your parents for them to better understand what is the same-sex attraction?

What do your parents think about your sexual orientation now? Are there any changes in your parents' attitudes and behaviours about your sexual orientation so far?

What, if any, are the changes in your internal family (nuclear family) relationship?

Chinese Version of the interview schedule for parents

您能告诉我你儿子或女儿向您出柜的故事吗？当你第一次意识到你的儿子/女儿是同性恋时，您感觉如何？

当你第一次意识到你的孩子是同性恋时，你做了什么，如果有的话？

(提示：例如，和孩子谈一谈他/她的经历)

在孩子跟您出柜后，你和孩子之间的关系发生了什么变化？当你第一次意识到孩子的性取向时，你能告诉我你们的关系发生了什么变化吗？

在您最初意识到你的孩子是同性恋之后，你是如何处理来自大家庭亲戚关于婚姻的相关提问的；例如，如果他们问你“你的儿子/女儿结婚了吗？”“他/她有女/男朋友吗？”

您的孩子向您出柜已经有一段时间了，所以您能告诉我在这段时间您对于孩子的性取向有做过什么吗？

提示：例如，您是否尝试了解有关性少数群体的更多信息？

您现在对孩子的性取向有何看法？到目前为止，您的态度和行为是否有任何变化？

如果有，您的内部家庭（核心家庭）关系发生了什么变化吗？

作为同性恋孩子的父母，您现在是如何处理来自亲戚朋友同事的关于儿女婚姻的相关问题？在这几个月了解孩子的性取向之后，您与大家庭（亲戚朋友）的关系有过什么变化吗？

Chinese Version of the interview schedule for adult children

您能告诉我您向父母出柜的故事吗？您大概做了什么准备，准备了多长时间，您出柜时的感受跟当时父母的态度吗？

当您的父母第一次意识到您是同性恋时，他们做了什么，如果有的话？

(提示：例如，和你谈一谈你的经历？)

在您出柜后，您跟父母之间的关系发生了什么变化吗？当他们第一次意识到您的性取向时，您能告诉我你们的关系发生了什么变化吗？

在您跟父母出柜后，您是如何处理来自大家庭亲戚关于婚姻的相关提问的；例如，如果他们问你“你有女/男朋友吗？”你怎么回答？

您出柜已经有一段时间了，所以您能告诉我在这段时间您的父母对于您的性取向有做过什么吗？

提示：例如，您是否曾尝试寻求当地 LGBTQ 组织的帮助，或者您是否尝试向您的父母提供更多 LGBTQ 知识，以便他们更好地了解什么是同性恋或性少数？

你父母现在对你的性取向有什么看法？到目前为止，您父母对您的性取向的态度和行为是否有任何变化？

如果有，您的内部家庭（核心家庭）关系发生了什么变化吗？

Appendix B Recruitment Advertisement Content

For online social platforms:

Are you a lesbian or gay person aged between 20 and 40? Have you been out to your parents for at least 3 months?

I am Alison Guo and I'm a PhD student at Western Sydney University who is currently studying in Australia. I'm undertaking research into Chinese parents' attitudes toward their child's sexual orientation. This research seeks to interview both young lesbian/gay people and, where possible, their parents. Participation is voluntary although there will be a small payment for involvement in the interview. Please contact me (19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au) for more information if you are interested.

For PFLAG's (Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chat group (this is the only chat group that has parents who have joined)

Hi everyone. I am Alison Guo and I'm a PhD student at Western Sydney University who is currently studying in Australia. I'm undertaking research into Chinese parents' attitudes toward their child's sexual orientation. This research will interview both young lesbian/gay people and parents of young lesbian/gay people. If you are a parent and have a lesbian/gay child who is between the ages of 20 to 40 years old and has been out to you for at least 3 months or more; Or, if you are a gay or lesbian who is between ages of 20 to 40 years old and have come out to your parents for at least 3 months or more, it would be wonderful to speak to you and your parents (separately). Participation is voluntary although there will be a small payment for involvement in the interview. Please contact me (19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au) or add my WeChat account for more information if you are interested.

For chat groups of local LGBTQ organisations other than PFLAG:

Hi everyone. I am Alison Guo and I'm a PhD student at Western Sydney University who is currently studying in Australia. I'm undertaking research into Chinese parents' attitudes toward their child's sexual orientation. This research will interview both young lesbian/gay people and parents of young lesbian/gay people. If you are a lesbian/gay who is between the ages of 20 to 40 years old and have been out to your parents for at least 3 months or more, it would be wonderful to speak separately to you and your parents, if possible. Participation is voluntary although there will be a small payment for involvement in the interview. Please contact me (19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au) or add my WeChat account for more information if you are interested.

Chinese Version of the Advertisements for Recruitment

招募内容：

在线社交平台：

你是一个向父母已出柜至少3个月的20-40岁之间的拉拉或gay吗？

我是 Alison Guo，一名西悉尼大学的博士生，目前正在澳大利亚学习。我正在研究中国父母对孩子性取向的态度。这项研究旨在采访中国年轻的同志族群，并在可能的情况下采访他们的父母。参与是自愿的，虽然参与采访会提供少量的报酬。如果您有兴趣，请联系我（19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au）了解更多信息。

同性恋亲友会聊天群（PFLAG）：

大家好我是 Alison Guo，一名西悉尼大学的博士生，目前正在澳大利亚学习。我正在研究中国父母对孩子性取向的态度。这项研究将采访年轻的男/女同志和他们的父母（孩子和父母的采访是分开独立进行的）。如果您是父母，并且有一个年龄在20-40岁之间且已向您出柜至少3年以上的同志儿子/女儿；或者，如果您是年龄在20至40岁之间并且已经向您的父母出生至少3个月或以上的拉拉/gay，希望和您和您的父母分别做一个采访。参与是自愿的，虽然参与采访会提供少量的报酬。如果您有兴趣，请联系我（19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au）或添加我的微信帐号以获取更多信息。

其他 LGBTQ 微信聊天群:

大家好。我是 Alison Guo , 一名西悉尼大学的博士生 , 目前正在澳大利亚学习。我正在研究中国父母对孩子性取向的态度。这项研究将采访年轻的男/女同志和他们的父母 (孩子和父母的采访是分开独立进行的) 。如果您是年龄在 20 至 40 岁之间并且已经向您的父母出生至少 3 个月或以上的拉拉/gay, 希望和您和您的父母分别做一个采访。参与是自愿的, 虽然参与采访会提供少量的报酬。如果您有兴趣, 请联系我 (19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au) 或添加我的微信帐号以获取更多信息。

Appendix C Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet – parents – General (Specific)

Project Title: Chinese parents with gay/lesbian children: reflections, experiences, and family relationships

Project Summary:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Alison Xinyi Guo, PhD student in the School of Education at Western Sydney University. The research aims are two-fold: First, it seeks to understand parents of young gay men and lesbians in mainland China and to explore their perspectives of their child's sexuality, how they deal with the conflicts between generations for the sake of internal family harmony, and how they behave in front of extended family members or other friends as the parent of a non-heterosexual child. The second aim of this study is to explore parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's sexual orientation and how they deal with the internal family relationship after being aware of their son's or daughter's sexuality.

All Chinese parents of a gay or lesbian child between the ages of 20-40 are invited to be involved in this research. Parents are welcome to participate either individually or as a couple.

How is the study being paid for?

This research is supported by Western Sydney University in Australia. You will be paid \$10 AUD (50 RMB) when the interview has been completed. The payment is compensation for your time.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an online interview via WeChat with the researcher. The interview will last 60 to 90 minutes. It will be recorded, transcribed and further analysed by the researcher who will then use the de-identified information to write a PhD thesis on the topic.

The researcher will ask you questions about your feelings about your child's sexual orientation and any changes in your internal family relationship and social relationships with relatives and friends after becoming aware of your child's sexual orientation. You will also be asked some questions about how you have managed your internal family relationship and how you continue to manage social relationships with others as a parent of a gay son or a lesbian daughter.

How much of my time will I need to give?

The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

There are no direct benefits for participating in this research. However, de-identified results may be published in academic journals in gender and sexuality in an effort to give people from the world a better sense of the relationship situation of Chinese gay men/lesbians and their parents in the Chinese context. The researcher will also share the results with local LGBTQ organisations in mainland China in an effort to bring knowledge, confidence and encouragement to parents of gay/lesbian children who are currently struggling with similar issues that you may have experienced.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

Talking about sensitive issues may at times make you feel uncomfortable or distressed. If you feel too uncomfortable to continue, you can withdraw from the interview at any time or come back at a later point.

If you are feeling distressed, you can contact “Jiangsutongtian” (a LGBTQ non-government organisation based in Nanjing) for confidential counselling via WeChat, by contacting @tongtianjiangsu. When you have added @tongtianjiangsu on WeChat successfully, you will find that they have posted an article about how to contact them for the counselling service. You will be provided with information about options to talk to them, either via text messages or voice call via WeChat. Many people, however, do not feel distressed when talking about these issues. You may find it cathartic and reassuring to be able to share your experiences about your child’s sexuality.

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, no personal details of participants will be shared. In fact, this interview will not ask you any personally-identifiable questions; your responses will be completely anonymous.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

Please be assured that only the researcher will have access to the raw data you provide. However, your data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time. As a researcher in the area of gender and sexuality-diversity, it is possible that Alison might use findings from this project in future work such as additional publications or to compare findings to a similar project conducted at a later date. If this in the case, your identity will remain confidential.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time by telling the researcher that you want to leave.

If you do choose to withdraw midway through the project, your relationship with the researcher will not be compromised. Your recorded data will be destroyed as well.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Alison Xinyi Guo should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. Her email address is: 19171089@student.westernsydney

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Please be aware that all complaints or reservations can only be accepted in English. If you are unable to write in English, it is suggested that you use Google Translation or an equivalent translation application before you contact the Ethics Committee.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13090.

Participant Information Sheet – Adult children – General (Specific)

Project Title: Chinese parents with gay/lesbian children: reflections, experiences, and family relationships

Project Summary:

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Alison Xinyi Guo, PhD student in the School of Education at Western Sydney University. The research aims are two-fold: First, it seeks to explore parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their child's sexual orientation and how they deal with the internal family relationship after being aware of their son's or daughter's sexuality *from the perspective of gay/lesbian young people*. The second aim of this study is to understand parents of young gay men and lesbians in mainland China and to explore their perspectives of their child's sexuality *from the perspective of gay/lesbian young people*, including how they deal with the conflicts between generations for the sake of internal family harmony, and how they behave in front of extended family members or other friends as the parent of a non-heterosexual child.

All Chinese self-identified gay men and lesbians between the ages of 20-40 years of age who live in Nanjing and who have been out to their parents for at least 3 months or more are welcome to participate. You will be asked to invite your parents to participate, however, if your parents refuse to participate, you can still participate in the project.

How is the study being paid for?

This research is supported by Western Sydney University in Australia. You will be paid \$10 AUD (50 RMB) when the interview has been completed. The payment is compensation for your time.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an online interview via WeChat with the researcher. The interview will last 60 to 90 minutes. It will be recorded, transcribed and further analysed by the researcher who will then use the de-identified information to write a PhD thesis on the topic.

The researcher will ask you about your coming out experiences to your parents and your parents' attitudes and behaviours when they realised your sexual orientation. You will also be asked some questions about any changes in your internal family relationship and social relationships with relatives from extended family after your coming out and how you and your parents have managed and continue to manage these relationships.

How much of my time will I need to give?

The interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?

There are no direct benefits for participating in this research. However, de-identified results may be published in academic journals in gender and sexuality in an effort to give people from the world a better sense of the relationship situation of Chinese gay men/lesbians and their parents in the Chinese context. The researcher will also share the results with local LGBTQ organisations in mainland China in an effort to bring knowledge, confidence and encouragement to parents of gay/lesbian children who are currently struggling with similar issues that you may have experienced.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?

Talking about sensitive issues may at times make you feel uncomfortable or distressed. If you feel too uncomfortable to continue, you can withdraw from the interview at any time or come back at a later point.

If you are feeling distressed, you can contact “Jiangsutongtian” (a LGBTQ non-government organisation based in Nanjing) for confidential free counselling via WeChat, by contacting @tongtianjiangsu. When you have added @tongtianjiangsu on WeChat successfully, you will find that they have posted an article about how to contact them for the counselling service. You will be provided with information about options to talk to them, either via text messages or voice call via WeChat. Many people, however, do not feel distressed when talking about

these issues. You may find it cathartic and reassuring to be able to share your experiences about your child's sexuality.

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, no personal details of participants will be shared. In fact, this interview will not ask you any personally-identifiable questions; your responses will be completely anonymous.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?

Please be assured that only the researchers will have access to the raw data you provide. However, your data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time. As a researcher in the area of gender and sexuality-diverse, it is possible that Alison might use findings from this project in future work such as additional publications or to compare findings to a similar project conducted at a later date. If this in the case, your identity will remain confidential.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time by telling the researcher that you want to leave.

If you do choose to withdraw on the half way, your relationship with the researcher will not be compromised. Your recorded data will be destroyed as well.

Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the Chief Investigator (Alison Xinyi Guo)'s contact details (19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au). They can contact Alison to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain a copy of the information sheet. In fact, it would be great if you did tell other gay/lesbian friends or parents of gay/lesbians in Nanjing so that we can get a broad sense of experiences.

What if I require further information?

Please contact Alison Xinyi Guo should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate. Her email address is: 19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.

Please be aware that all complaints or reservations can only be accepted in English. If you are

unable to write in English, it is suggested that you use Google Translation or an equivalent translation application before you contact the Ethics Committee.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H13090.

Chinese Version of Participant Information Sheet (for parents)

参与者信息表 (适用于家长) - 一般 (特定)

标题： 中国同志群体的父母：反思，经历与家庭关系

项目总结：

您被邀请参加由西悉尼大学教育学院博士生 Alison Xinyi Guo 进行的研究。研究目的有两个方面：第一，它旨在了解中国大陆年轻男女同志的父母，并探讨他们对孩子性取向的看法，以及如何为了内部的家庭和谐而处理两代人之间的冲突矛盾，以及作为同志孩子的父母，他们如何在其他亲戚成员或其他朋友面前表现。本研究的第二个目的是从年轻同志的角度探讨了解父母对他们性取向的看法以及如何处理家庭内部关系。

所有年龄在 20-40 岁之间的住在中国大陆的男女同志的父母都欢迎参与这项研究。父母可以任意一方或作为夫妇参加。

这项研究是如何支付的？

该研究由澳大利亚西悉尼大学资助。采访结束您会得到 10 澳元（合 50 人民币）的报酬作为感谢（您的宝贵时间）。

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您将被邀请参与在线访谈，访谈会通过微信语音通话进行。访问将持续 60 至 90 分钟。它将由研究人员记录，转录和进一步分析，然后研究人员将使用得到的信息撰写关于该主题的博士论文。

在了解到孩子的性取向后，研究人员会向您询问您的感受以及您内部家庭关系的变化以及与亲朋好友的人际关系。您还将被问到一些问题，关于您如何调节您的内部家庭关系以及您如何继续作为同性恋子女的父母与他人建立社交关系。

我需要被占用多少时间？

访问大约需要 60 到 90 分钟。

我可以从中获得什么好处？

参与本研究并没有直接的好处。但是，去识别的信息结果可能会发布在性别性向和性小众的学术期刊上，以便让世界各地的人们更好地了解中国男/女同性恋者及其父母的状况。研究者还将与中国大陆的当地 LGBTQ 组织分享研究成果，努力为正在挣扎，纠结，或不知道如何解决类似问题的同志群体的父母带来知相关识，信心和鼓励。

该研究是否会对我有任何风险或不适？如果是这样，将采取什么措施来纠正它？

谈论敏感问题有时可能会让您感到不舒服。如果您持续感觉不舒服，可以随时退出访问或稍后再回来。

如果您感到苦恼，可以通过微信联系“江苏同天”(一家在南京成立的非盈利志愿 LGBTQ 组织)联系@tongtianjiangsu 进行保密咨询。当您成功添加江苏同天公众号后，您会在历史发表中看到关于咨询的文章，那篇文章会提供详细的介绍关于您如何预约咨询和您希望选择的咨询方式，譬如您可以选择打字形式或语音通话。然而，许多人在谈论这些问题时并不感到苦恼。你可能会发现它是一种宣泄和安慰，能够分享你对孩子性取向的看法和经历。

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如果我需要更多信息怎么办？

如果您希望在决定是否参加之前进一步讨论该研究，请联系 Alison Xinyi Guo。她的电子邮件地址是：19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au

如果我有投诉怎么办？

如果您对本研究的道德行为有任何投诉，您可以通过电话+61 2 4736 0229 或发送电子邮件至 humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au，通过研究参与，发展和创新 (REDI) 联系道德委员会。请注意，所有投诉只接受英语。如果您无法用英语撰写，建议您在联系

道德委员会之前使用 Google 翻译或其他有效的翻译软件进行翻译后再递交您的投诉申请。

如果您同意参加本研究，可能会要求您口头签署参与者同意书。信息表供您保留，研究人员保留同意书。

该研究已获得西悉尼大学人类研究伦理委员会的批准。批准编号为 H13090。

Chinese Version of Participant Information Sheet (adult children)

参与者信息表 (适用于年轻人) - 一般 (特定)

标题： 中国同志群体的父母：反思，经历与家庭关系

项目总结：

您被邀请参加由西悉尼大学教育学院博士生 Alison Xinyi Guo 进行的研究。研究目的有两个方面：第一，它旨在了解中国大陆同志的父母对孩子性取向的态度和行为，以及从年轻同志的角度了解父母对他们性取向的看法以及如何处理家庭内部关系。

本研究的第二个目的是通过年轻人对父母的观察和了解，探讨中国大陆年轻男女同志的父母，包括他们对孩子性取向的看法，如何为维护内部家庭和谐而处理两代人之间的冲突矛盾，以及作为同志孩子的父母，他们如何在其他亲戚成员或其他朋友面前表现。

所有来自中国大陆，对自己的自我认同为男同志 (gay) 或女同志 (拉拉/les) 年龄在 20-40 岁之间，并且已经向父母出柜至少 3 个月或以上以及他们的父母都欢迎参加。

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研究人员会向您询问您向父母出柜的经历以及您父母在得知您性取向时的态度及感受。您还将被问到一些问题，关于您出柜之后您的内部家庭关系变化，您如何调节您的内部家庭关系，以及您如何管理和维持和大家庭亲属的关系。

可能需要您邀请您的父母也参加这个研究项目，不过父母的参与并不是必要的，如果他们拒绝参与并不会影响到您的参加，也就是说您可以继续参加访问。

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访问大约需要 60 到 90 分钟。

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您希望选择的咨询方式，譬如您可以选择打字形式或语音通话。然而，许多人在谈论这些问题时并不感到苦恼。你可能会发现它是一种宣泄和安慰，能够分享你对孩子性取向的看法和经历。

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我可以告诉其他人这项研究吗？

当然，您可以告诉其他您觉得也符合参加条件的朋友，只需要提供研究者 Alison Xinyi Guo 的联系方式（19171089@student.westernsydney.edu.au），这样他们就可以通过联系

Alison 然后讨论参加这项研究的下一步计划并获得一份参与者信息表。其实，我们非常欢迎您邀请身边符合这项研究条件的同志朋友来参加和分享他们的经历。

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该研究已获得西悉尼大学人类研究伦理委员会的批准。批准编号为 H13090。

Appendix D Consent Form

Consent Form – General (Specific)

Project Title: Chinese parents with gay/lesbian children: reflections, experiences, and family relationships

I hereby consent to participate in the above named research project.

I acknowledge that:

- I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to email the researcher if I have any questions about the project or my participation.
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I can block or delete the researcher after the interview has been completed
- I can block the researcher from seeing my Moments on WeChat during the data collection
- The researcher can delete me after the interview and payment has been completed
- The researcher can block me from seeing her Moments on WeChat during the data collection

I consent to:

Participating in an online telephone interview via WeChat

Having the interview audio recorded

Being friends with Alison Xinyi Guo on WeChat during the data collection stage with the knowledge that I can block her at any time if I so choose or if I decide to withdraw from the study.

I consent for my data and information provided to be used for this project.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University. The ethics reference number is: H[insert number]

What if I have a complaint?

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Please be aware that all complaints or reservations can only be accepted in English. If you are unable to write in English, it is suggested that you use Google Translation or an equivalent translation application before you contact the Ethics Committee.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Chinese Version of the Consent Form

知情同意书

标题：中国同志群体的父母：反思，经历与家庭关系

我同意参加以上标题的研究

我承认：

- 我已阅读参与者信息表，如果对项目或参与有任何疑问，我们有机会通过电子邮件发送给研究员
- 向我解释了项目所需的程序和所涉及的时间，我对项目的任何问题都得到了满意的答复。
- 在采访结束后我可以拉黑或删除研究者
- 在数据收集期间我可以屏蔽研究者看我的朋友圈内容
- 在采访和付款结束后研究者可以删除我
- 在数据收集期间研究者可以屏蔽我看她的朋友圈内容

我同意：

通过微信语音方式完成在线采访

采访内容被录音

在数据收集期间跟 Alison Xinyi Guo 在微信上互为朋友并且可以在任何时间拉黑她如果我想退出或终止采访

我同意我提供的数据和信息可以在这个研究和其他相关项目中使用

我理解我的参与是保密的，研究期间获得的任何信息可能会被发表或存储用于其他研究用途，但不会以任何方式使用我的信息来揭示我的身份。

我知道我可以随时退出研究，而不会影响我与研究人员以及现在或未来所涉及的任何组织的关系。

签名：

姓名：

日期：

该研究已获得西悉尼大学人类研究伦理委员会的批准。道德参考编号为：H13090

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您提出的任何问题都将得到保密处理并进行全面调查，您将被告知结果。

Appendix E Ethics Approval Letter

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

3 April 2019
Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja
School of Education

Dear Tania,

Project Title: "Chinese parents with gay/lesbian children: Reflections, experiences, and family relationships"

HREC Approval Number: H13090

Risk Rating: HREC

I am pleased to advise the above research project meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. This HREC is constituted and operates in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018).

Approval of this project is valid from 3 April 2019 until 3 April 2022.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Tania Ferfolja, Alison Xinyi Guo, Jacqueline Ullman

Summary of Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
2. A final report will be due at the expiration of the approval period.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to being implemented. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Committee via the Human Ethics Officer as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.
6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

7. Project specific conditions:

There are no specific conditions applicable.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au as this email address is closely monitored.

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane
Presiding Member,
Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee

369