

## **NEGOTIATING MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL IDENTITY IN CHINA: A STUDY OF SEXUAL MINORITIES OF DIFFERENT GENDERS AND SOCIOECONOMIC STUTUSES (GRF FUNDED)**

WONG, Day

### **Key implications**

1. There are considerable gender differences within the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community in China regarding their views about traditional values, coping strategies for marriage pressure, and attitudes toward sexual identity.
2. In China where traditional Confucian values have been revived to build a harmonious society, sexual minorities are under intense pressure to observe filial piety and meet parental expectations.
3. Queer feminists in China have campaigned against compulsory marriage and played an agentic role in social change. Their influence on the LGBT community as well as the larger society cannot be overlooked.



### **Background**

China's market reform and opening up have resulted in the increased visibility of sexual minorities and enabled them to connect with each other. Globalized discourses of sexual rights and coming out have begun to serve as the building blocks for the construction of sexual identities. However, with the retreat of the state in the provision of social welfare, the Chinese government has reinvigorated the Confucian value of filial piety in order to solve the problem of care for an aging population. Sexual minorities in contemporary China continue to face intense pressure to fulfil filial duties to marry and have a child. Some sexual minorities enter a conventional marriage and establish a heterosexual identity. Others, on the contrary, may pursue an independent sexual identity and lifestyle. There are still others who opt for a cooperative marriage where gays and lesbians marry each other so that they can carve out space for same-sex relationships. This research examines the various ways that Chinese sexual minorities of different genders and socioeconomic statuses cope with marriage pressure and its impact on identity construction.

### **Focus of study**

We must recognize that sexual minorities in China are heterogeneous rather than homogenous. Men and women can experience and cope with marriage pressure in rather different ways.

The HKBU Sociology Research Brief Series are succinct summaries of our faculty members' projects that are of interest to the general public.

Socioeconomic status may also influence sexual minority identification on both individual and community levels. Individuals with higher education and income may have more resources to cope with discrimination and to develop a positive identity. The communities in which sexual minorities live also can differ, with some regions being more developed and better endowed with resources and networks that promote sexual minority identification.



## Research methods

The research utilized a mixed methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative studies. With the help of our partner organizations in China, a questionnaire survey was conducted online. The final sample consisted of 1075 respondents, aged 20 to 35 year-old, who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. At the end of the questionnaire survey, contact information was asked with the attempt to recruit eligible respondents of in-depth interview. Altogether 60 in-depth interviews were conducted.

## Key findings

While sexual minority men and women reported experiencing similar levels of family pressure to marry, more sexual minority men than women endorsed traditional values, expressed concerns about sexual identity, and considered engaging in cooperative marriages or conventional heterosexual marriages. Socioeconomic status at individual and community levels also matters. For

example, sexual minorities who earn higher annual income were more able to manage the harmful effects of stigma and hold a positive attitude toward sexual identity. Those who live in large cities had better access to support groups and hotlines that help them cope with identity stress.



Specifically, among sexual minority women, those who live in large cities are exposed to ideas of feminism and sexual rights through inter-regional and transnational networks with queer communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas. These community discourses, resources and networks foster an awareness of gender inequalities, a critical attitude toward marriage pressure, and a more positive evaluation of sexual identity.

## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

Wong, Day et. al. (under review). Gender differences in sexual minority identity concerns among young adults in China: The role of socioeconomic status, familial, and cultural factors

Wong, Day "Negotiating Marriage & Sexual Identity: A Study of Gays and Lesbians in Urban China." Presented in Rethinking Global Urban Justice Conference, organized by Research Committee 21 of the International Sociological Association, on 11 Sep 2017.

## REQUEST FOR MORE DETAILS

Please contact Dr. Day Wong at [daywong@hkbu.edu.hk](mailto:daywong@hkbu.edu.hk) for more information about the project.

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, HKBU**

**website:** <http://socweb.hkbu.edu.hk>