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Rethinking the Dichotomy of Sexual Identity and Relational Intimacies: Chinese Gay
Men's Mental Health in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

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Abstract

Very little research has examined the psychological adjustment of gay men in mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs)—a marital union wherein one spouse is a sexual minority person (e.g., gay/lesbian, bisexual) while the other is heterosexual. Examining gay men’s psychological adjustment in MOMs provides insights into how sexual identity intersects with relationship dynamics to shape mental health in heteronormative societies. Based on survey responses from 54 Chinese gay men in MOMs who simultaneously engage in a same-sex relationship occurring outside of marriages, the current exploratory study examined the relative contributions of marital relationship quality, same-sex relationship quality, and sexual identity to their psychological adjustment (i.e., depression, life satisfaction, and loneliness) in the sociocultural contexts of China. Multiple regression analyses revealed that positive sexual identity was a significantly negative predictor of depression and loneliness and a significantly positive predictor of life satisfaction. Whereas marital relationship quality was significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction and negatively associated with loneliness for gay men in MOMs, same-sex relationship quality was not a significant predictor of their psychological adjustment. Results indicate that both positive sexual identity and marital relationship quality play important roles in the mental health of gay men in MOMs. Discussion focuses on the sociocultural contexts in China that in part shape gay men’s situations in MOMs.

Keywords: gay men, MSM, marital relationship quality, sexual identity, mixed-orientation marriage, mental health

“Why are you with men knowing that you cannot have children with them?”

(Grandmother of a Chinese gay man; Zheng, 2015, p. 3).

Social scientists have long been interested in sexual diversity and its implications for relationships, health, and well-being. Whereas psychologists tend to focus on one’s sexual identity and its association with well-being (e.g., Meyer, 2003), cultural anthropologists have paid tremendous attention to the ways in which sexual subjectivities are culturally situated. As shown by the quote above, the construction of sexual identities can indeed be more relational and familial in non-Western societies, for better or for worse (Zheng, 2015). Such a disciplinary distinction prompts a critical question when it comes to mental health for sexual minority individuals: how do sexual identities signifying the “self” (e.g., gay) and relationship dynamics pinpointing relational intimacy each contribute uniquely to sexual minority individuals’ psychological adjustment? The answer to this question may depend on the sociocultural contexts where identities and relations are situated. Although studies on Western sexual minority people substantiate the salience of sexual identity (e.g., being a gay or lesbian person) in predicting mental health outcomes (Meyer, 2003), emerging evidence indicates that interdependent relationships are more important for sexual minority individuals’ well-being in East Asian societies (Shao, Chang, & Chen, 2018). In light of this cultural difference, the current exploratory study examined the relative importance of sexual identity and relationships dynamics in the psychological adjustment of Chinese gay men in MOMs who managed a marital relationship and a same-sex relationship simultaneously.

Gay Men in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

Despite growing social acceptance of diverse relationships among the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community across the globe, heterosexual marriage persists as

the predominant way of “doing” marriage. Whereas some sexual minority individuals have had privileges to marry their same-sex partners, others end up marrying heterosexual spouses due in large part to societal pressure and the lack of legalization of same-sex marriage (Pandya et al., 2012; Xing 2012). Indeed, many sexual minority men marry women. Previous studies suggest that they do so for various reasons, including the unawareness or denial of their same-sex desire at the time of marriage (Buxton, 2005), pressure from society or religious community to embrace heterosexual family life (Higgins, 2002; Ortiz & Scott, 1994; Pearcey, 2005), and pressure to fulfill familial obligations (Lee, 2002). However, being in heterosexual marriages does not prevent them from exploring or acting upon their same-sex desire. In fact, many sexual minority men engage in same-sex relationships outside of their marriages secretly (Buxton, 2005), which might have consequences for both themselves and their wives—especially when their wives discover such “affairs.”

Scholarly attention has rarely been paid to this group of men, perhaps because they are difficult to reach. A closer examination of those few relevant qualitative studies indicated that gay men in the US married women largely due to their own internalization of societal norms to appear “normal” or to embrace a mainstream heterosexual family life (Higgins, 2002; Ortiz & Scott, 1994; Pearcey, 2005), whereas Asian gay men were more likely to marry women as a result of external pressure from immediate family members (e.g., parents; Lee, 2002; Zheng, 2015). Of those few quantitative studies focusing on this group of men, most have focused on identifying predictors of marital relationship quality, highlighting the unique contributions of marital commitment (Kays, Yarhouse, & Ripley, 2014), marital sex (Gnilka & Dew, 2009), and openness about sexual orientation with wives (Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Only one (Malcolm 2008) included a measure of psychological distress and indicated that positive gay identity (i.e.,

the extent to which one identifies as gay) was significantly associated with higher psychological adjustment. Given that marital relationship quality is associated with well-being for individuals in heterosexual marriages (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007) and same-sex relationship quality with mental health for sexual minority individuals (Whitton & Kuryluk, 2014), examining how the unique MOM context affects psychological adjustment of gay men who manage relationships with both their wives and same-sex partners becomes important.

Gay Men, Men Who Have Sex with Men, and Mental Health

Another issue that contributes to the paucity of research on gay men in MOMs is that they are often lumped into the *Men Who Have Sex with Men (MSM)* category. Widely circulated in public health and HIV literature, *MSM* is often used as a non-stigmatizing terminology that targets certain sexual behaviors instead of a sexual minority identity. Yet, some scholars are critical of this so-called neutral terminology; they argue that the hegemonic adoption of *MSM* obscures the ways in which sexuality can help facilitate public health intervention (e.g., Young & Meyer, 2005). For instance, given that *MSM* erases sexual identity to emphasize behaviors, those who do identify as sexual minority persons (e.g., gay) and view sexual identity as an important part of their life might feel left out and invalidated by the *MSM* category, which puts them at greater risks of both HIV and sexual identity conflict (Boellstorff, 2011; Young & Meyer, 2005).

Recent studies have started to examine mental health outcomes among the *MSM* population, with the hope that addressing mental health issues among them would improve the efficiency of public health intervention. In contrast to the de-emphasis of sexual identity in public health research on *MSM*, many studies tapping the mental health of *MSM* have paid tremendous attention to how stress resulting from sexual identity might influence psychological

adjustment and health behavior (Berg et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2016; Sun, Whiteley, & Brown, 2020). For example, *MSM* with more sexual identity concerns are more likely to report higher levels of psychological distress (Choi et al., 2016) and less commitment to HIV testing (Berg et al., 2015). These studies illustrate that a positive sexual or gay identity resulting from less sexual stigma and discrimination might be a new entry point for intervention.

Other studies have examined how relationship dynamics contribute to lived experience and risky sexual behaviors among *MSM*. In particular, positive dynamics of romantic relationships (i.e., more intimacy and commitment) are shown to be associated with more unprotected sex among *MSM* in the US (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Clerkin, 2011). Chinese *MSM*, on the other hand, have been shown to struggle with same-sex attractions in the face of marital pressures from family members (Steward, Miège, & Choi, 2013), and those who did marry women have reported higher levels of psychopathology compared to unmarried *MSM* (Liu et al., 2018). Taken together, regardless of whether or not one is lumped into the *MSM* category, for gay men, both sexual identity and relationship dynamics have profound implications for their health outcomes, which, arguably, are further complicated by sociocultural contexts.

Gay Men and the Chinese Society

Very few studies have examined the relative contributions of sexual identity and relationship dynamics simultaneously for gay men; even fewer have done so in the context of China. Afraid of coming out in a society stigmatizing same-sex desire and lacking marriage equality, many gay men in China have been pressured by parents and family members into marrying women (Xing 2012). Although recent research on consensual non-monogamy in Euro-American societies has inspired discussions of new types of relationship dynamics wherein couples of various sexual orientations might be able to establish fulfilling life (Matsick et al.,

2014), family scholars indicated that relationship and family formations in China remain intact and conventional despite economic development (Raymo et al., 2015).

Chinese society has historically prioritized interdependent relationships (e.g., Nisbett et al., 2001); thus, children are socialized to prioritize familial relationships early in life. Due to social emphasis on filial piety, one of the more important Confucian values, Chinese children are obligated to heed their parents' opinions on marital, occupational, and other life decisions (Shek, 2006). For example, many Chinese individuals will seek their parents' approval of their partners before formally getting married. Partially due to the Confucian values that prioritize the continuation of the family bloodline (Shek, 2006), a man who marries and has a child—ideally if the child is a boy—is considered filial. Moreover, the pressure from Chinese parents to their sons regarding marriage and having children has increased tremendously since the implementation of the one-child policy because that is the only way to continue the bloodline of the family. As Liu and Choi (2006) indicated, many Chinese gay men had sex with women not due to their own desire but the social pressure to continue the family lineage. Therefore, for many gay men in China, marrying a woman may have more to do with fulfilling their parents' expectations and avoiding social pressure than with following their own wishes.

Although no official statistics are available regarding the number of gay men in MOMs in China, previous reports indicate that there are at least 10 million women married to sexual minority men in China (Liu et al., 2015; Xing, 2012). Surprisingly, however, no empirical studies to date have addressed the mental health of Chinese gay men in MOMs, perhaps because they are largely invisible and, at times, overshadowed by the *MSM* category. Considering that many of them engage in a heterosexual marital relationship and a same-sex relationship simultaneously (Xing, 2012)—one resulting from societal and familial pressure, the other related

to their same-sex desire, the potential consequences of such relationships on their psychological adjustment are worth investigating. Moreover, in light of productive lines of research in Western industrial societies emphasizing the self (e.g., sexual identity) and studies from China pinpointing interdependent relationships, of great interest are also the ways in which sexual identity and relationship dynamics might influence well-being of sexual minority men in MOMs. Thus, the current exploratory study aimed to examine the relative contributions of marital relationship qualities, same-sex relationship qualities, and sexual identity to the mental health of a unique group of gay men who managed a marital relationship and a same-sex relationship simultaneously.

The Current Study

The current survey study examined the psychological adjustment of gay men in MOMs in China, particularly paying attention to the ways in which marital relationship quality, same-sex relationship quality, and sexual identity (i.e., the extent to which one is comfortable with one's sexual orientation) might affect mental health outcomes. First, considering that positive sexual identity is widely assumed to be associated with better mental health outcomes based on research using Western LGB samples (e.g., Mohr & Kendra, 2011), we examined this link between sexual identity and mental health of gay men in MOMs in China. Second, given that many gay men in China are pressured into MOMs while secretly seeking same-sex relationships (Xing, 2012; Zheng, 2015), we examined the differences and associations between marital relationship qualities and same-sex relationship qualities. Specifically, we tested a) whether there were significant differences between the dimensions of marital relationship quality (i.e., satisfaction, conflict, commitment) and those of same-sex relationship quality and b) whether there are significant negative correlations between the quality of these two types of relationships, such that

gay men who experience significantly higher marital satisfaction might report lower satisfaction of their same-sex relationships. Due to the incompatibility of a marital relationship with a same-sex relationship in MOMs in heteronormative Chinese societies (Xing, 2012), we note that this would conflict with the spillover hypothesis (Erel & Burman, 1995), which would propose positive associations between relationship dynamics. Third, although some studies have pinpointed the relational aspects of sexual identity and the importance of interdependent relationships in non-Western cultural contexts (Brainer, 2019), the centrality of sexual identity seems to prevail when it comes to psychological adjustment (Meyer, 2003). In light of the fact that many gay men engage in same-sex relationships outside of MOMs (Xing, 2012) might suggest their desire for an “authentic” self that their same-sex relationships would help realize, we thus investigated the relative contributions of marital relationship quality, same-sex relationship quality, and positive sexual identity to psychological adjustment of Chinese gay men in MOMs.

As such, we hypothesized that (1) positive sexual identity would be significantly correlated with better psychological adjustment (i.e., lower depression and loneliness, higher satisfaction with life) for Chinese gay men in MOMs; (2) Chinese gay men in MOMs would report significantly higher same-sex relationship quality than marital relationship quality; (3) dimensions of marital relationship quality would be significantly and negatively correlated with dimensions of same-sex relationship quality; (4) measures of same-sex relationship quality and sexual identity would be significantly associated with measures of psychological adjustment (i.e., depression, life satisfaction, and loneliness) whereas marital relationship quality would not, as many gay men marry women due to the fulfillment of societal expectations rather than their own

wishes, rendering it such that marital relationship quality may not have an appreciable impact on their psychological adjustment.

Method

Participants

The study sample included 54 gay men who were in MOMs while having a same-sex relationship at time of the survey. Among initial survey data received from 104 sexual minority men, we first excluded 7 men who indicated that their wives are non-heterosexual and 21 men who had not been in a same-sex relationship during the past 6 months. Given that there were both gay ($N = 54$) and bisexual men ($N = 22$) in the sample, we wanted to know if there were any differences in marital relationship qualities between these two groups because bisexual men are presumably attracted to their wives whereas gay men have little, if any, attraction to their wives. Independent t -tests revealed that compared to gay men, bisexual men reported significant higher levels of marital satisfaction, $t(72) = -2.29$, $p = .03$, and marital commitment, $t(72) = -3.83$, $p < .001$. There were no significant differences between the two groups on other main measures (i.e., marital conflict, dimensions of same-sex relationship qualities, sexual identity, and psychological adjustment). As such, although previous studies often combine gay and bisexual men due to their shared struggles in heteronormative societies, we decided to exclude bisexual men in our analyses because of these differences in marital relationship qualities. Thus, the final study sample included data from 54 gay men who were in MOMs in China.

Gay men in the study aged from 23 to 60 years old ($M = 37.48$, $SD = 8.82$). The average number of years of marriage was 11.31 years ($SD = 9.31$), and the average number of years of current same-sex relationship was 1.97 years ($SD = 2.55$). In terms of educational attainment, more than half of them did not have a 4-year college degree ($N = 33$, 61.11%), 15 had a 4-year

college degree (27.78%), and 6 (11.11%) had a master's degree or higher. In terms of annual income, an indicator for socioeconomic status (SES), more than half of them ($N = 31$, 57.41%) earned less than 70,000 yuan, 15 (27.78%) earned between 70,001 to 200,000 yuan, and 8 (14.81%) earned more than 200,000 yuan per year. According to the official definition of middle class in China (60,000 to 500,000 yuan; China Power Team, 2018), about half of the men in the current sample could be considered as middle class.

At the time of the survey, most participants had not disclosed their sexual orientation to their mother ($N = 42$, 77.78%) or father ($N = 43$, 79.63%). In terms of wives' knowledge about their sexual orientation, the majority of them ($N = 32$; 60.38%) believed that their wives did not know, 11 (20.75%) said their wives accidentally found out, 7 (13.21%) self-disclosed to their wives, 3 (5.66%) said they were not sure, and 1 did not answer this question. Independent t -tests of men's perception of wives' knowledge about their sexual orientation on study main variables revealed that as compared to men whose wives did not know about their sexual orientation, men whose wives knew about their sexual orientation reported marginally and significantly higher levels of same-sex relationship conflict [$t(48) = 1.88$, $p = .067$] but significantly lower levels of same-sex relationship commitment [$t(45) = -2.22$, $p = .031$]. However, there were no significant differences between these two groups in terms of same-sex relationship satisfaction, measures of marital relationship quality, and measures of psychological adjustment.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from online support groups of married gay and bisexual men as well as non-profit organizations serving the needs of sexual minority men married to women in China between November 2018 and March 2019. All participants completed the survey in Mandarin Chinese. Some of the measures (i.e., sexual identity and well-being measures) were

adopted from previous translations in a study with LGB young adults in China (*blinded for review*), while others (i.e., relationship quality measures) were translated and back-translated by two bicultural and bilingual research assistants. Each of them translated half of the survey measures from English to Mandarin, and they then switched the translated part and back-translated it from Mandarin to English. They met with the first author twice to discuss any issues encountered. The team paid particular attention to how the Chinese word choices reflect both the meaning of the original English scales and the cultural aspect of the Chinese language. For example, in one of the items indicating marital commitment, “I feel very attached to our marriage—very strongly linked to my wife,” the expression of “very strongly linked” means “very connected” (GuanXiJinMiDe; 关系紧密的) but not necessarily very attached in Chinese under direct translation. We decided to use “MiBuKeFen (密不可分)” to reflect high levels of relational intimacy and attachment. The final survey was approved by all team members before distribution.

The study information sheet that included both the informed consent information and the online survey link was disseminated to organization directors who then reached out to their members. To participate, respondents needed to: (1) self-identify as a sexual minority man, (2) perceive to be currently married to a heterosexual woman, and (3) currently be in a same-sex romantic relationship. Upon finishing the survey, participants were entered into a raffle to win one of twenty gift cards (approximately \$15 each). All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the PI’s institution before data collection.

Measures

Given that some of the main measures (i.e., sexual identity and well-being measures) have already been found to be valid and reliable in a previous study with LGB young adults in

China (*blinded for review*), we provide more information regarding validity and reliability specifically on measures of relationship qualities (i.e., satisfaction, conflict, and commitment).

Demographics

Participants were asked to indicate their age, sexual orientation (1 = gay, 2 = bisexual, 3 = other), educational attainment (1 = less than four-year college, 2 = four-year college, 3 = graduate degree or higher), income (recoded as 1 = less than 70,000 yuan, 2 = 70,001 to 200,000 yuan, 3 = more than 200,000 yuan), years of marriage, years of current same-sex relationship, whether they disclosed their sexual orientation to their mothers and fathers, and whether their wives knew about their sexual orientation.

Marital relationship quality

Marital satisfaction. The three-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986) was used to measure marital satisfaction. It has been found to be valid and reliable in the Chinese population (Miller et al., 2013). Participants rated their marital satisfaction with wives (e.g., “How satisfied are you with your marriage?”) on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = extremely dissatisfied, 6 = extremely satisfied). $\alpha = .91$, 95% CI (.85, .94).

Marital conflict. A two-item conflict subscale of the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Busby et al., 1995) was used to measure marital conflict. The RDAS scale has been found to be valid and reliable among Chinese heterosexual couples (Li & Zheng, 2017). Participants indicated their frequency of conflict with their wives (e.g., “How often do you and your wife quarrel?”) on a 6-point Likert-type scale (0 = Never, 6 = All the time). $\alpha = .69$, 95% CI (.46, .82).

Marital commitment. A seven-item commitment subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) was used to assess participants’ commitment to their

heterosexual marriage. The commitment subscale has been found to be valid and reliable among both heterosexual (Zhang & Malhi, 2014) and sexual minority couples (Shieh, 2010) in Chinese societies. Participants indicated their commitment to their current marriage (e.g., “I want our marriage to last forever.”) on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = do not agree at all, 6 = agree completely). $\alpha = .85$, 95% CI (.78, .91).

Same-sex relationship quality

The same three measures assessing *marital relationship quality* were used to measure qualities of *same-sex relationship*, with all item wordings referring to participants’ current (most important) same-sex partners instead of wives. We changed the word “marriage” to “same-sex relationship.” Although two of these three measures have not been used among sexual minority couples in China due to the paucity of research on this group, all of them have been found to be valid and reliable in measuring same-sex relationship qualities in Western societies (Belous & Wampler, 2016; Greene & Britton, 2015; Kurdek, 1992). In the current study, α s = .93, 95% CI (.89, .96) for satisfaction; .76, 95% CI (.58, .86) for conflict; and .86, 95% CI (.79, .91) for commitment.

Sexual identity

A nine-item short form of the LGB identity scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011) was used to assess the extent to which participants were comfortable with their gay and bisexual identity—that is, the extent to which one internalizes homophobia, conceals same-sex relationships, and expects unacceptance from others towards their same-sex desire. They indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about their self-perception of sexual identity (e.g., “I wish I were heterosexual.”) on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 6 =

Strongly agree). All items were reverse coded to reflect positive sexual identity. $\alpha = .83$, 95%CI (.75, .90).

Depressive symptoms

The ten-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Andresen et al., 1994) was used to measure participants' depressive symptoms. Participants indicated how often they experienced stated feelings in the past week (e.g., "I feel depressed.") on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 =rarely, 4 = all of the time). $\alpha = .87$, 95%CI (.82, .92)

Life Satisfaction

The five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure participants' life satisfaction. They indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about their life (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life.") on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree). $\alpha = .84$, 95% CI (.77, .90).

Loneliness

An eight-item revised short form of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) was used to assess participants' loneliness. They were asked how often they experienced loneliness (e.g., "I feel left out.") on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never, 4 = Often). $\alpha = .76$, 95% CI (.65, .85).

Data Analysis

To answer the question of whether positive sexual identity is significantly and correlated with measures of psychological adjustment (i.e., depression, life satisfaction, and loneliness), bivariate correlations were conducted. To answer the question of whether there are significant differences between the dimensions of marital relationship quality and those of same-sex relationship quality among gay men in MOMs, paired sample *t*-tests were conducted. Finally, to

examine the unique contributions of positive sexual identity and relationship qualities to psychological adjustment, multiple regression analyses were conducted.

Before conducting multiple regression analyses, we examined the correlations between demographic variables (age, educational attainment, income, years of marriage, years of same-sex relationships, and outness to mothers and fathers) and our criterion variables (i.e., depression, life satisfaction, loneliness) in order to decide what to control in the regression models.

Considering that only income (with depression $r = -.29$, $p = .040$ and life satisfaction $r = .41$, $p = .002$) and outness to mother (only significantly correlated with depression, $r_{pb} = -.32$, $p = .029$) were significantly correlated with at least one of the criterion variables, we included them as covariates in the regression models. Given that the dimensions of marital relationship quality are highly intercorrelated, we calculated an index of overall marital relationship quality [$\alpha = .91$, 95% CI (.86, .94)] by averaging all item scores of the three scales (conflict being reverse coded) to address the issue of multicollinearity. We did the same to generate an index for overall same-sex relationship quality [$\alpha = .88$, 95% CI (.82, .92)]. Descriptive statistics and correlations among main variables are presented in Table 1.

We also screened for missing data. Most measures had only 2 or 3 missing values, with positive sexual identity and depressive symptoms have the most missing values (both $ns = 5$; 9.26%). Results from Little's MCAR (missing completely at random) test indicated that data were missing completely at random, $\chi^2(34, N = 54) = 36.99$, $p = .33$ (Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010). Data were then imputed with income and outness to mother as auxiliary variables in Stata 15 using multiple imputation with 20 times repetition (Rubin, 1996). Thus, three multiple regressions were performed using multiple imputation estimations. In each model, we included

income, outness to mother (0 = no, 1 = yes), positive sexual identity, overall marital relationship quality, and overall same-sex relationship quality.

Results

Was Positive LGB Identity Correlated with Measures of Psychological Adjustment?

As can be seen in Table 1, consistent with our hypothesis, positive sexual identity was significantly correlated with depression ($r = -.34, p = .02$) and loneliness ($r = -.37, p = .008$). However, positive LGB identity was not significantly correlated with life satisfaction. Of note is that positive sexual identity was significantly and negatively correlated with overall same-sex relationship quality ($r = -.42, p = .004$), suggesting that gay men in MOMs with higher levels of positive sexual identity were more likely to report significantly lower quality of same-sex relationship.

Do Dimensions of Marital Relationship Quality Significantly Differ from Those of Same-Sex Relationship Quality?

As can be seen in Table 2, consistent with our hypotheses, results showed that gay men in MOMs reported significantly higher levels of overall same-sex relationship quality than overall marital relationship quality, $t(44) = -5.24, p < .001, d = -.78$. In particular, they reported higher levels of satisfaction, $t(49) = -3.96, p < .001, d = -.56$, higher levels of commitment, $t(48) = -4.94, p < .001, d = -.71$ and lower levels of conflict, $t(51) = 6.97, p < .001, d = .97$, in their same-sex relationship than in their marital relationship. Contrary to our hypothesis, there were few significant associations between dimensions of marital relationship qualities and same-sex relationship qualities. The correlation between marital conflict and same-sex relationship commitment was marginally significant ($r = .26, p = .068$); all other associations across dimensions of these two types of relationships were not significant.

Which Factors Make Unique Contributions to Sexual Minority Men's Psychological Adjustment?

Depression

Results suggested that positive LGB identity and income were significant predictors of depression. The full model, inclusive of 5 predictors, was significant, [$R^2 = .314$; Adjusted $R^2 = .242$; $F(5, 43.6) = 3.22, p = .015$]. The only significant predictors were income and positive sexual identity, $B (SE) = -.23 (.11), p = .045, \beta = -.29$; $B (SE) = -.28 (.10), p = .009, \beta = -.44$, respectively. Thus, overall marital relationship quality and same-sex relationship quality were not significant predictors of depression, suggesting that relationship qualities were not as important as positive sexual identity for sexual minority men's depression. Results are presented in Table 3.

Life satisfaction

Results suggested that overall marital relationship quality, positive sexual identity, and income were significant predictors of life satisfaction. The full model was significant [$R^2 = .413$; Adjusted $R^2 = .352$; $F(5, 45.4) = 5.96, p < .001$], with overall marital relationship quality, positive sexual identity, and income being the significant predictors, $B (SE) = .41 (.12), p = .001, \beta = .44$; $B (SE) = .32 (.14), p = .024, \beta = .31$; $B (SE) = .43 (.16), p = .008, \beta = .33$, respectively. Therefore, overall same-sex relationship quality did not have significant associations with life satisfaction, whereas overall marital relationship quality significantly contributed to life satisfaction of sexual minority men in MOMs. Results are presented in Table 4.

Loneliness

Results suggested that positive sexual identity and overall marital relationship quality were significant predictors of participants' loneliness, whereas overall same-sex relationship

quality was not. The full model was significant [$R^2 = .278$; Adjusted $R^2 = .202$; $F(5, 45.6) = 3.32$, $p < .012$]. Positive sexual identity was a significant predictor, $B (SE) = -.27 (.09)$, $p = .004$, $\beta = -.45$. Overall marital relationship quality was significantly and negatively associated with loneliness, $B (SE) = -.16 (.07)$, $p = .036$, $\beta = -.29$, suggesting that higher levels of overall marital relationship quality among sexual minority men in MOMs were associated with lower levels of loneliness. Thus, whereas overall same-sex relationship quality was not a significant predictor of loneliness, positive sexual identity and overall marital relationship quality were significantly and negatively associated with loneliness. Results are presented in Table 5.

Supplementary Analyses

Due to concern of the study sample size, we conducted post-hoc power analyses to determine the achieved power of the R^2 increase associated with the main variables of interest (i.e., positive sexual identity, overall marital relationship quality, and overall same-sex relationship quality) in the three regression models at the .05 alpha level. In each analysis, we first used hierarchical linear regression to calculate the R^2 increase indicating the special effect of the three main variables of interest. We then calculated the residual variance (i.e., $1 - R^2$ of the full model) to be entered with the R^2 increase in G*Power to determine the effect size. Post hoc power analyses showed that all three models had sufficiently achieved power at the .05 alpha level. For the model predicting depression, $F(3, 41.7) = 2.64$, $\Delta R^2 = .165$, $p = .062$, the achieved power of the R^2 increase was .84. For the model predicting life satisfaction, $F(3, 44.8) = 5.34$, $\Delta R^2 = .231$, $p = .003$, the achieved power of the R^2 increase was .97. The model predicting loneliness had an achieved power of .93, $F(3, 45.5) = 4.53$, $\Delta R^2 = .226$, $p = .007$.

Considering that dimensions of same-sex relationship qualities were not significantly correlated with each other (e.g., conflict & commitment, $r = -.23$, $p > .05$) as were dimensions of

marital relationship qualities, we investigated whether particular dimensions of same-sex relationship quality (i.e., satisfaction, conflict, and commitment) were significant predictors so that we could rule out the possibility that the creation of an index of same-sex relationship quality as a predictor obscured significant associations between dimensions of same-sex relationship qualities and the outcome variables. We repeated the regression analyses using each of the three dimensions instead of the overall same-sex relationship quality. Results were consistent with previous models that merged the three dimensions into an index of overall same-sex relationship quality. Of the nine analyses (three dimensions by three outcome variables), none of the indicators of same-sex relationship quality were significant predictors.

Discussion

The current study is the first to examine the mental health of gay men in MOMs in China, uncovering the relative contributions of marital relationship quality, same-sex relationship quality, and positive sexual identity to Chinese gay men's psychological adjustment. Results suggested that positive sexual identity and marital relationship quality were significantly associated with measures of psychological adjustment, whereas same-sex relationship quality was not. Consistent with previous research on sexual minority men from Western industrialized countries (e.g., Meyer, 2003), positive sexual identity in the current study was a significant predictor of psychological adjustment, highlighting the centrality of sexual identity for sexual minority men. In this unique sample, gay men in MOMs who were more comfortable with their sexual orientation (i.e., more positive sexual identity) reported significantly lower levels of depression and loneliness as well as higher levels of life satisfaction. These results would suggest that the extent to which gay men are comfortable with their sexual orientation or have less internalization of societal stigma towards same-sex desire is of great importance for their

psychological adjustment, even in marital and cultural contexts that might be suppressive towards their sexual identity.

Interestingly, positive sexual identity was also a significant predictor of life satisfaction for gay men in MOMs, despite the lack of a significant correlation between these two measures at the bivariate level. This would suggest that after controlling for other factors (e.g., marital relationship qualities, same-sex relationship qualities), positive sexual identity was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction for Chinese gay men in MOMs. A previous study on sexual minority young adults in China, however, reveals that measures of sexual identity were not a significant predictor of life satisfaction, whereas educational attainment was (Shao et al., 2018). This contrast may illustrate the fact that the effects of positive sexual identity on life satisfaction might differ for sexual minority persons at different developmental stages. Whereas a positive sexual identity might bring about higher levels of life satisfaction for middle-aged gay men in MOMs, the sources of life satisfaction for sexual minority young adults might come from elsewhere. Thus, future research should further examine how factors such as positive sexual identity might shape positive and negative aspects of psychological adjustment differently among various groups of sexual minority individuals.

Contrary to our hypothesis, there were few significant correlations between measures of marital relationship quality and measures of same-sex relationship quality. This might pinpoint the fact that gay men in MOMs usually keep their marital relationship and same-sex relationship separate as a way to protect themselves when navigating a social world that is highly stigmatizing towards their sexual orientation. As Zheng (2015) noted, gay men in China manage their romantic relationships as if they were living in two worlds, such that they often keep their same-sex relationship private so that they could appear “heterosexual” to others. Despite the

absence of significant correlations, of interest are the significant differences between the dimensions of marital relationship quality and those of same-sex relationship quality. Consistent with our hypothesis, gay men in MOMs reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction and commitment and lower levels of conflict in their same-sex relationships than in their marital relationships. Even though this group of men chose to marry a woman, they reported more enjoyment in their same-sex relationships, which might suggest that being in a heterosexual marriage did not disrupt their enjoyment pursuing same-sex desire. Indeed, as Xing (2012) indicated, MOM can at times serve as a protection wherein married sexual minority men in China can appear heterosexual (i.e., “normal”) while engaging in same-sex relationships.

Multiple regression analyses showed that overall marital relationship quality was significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction and significantly and negatively associated with loneliness, whereas overall same-sex relationship quality was not significantly associated with any of psychological adjustment measures, which disconfirmed our hypothesis. This might suggest that gay men in MOMs might have already perceived heterosexual marriage as an important part of their life and a necessity to fulfill social obligations, whereas same-sex relationships were not as serious even though they reported more desire of commitment to it than to their marriage. Indeed, Li et al. (2010) indicated that many married gay men in China viewed heterosexual marriage as “natural” and a social obligation that “could not be challenged” (p. 405). As such, higher marital relationship quality might give rise to one’s feeling of being a responsible man and presumably more social resources and capital in the Chinese society, resulting in higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of loneliness. However, the reverse is also possible, such that gay men with better psychological adjustment might be more likely to

maintain better relationships with their wives. Therefore, future studies of gay men in MOMs should implement longitudinal design to test causal relations between these variables.

Although the fact that both positive sexual identity and overall marital relationship quality were significantly associated with measures of psychological adjustment might seem to be contradictory, this might substantiate the consistent demonstration of cultural anthropologists that same-sex desire and relational intimacies can indeed co-exist in “traditional” marriage in non-Western societies (e.g., gay men marrying women; Boellstorff, 2005). However, given the positive association between sexual identity and relationship qualities among US sexual minorities (Mohr & Daly, 2008), a counterintuitive finding of the current study is that positive sexual identity was significantly and negatively associated with same-sex relationship quality, which further pinpoints the importance of cultural contexts in shaping sexuality and relationship dynamics for gay men in China. Arguably, whereas gay men in China with more positive sexual identity might have better psychological adjustment, the quality of their same-sex relationship might suffer due to the heteronormative sociocultural contexts that in part results in their MOM in tandem with their impossibility to engage in same-sex relationships freely and openly. Taken together, the relations between sexual identity and relationship qualities and their implications for mental health might be complex and nuanced for sexual minority men in non-Western societies. Future studies should examine such associations and their health implications for sexual minority men in other non-Western societies as well as the decisions, negotiations, and strategies gay men in MOMs would make in navigating two types of relationships.

Although we believe that our study is one of the first to explore the associations between relationship quality and mental health in this understudied population, its contributions should be considered in light of its limitations. First, although gay men in the study reported that their

wives are heterosexual, relying on such reports may be problematic. Similar to how wives perceived their gay husbands to be heterosexual, gay men's perceptions of their wives being heterosexual may not always be accurate. Second, due to low visibility of this group of men, recruiting a large sample was challenging, resulting in a small sample size, which makes it harder to detect more complex effects of predictor variables. Third, selection bias is also possible. Considering that many gay men in MOMs keep their same-sex relationship rather private to appear "heterosexual" (Xing 2012), participants who completed the survey might already be more accepting towards their sexual orientation. On the other hand, it could also be that gay men who are suffering in MOMs decide to join online organizations and support groups to cope. Social desirability might also have affected how they had responded to measures of same-sex relationships and sexual identities, given that same-sex desire is socially stigmatized. Thus, our results are not generalizable to all sexual minority men in MOMs and thus should be interpreted within the Chinese sociocultural context and with considerations of specific familial and relationship dynamics.

Future studies could utilize in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork to examine the ways in which gay men in MOMs are qualitatively different from or similar to other groups of sexual minority men, such as those who are in MOMs but do not engage in same-sex relationships. Despite these limitations, our study showed that positive sexual identity and marital relationship quality were significantly associated with certain dimensions of mental health of gay men in MOMs, whereas same-sex relationship quality was not a significant predictor. We hope that our study is a starting point for new lines of research on such an understudied population. Future research should utilize larger samples and longitudinal designs

to better examine factors that influence mental health of gay and other sexual minority men in MOMs.

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Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Main Variables*

	<i>M (SD)</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. PSI	3.07 (0.91)	-.07	.15	-.06	-.10	-.32*	.39**	-.36*	-.42**	-.34*	.20	-.37**
2. Marital satisfaction	2.97 (1.43)	--	-.66***	.72***	.89***	-.03	.05	-.12	-.06	-.28†	.41**	-.37**
3. Marital conflict	3.27 (0.95)		--	-.59***	-.73***	-.04	.14	.26†	.09	.10	-.28*	.14
4. Marital commitment	3.07 (1.04)			--	.94***	-.004	-.05	-.13	-.03	-.14	.43**	-.17
5. Overall MRQ	3.15 (0.98)				--	.004	-.09	-.10	.01	-.25	.49***	-.28†
6. SSR satisfaction	4.10 (1.16)					--	-.35*	.56***	.80***	-.06	-.03	-.06
7. SSR conflict	2.11 (0.86)						--	-.23	-.46***	-.27†	-.02	-.25†
8. SSR commitment	4.18 (1.00)							--	.93***	.04	-.18	.20
9. Overall SRQ	4.24 (0.83)								--	.06	-.08	.16
10. Depression	2.16 (0.58)									--	-.43**	.62***
11. Life satisfaction	2.96 (0.96)										--	-.45***
12. Loneliness	2.63 (0.56)											--

Note. PSI = Positive sexual identity; MRQ = Marital relationship quality; SSR = Same-sex relationship; SRQ = Same-sex relationship quality. Conflict is reversely coded in calculating overall relationship quality. † $p < .08$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 2*Results of Paired Sample t-tests and Descriptive Statistics by Relationship Type*

	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
	Marital relationship	Same-sex relationship		
Satisfaction	3.01 (1.42)	4.04 (1.13)	-3.96*	-.56
Conflict	3.27 (0.95)	2.12 (0.87)	6.97*	.97
Commitment	3.06 (1.04)	4.09 (0.87)	-4.94*	-.71
Overall relationship quality	3.19 (0.96)	4.16 (0.80)	-5.24*	-.78

Note. Conflict is reversely coded in calculating overall relationship quality. * $p < .001$.

Table 3*Multiple Regression Predicting Depression*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Income	-.23	.11	-.29*
Outness to mother (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-.38	.23	-.22
Positive sexual identity	-.28	.10	-.44**
Marital relationship quality	-.06	.09	-.11
Same-sex relationship quality	-.11	.11	-.16
	Adj. R^2	.242*	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4*Multiple Regression Predicting Life Satisfaction*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Income	.43	.16	.33**
Outness to mother (0 = no, 1 = yes)	.25	.33	.09
Positive sexual identity	.32	.14	.31*
Marital relationship quality	.41	.12	.44***
Same-sex relationship quality	.12	.16	.11
		Adj. R^2	.352***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 5*Multiple Regression Predicting Loneliness*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Income	-.09	.10	-.12
Outness to mother (0 = no, 1 = yes)	-.18	.22	-.11
Positive sexual identity	-.27	.09	-.45**
Marital relationship quality	-.16	.07	-.29*
Same-sex relationship quality	-.05	.10	-.07
	Adjusted R^2	.202*	

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.