

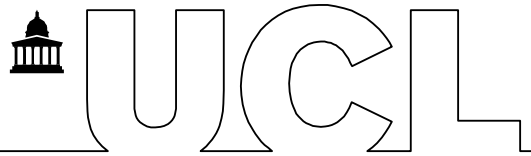
**COURSEWORK TITLE**

**Exploring the Growth Trajectories of Individuals Born in Mixed-Orientation  
Marriages:  
Insights under the Discourse of Heterosexual Hegemony in Contemporary China**

STUDENT NAME: SHUXIN LI

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# Abstract

This dissertation investigates the growth trajectories and prosperity of individuals born in mixed-orientation marriages (IBMOMs) in contemporary China, aiming to uncover how these family structures impact their lived experiences and overall happiness. Through qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with IBMOMs, the study explores their emotional experiences, coping mechanisms, family dynamics, and prosperity strategies on their life trajectories. The research identifies that IBMOMs' emotional responses are significantly influenced by the timing of their parents' LGBTQ identity disclosures and the nature of parental relationships. And heterosexual spouses' long-term psychological state often leads to profound distress for IBMOMs, affecting the formation of their self-identity and views on interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the study highlights that supportive family environments, effective coping strategies, and economic stability are crucial for IBMOMs' prosperity. Finally, the dissertation advocates for broader societal reforms, including the legalization of LGBTQ marriages and improved public understanding of LGBTQ issues, to reduce the challenges faced by IBMOMs and promote a more inclusive society.

Keywords: IBMOMs, mixed-orientation marriages, LGBTQ, China, emotional experiences, family dynamics, prosperity.

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## **List of abbreviations**

IBMOMs - Individuals Born in Mixed-Orientation Marriages

IPV - Intimate Partner Violence

IVF - In Vitro Fertilization

LGBQ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer

MOMs - Mixed-Orientation Marriages

MOREs - Mixed Orientation Relationships

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

UCL – University College London

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

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Figure 1- Breakdown of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in China as August 2014, by age. (Source: Community Marketing & Insights @Statista 2024)

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Motivations

Mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs) refer to partnerships where one individual experience distinct same-sex attractions and may identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer (including pansexual, omniseual and asexual) while the other spouse identifies as heterosexual with no same-sex attractions (Buxton, 2000; Tornello & Patterson, 2012; Kays et al., 2013). People enter into such marriages for various reasons, including social pressure, personal beliefs, or a desire to conform to familial expectations of heterosexual relationships (Herek, 2004; Schwartz, 2012).

Particularly in China, the influence of traditional cultural values combined with contemporary government policies significantly impacts LGBTQ individuals' decisions to enter heterosexual marriages. Traditional Confucian values, which emphasize filial piety and societal harmony, place immense pressure on individuals to meet familial and social expectations on marriages and offspring (Hsu et al., 2001; Liu, 2007; Whyke, 2022). Additionally, the Chinese government's stance on LGBTQ issues, the lack of legal recognition for same-sex partnerships and the promoting policies on fertility further compel many LGBTQ individuals to conform to heterosexual norms to avoid social and legal repercussions (Zhu, 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Whyke, 2022). This dual influence of cultural and political factors results in a substantial number of LGBTQ individuals entering into MOMs.

China has one of the largest LGBTQ populations in the world, amounting to at least 47.5 million (Xie & Peng, 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Axelsdóttir, 2016). Such a large demographic group yet faces severe discrimination and exclusion in many parts of China today (Zhao, 2024). However, throughout Chinese history, homosexual relationships were not always prohibited and even received a certain level of acceptance during some periods and within specific cultural contexts (Ruan & Tsai, 1987; Hinsch, 1992; Xie & Peng, 2017). During times of social upheaval or cultural flourishing, such as the Wei-Jin periods and Tang dynasty, there was greater expression of individual desires, and homosexual themes were more visibly portrayed in poetry, literature, and art (Axelsdóttir, 2016; Pickett, 2022). However, for the lower classes of society and in periods where Confucianism was particularly influential, such as the Song and Ming dynasties, homosexuality and other non-heterosexual behaviours were often seen as a violation of ethical and social norms, as the traditional family roles emphasised by Confucianism were more strictly enforced there (Louie & Low, 2003; Li, 2021). In modern China, attitudes towards the LGBTQ community continue to reflect a contradictory mix. On one hand, the influx of Western culture brought about movements advocating science, democracy, and individual rights, allowing

gender issues to be discussed more openly (Axelsdóttir, 2016). On the other hand, the concept of homosexuality as a mental disorder also began to influence China, leading to the stigmatization of the LGBTQ community (Wu, 2008; Drescher, 2014). This stigmatization improved somewhat only after 1997 when arrests of LGBTQ individuals under the charge of “hooliganism” ceased and in 2003 when homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness, marking its depathologization (Axelsdóttir, 2016; Jeffreys, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). However, same-sex marriages are still not recognized, and discrimination persists (Wang et al., 2019). The reform and opening up in 1978 introduced Western media and Internet culture to China, which fostered a gradual softening of attitudes towards LGBTQ issues and the flourishing of queer-related spaces (Pan, 2006; Kong, 2016). However, these developments were met with governmental surveillance and societal conservatism, especially as the global HIV epidemic began highlighting the high risks among men who have sex with men, reinforcing stigma against the LGBTQ community (Wu, 2008; Huang, 2020). Many LGBTQ individuals continued to remain closeted, and gender-related education remained limited (Cui, 2009; Xie & Peng, 2017). Pressured by traditional family values, many homosexuals still opted for heterosexual or cooperative marriages (Liu, 2013).

Within this background, we can speculate that China is probably the country with the most mixed-orientation marriages (MOMs), a significant portion of which remains invisible, making the Chinese context a critical area for exploring the dynamics and implications of such marriages.

Buxton (2006) noted that, children are involved for the majority of MOMs families. Previous research also shows that the majority of children with LGBT parents are still born into MOMs families nowadays, where one parent has come out after being previously married (Snow, 2013). And in China, family pressure to carry on the lineage is an enormous contributor to MOMs, which means many children are born into such family structures. However, unlike heterosexual spouses or the coming-out LGBTQ parent in MOMs who have become a recognized minority group in society and attracted increasing attention and discussion regarding their well-being (Li et al., 2016, Chow et al., 2013), the children have frequently been marginalized in those research studies, being treated merely as adjuncts in a MOMs family structure and often glossed over in the results or recommendations sections. While these children, as individuals, possess their own subjectivity and cannot be disregarded, particularly considering the vulnerability they face due to their parents’ mixed-orientation status (Goldberg et al., 2012). Therefore, this study defines a unifying term for these children, individuals born in mixed-orientation marriages, which can be abbreviated to “IBMOMs”, and deserves to be seen and explored.

## 1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the growth trajectories and prosperity of individuals born in mixed-orientation marriages (IBMOMs) in contemporary China, which includes exploring the unique challenges, lived experiences and family relationships of IBMOMs. It also aims to provide a novel perspective to observe the current heterosexual hegemonic marital relationships in China, and understanding how these factors shape their identities and overall happiness.

To achieve this, the following objectives have been established:

1. To analyze the emotional experiences encountered by IBMOMs during their growth;
2. To explore how family dynamics influence IBMOMs' perceptions of identity and relationships;
3. To identify and evaluate the factors that contribute to the prosperity of IBMOMs;
4. To propose strategies to help IBMOMs attain happiness.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The main focus of the research is to explore the lived experiences of IBMOMs and specific research questions are listed below:

1. **What emotional experiences do IBMOMs encounter during their growth, and how do they cope with these emotions?**

This question mainly focuses on identifying the emotional impact of LGBTQ parents on IBMOMs and the strategies they use to manage these emotions.

2. **How does the state of heterosexual spouses who stayed in MOMs affect the well-being of IBMOMs?**

This question mainly focuses on the impact on identity formation and psychological health of IBMOMs caused by heterosexual spouses.

3. **What factors contribute to the prosperity of IBMOMs, and how can it be achieved?**

This question seeks to determine the key elements that foster the well-being and prosperity of IBMOMs, and the measures necessary to support their growth

## 1.4 Structure

For this dissertation, Chapter 2 conducts a literature review that compares China and Western countries, analyzes the reasons LGBTQ individuals enter MOMs from multiple dimensions. It also reviews existing research on IBMOMs, identifying research gaps and establishing the theoretical foundations for the study. Chapter 3 details the methodology, outlining the inductive and qualitative research approaches adopted, methods of data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations. Chapter 4 integrates findings and

discussion, which allows the discussion to follow immediately after each finding, enhancing the narrative flow and preventing readers from getting lost. This chapter also addresses the study's limitations and outlines directions for future research. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by directly answering the three research questions and summarizing the study's contributions on the basis of a background review.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review consists of five parts. It begins by defining the key terms “LGBQ” and “Heterosexual Hegemony”. Secondly, it traces the development and focuses of Western research on MOMs, including the unique experiences of IBMOMs. The review then explores the Chinese context, where traditional values and modern policies intersect, creating distinct narratives that shape the understanding of MOMs and IBMOMs. This comparison highlights existing research gaps and outlines potential areas for further investigation. Finally, the review introduces the concepts of life course trajectory and Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, which underpin the theoretical framework of this study.

### **2.1 Definition of Key Terms**

#### **2.1.1 LGBQ**

LGBQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identities. This term encompasses a spectrum of sexual orientations distinct from heterosexuality (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013). This dissertation focuses specifically on LGBQ individuals, excluding the “T” for transgender from LGBTQ, due to the unique and significantly different challenges transgender individuals face, particularly in contexts like marriage and reproduction, which require a separate, focused study to address adequately (Tadlock et al., 2017; Ecker et al., 2019).

#### **2.1.2 Heterosexual Hegemony**

Heterosexual hegemony, distinct from heterosexual desire, focuses on constructing and maintaining a socio-cultural environment where heterosexual relationships are viewed as the orthodox and desirable paradigm of life (Myers & Raymond, 2010). Within this framework, foundational social activities such as family and marriage are exclusively formed by heterosexuality, while other sexual orientations are marginalized or deemed inferior (Herz & Johansson, 2015). This rigid definition of gender roles and sexual orientations leads to widespread oppression of LGBQ individuals (Dean, 2013; Lasio et al., 2018). And for IBMOMs, this cultural environment restricts their understanding and acceptance of their own identities, as their existence inherently challenges this hegemonic structure. Thus, examining the life trajectories of IBMOMs under heterosexual hegemony is crucial for uncovering hidden social pressures and developing more inclusive support mechanisms.

Moreover, Jackson (1999) noted that “everyday heterosexuality is not simply about sex, but is perpetuated by the regulation of marriage and family life, divisions of waged and

domestic labour, patterns of economic support and dependency” (p.26). Consequently, heterosexual desire is also recognized as the foundation of dominant masculinity, systemically upholding patriarchal societies, which in turn impacts the life experiences of individuals in MOMs, especially when they seek to challenge or escape these traditional frameworks (Connell, 1987; Dean, 2013; Herz & Johansson, 2015). Therefore, this emphasis on heterosexual hegemony in this dissertation concerns not only about the rights of LGBTQ and other minorities, but also points to the entire system of heteronormativity as the basis of social and cultural institutions.

## **2.2 Western Perspectives on Mixed-Orientation Marriages and Their Impact**

### **2.2.1 Research on Mixed-Orientation Marriages in the West**

In contemporary society, MOMs serve as a critical subject for understanding how heterosexual hegemony influences the lives of generations of LGBTQ people (Lasio et al., 2018). While the West has progressively embraced broader family structures and sexual diversity, estimating the number of people in MOMs is inherently challenging due to privacy concerns regarding sex orientation, varying definitions towards MOMs, and a lack of systematic data collection among different countries (Baunach, 2012; Tornello & Patterson, 2012; Hille et al., 2019). Moreover, existing data, such as the estimates of 17,000 men in Australia and over two million in the United States who are in MOMs, are outdated (Buxton, 1994; Hopwood et al., 2019). The only thing that is certain, however, is that hundreds of millions of people around the world are in these relationships due to the hidden nature of MOMs, underscoring the need for updated research (Buxton, 1994; Ross, 1989).

Research on MOMs has come a long way in the West over the past three decades (Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016). Hernandez et al. (2010) summarized Western researches on MOMs from 1988 to 2008, identifying five key themes: “(a) Negotiating MOM, (b) Heterosexual Wives, (c) Bisexual and Gay Husbands, (d) Bisexual and Gay Husband Challenges, and (e) Clinical Practice Issues” (p.308), and noted that MOMs relationships are so complex that they require considerable flexibility and profound understanding.

#### **2.2.1.1 Bisexual and Gay Husbands**

Initial academic research on MOMs primarily focused on the experiences of homosexual/bisexual men, with less attention given to children or lesbian/bisexual women (Hernandez et al., 2010; Tornello & Patterson, 2012; Hopwood et al., 2019). Malcolm (2002) found that due to cognitive dissonance driven by same-sex attraction, married homosexual men experienced significantly higher stress levels compared to married bisexual men and

unmarried homosexual/bisexual men. Tornello and Patterson (2012) found that while levels of parenting stress and the closeness of parenting collaborations with heterosexual partners were not significantly related to whether gay fathers stayed in MOMs relationships, those fathers with male partners reported much higher levels of satisfaction and emotional well-being in their relationships compared to those who stayed in MOMs relationships (Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016). Thus, these researches primarily highlight the psychological struggles of homosexual individuals in MOMs, especially their mental health challenges and the internal conflicts between their sexual identity and marital responsibilities (Kissil & Itzhaky, 2014; Hopwood et al., 2019).

### **2.2.1.2 Disclosure and Heterosexual Spouses**

The act of disclosure of a non-heterosexual orientation by one partner is another research priority, often marking a pivotal moment in these marriages and reshaping family interactions and individual well-being (Buxton, 2000, 2006). Researches indicate that roughly one-third of these couples separate within the first year after disclosure, with another third dissolving over the next two to three years. Only about one-sixth of couples manage to sustain their marriage beyond these initial years post-disclosure (Buxton, 2000). Stable marriages are more frequently observed among women who are married to bisexual men, particularly when those marriages involve open relationships and maintain effective communication (Hays & Samuels, 1990; Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). The focus of research thus has broadened to include the profound impacts on heterosexual spouses. Various studies have shown that heterosexual spouses often unknowingly marry someone with same-sex attractions, leading to feelings of “infidelity, trauma, and betrayal” upon disclosure (Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016, p.208). Therefore, heterosexual female spouses typically go through four major phases of recovery: initially addressing immediate concerns like secrecy, isolation, and financial struggles, subsequently tackling recurring emotional responses such as grief and anger, followed by enduring challenges like trust issues and depression, and ultimately advancing towards decisions about staying together or separating, with the potential for forgiveness (Grever, 2012; Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016). Buxton (2012) also found that heterosexual men married to lesbian or bisexual women described similar experiences, including negative feelings like sorrow, emotional pain and reduced self-esteem after disclosure.

While heterosexual spouses may experience disclosure as a destabilizing event, for sexual minorities in MOMs, disclosing orientation can sometimes be seen as an opportunity to redefine personal and shared belief systems, potentially reshaping their faith in a more inclusive manner (Buxton, 2006; Bradford, 2012). Thus, these distinctions underscore the importance of examining the specific conditions and timings of disclosure, as well as the varied responses from spouses, which hinge significantly on their initial expectations and

the existing status of their relationships (Bradford, 2012). However, despite the pressing need for expert guidance on tailored communication strategies and supportive interventions, many couples reported difficulty in finding therapists who were knowledgeable about MOMs (Buxton, 2004; Hernandez et al., 2010).

### **2.2.1.3 Reasons for LGBTQ Individuals Entering MOMs in the West**

In addition to the family dynamics at the onset and following the disclosure of MOMs relationships, a significant portion of related research has also explored the reasons why the LGBTQ community chooses to enter into such relationships (Legerski et al., 2016). Schwartz employs Carter and McGoldrick's model of Vertical and Horizontal Flow of Stress in the Family Life Cycle for analysis (Schwartz, 2012). Vertical stressors, which impact societal, community, and familial systems, encompass racism, sexism, homophobia, and discrimination, while horizontal stressors entail developmental, unpredictable, and historical events. For instance, when horizontal stress factors, such as reaching a certain age without being married, intersect with vertical stressors within family system (e.g., all cousins are already married) (Herek, 2004), an individual may perceive a social obligation to marry in order to gain acceptance (Schwartz, 2012).

Ortiz and Scott (1994) have categorized the motivations into two distinct types: "sex-role conservatism" and "marriage as a solution". "Sex-role conservatism" refers to marrying due to perceived obligations, shaped by societal expectations and family pressures that promote adherence to heterosexual standards (Ortiz & Scott, 1994). Research by multiple scholars provides insight into the pervasive nature of these pressures. Societal expectations are often conveyed through prevailing cultural narratives that equate success and normalcy with heteronormative milestones, such as marriage and procreation (Wolkomir, 2009; McNeill, 2013; Athan, 2020). Wolkomir (2009) pointed out that whether it involves LGBTQ individuals entering into marriages or couples divorcing after the disclosure, these behaviors intrinsically follow the binary gender expectations embedded in traditional societal discourse because "the presence of homosexual desire in their marriages permanently 'polluted' their ideological scripts for gender and marriage" (p.514). Family pressures could be even more direct and impactful. Higgins (2002) noted that although the societal pressure decreased after the legalization of same-sex marriages, the familial obligations and fundamentalist religious views ingrained from a young age led to self-depreciation. Families exerted pressure not only through overt statements but also through subtle cues and implications, clearly signaling that heterosexual marriage was the natural and expected path (Higgins, 2002; Pearcey, 2005; Yarhouse et al., 2011). The desire to "fit in" or the fear of losing familial bonds could be powerful motivators that pushed individuals towards decisions that aligned with societal and familial expectations, even at the cost of personal happiness and authenticity (Edser & Shea, 2002; Yarhouse et al., 2011).



As for “marriage as a solution”, this category offers an in-depth look at the more personal, internal conflicts faced by gay men, which encompasses conscious behaviors such as concealing, denying, or attempting to rectify feared same-sex attractions (Ortiz & Scott, 1994). Such motivations often stem from internalized homophobia, where religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping these internal motivations (Olson et al., 2006; Barringer et al., 2013). Numerous studies have emphasized that major religious doctrines across various faiths depict homosexual acts as unnatural and sinful, leading to a correlation between the level of homophobia and the intensity of an individual’s religious involvement (Higgins, 2004; Yip, 2005; Whitley, 2009; Ng et al., 2015). Christianity and Islam both traditionally view homosexual behavior as contrary to divine intentions, primarily emphasizing procreation as the purpose of human sexuality (Finke & Adamczyk, 2008; Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Both religions endorse the sanctity of heterosexual marriage based on creation narratives, presenting it as divinely mandated and normative, which makes acceptance of LGBTQ identities within these faith frameworks more challenging (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014; Xie & Peng, 2017). In many Islamic countries, this religious stance has been further codified into law, where homosexual acts are criminalized and severely punished, reinforcing the religious prohibition with state-enforced consequences (Hélie, 2004).

Research within more conservative religious communities such as Orthodox Judaism and Mormonism demonstrates how “sex-role conservatism” and “marriage as a solution” often intersect and manifest simultaneously under strict religious regulations, characterized by Orthodox Judaism’s complete obedience to rabbinical authority that prioritize family over the individual (Burdette et al., 2005; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2014). Similarly, these communities feature tight-knit bonds, as seen in Mormonism where forming heterosexual families is a commandment, typically resulting in higher marriage rates, lower divorce rates, and larger families (Heaton & Goodman, 1985; Legerski et al., 2016). Thus, LGBTQ members who believe in these religions often view entering into MOMs as a pathway to spiritual salvation and social acceptance, while heterosexual spouses may choose divorce after disclosure to maintain the purity of faith (Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Skidmore et al., 2023).

Influenced by a notable shift in Western societies’ attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals in recent years due to various LGBTQ campaigns, an increasing number of major religious denominations began to reinterpret their doctrines to be more inclusive, which publicly acknowledged LGBTQ rights, marking a significant departure from their past stances (Baunach, 2012; Endsjø, 2020). However, acceptance varies significantly, particularly in conservative religious sects where changes are more gradual and complex (Hernandez et al., 2010; Legerski et al., 2016). This disparity highlights the ongoing tension within religious communities as they navigate between traditional doctrines and the evolving social landscape regarding LGBTQ rights.

#### **2.2.1.4 From MOMs to MOREs**

While research into MOMs has evolved, the majority of the studies has relied on Buxton's conceptual framework, which primarily focuses on marriages between a "straight" spouse and a spouse with same-sex attraction (Buxton, 2000; Vencill & Wiljamaa, 2016). However, this definition has restricted the scope of research on mixed orientations by emphasizing the experience of the heterosexual spouse, often highlighting unhappy marital outcomes within MOMs (Buxton, 2011; Tasker et al., 2020). Therefore, Vencill and Wiljamaa (2016) expanded the concept of Mixed Orientation Relationships (MOREs) beyond traditional MOMs to include a broader range of dynamics like non-married partnerships and those without a "straight" partner, such as lesbian-bisexual partnerships, redefining mixed orientation as relationships simply with misaligned sexual orientations. This shift highlights the potential for MOREs to foster satisfying unions, as they allow spouses to "practice relational self-determination—making consistent, intentional, and self-motivated choices that benefit the relationship" (Ferreira De Melo, 2022, Abstract). By intentionally choosing to enter MOREs, couples often report more successful and mutually fulfilling relationships, demonstrating more possibilities and positivity than typically observed in MOMs (Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006).

#### **2.2.2 Studies on Individuals Born in Mixed-Orientation Marriages in the West**

While there is a wealth of research on MOMs, existing studies primarily concentrate on the immediate family members within MOMs, often neglecting the nuanced experiences of children born into these settings, which significantly differ from those of their parents (Goldberg et al., 2012; Tornello & Patterson, 2012).

Regnerus (2012) found that children whose parents transition to a same-sex relationship often encounter issues with identity, emotional security, and social acceptance, similar to the difficulties experienced by children from divorced or single-parent families. These challenges, reflecting the stigma around non-traditional family structures, underscoring the need for greater understanding and support mechanisms for IBMOMs. Buxton (2006) also pointed out that IBMOMs are impacted in six key areas, "sexuality, marriage, parenthood, identity, integrity, and belief system" (p.51). Snow's work in "How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent" (2013) provided a unique perspective by drawing directly from the narratives of IBMOMs. As a primary source, the documented stories offer firsthand insights into their feelings, corroborating the six key areas identified by Buxton.

Many IBMOMs struggle from an early age with confusion and isolation as they try to make sense of their non-traditional family structure. This struggle is exacerbated by the secrecy they keep to avoid negative reactions from peers and school, deepening their loneliness and psychological stress (Snow, 2013). As they grow, IBMOMs may question their own sexual

orientation due to societal expectations or assumptions, which is particularly stressful in homophobic environments (Snow, 2013). Furthermore, IBMOMs frequently meet loyalty conflicts, especially during divorce and custody disputes. Children often feel torn finding a balance between supporting their LGBTQ parent and the other, particularly if one parent disapproves of the other's sexual orientation (Snow, 2013). All these stresses are often seen in the adolescent period and result in a breakdown of belief system, fostering uncertainty about future choices and distrust of conventional values (Buxton, 2006).

Despite these challenges, many IBMOMs also report positive outcomes such as increased open-mindedness and a closer bond with their LGBTQ parent. This closer connection is often attributed to children perceiving their parents as being more honest with themselves, and "barriers to communication come down" after coming out (Snow, 2013, p.2). Additionally, the presence of a parent's new same-sex partner often introduces fresh perspectives and friend-like support, together fostering an inclusive atmosphere and providing diverse role models in harmonizing complex relationships with resilience (Snow, 2013). Understanding how these children recognize their identities and deal with relationships can inform support mechanisms and interventions, which necessitate further development (Buxton, 2005). As societal acceptance evolves, future studies may reveal differing outcomes for children raised in more accepting environments compared to those who grew up in less tolerant settings (Buxton, 2011).

## **2.3 Chinese Context**

To fully grasp why studying MOMs relationships and their impact on IBMOMs in China is particularly important, it's essential to delve into the historical and cultural context that shapes current societal attitudes. As scholars studying Chinese same-sex relationships and queer identity in China have pointed out, "the unique cultural landscape within China is key for understanding the complexities of this issue" (Liu, 2013, p.498). The significant differences in views on sexual orientation, gender roles, and marriage between Western countries and China necessitate a locally rooted analysis.

Firstly, the situation in China is quite different when it comes to religious influences. In China, only 10% of citizens believe that religion plays an important role in their lives and numerous religions have evolved from a mixture of several sources of beliefs, which are loosely defined and organized (Lin et al., 2016; Xie & Peng, 2017). Consequently, the pressures faced by Chinese LGBTQ individuals do not primarily stem from a rigid religious environment as seen in the West. Instead, these pressures are deeply rooted in other cultural and societal factors.

In China, the vertical and horizontal pressures mentioned above hold particular significance and differ significantly from Western culture. This divergence can be

attributed to China's historical implications, traditional culture, societal perceptions, and government policies.

### **2.3.1 China's Attitudes Toward LGBTQ in Historical Perspective**

The historical shifts presented in the introduction part demonstrate how societal attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals in China were not static but evolved with broader cultural, social, and political changes. China once held a relatively tolerant attitude towards the LGBTQ community, but engaging in same-sex activities does not equate to the acceptance or formation of a legitimate sexual identity (Liu, 2013). Both in ancient and modern times, this tolerance was based on individuals fulfilling their social obligations, such as establishing traditional heterosexual families and passing on the lineage (Ruan & Tsai, 1987; Hinsch, 1992). Additionally, as Wu (2008, p.118) noted, "same-sex encounters were only seen as behavior, not the core or some special nature of the person", one reason for the tolerance in ancient time towards homosexuality was that society had not constructed the concept of homosexuality as an identity, leaving them without a voice and making it impossible for LGBTQ to become a significant social issue, thus being long ignored by the ruling class (Li, 2021). With the introduction of Western ideas, the spread of LGBTQ concepts, and the establishment of the heterosexual monogamous system in China, the possibility of forming romantic relationships with the same sex outside the family was stifled, thus leading to the appearance of a shift from tolerance to a more restrictive attitude towards LGBTQ individuals. This societal context makes the experiences of the LGBTQ community and IBMOMs in China particularly unique and worthy of in-depth study.

### **2.3.2 Contemporary Reasons for LGBTQ Individuals Entering MOMs in China**

In contemporary China, a substantial proportion of the LGBTQ community continues to enter into MOMs. Unlike the individualistic approach in the West, the family-centered view that prioritizes family values over personal happiness has led nearly 80% of gay men to choose marriage with heterosexual women, with at least 24 million homosexuals being forced into or planning to enter such marriages (Zhang, 1994; Cui, 2009; Liu, 2013; Li, 2014). According to a 2016 UNDP report, 84.1% of married sexual minorities are in heterosexual marriages, and only 13.2% are in collaborative marriages (UNDP, 2016). And either type of marital relationship often causes immense psychological stress and pain for both parties (UNDP, 2016). Uninformed spouses, or children born into such unhealthy marital relationships, are even more innocent victims of such relationships (Zhang, 1994).

The prevalence of this phenomenon reveals the complex challenges faced by the Chinese LGBTQ community, which must balance personal sexual orientation with societal and cultural expectations. The choices made in this context are not merely personal affairs but results of societal and cultural forces. The following sections will delve into the specific

reasons driving LGBTQ individuals into these marriages, including cultural traditions, policy influences, the maintenance of heterosexual hegemony, and the longstanding lack of recognition of the LGBTQ community.

### **2.3.2.1 Cultural Traditions**

Agrarian culture and Confucian traditions profoundly influenced Chinese societal views on sexuality, particularly regarding family structure and lineage continuation.

Historically, Chinese dynasties promoted childbirth and agricultural productivity, as a large labor force was essential to compensate for low productivity and sustain the agrarian civilization, which is the cornerstone of Chinese society for millennia (Wang, 1994). This family-centred economic model therefore requires the production of offspring, especially strong male offspring, to ensure a stable labour force and food output, which are crucial for the entire family's survival and prosperity (Murowchick, 1994; Huang, 2018).

Confucian thought further reinforced these views. Confucianism advocates for close friendships, which, to some extent, facilitated romantic relationships between men and even indirectly promoted homosexual behavior (Crompton, 2003; Axelsdóttir, 2016). Yet, Confucius clearly defined male roles, to be respectful as a courtier, filial as a son, and benevolent as a father, which allowed for private homosexual relationships as long as heterosexual relationships were maintained publicly (Gerkin, 2009; Li, 2013). Although no religion outright forbids homosexuality, traditional Confucian culture profoundly influences Chinese and broader East Asian societies. In Japan and South Korea, tolerance for homosexuality remains lower than in the West, despite similar levels of economic development and sex education (Smith, 2011; Inglehart et al., 2014).

In Confucian ideals, the family is the foundation upon which individuals perform specific roles within society, emphasizing a hierarchical order where subordination maintains stability (Xie & Peng, 2017; Whyke, 2022). This philosophy not only mandates obedience to authority and traditional family values but also upholds the belief that the purpose of sexual activity is procreation within the framework of marriage, encapsulated by the classic saying, "among the three forms of filial piety, the worst is to have no descendants" (Yeh & Bedford, 2003; Yu et al., 2011). Filial piety, on the other hand, is one of the most valued virtues in Confucius' ideology, guiding the individual in how to interact with family members, especially parents and ancestors (Hu & Wang, 2013). This cultural tradition often places parents' expectations above all else, especially concerning marriage and offspring, because filial piety deeply ingrains the notions of heterosexuality and the continuation of family bloodline, where failure to pass on the generation, especially male heirs, would be seen as undutiful (Hwang, 1999; Hsu & Waters, 2001; Liu, 2007). Since same-sex couples are unable to have children in the traditional way, their incomplete family structure is seen

as a sign of unfiliality, contributing to the stigmatization of homosexuals (Xie & Peng, 2017; Yu et al., 2011). Moreover, the Doctrine of the Mean in Confucianism, which emphasizes being average and ordinary, advocates for choosing the path taken by the majority of the population to fulfil the family and social obligations of marriage and childbearing (Wang et al., 2020b). This is a common choice in Chinese collectivist societies to avoid being “othered” and bringing shame and stigma to the family’s reputation (Hu & Wang, 2013; Hua et al., 2019).

### **2.3.2.2 Policy Influences**

In China, the one-child policy implemented from 1979 to 2015 has profoundly shaped the social fabric (Gerkin, 2009). By mandating most couples could have only one child to contain excessively rapid population growth, today’s urban family structure typically consists of a couple, their four elderly parents, and one child (Wang & Fong, 2009). This family model deepened the dependency of family members on each other for social and economic support (Zavoretti, 2006; Wang, 2020). As social services such as education, housing, health care and retirement schemes became marketised and the job market environment grew more competitive, the generations born under the one-child policy became increasingly reliant on their parents’ economic support (Kuan, 2015; Attané, 2016; Wang, 2020). This, in turn, gave parents substantial control over their lives, expecting filial returns in the form of caring for them and making decisions about marriages and raising grandchildren, thereby reinforcing a heteronormative lifestyle (Zavoretti, 2006; Zhong & He, 2014; Hildebrandt, 2018).

The one-child policy was not only about controlling population growth but also about concentrating resources to raise a high-quality and competitive next generation (Greenhalgh, 2010). Therefore, scholars view the one-child policy as a “one-strike” policy, with no room for error or deviation from the prescribed societal roles (Attané, 2002). It effectively made each child the “only hope” of their family, resulting in a generation that is under extraordinary pressure to succeed financially, professionally, and in marriage, especially for those who are both in the LGBTQ community and are the “only children” (Hildebrandt, 2018). Under such pressures, they are more likely to experience intense familial expectations and constraints, leading them to enter into MOMs relationships (Wang et al., 2019).

The introduction of the two-child policy in 2016 and more recently the three-child policy aim to address the challenges of an aging population (Peng, 2019). However, these policy adjustments inadvertently increased the burden on the current generation of one child (Attané, 2016). Unmarried LGBTQ individuals are under increased familial pressure to marry, potentially leading to more MOMs in the future, while those already struggling in

heterosexual relationships imposed by societal expectations face pressures to have more than one child (Peng, 2019; Wang, 2020).

### **2.3.2.3 Heterosexual Hegemony in China**

In China, heterosexual hegemony is firmly institutionalized through societal channels like mass media that often stigmatize the LGBTQ community (Zhu et al., 2024), and through its legal framework, such as marriage laws, which enforce a monogamous heterosexual marriage system (Song et al., 2021). These laws clearly define marriage as between a man and a woman, thereby excluding LGBTQ individuals from the marital institution on a legal basis and preventing them from receiving the same social and legal benefits as their heterosexual counterparts (Liu, 2013). For example, LGBTQ individuals cohabiting with their partners find it difficult to protect their personal rights as heterosexual couples do, because the Chinese legal system does not acknowledge civil or domestic partnerships for same-sex couples, effectively treating them as unrelated individuals particularly in legal matters like property disputes (Luo, 2019; Wang, 2020).

Such limitations not only strip these couples of legal protections but also inhibit their access to services like in vitro fertilization (IVF) (Hildebrandt, 2018). Government regulations stipulate that only legally married couples can access IVF treatments, compelling many to seek such services abroad at a high financial cost (Jourdan, 2015; Kuhn, 2016). Moreover, the adoption laws in China further marginalize LGBTQ individuals by allowing single parent adoptions but explicitly barring same-sex couples from adopting (Hildebrandt, 2018; Wang & Zheng, 2021). These singles are also prohibited from disclosing their sexual orientation, which perpetuates the invisibility and societal ignorance of the LGBTQ community's familial and reproductive needs (Hildebrandt, 2018). This legislative environment underscores a broader societal reluctance to recognize and support the rights and identities of the LGBTQ community, maintaining a status quo where traditional family structures are promoted and alternative family forms are ignored (Liu, 2013).

The hegemonic presence of heterosexuality in China is also evident in LGBTQ motivations for choosing marriage. Li (2009) noted that pursuing a divorced status can serve as a strategy for LGBTQ individuals to reduce social interference. Unmarried individuals, often face constant social pressure, while divorced individuals are subject to much less social scrutiny (Li, 2009). This stark difference highlights a subtle aspect of heterosexual dominance and the Chinese societal emphasis on one's "reputation", compelling LGBTQ individuals to conform to traditional marital expectations to find respite from societal demands.

### 2.3.2.4 Persistent Gaps in LGBQ Awareness

With increasing awareness and acceptance of gender and sexual orientation diversity, more people, especially millennials, are willing to be open about their identities, making the number of LGBQ people ostensibly on the rise (Newport, 2018; White et al., 2020). Whereas the age distribution survey for China's LGBT community in the Figure 1 shows a significant decline in self-identification as LGBT with increasing age, which may suggest that lack of sex education and awareness in China in early years could be linked to this trend (Community Marketing & Insights, 2014). The topic of sexual diversity is often ignored or misrepresented in Chinese education and public discourse, leading many LGBQ individuals to only begin understanding their sexual orientation after marriage, causing personal and familial conflicts (Chen, 2017). The public's understanding of the LGBQ community also lacks depth and empathy, and insufficient or incorrect social messaging has even resulted in the stigmatisation of the LGBQ community (UNDP, 2016). Under these circumstances, LGBQ individuals face not only internal confusion about their sexual orientation, but also external social discrimination and exclusion, which together push them to hide their sexual orientation in order to fit into society.

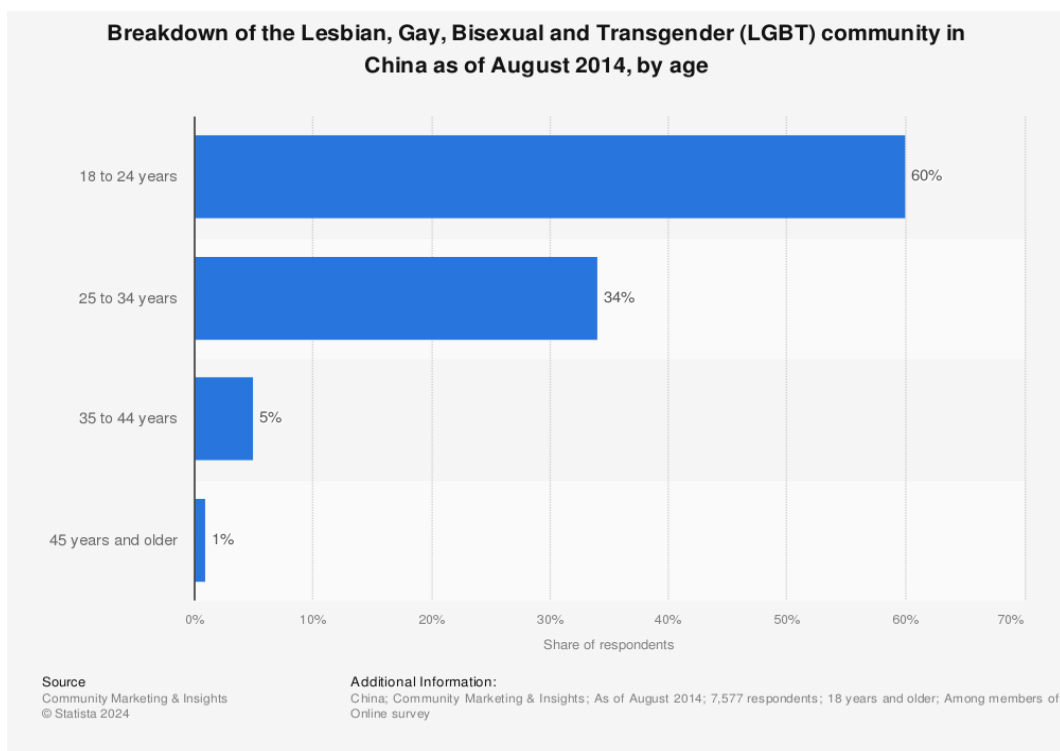


Figure 1- Breakdown of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community in China as August 2014, by age (Source: Community Marketing & Insights @Statista 2024)



### 2.3.3 Intersectionality

While previous section has illuminated the varied pressures that compel Chinese LGBTQ individuals to enter into MOMs, this section shifts focus to the spouses of these LGBTQ individuals, as it is crucial to recognize the implications of these marriages extend beyond the LGBTQ individuals themselves.

Driven by the strong patriarchal values in China, men are often burdened with the familial expectation to continue the family lineage, leading many to seek heterosexual marriages and pursue childbearing more urgently (Li et al., 2016; Song & Ji, 2020). This context results in a huge number of heterosexual women, estimated at 13.6 million, entering MOMs without knowing their partner's true sexual orientation, thus becoming "Tongqi" (Liu et al., 2015). While heterosexual men also become "Tongfu" under similar circumstances, their numbers remain less documented and receives less societal attention (Zhu, 2017; Li et al., 2021; Tsang, 2021; Song et al., 2023). These two terms each contain two characters: "tong [同]" refers to "homosexual", "qi [妻]" means "wife", and "fu [夫]" stands for "husband" in Chinese. Tongqi and Tongfu, despite sharing the experience of being in a MOM, face distinctly different challenges (Kam, 2008; Ji et al., 2021). This divergence largely stems from intersectional factors that significantly heighten the challenges for Tongqi compared to Tongfu, underscoring why the issues faced by Tongqi deserve more attention.

The concept of intersectionality is vital in comprehending how gender, class, and race intersect to shape outcomes in various social spheres and how marginalized groups resist overlapping inequalities (Ferree, 2010). Social contexts are shaped by intersecting systems of power and oppression, and these dynamics influence individual experiences and societal outcomes (Bograd, 1999; McCall, 2005). For instance, both Tongqi and Tongfu belong to minority groups who passively enter MOMs, however, patriarchal traditions dictate women's roles in reproductive functions and household duties, reinforcing gender inequalities (Lui, 2017). Thus, gender inequality should be incorporated into the analysis of Tongqi and Tongfu's experiences within the Chinese context as it shapes different social experiences and interactions, especially when seeking divorce or custody of children.

In Chinese societies, women often find themselves in disadvantaged positions, especially within marital relationships. When Tongqi discover that their husbands are homosexual and choose to divorce, they face a series of difficulties and suffer from "profound intimate partner violence (IPV, i.e., physical abuse, verbal abuse, and emotional abuse), suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, depressive symptoms, anal sex coercion, and at risk of sexual transmitted diseases" (Wang et al., 2020a, p.2). Firstly, some Tongqi may find it difficult to divorce as they concern about "the impact on their children and parents, as well as the likelihood of uneven property distribution" (Li et al., 2016, p.951), and divorce may attract

social condemnation and pressure from family, friends, community, and even the media. Secondly, the traditional gender pattern of “man responsible for the outside, woman responsible for the inside” has led many women to become housewives after marriage, relying entirely on their husbands and making them financially vulnerable in the event of a separation (Fang & Walker, 2015, p.3). Thirdly, even if Tongqi initiate divorce proceedings, child custody often goes to the husband, as Chinese marriage law typically only acknowledge heterosexual cheating behaviour, not those engaged in same-sex affairs (Li et al., 2016). Moreover, traditional beliefs deem children better suited to live with their fathers who may provide better financial conditions (Fan, 2016; Tsang, 2021). Consequently, Tongqi must weigh the severe impact of potential societal pressure, financial instability and the risk of losing custody against the emotional toll of remaining in such marriages (Li et al., 2016). As mentioned earlier in the definition of heterosexual hegemony, this gender inequality in the marriage relationship is also a display of patriarchal society asserting its hegemonic position.

Conversely, Tongfu rarely face similar challenges as men often wield more power and resources, making them more likely to succeed in divorce. Moreover, society tends to be more lenient in judging men, so they are more likely to receive sympathy and support from their surroundings, enabling them to establish new families with greater courage (Leopold, 2018). This unequal social status results in different challenges for Tongqi and Tongfu when facing marriage breakdowns.

## **2.4 Research gaps**

When reviewing the existing literature related to IBMOMs in China, two notable research gaps emerge.

First, there are significant gaps in research on LGBTQ-related issues between Western and Chinese contexts, particularly in the realm of MOMs and same-sex marriage study. In Western academia, there is a robust body of literature exploring the complexities and societal impacts of LGBTQ relationships, supported by a more open political and social environment (Xie & Peng, 2017). Conversely, Chinese research lags due to stricter societal and policy constraints that limit discussion and exploration of such topics. Moreover, as Kissil & Itzhaky (2014) have highlighted, there is a lack of research exploring these marriages across diverse contexts. The unique cultural backdrop of China results in motivations for LGBTQ individuals entering MOMs that differ significantly from those in Western contexts, leading to vastly different outcomes. This makes it a topic that warrants further investigation.

Second, while considerable attention and research has been devoted to the experiences of Tongqi in China, there has been virtually no dedicated research on the experiences and

encounters of IBMOMs. Even the West has very little research specializing in IBMOMs. This neglect persists despite the fact that these individuals also face significant social and psychological repercussions.

These comparative lack highlight a critical need for comprehensive research in China to better understand and support IBMOMs, whose experiences remain largely unexamined and misunderstood in the broader discourse on LGBTQ and family dynamics in MOMs.

## **2.5 Theoretical foundation**

This study primarily adopted the concept of life course trajectory and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as the theoretical basis for exploring Chinese IBMOMs' prosperity.

The life course theory links the temporal sequence of an individual's life stages into a continuous trajectory that mutually influences each other (Elder, 1975; Mayer, 2009; Alwin, 2012). According to Riemann and Schütze, the theory emphasizes the unpredictability and instability of life and how the significant events and turning points changes individual trajectories (Gerhard et al., 1991). In the context of this study, a crucial event could be the moment when IBMOMs become aware of their parents' LGBTQ identity, or it could be the moment when any event occurred that caused them to feel a dramatic emotional shock. Additionally, it points out the cumulative impact of early life experiences on future trajectories, where positive or negative events gradually have more profound effects over time (Mayer, 2009; Bernardi et al., 2019).

On the other hand, identity theory focuses on how individuals establish, shape and rebuild their self-identity across different life stages (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Based on Erikson's psychosocial development theory, life is divided into childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, further subdivided into eight sub-stages. The adolescent stage is particularly crucial for identity formation, where individuals strive to establish a sense of self (Erikson, 1959).

These two theories interact in several ways to help us understand the complex life experience of IBMOMs and explore the potential trajectories of IBMOMs' identity development and well-being. Firstly, the life course theory provides a framework for understanding how significant events, such as parental disclosure, can disrupt the organized life of IBMOMs and reshape their expectations and identities. By depicting the entire trajectory, we can identify key moments of transition and understand how these events influence their identity formation process. Secondly, identity theory complements the life course trajectory perspective by focusing on how individuals construct their identities in different life stages. For IBMOMs, their reactions to the disclosure may vary

depending on the stage of life they are in, which can be further analyzed based on Erikson's psychosocial development theory. For example, adolescents, who are exploring their own sexuality and identity, may find it difficult to deal with this change, while most adults are "glad to see both parents happier, whether divorced or still married" (Buxton, 2006, p.55). By understanding how IBMOMs negotiate their identities within the context of their life trajectories, we can identify factors that facilitate resilience and adaptation to provide more targeted support and interventions to help IBMOMs face the challenges and support their journey towards prosperity.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## 3.1 Research Approach

The methodology adopted for this research is rooted in an inductive and qualitative approach, aimed at exploring the nuanced experiences of Chinese IBMOMs.

Inductive approach was chosen because it facilitates the exploration of multiple possibilities through the collection and analysis of data before applying theories, without being constrained by predefined hypotheses (Flick et al., 2017). This is particularly apt given that each IBMOMs has a unique family background and emotional journey that are unpredictable and less documented in existing literature. The qualitative research method complements this by providing a framework for collecting rich descriptive data, capturing the complex feelings of those living in MOMs (Harwell et al., 2011). Emphasizing the importance of individual voices, this approach is suitable given the sensitivity of the topic. It considers both the sample size requirements of mixed method and allows for an in-depth examination of subjective experiences, including personal narratives, familial interactions, and societal dynamics, which quantitative method might overlook (Harwell et al., 2011). Such a detailed exploration is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of IBMOMs, that not only fills academic gaps but also aids in formulating effective measures to support the well-being of IBMOMs, making it particularly suitable for this study.

## 3.2 Data Collection

### 3.2.1 Recruitment and Sampling Process

To recruit participants for this study, a blend of convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and online recruiting advertisements was employed. Convenience sampling was conducted at accessible locations such as online forums and posts, through which 42 invitations were initially sent out. Snowball sampling involved collaboration with NGOs and influential LGBTQ content creators. Specifically, contacts were made with an LGBTQ community called “Outstanding Partner [出色伙伴]” and a social media influencer with 145k followers, leading to the recruitment of three potential participants. Additionally, online recruiting advertisements were posted on Chinese platforms like Weibo, RED, Douban, and Bilibili, yielding 14 contacts.

To be eligible for this study, participants must satisfy the following requirements. First, participants had to be raised in China to reflect the cultural context pertinent to the study. Second, all participants were required to be 18 years or older to ensure they had reached a stage of relatively stable identity. Third, individuals needed to self-identify as IBMOMs.

Overall, 59 invitations were issued, and 16 responses were received, with 11 IBMOMs initially agreeing to participate. However, scheduling conflicts resulted in two withdrawals. The format of the interviews varied to accommodate participants' preferences and privacy concerns. Four participants opted for text-based interviews, where interview guidelines were sent to them and they responded in writing. The remaining five participants agreed to use the Chinese conferencing software "Feishu" for online interviews, which lasted between 0.5 to 2.5 hours. One text-based interview was later excluded due to insufficient depth in responses, leaving eight effective interviews. This sample size was considered acceptable as it aligns with Guest et al.'s (2006) recommendations for qualitative research, suggesting that 6-12 participants are sufficient to yield meaningful themes and observations. The demographics of the participants are summarized in Table 1, which provides an overview of their age, gender, parents' details and other relevant details.

Name	Gender	Age	Parent's Sex Orientation	Parents' Current Marital Status	Economic Dominance
Interviewee A	Female	27	Lesbian mother & Straight father	Divorced	Same
Interviewee B	Non-binary	29	Straight mother & Gay father	Maintained	Father (mom as full-time housewife)
Interviewee C	Non-binary	26	Straight mother & Gay father	Maintained	Father (mom as full-time housewife)
Interviewee D	Female	21	Bisexual mother & Straight father	Separated	Previously father (mom as full-time housewife), later the same
Interviewee E	Female	20	Straight mother & Gay father	Maintained	Father
Interviewee F	Female	20	Straight mother & Gay father	Maintained	Same
Interviewee G	Female	19	Straight mother & Gay father	Separated	Mother
Interviewee H	Male	20	Lesbian mother & Straight father	Divorced	Mother

*Table 1- Participants' Demographics*

### 3.2.2 Procedure

Drawing upon the life course theory as a conceptual framework, participants were encouraged to map out their life trajectories related to their relationships with their parents before the interviews (see Figure 2 for an example), which facilitated more focused discussions on significant events and turning points during the interviews. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Chinese. This method, chosen for its flexibility compared to structured interviews, allowed for more controlled yet adaptable conversation flows, ensuring that discussions remained focused on the subject without sacrificing the depth and genuineness (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis.

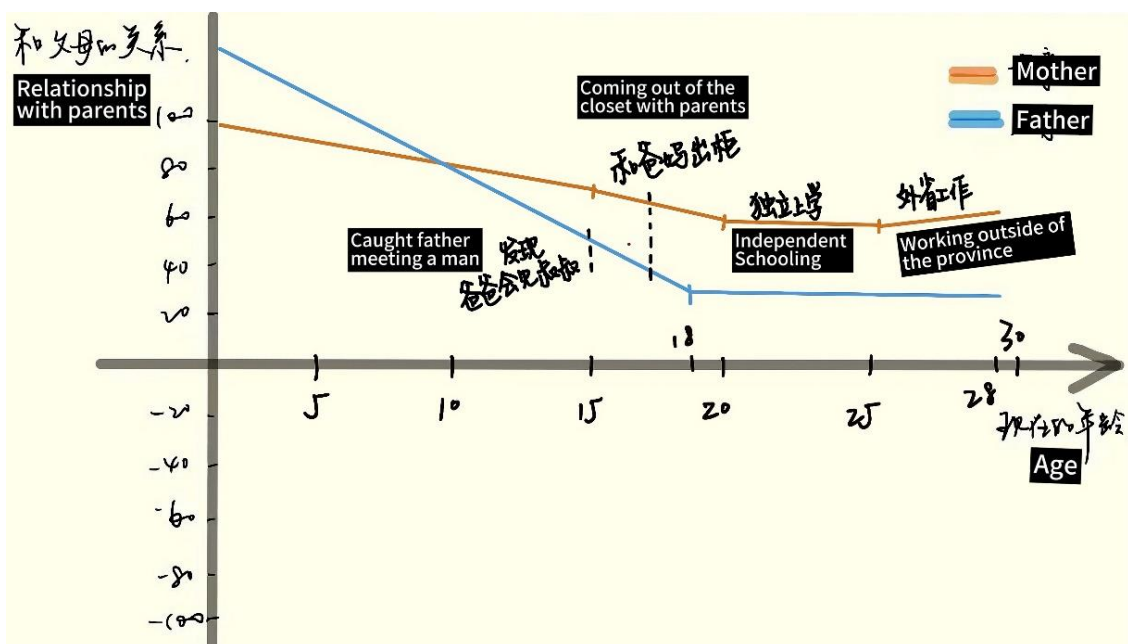


Figure 2- Interviewee B's Life Trajectories Related to Relationships with Their Parents

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study utilized thematic analysis, which involved repeatedly reading the stories of IBMOMs and conducting a detailed examination of participants' narratives by identifying key themes, patterns, and structures that emerged during the reading (Minichiello, 1992; Braun & Clarke, 2012).

All semi-structured interviews were fully transcribed, maintaining the original language to preserve the authenticity and reduce data loss (Santos et al., 2014). As a native Chinese speaker, I performed coding in Chinese to ensure a more accurate representation of participant sentiments, and the process was conducted manually due to the manageable sample size (Donohoe & Lu, 2008). Basic themes identified during coding were translated into English to facilitate further analysis and discussion. This bilingual approach minimized

potential errors in data interpretation, respecting the original context while enabling broader accessibility (Esfehani & Walters, 2018). And the coding process was developed through inductive methods, leading to the identification of four primary themes, including IBMOMs' emotional experiences, coping mechanisms, dynamics of staying in MOMs, and strategies to help IBMOMs achieve prosperity.

### **3.4 Ethical Issues**

Due to the sensitive nature of exploring identity and unique family relationships within MOMs, strict adherence to ethical standards was maintained throughout the study. Prior to their participation, all interviewees were sent an participants information sheet that detailed the content of study. After confirming their participation, a consent form was required to be signed before the interview. And at the start of each interview, verbal consent was reconfirmed, ensuring participants were comfortable with the recording and clarifying their understanding of the research process and their rights within it.

To protect anonymity, all personal identifiers were removed from the final dissertation. All research-related information was securely stored on UCL's cloud services and would be deleted promptly upon the completion of the project. Participants also retain the right to terminate or withdraw at any stage of the research process.



## Chapter 4: Findings & Discussions

This section is presented with merging findings and discussions into a cohesive analysis to enhance clarity and coherence for the reader. The chapter explores four main themes emerged from thematic coding, emotional experiences, coping mechanisms, family dynamics, and prosperity strategies, which collectively address the three core research questions. Furthermore, the chapter outlines the study's limitations and suggests directions for future research, enriching the understanding of IBMOMs' lived realities within the Chinese context.

### 4.1 IBMOMs' Emotional Experiences

#### 4.1.1 Emotions upon the Disclosure of Sex Orientation

The emotional reactions of IBMOMs to the disclosure of their parents' sexual orientation varied depending on the life stages at which the discovery occurred. Based on the interview data, it was observed that when IBMOMs learned about their parents' sexual orientation in the stage of childhood or adulthood, their emotional responses tended to be neutral or indifferent. However, during adolescence, the reactions were more intense and conflicted.

For example, Interviewee E discovered her father's sexual orientation during her teenage years and described feelings of *"shock and disgust"*. She struggled with identity issues and wanted to sever ties with her father, stating, *"I feel like I've been deceived all these years, and I feel sorry for my mom. It made me question the meaning of my existence, wishing I had never been born to face all this."*

Conversely, those who discovered their parents' sexual orientation in childhood or as adults often had a more detached reaction. As Interviewee C, who confirmed her father's sexual orientation at 24 years old, said, *"By then I was already indifferent to my father, I didn't feel much of anything. To simply put it: a lot of things made sense and fell into place."* Similarly, another IBMOMs who found out as a child, expressed indifference: *"At the age around twelve, I didn't really understand what it meant. I didn't care much at the time, and I didn't want to think more about it afterward. If he really had such tendencies, I wouldn't have had much of an emotional reaction."*

The variations in emotional responses can be analyzed using Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which serves as the theoretical foundation of this study. Adolescence (ages 13-19), characterized by the psychosocial crisis of role confusion, is a critical period for self-identity formation (Erikson, 1959). During this stage, adolescents are more likely to experience intense emotional reactions to any disruption in forming a complete and coherent sense of self, including the discovery of a parent's LGBTQ identity (Seiffge-Krenke & Weitkamp, 2019). This can lead to doubts about their own identity,

feelings of shame, and a sense of alienation from their peers. (Mitchell et al., 2021). In contrast, the child may be too young to fully grasp the complex concepts of sexual orientation, leading to more neutral reactions. While in adulthood, the focus of the intimacy crisis shifts toward forming intimate relationships outside the family, diminishing the emotional weight of discovering a parent's sexual orientation (Erikson, 1959; Mitchell et al., 2021).

The emotional experiences of IBMOMs upon discovering their parents' sexual orientations also align with Buxton's (2006) findings, illustrating the universal emotional impact of such disclosures regardless of cultural background, and fill the gap in the literature concerning Chinese IBMOMs' struggles. In terms of sexualities, temporary self-doubt emerges, "*In middle school, I suspected my brother was gay, and so did I*" (interviewee G). There is also a sense of loss in parenthood due to perceived lack of love from their parents, "*I just think she is a very cold person, abandoning her own child to be with her girlfriend*" (interviewee A). In terms of identity, some develop an aversion to homosexuality, "*I used to speak up for the LGBTQ community, but now I'm getting a little sick of them. I just can't view the gay community in the same way anymore*" (interviewee E). Regarding integrity, there's frustration about concealing this discovery from other family members, "*I've kept it hidden for ten years because I felt that revealing it would destroy my relationship with my dad and the rest of my family, [...]. After all, family skeleton should be kept in the closet*" (interviewee F). Finally, regarding belief systems, there's a questioning of traditional views, "*This situation has indeed deepened my belief that being born is meaningless, forcing me to think more about anti-natalism*" (Interviewee C). Interviewee H is the only one who reported a very positive attitude following the disclosure. In this case, the mother proactively disclosed her sexual orientation and engaged in deep communication with H, leading to "*a more trusting and intimate relationship*" (interviewee H). The happiness H felt in forming a new family with his mother's same-sex partner also resonates with Snow's (2013) findings on the experiences of Western IBMOMs.

As evidenced in other seven interviews, disclosures that were not actively managed often led to negative feelings, emphasizing the method of disclosure also plays a crucial role in shaping emotional responses. This highlights the importance of thoughtful and mature communication within families, a need also supported by existing literature on effective communication strategies within MOMs (Hernandez et al., 2010; Bradford, 2012).

#### **4.1.2. Emotions upon Family Environment**

IBMOMs' emotional experiences were also significantly influenced by their family environment, especially the relationship between their parents. Surprisingly, half of the IBMOMs reported that the turning point of their emotional attachment to their parents was not the disclosure of parents' sexual orientation. Instead, the real source of emotional

distress stemmed from the lack of love and ongoing quarrels between parents, issues that began in the IBMOMs' early childhood. As Interviewee D mentioned, "*The disclosure didn't impact me much; it was probably their constant arguing when I was young that led to my emotional withdrawal and detachment from the family, and later I just refused to let them influence me*". In contrast, Interviewee H, whose mother formed a new family with her same-sex partner, described the family atmosphere as harmonious and full of love. "*My mom's partner treats me well, and I get along great with my stepsister. For me, this change has been quite happy*".

Additionally, many negative family behaviors and dynamics have caused IBMOMs to experience emotional and psychological distress. For example, Interviewee D's parents killed her pets three times when she was a child while she was away from home, causing D to "*went numb, [...], the only feeling left in my heart was a dull pain, and I stayed in a dazed state for several days*". Interviewee G's parents were hyper-controlling, and in order to prevent G from locking herself in the room to be alone, "*they used a kitchen knife to chop up the door. All the doors to the rooms in our house used to be chopped up anyway, even the toilet*". Another extreme case is where Interviewee B experienced severe physical abuse and was emotionally traumatized by her father after he accidentally discovered B was also attracted to the same sex. In this case, the emotional damage stemmed not from the father's sexual orientation but from his internalized homophobia and inability to accept his daughter's identity. This highlights how unresolved issues within a parent's own identity can severely affect the children's emotional well-being, reinforcing the importance of acceptance and open communication in family dynamics.

These phenomena reveal that the sexual orientation of parents is not the decisive factor in shaping a child's emotional experiences, rather, the quality of the parents' relationship and the stability of the family environment have a greater impact on children's emotional well-being (Wainright et al., 2004). A family environment filled with love and support can foster positive emotional experiences. This challenges the assertions made by Regnerus (2012), who proposed that children whose parents transition to a same-sex relationship often encounter similar issues to those seen in divorced or single-parent families, without considering harmonious same-sex family settings. The research observation that found no significant differences in the well-being and personal development of children raised in same-sex versus heterosexual partner families are supported by this study (Gartrell & Bos, 2010; Calzo et al., 2017). Children from same-sex families may even exhibit better psychological health and more inclusive values, as they often face more social pressure, which cultivates stronger resilience (Titlestad & Pooley, 2013). As Interviewee H expressed, "*The atmosphere in our family is quite open and supportive, and probably had a positive influence on my upbringing, teaching me how to understand and respect different people*".

## 4.2 Coping Mechanisms

To address the diverse emotional reactions mentioned above, IBMOMs have adopted various coping mechanisms that can be categorized into two main groups: internal processing and external support.

When emotional disturbances become unbearable, internal processing mechanisms kick in. The case of Interviewee F and G demonstrates that the brain would either intentionally or unconsciously activate defense mechanisms to selectively forget painful memories, a phenomenon medically referred to as “suppression-induced forgetting” (Streb et al., 2016; Guan & Wang, 2021). Although this defensive mechanism can initially help manage acute distress by allowing individuals to temporarily escape the immediate impact of trauma, it is noted that “repressive coping leads to negative intrusive thoughts in the long run” and may trigger posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Geraerts et al., 2006, p.1458). This underscores the need for more informed and sensitive therapeutic interventions that focus not just on suppressing, but on understanding and gradually processing the emotional content. However, there were instances where IBMOMs demonstrated increased resilience and resistance, especially after witnessing their parents’ avoidance and concealment of their own sexual orientations. They became more assertive in expressing their own sexual identities, as explained by Interviewee C, “*My dad’s behavior makes me lean more towards expressing my own sexual identity because I think a big reason he’s living so miserably now (from a sexual perspective) is because his social environment doesn’t allow him to freely express his sexual orientation*” and by Interviewee B, “*Didn’t my dad say that this path (being homosexual) is hard? Well, I’ll do everything exceptionally well, [...], I want to show him that even though I’m lesbian, I can do well. I’ll do the things he is afraid to do*”.

External support encompasses both professional aid and reliance on social networks. IBMOMs frequently seek assistance from professionals like therapists or legal advisors. Yet, they often face challenges such as concerns over confidentiality, economic constraints, and professionals’ lack of understanding of MOMs dynamics. As Interviewee E said, “*I don’t trust school counseling not to leak information, nor can I afford outside psychological treatment due to its high cost*”, this can result in delayed or absent therapeutic intervention, leading to more profound psychological effects. Those who have undergone mental health treatment have highlighted the mixed quality of support, with some expressing that “*the psychological counseling in China really varies in quality*” (Interviewee G), and others experienced similar situations in treatment abroad that offers generic advice without real help (Interviewee B). Unprofessional therapy can directly lead to secondary harm to IBMOMs, even retriggering suppression-induced forgetting (Interviewee G). Professional therapists, on the other hand, lack knowledge of families like MOMs, which are rife with complex emotions, “*He seemed quite helpless in this area, [...], because it’s indeed quite*

*niche*” (Interviewee G). This aligns with Western studies indicating the difficulty in finding therapists knowledgeable about MOMs, highlighting a global challenge in offering effective psychological support to families like MOMs (Buxton, 2006; Hernandez et al., 2010).

Additionally, social platforms and friends serve as significant outlets for IBMOMs, allowing them to connect with others with similar experiences, thereby alleviating feelings of isolation. The anonymity and empathy provided by online communities help IBMOMs to express their feelings without facing judgment or pity from their direct social circles, *“I can resonate only with those who are strangers yet share similar fates on the Internet, and anonymity allows me to speak without reservations, [...], as I am afraid that the sympathy and pity would be my friends’ first impression of me”* (Interviewee E). And direct support from friends is also important, especially when dealing with severe stress or incidents like physical abuse, *“I used to not talk to anyone about anything, but once I vented everything to a close friend at the time, it felt much lighter afterwards. Now, whenever there’s a chance for communication, I can speak more freely”* (Interviewee D).

In essence, therapists must first undergo specialized training and possess a thorough understanding of the complex backgrounds of MOMs and the internal coping processes of IBMOMs to provide effective counseling. Enhancing community and online support systems is also crucial as they offer essential, daily assistance that supplements the shortcomings of professional therapy. This sets a clear direction for future developments in helping IBMOMs better deal with their emotions.

### **4.3 Dynamics of Staying in MOMs**

As seen in the participants’ demographics in the methodology section, six out of eight MOMs families have not divorced, with most unions consisting of female heterosexual spouses and male homosexual partners. The two families that have divorced were combinations of male heterosexual spouses and female homosexual partners, where the lesbian spouses were economically independent and even superior to their male partners. This finding presents a different outcome compared to Buxton’s (2000) survey in the West, which showed that five-sixths couples divorced after disclosure. This discrepancy may be attributed to differences in cultural values, social discourses, the importance of children in maintaining family unity, and barriers to obtaining a divorce. As described in the literature review, Chinese culture, rooted in Confucian principles, places a strong emphasis on the family as the foundational unit, whereas Western societies tend to prioritize individualism and independence. The breakdown of a marriage often signifies the fragmentation of the family, which is a severe blow for Chinese individuals (Lee, 2021). This sentiment is often exacerbated by societal perceptions, as divorce has historically carried significant stigma in

China, particularly for women (McCrea & McCrea, 2022). As part of the family, children are also a primary reason parents maintain their marriages, aiming to provide a stable environment (Xu et al., 2015).

### 4.3.1 Reasons Behind Heterosexual Spouses' Decision to Stay in MOMs

In the interviews, we also observed the factors mentioned above functioning in families that did not choose to divorce. “For the well-being of the children” is a common reason given by heterosexual spouses for staying married. However, from IBMOMs' perspective, this reason often serves as an excuse rather than a genuine motivation, “*she puts the burden of this marriage, whether they live separately or get divorce, all on me, [...], it's very irresponsible*” (Interviewee G). From the observation of IBMOMs, the decisions were made for several reasons. First, objective barriers such as military marriages make divorces notoriously difficult to process, as seen in the case of Interviewee B's mother. Second, dependency and indecision also play a role, with some heterosexual spouses displaying dependent personalities and a reluctance to make decisive life changes. Third, financial considerations influence both high earners, who fear the division of property in the event of a divorce would leave them with less assets, and lower earners or full-time housewives, who worry about losing financial security and not being able to survive. Additionally, the stigmatization within the Chinese patriarchal society places a heavy burden on women to uphold their husbands' dignity, discouraging them from pursuing divorce due to potential damage to the husband's honor and the woman's own reputation, reflecting the profound cultural stigma around divorce in China.

From these reasons, the gender dilemmas naturally emerge, which require integrating the concept of intersectionality into analysis. The plight of heterosexual wives within MOMs, compared to heterosexual husbands' successful divorcing cases, sheds light on the entrenched gender inequalities that exacerbate women's vulnerabilities even upon the decisions on divorces. Besides, economic independence appears to be a significant factor that empowers women to make autonomous decisions regarding their marital situations (Schwartz & Gonalons-Pons, 2016). For example, interviews indicate that lesbian spouses who have successfully divorced are either the main source of income for the family or economically independent of their spouses. This economic autonomy often provides them with the necessary leverage to leave a marriage that no longer meets their emotional or psychological needs, while heterosexual female spouses, who were often in a disadvantaged position in various aspects, found it difficult to make the decision to divorce.

The intersectionality framework helps illuminate how different axes of identity—gender, economic status, and societal roles—intersect to create unique experiences and challenges for individuals within MOMs (Ferree, 2010). The findings from these interviews not only

corroborate the theoretical discussions of intersectionality in the literature but also provide new insights into the ways economic empowerment can serve as a countermeasure to gender-based disparities within marriages. This approach would not only support women in gaining more control over their personal and marital decisions but also challenge the patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequalities in society.

### 4.3.2 Impacts of Staying Decisions on IBMOMs

The decision to stay, however, carries a significant emotional toll. Many IBMOMs observed the sufferings experienced by their loved ones, significantly affecting their mental health. *“My mom started out just being sad, and later it turned into complete despair, I even think my mom developed some kind of mental illness”* (Interviewee B). At first, most of them feel a compulsion to protect their mothers, which shifts their relationship to one resembling peers rather than parent-child. This long-term relationship patterns, starting from a young age, imposes significant psychological stress. *“My mother treated me like an adult during my elementary and middle school years, confiding in me as if I were her friend. This placed a significant psychological burden on me. I felt that since my mother had such a difficult life from a young age, I had to become an exceptionally great child to bring some happiness to her life”* (Interviewee G).

Moreover, the formation of Interviewee B’s non-binary gender identity came in part from her mother’s dependence on her. *“In this unhappy, discordant family environment, due to the absence of a father figure, I became like my mom’s second partner, [...], anything that dad or son might do, mom would ask me to do”*.

This peer-like relationship, while may form closer bonds and lead to IBMOMs developing more independent personalities, also signifies a lack of nurturing love. Coupled with repeated complaints about LGBTQ spouses, it profoundly impacts IBMOMs’ perspectives on relationships and marriage. *“Even now, my expectations of a partner are that I need someone who can love me like a real mother would”* (Interviewee B), encapsulating the deepest longing for emotional security. Many IBMOM stated that they do not trust the opposite sex and have an ingrained fear of building long-term heterosexual relationships.

The experiences above highlight how the influence of heterosexual spouses on IBMOMs predominantly manifests in areas of parenthood, sexualities, and marriage. These insights, combined with the impacts explored in the section “Emotional Experiences of IBMOMs”, which primarily revealed the influence from LGBTQ parent, fully validate Buxton’s (2006) assertion of six key areas where IBMOMs are impacted.

## 4.4 Strategies to Help IBMOMs Achieve Prosperity

During the interviews with IBMOMs, their perspectives on what measures they think are necessary to help their community flourish within their unique family environments were gathered. These insights suggest that effective support should encompass both preventive and supportive strategies. Preventive strategies aim to reduce the occurrence of MOMs fundamentally, thereby decreasing the population of IBMOMs and reducing the likelihood of children growing up in unhealthy family atmospheres. On the other hand, supportive measures focus on enhancing the well-being of existing IBMOMs by ensuring they have access to the necessary resources.

Many IBMOMs emphasized the importance of legal and social reforms that could decrease the formation of MOMs. Nearly every IBMOMs mentioned the support for the legalization of LGBQ marriages, which would allow individuals to choose partners they truly love. This is a relief and protection not only for LGBQ individuals pressured by societal and family expectations, but also for non-LGBQ individuals who face the risk of becoming “Tongqi” and “Tongfu”, as well as innocent children who may be born into loveless families. Given that children raised in loving homosexual households show no difference in performances compared to those from heterosexual families (Gartrell & Bos, 2010; Calzo et al., 2017), policies following the legalization of LGBQ marriages, such as allowing same-sex couples to access IVF and establishing more inclusive adoption policies (Hildebrandt, 2018), should also be considered. Moreover, there is a call for adjusting national policies like the three-child policy in China, which “*creates fertility anxieties among societies and forces the younger generation, including LGBQ, to feel greater pressure to get married and have children*” (Interviewee B), which is consistent with a literature review on how China’s LGBQ community has been affected by the policy and entered into marriage.

On the supportive side, IBMOMs stressed the need for comprehensive psychological treatment tailored specifically for families within MOMs, focusing on healing emotional trauma and addressing ongoing challenges for both IBMOMs and their parents. Legal assistance for navigating divorces, especially in ensuring fair treatment and protection in property and custody disputes, is also critical. Only when vulnerable groups are financially secure can they smoothly access more specialized treatment and make decisions that are in their best interests. Additionally, as Interviewee F noted, “*Society is hesitant to talk about issues related to sex, let alone homosexuality. Therefore, I think we need to get rid of the shame surrounding the topic of sex*”, thus enhancing educational efforts to include holistic sexual education and information about LGBQ is a widely supported idea among IBMOMs. The power of education can reshape a generation’s views, helping to de-stigmatize LGBQ identities and foster a more inclusive society (UNDP, 2016; Xie & Peng, 2017).



The idea of establishing a community for IBMOMs to find peers with similar experiences garnered some support but also some concerns. Supporters look to share experiences, find resonance, and help other IBMOMs, while concerns vary from “*we might not have much to share due to our diverse family experiences*” (Interviewee A), to worries that “*younger IBMOMs might see the community as just a novelty and could cause secondary harm without proper understanding*” (Interviewee B), and fears that “*being a sexual minority and IBMOMs at the same time, entering a community which likely to include heterosexual IBMOMs who hold negative views of LGBTQ people because of their parents, may invite hostility*” (Interviewee D). These concerns merit attention as pointed out by Interviewee B, “*Only with a comprehensive sexual education system in place can communities better serve this group. Otherwise, the establishment of such communities may not be as effective as imagined*”.

## **4.5 Contributions and Limitations**

### **4.5.1 Contributions**

This study bridges significant research gaps by focusing on China, and delves deeply into the experiences of IBMOMs, enriching the understanding of a minority group that even Western literature has scarcely explored. Through in-depth interviews, we found that Chinese IBMOMs’ emotional fluctuations mirror those of IBMOMs in Western contexts. However, compared to Western cases, China report fewer positive outcomes in family relationships, which often include greater open-mindedness and closer relationships with their LGBTQ parents. In the West, IBMOMs frequently experience the dilemma of balancing support between their LGBTQ parent and the other, while such torture are less common among Chinese IBMOMs, possibly due to a lack of societal understanding of LGBTQ individuals, compounded by the prevalence of “full-time housewife” roles, where gender inequalities intersect. This orientation towards supporting the female and heterosexual parent, while being empathetic, also places an excessive emotional and psychological burden on Chinese IBMOMs, reshaping parent-child relationships into more of a peer-like dynamic and affecting the formation of gender identity and marital views. This intertwined emotional bond and dependence is shaped by China’s unique social landscape and highlight how cultural differences influence personal experiences and psychological adaptations.

In addition, unlike much of the previous literature that focuses on emotional and psychological impacts, this study uniquely underscores the importance of economic stability to vulnerable groups. This not only supports the independence of IBMOMs but also empowers them to make healthier life choices, highlighting a practical pathway to resilience and prosperity that is less emphasized in Western contexts.

Interestingly, the study reveals that compared to the Western enthusiasm for establishing and evolving community cultures, such as the “COLLAGE” (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), which remains active to this day, Chinese IBMOMs maintain an optimistic yet cautious stance towards the role of communities (Snow, 2016, Foreword). This difference is also linked to the varying stages of LGBTQ cultural development between the East and the West. Based on the positive outcomes of same-sex marriage practices in the West, this study suggests policy recommendations concerning legal reforms, social support, and the advancement of sexual education tailored to China, aimed at enhancing the growth and prosperity of Chinese IBMOMs step by step.

In a nutshell, this study not only corroborates several key findings from the existing body of knowledge but also introduces fresh perspectives, particularly concerning cultural specificity in coping strategies, economic empowerment, and the reforms in legal and educational policies. These insights significantly enrich the global discourse on IBMOMs, providing a foundation for culturally sensitive research and policy-making that could be applied in Chinese contexts.

#### **4.5.2 Limitations**

While this study has generated some insightful findings, it is important to identify its limitations, as these may affect the breadth and depth of the conclusions drawn and provide direction for future research.

Firstly, the willingness of interviewees to participate could suggest a bias towards those who have potentially reconciled with their experiences to some extent. Among the 59 invitations sent, only 16 responded, including one particularly emotional respondent who declined to be interviewed to avoid being retraumatized. This indicates a potential gap in capturing the full emotional types, particularly those still struggling with fresh or unresolved feelings about their parents' LGBTQ identities.

Secondly, the sample size of only eight participants, while acceptable within qualitative research norms, remains relatively small. A larger sample size would have provided a more meticulous exploration of the complex emotional issues. Additionally, the low proportion of male participants and predominance of parents identifying strictly as homosexual may introduce further bias, limiting the representation of diverse gender perspectives among IBMOMs and the range of parental sexual orientations covered.

Lastly, the depth of analysis in this study was limited by the lack of existing literature on the lived experiences of Chinese IBMOMs. This research venture into relatively new territory, which means that while it lays the groundwork, it lacks the extensive theoretical support typically provided by a more established field of study. This limitation highlights

the need for continued research to build a more comprehensive body of literature on this topic.

## **4.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

Building upon the insights and limitations identified in this study, the following recommendations are proposed to guide future research on IBMOMs.

Firstly, efforts should be made to include IBMOMs at various stages of reconciliation with their family situations to enrich the understanding of the effect of time on the evolution of emotions. However, ethical issues must be considered during recruitment, with sensitivity to potential participants who may find recalling their experiences painful and are unwilling to reminisce.

Recruiting a more balanced representation of genders, such as male and non-binary individuals, could offer different interpretative perspectives on their life details and may yield new insights into how heterosexual spouses impact the well-being of IBMOMs. A wider range of parental sexual orientations, including asexuality, should also be included to cover a broader scope of experiences, helping to ensure research outcomes are not biased by a lack of diversity in participant backgrounds. Additionally, with a sufficient sample size, focused studies on specific subsets of the IBMOM population, such as those with bisexual parents, could be conducted. This specialized research could reveal the differences caused by various sexual orientations and deepen the understanding of the subtle impacts of parental sexual expressions on IBMOMs, and may further analyze the results in comparison with the study on MOREs.

Larger-scale studies, possibly employing mixed methods, could provide a more meticulous exploration of the complexities of IBMOMs' emotional and psychological experiences. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are also valuable as they can track changes in the experiences and attitudes of IBMOMs over time, reflecting the evolving policies and societal attitudes.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored the lived experiences of IBMOMs in the context of China, aiming to uncover the unique challenges and emotional experiences associated with their upbringing, and propose strategic recommendations to help them achieve prosperity. To accomplish this, the study utilized a series of in-depth interviews and applied life course theory to pre-interview preparation in order to identify significant transitions in the interviewees' life journeys. These interviews collected comprehensive data on the IBMOM's life stories and emotional responses, which were analyzed using Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. I am now prepared to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the study, which aims to examine various aspects of the impact of gay and straight parenting on IBMOMs, respectively, and make recommendations after recognizing their pain points and demands.

### **What emotional experiences do IBMOMs encounter during their growth, and how do they cope with these emotions?**

The findings demonstrated the various emotional responses, manifesting in six key areas: sexuality, marriage, parenthood, identity, integrity, and belief systems, which aligned with Buxton's (2006) research on Western IBMOMs. And these emotional responses were mainly influenced by the timing of the disclosure of their parents' LGBTQ orientation and the family relationships formed from a young age. Adolescents experienced more intense emotional fluctuations, reporting feelings such as nausea, disgust, and suppression, while IBMOMs during childhood and adulthood often exhibited more indifference. This aligned with Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, highlighting a period where identity crises were most acute. Another key finding noted that compared to their parents' sexual orientation, family relationships were more crucial to the growth trajectories of IBMOMs. Half of the interviewees indicated that the root of their distress stemmed from poor relationships between their parents. The reported happiness and well-rounded personality of an IBMOMs who lived in a loving and fulfilling same-sex family after his parents divorced at a very early age supported this view in the opposite direction.

IBMOMs had varied coping mechanisms, ranging from internal mechanisms such as suppression-induced forgetting or showing greater resilience, to seeking external support through professional services, social platforms, and close friends. However, experiences of IBMOMs encountering unprofessional treatment in psychotherapy, leading to secondary trauma, underscored the urgency and necessity for sensitive family communication and professional support tailored to their unique circumstances.

## **How does the state of heterosexual spouses who stayed in MOMs affect the well-being of IBMOMs?**

The decision of heterosexual spouses to stay in MOMs was often rooted in patriarchal norms, coupled with indecisive personality traits, objective restrictions, and socio-economic barriers, leading to an emotionally troubled family environment. The grief and anxiety of heterosexual spouses, conveyed through behaviors and verbal expressions, severely impacted the mental health of young IBMOMs, reshaping their relationships with their parents. This parent-child dynamic, where parents sought emotional and psychological reliance from their children, further shaped IBMOMs' views on self-identity and marital relationships. The long-term lack of parental love, while fostering independence, deeply embedded a need for care beneath a facade of self-sufficiency. This enduring emotional toll highlighted the interplay between societal structures and personal trauma, showcasing a facet of classic Chinese familial roles and societal expectations.

### **What factors contribute to the prosperity of IBMOMs, and how can it be achieved?**

The research not only directly discussed measures to achieve prosperity for IBMOMs but also implicitly answered what factors contribute to their prosperity through discussions across the themes. Key factors identified included the family environment during growth, parents' attitudes and strategies towards MOMs relationships, diverse and effective coping mechanisms, and economic stability. Therefore, beyond individual and family strategies, broader social reforms were crucial. Advocacy for the legalization of LGBQ marriages, strengthening sexual education, and promoting awareness of LGBQ issues were measures that could collectively reduce the formation of MOMs and foster a healthier and more inclusive society. This comprehensive approach not only treated the symptoms but also addressed the root causes, paving the way for a future where individual identities and family structures coexist more harmoniously. Additionally, supportive measures such as professional psychological support were highlighted again, underscoring their urgency.

Despite these insights, the study recognized its limitations, including potential biases due to the small sample size and lack of equal distribution of participant characteristics. Future research should focus on expanding sample size, exploring longitudinal impacts, and conducting further investigations into the slight differences of IBMOMs' lives across different cultural and familial backgrounds.

To conclude, this dissertation contributes to a nuanced understanding of a relatively underexplored group within both the Chinese and global contexts. It highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions and informed policy-making that recognize and respect the complex identities and familial configurations in today's society. As China is the country with the largest LGBQ population in the world and likely the highest number of MOMs

families, this study also calls for attention to IBMOMs growing up in such family environments, rather than focusing solely on the levels of “Tongqi” or “Tongfu”. This research also offers foundational knowledge and recommendations that can inform stakeholders, from policymakers to psychological therapists, about the supportive measures necessary to promote the well-being and prosperity of IBMOMs.

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# Appendix

## Example of Coding Process

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories	Code	Code in Chinese	Excerpt from the source	Source	
IBMOMs' emotional experiences	Emotions upon the disclosure of sex orientation	Childhood	Indifferent	不在意	基本没什么波动，就是可能本身也没有太大的对取向方面的成见，所以觉得我妈妈喜欢男的还是喜欢女的好像影响不大，反正他俩本来也没有在一起	A	
			Confused, Unsure.	困惑，不确定	一直要追根溯源的话，好像并没有那种特别明确的契机让我恍然大悟，就是感觉那个时候是	A	
			Confused, Unsure.	困惑，不确定	但是十二三岁的时候其实不太理解这件事情的，我当时也没有太在意，只是后面回想起来就是说这具体是什么事情，我不愿意去多想，就是也没有说不好听的意思，就如果他真的有这种倾向的话，我也不会说怎么样，因为我理解他。	B	
			Mild, confused.	淡淡的，懵懵的	当时我不知道我是什么样的想法，我觉得我现在回想起来是比较淡然的，我不是直接把这个视频和我的爸爸联想在一起，我更多的是觉得说它是一个黄片的那种感觉。	G	
			protective desire	保护欲	我当时我就会觉得我特别想去保护我的妈妈，我不想要有人背叛她。	G	
		Surprised, Confused.	吃惊，困惑	教育都是很包容的，我也没有经过多久就接受了这件事情。	H		
		Happv. Intimate.	开心，亲密	我，也愿意让我了解她真实的一面。	H		
		Adolescence	Negative perception of LGBTQ	对LGBTQ产生负面印象	我觉得如果我更明确地知道这件事情，可能会对我的心境状况造成更加严重的危害，因为早年的我对LGBTQ的理解非常淡薄和片面，可能会导致我走上主动对少数群体抱有负面情绪的道路。	C	
			shocked	震惊	有一点震惊	D	
			suddenly realize	恍然大悟	就算说我跟他是情侣，我也觉得，就是我突然就反应过来，这件事情好像不奇怪。回想起以前在跟我妈在性少数群体这方面的接触，我就觉得这是一件很合理的事情。	D	
			Shocked, disgusted.	震惊、恶心	超级震惊加恶心吧，觉得这么多年都在被欺骗，替妈妈感到不值，甚至想要和他断绝关系，也找过律师但是因为我还是学生没有经济实力最后也作罢了	E	
			Bitterness, resentment	痛苦、怨怒	当时非常怨怒，觉得这样的命运怎么会降临在我身上，也怀疑过我为什么要出生如果我不出生就不会面对这些了，以前天天看耽美，也替同性恋群体发声，现在变得有点厌恶他们，总之现在不再能以平常心看待男同性恋，对女同性恋倒是没有什么偏见	E	
		Adulthood	Negative perception of LGBTQ	对LGBTQ产生负面印象	是这些已经事实我没有办法改变，现在唯一能依靠的就是母亲，我的妈妈还在等着我长大	F	
			strong	坚强	很突然，就是也没有想过，就是我也是一个比较震惊，因为小时候还是比较懵懵的时期吧。	E	
			shocked	震惊	手冰凉，然后我特别生气，就是很生气	F	
	vigorous		生气	一开始真的很痛苦，就是我当时真的很，真是很难受，我也不能跟别人说，我只能自己消化这件事情，然后后面慢慢的我自己都忘了。	F		
	Bitterness		痛苦	我的反应比较平淡，因为其实很长一段时间来我们都有怀疑过这件事情，而且我其实当时对我爸的情感已经非常淡薄了，我没有很特别的想法，也没有什么特别的波动	C		
	Emotions upon family environment	Adulthood	Indifferent	失落	当时我还正好是一年级，我就觉得特别的小家都有爸妈，就没有妈妈，我倒是知道他去外地，但是他就是基本上连电话都不怎么给我打，但是后来我才知道他原来跑去找女朋友了，而且他女朋友还对他那么不好。唉，其实真的挺难评的	A	
			disappointment	失落	小的时候肯定还是会有点就是，嗯，怎么说，失落吧应该算，我也没有很理想过她，但是自己确实会失落，就是别人都是一对父母的家庭，为什么我是一对爷爷奶奶的家庭，别人可以和父母在一起那么久，但是爷爷奶奶他们肯定会比父母先走一步，我要一个人走的路更长。	A	
			disappointment	失落	我奶非常伤心，甚至精神上受了一些影响，以一个比较自私的口吻来讲，就是说你自己的问题，为什么你伤害了我的，然后要让我来解决？所以我会在这个角度对他产生一些怨恨	B	
			resentment	怨恨	如果小的时候我爸就对我不好，然后对我妈也是那种家暴男或者怎么样的，我可能现在会更恨他一点。但是现在的情况就是说我说我再说我也不愿意见到这个人，我很讨厌他，那他就是欠或者什么的这些，我会说这种话，但是过年过节的时候回去见到他还是会表面上维持和谐，然后就觉得甚至我爸这两年就是他可能生病什么的，我还是会给他买东西，还是会心疼	B	
			twisted emotions	拧巴	我也懒得管他们这些事情了，因为他们从小就经常吵架，我已经累了，反正我小时候就特别不喜欢他们吵架，他们每次吵架我就哭，后来我就累了，我就不管了，反正就成长成了一个很冷漠的人；他们小时候老是吵架，导致我就是情感封闭，然后跟家庭割裂，我就觉得他们的事情跟我都没有关系，后来我就拒绝受到他们的影响，就是这种感觉。	D	
		Adulthood	Disappointment, indifference, fragmentation	失望、冷漠、割裂	不再那么崇敬父亲，他在我心中父亲的角色被淡化了取而代之的是厌恶但是毕竟十几年的血肉亲情不可能割舍的掉，有时候感觉自己很矛盾一边恨他一边又因为所谓父亲的爱而动摇；我父亲曾经是一个完美的父亲，现在就是很矛盾吧，恨与爱并存	E	
			twisted emotions	拧巴	我就跟我妈说了，我说你怎么这么放心你的丈夫呢？嗯，你知不知道他会约她？然后但是我妈她的反应就是超级冷淡的，嗯，我觉得现在想起来最特别的状态的。	G	
			Disappointment, indifference,	失望、冷漠	我觉得对我个人来说增加了麻烦，真的就是增加了麻烦和纠结和内心的矛盾。	G	
			Struggle, paradox.	纠结、矛盾	我妈一直对我很好，她在我成长的每一个阶段都非常支持我，像朋友一样，而且我从小就只跟我妈一起生活，所以我对我妈感情很深，在我眼里她一直是一个女强人，事业方面非常厉害，所以从小到大我都很崇拜她，她的取向对我也没什么多大影响，反而觉得她更酷了，也理解了一些她之前的决定。	H	
			Happiness, understanding	幸福、理解	13岁的时候，当我还不知道这一切的时候，我第一次发现我爸出轨的时候，我就觉得很恶心，我就无法，就是因为那个时候他们在我心里还是父母的形象嘛，我就无法把他们和这种事情联系在一起，我就很恶心，所以我就不知道这件事情。	D	
		Extreme situations related to sex orientation	Adulthood	disgusted	恶心	大学的时候谈了一个女朋友，有一天爸妈就直接就是撞破这件事情，我爸把我的肋骨打断了，如果我爸爸他没有经历过这种取向的探索，他是一个和普通的爸爸一样的情况，就他对我真的有那么恨吗？还是说他不想让我走他的老路才这样？他因为他自己的身份，他自己产生了一些自卑也好，或者是没有面子也好，然后因为这件事情对我产生的一些，不管是拳脚相加，还是说严加管教，还是说他和他人的爸爸不一样，这件事情对我才是影响最大的。	B