



Where is the Future?: Life Goals of Chinese LGB Young Adults

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Abstract

The current study examined self-articulated goals of Chinese gay, lesbian, and bisexual (LGB) young adults from mainland China in order to identify the types of self-expectations and future orientation shaped by experiences living in the heteronormative Chinese society and thus to better understand the development of Chinese sexual minority young adults during the transition to adulthood. Results indicated that family-related goals and romantic relationship goals were the most frequent goals reported by participants when considering their sexual minority status in China, which suggested that Chinese LGBs wanted acceptance and support from their families as well as being able to fulfill their needs for romantic relationships in a family-prioritizing and heteronormative social environment. Thus, familial and romantic relationships might be of particular importance for Chinese sexual minority young adults.

Introduction

- Research on young adults' life goals and the ways by which they regulate and control their own development during the transition to adulthood has paid little attention to sexual minorities.
- Given that the exploration of self-identities is an important developmental task for young adults (Erikson 1950, 1963), examining the life goals of sexual minority young adults is important for their actualization.
- The life goals of heteronormative cis-gender adolescents and young adults reflected their future plans, often related to education, occupation, and sometimes family formation (Chang et al., 2006).
- Considering that sexual minorities in a more traditional heteronormative and family-oriented society might have more constraints in regulating their development, the current study explored the content of goals as a starting point for research.

Methods

Sample Characteristics

- 235 self-identified Chinese born and raised LGB individuals from Mainland China
- 46% cis-female; 84% gay/lesbian and 16% bisexual
- 18 and 33 years old ($M = 22.67$, $SD = 3.33$)
- 162 (69%) were pursuing undergraduate degree or had higher degrees.
- 151 (64%) were financially dependent on their parents
- 145 (62%) were living with their parents
- 50 (21%) had no same-sex relationship experience; 107 (46%) had once or twice; 78 (33%) had three times or more.

Procedure

- Participants were asked to provide up to three answers for an open-ended question "What are the most important goals and plans you have regarding your sexuality status in China?"
- 605 goals generated in total: 168 (71.5%) participants generated 3 goals; 34 (14.5%) generated 2 goals; and 33 (14%) generated only 1 goal.

Table 1

Coding Scheme for Self-Reported Life Goals

Category	Examples
1. Educational goals	"Go to grad school," "Pass all tests," "Academic achievement"
2. Occupational goals	"Have a good job," "Have a stable career," "Get promoted at work"
3. Family related goals	"Coming out to parents," "adopt a boy if possible," "Legal recognition of my girlfriend and I"
4. Autonomy goals	"Be independent," "Be financially independent," "Be free and not restricted"
5. Self-actualization goals	"Improve myself," "explore and make sure of my sexuality," "Coming out"
6. Travel and leisure goals	"Travel around the world," "immigrate abroad," "Organize a band,"
7. Humanitarianism goals	"Legalization of same-sex marriage in China," "Change sexual minorities' situations in China," "Help more people"
8. Material goals	"Buy an apartment," "Buy a car," "Earn enough money"
9. Romantic relationship goals	"Be with my boyfriend forever," "Find a same-sex partner," "Find someone who loves me"
10. Other goals*	"Be healthy," "Make good friends," "work out and be strong"

*Other goals include health and peer-related goals

- Goals were originally reported in Chinese and were then translated into English. Two trained bicultural and bilingual undergraduate researchers coded the goals; initial disagreements about coding were brought to the third author, a psychology professor. All disagreements were resolved and all three authors agreed with the final coding.
- The coding scheme is based on Chang et al.'s life goal study (2006).

Results

- The goal coding schemes from previous studies performed poorly for this study and was subsequently revised substantially (see Table 1 for new goal categories colored in GREEN).
- Results showed that the most frequent goals mentioned were related to family and romantic relationships. For reference, please see Table 2 and 3.

Table 2

Frequency of Goals and Number of Participants Generating Goals by Each General Category

Category	Frequency N (% of total goals)	Number of participants N (% of total participants)
1. Educational goals	34 (5.6)	33 (14.0)
2. Occupational goals	66 (10.9)	63 (26.8)
3. Family related goals	136 (22.5)	107 (45.5)
4. Autonomy goals	43 (7.1)	39 (16.6)
5. Self-actualization goals	62 (10.2)	52 (22.1)
6. Travel and leisure goals	35 (5.8)	35 (14.9)
7. Humanitarianism goals	48 (7.9)	36 (15.3)
8. Material goals	37 (6.1)	34 (14.5)
9. Romantic relationship goals	133 (22)	135 (53.2)
10. Other goals*	11 (1.9)	10 (4.3)

*Most frequent categories are highlighted in blue.

*Other goals include health and peer-related goals

Table 3

Frequency of Goals by the Most Frequent Subcategories

Subcategories (general)	Frequency N(% of total goals)	Examples
1. Find a partner, no family formation mentioned (Romantic relationship goals)	87 (14.4)	"find a romantic partner," "have a romantic relationship"
2. Relationship to family of origin (e.g., parents) (Family related goals)	62 (10.2)	"successfully out to parents," "parental support for my sexuality"
3. Marry in the nontraditional sense (Family related goals)	58 (9.6)	"form a same-sex household," "marry my girlfriend and raise a child with her"
4. Other aspect of partner relationship (Romantic relationship goals)	46 (7.6)	"be with my boyfriend forever," "have a stable relationship with my partner"
5. Social Justice (Humanitarianism goals)	40 (6.6)	"legalization of same-sex marriage," "eliminate discrimination toward sexual minorities"
6. Autonomy, financial (Autonomy goals)	37 (6.1)	"be financially independent,"
7. Occupation or career, not further specified (Occupational goals)	36 (6.0)	"have my own career," "find a good job"
8. Self-actualization, not other wise specified (Self-actualization goals)	36 (6.0)	"coming out (in general)," "live up to my own expectations"

Discussion

- The results suggested that romantic relationships and the support for one's sexuality from one's family are of particular significance for sexual minorities young adults in China during the transition to adulthood.
- Results of the current study raise interesting questions about whether and to what extent educational and occupational goals—goals are usually considered important for young adults—are significant to Chinese LGB young adults.
- Future studies should further explore how sexual minority young adults negotiate, control, and regulate their own development, how they achieve their sexuality-related goals despite constraints in their social environment, as well as how they incorporate basic developmental tasks into their future plans.