



Psychological Adjustment of Chinese LGB Individuals: Effects of Minority Stress and Perceived Social Support from Friends and Family

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Acknowledgement: the authors acknowledge the funding provided by Pacific Basin Research Center and the research assistance received from Wendy Bai, Yuye Zhou, Lijing Wang, and Hanzhen Zhang. Correspondence concerning this poster should be addressed to Esther S. Chang, Associate Professor of Psychology at Soka University of America, E-mail: echang@soka.edu



Abstract

The present study tested the minority stress model (Meyer, 1995, 2003) and the effects of perceived social support from friends and families among 278 self-identified LGBs (lesbian, gay, bisexuals) in China in order to identify the better predictors of Chinese LGBs' mental health outcomes. Results from hierarchical regression analyses indicated that friends' social support and families' social support perceived by participants were more important in predicting Chinese LGBs' psychological adjustment when compared to traditional indicators of minority stress.

Introduction

- Research on sexual orientation and gender diversity has recently grown in number but has often ignored the cultural backgrounds of participants. Given that cultural validity is critical when evaluating psychological theories (e.g., Hardin et al., 2014), research that considers culture, ethnicity, and nationality is imperative (Wang, 2016).
 - This study recognizes the vast contributions of Meyer's minority-stress model (1995, 2003), which proposes that LGBs experience higher levels of psychological distress as a result of their minority status in heterosexual society. For example, stressors related to sexual minority status, such as internalized homophobia (IH), self-concealment (SC), and rejection sensitivity (RS), have been proposed to be significant mediators of LGB status and psychological adjustment (Myer, 2003).
 - Interdependent relationships have been historically prioritized in the Chinese society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, the "self" cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration the relationships with family members and friends. Yet, being a LGB person in such a sociocultural context can be difficult because prioritizing interdependent relationships often requires sacrificing one's own individual needs. Thus, Chinese LGBs in a heteronormative and collectivistic social environment might suppress their sexuality to maintain social and familial relationships.
- ## Hypotheses
- Hypothesis 1: minority stressors (i.e., IH, SC, and RS) would be positively correlated with depression and loneliness but negatively correlated with life satisfaction
 - Hypothesis 2: Chinese LGBs' perceived social support from both friends and families would be significantly and negatively correlated with depression and loneliness but significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction
 - Hypothesis 3: Perceived social support from friends and from family would be better predictors of Chinese LGBs' psychological adjustment than minority stressors (i.e., IH, SC, and RS).

Methods

Participants

- 278 self-identified Chinese born and raised LGB individuals
- 46% female; 77% gay/lesbian and 23% bisexual
- Aged between 18 and 33 years old ($M = 22.39$, $SD = 3.34$)
- 198 (71%) were pursuing undergraduate degree or had higher degrees.
- 187 (67%) were financially dependent on their parents; 175 (63%) were living with their parents
- 67 (24%) had no same-sex relationship experience; 127 (46%) had once or twice; 84 (30%) had three times or more.

Measures

Demographic and control variables

- Gender, age, sexual orientation, educational level, and number of same-sex relationship experiences.
- Outness to family (A 3-item short version of Outness Inventory assessing outness to mother, father, and siblings/cousins; Morh & Fassinger, 2000; 1 = *this person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status*, 7 = *this person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status*, and it is openly talked about; $\alpha = .73$)

Minority Stressors (traditional set)

- Internalized homophobia (IH; 3 items; Mohr & Kendra, 2011; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .71$)
- Concealment motivation (SC; 3 items; Mohr & Kendra, 2011; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .76$)

- Gay-Related Rejection Sensitivity Scale (RS; 6 situations, each with 2 questions followed; Pachankis, Goldfried, & Ramrattan, 2008; 1 = *very unconcerned*, 6 = *very concerned*; 1 = *very unlikely*, 6 = *very likely*; $\alpha = .79$)
- #### Perceived Social Support
- Perceived Social Support—friends (PSS-friends; 4 items; Chou, 2000; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .84$)
 - Perceived Social Support—family (PSS-family; 4 items; Chou, 2000; 1 = *disagree strongly*, 6 = *agree strongly*; $\alpha = .82$)
- #### Psychological Adjustment
- Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS; 7 items, Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; 0 = *did not apply to me at all*, 3 = *applied to me very much, or most of the time*; $\alpha = .91$)
 - Satisfaction with Life Scale (5 items; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .84$)
 - UCLA Loneliness Scale (8 items; Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980; 1 = *never*, 4 = *often*; $\alpha = .82$)

Results

- HYPOTHESIS 1&2: Correlation analyses confirmed that IH and RS were significantly and positively correlated with depression and that all three minority stressors (IH, SC, RS) were significantly and positively correlated with loneliness but not with life satisfaction. As expected, both PSS-friends and PSS-family were significantly and negatively correlated with depression and loneliness but significantly and positively correlated with life satisfaction. (see Table 1). (Green = hypothesis confirmed; Red = hypothesis disconfirmed)

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and correlations among main variables

	<i>M(SD)</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Internalized homophobia	2.42 (1.20)	.50***	.30***	-.16**	-.08	-.06	.13*	-.06	.10*
2. Self-concealment	3.37 (1.25)	--	.26***	-.24***	-.04	-.08	.05	-.06	.17**
3. Rejection sensitivity	3.68 (0.90)	--	--	-.03	.01	-.01	.17**	-.08	.21***
4. Outness to family	3.10 (1.57)	--	--	--	.04	-.01	.09	-.08	-.05
5. Perceived social support—friends	4.59 (0.93)	--	--	--	--	.29***	-.26***	.36***	-.51***
6. Perceived social support—family	4.32 (1.04)	--	--	--	--	--	-.29***	.20***	-.28***
7. Depression	1.88 (0.62)	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.49***	.53***
8. Life satisfaction	3.32 (1.02)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.44***
9. Loneliness	2.46 (0.59)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

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

- HYPOTHESIS 3: Three-step hierarchical linear regression analyses confirmed that (1) perceived social support from friends (PSS-friends) and perceived social support from families (PSS-families) were better predictors of depression and life satisfaction than minority stressors and that (2) RS, PSS-friends, PSS-families, and the number of same-sex relationship experiences all significantly contributed to Chinese LGBs' loneliness (see Table 3, 4, and 5).

Table 2

Hierarchical Linear Regression Predicting Depression

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Gender	-.05	.07	-.04
Educational level	-.05	.06	-.05
Outness to family	.04	.02	.10
Same-sex relationship	.01	.03	.01
Internalized homophobia	.04	.04	.08
Self-concealment	-.01	.03	-.03
Rejection sensitivity	.11	.04	.15*
Perceived social support—friends	-.12	.04	-.18**
Perceived social support—family	-.13	.04	-.22***
Adj. R^2 for Step 1		.019	
Adj. R^2 for Step 2		.046**	
Adj. R^2 for Step 3		.135***	
ΔR^2 from Step 1 to Step 2		.038*	
ΔR^2 from Step 2 to Step 3		.093***	

Note. Results presented are Step 3 only. Step 1 included gender, educational level, outness to family, and number of same-sex relationships; Step 2 included internalized homophobia, self-concealment, and rejection sensitivity; Step 3 included perceived social support from friends and from family. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 3

Hierarchical Linear Regression Predicting Life Satisfaction

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Gender	.17	.12	.08
Educational level	.17	.10	.10
Outness to family	-.07	.04	-.11
Same-sex relationship	.11	.05	.13*
Internalized homophobia	.03	.06	.03
Self-concealment	-.04	.05	-.05
Rejection Sensitivity	-.06	.07	-.05
Perceived social support—friends	.30	.07	.28***
Perceived social support—family	.19	.06	.20***
Adj. R^2 for Step 1		.060***	
Adj. R^2 for Step 2		.060***	
Adj. R^2 for Step 3		.188***	
ΔR^2 from Step 1 to Step 2		.010	
ΔR^2 from Step 2 to Step 3		.131***	

Note. Results presented are Step 3 only. Step 1 included gender, educational level, outness to family, and number of same-sex relationships; Step 2 included internalized homophobia, self-concealment, and rejection sensitivity; Step 3 included perceived social support from friends and from family. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 4

Hierarchical Linear Regression Predicting Loneliness

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Gender	-.06	.06	-.05
Educational level	.02	.05	.02
Outness to family	.01	.02	.02
Same-sex relationship	-.07	.02	-.15**
Internalized homophobia	-.04	.03	-.07
Self-concealment	.05	.03	.10
Rejection Sensitivity	.12	.04	.19***
Perceived social support—friends	-.30	.03	-.47***
Perceived social support—family	-.09	.03	-.15**
Adj. R^2 for Step 1		.033*	
Adj. R^2 for Step 2		.076***	
Adj. R^2 for Step 3		.337***	
ΔR^2 from Step 1 to Step 2		.052**	
ΔR^2 from Step 2 to Step 3		.260***	

Note. Results presented are Step 3 only. Step 1 included gender, educational level, outness to family, and number of same-sex relationships; Step 2 included internalized homophobia, self-concealment, and rejection sensitivity; Step 3 included perceived social support from friends and from family. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

- The results showed that Chinese LGBs did experience minority stress to some extent. However, the results suggested that to survive and thrive in the collectivistic Chinese society, overall familial and social relationships and functioning might be more important to Chinese LGBs than their sexuality.
- The present study also provided new evidence to the important role of perceived social support from friends and families in affecting Chinese LGBs' mental health outcomes.
- The particular life stage of participants might be one limitation of the present study. Older LGB adults might have very different experiences. The relatively insignificant effects of minority stress might also be attributed to participants' relatively young age.
- Future studies focusing on sexual minorities from family-prioritizing societies can investigate the effects of perceived support for sexuality from friends and families as well as use longitudinal methods to examine such effects.