AN INTERCULTURAL COMPARISON OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOMOSEXUAL PARTNERS IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN CHINA - USING COMMUNICATION ON THE INTERNET AS A REFERENCE

Margaret T.L. Fung

A Project
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Communication

Supervisor: Professor Ling Chen

School of Communication
Hong Kong Baptist University

Hong Kong
August 2006
Acknowledgement

Writing the acknowledgement is the pleasurable last task that finishes the project. First, I thank my advisor Professor Ling Chen, for her never failing support throughout the process of my doing this project. Professor Chen was always there to listen to my questions and ideas and to give prompt responses and directions. She taught me how to choose the more appropriate methodology and how to frame my study into a more manageable configuration. Indeed it was Professor Chen’s class on intercultural communication which developed my interest in this area at the very first place. My most heartfelt thanks to her!

A special thank goes to my ex-colleague Dr. Kim-fan Wong, a really knowledgeable and helpful friend of mine, who has given me lots of valuable advice on the pioneer scholars in homosexuality study. Kim-fan is both a friend and a mentor. He showed me how to write an academic paper, define a research topic and not less important, he is most responsible for improving my English writing. I know I will continue learning a lot from him in the future.

Besides the two advisors, I would also like to thank all the teachers from whom I have learned a lot during these two years of communication study. Bit by bit their teachings naturally flowed out of my mind and got into this piece of my most important project. Professor John Powers, I enjoyed very much his lectures on communication repertoire and his lovely smiles in and outside of the classroom. Professor Ringo Ma, he let me know the first time in my life what “methodology” is. His sense of humour would make every classmate keep awake throughout the lecture. Thanks to Professor Steve Guo who helped me develop a more critical mind to the media and an acute awareness to “think out of the box”. Professor Kara Chan, the course on marketing became much more interesting and practical with her first hand experience and most recent examples. Ms. Susan Chan, she gave us quite a number of assignments and a whole lot more of valuable comments. I am thankful that she has revamped my foundation in public relations writing.

Let me also salute to all past, present and future scholars who have contributed and will continue to contribute to the study of the homosexual subculture. Without their enthusiasm and commitment in the pursuit of the “truth” of homosexuality, I would not make it to complete this project.
During the course of this work, I was fully supported by my mother who never complained for my not helping with the housework but kept serving me with home-made soups and herb teas. These were more crucial to my psychological than physical needs. I am greatly indebted to my mother for educating me with herself as the best live model and encouraging me to pursue my own, not her, interests and aspirations.

If this project would happen to receive any appreciation for its petite contribution, all the honour should go to my beloved ones I have acknowledged beforehand.

_____________________________

Margaret T.L. Fung

M.A. in Communication
School of Communication
Hong Kong Baptist University

Date: 30-July-2006
Abstract

Many studies have been conducted in the past two decades to examine homosexuality. In recent years, homosexuality has even become a fashion in popular culture. It seems the general straight populace should have been able to gain access to a more representative account of the homosexual community from academic resources and mainstream popular culture. This paper tries to provide another perspective for its readers to evaluate these representations of the homosexual community, through communications between homosexuals on the internet, in light of the first-hand experiences presented by the members. Two weeks of message threads posted onto three homosexual message boards based in China (including Hong Kong) and the other two based in the United States were analyzed. The message content was examined to identify the common patterns observed in the romantic relationships and shared beliefs held by the homosexuals in each country. It was observed from the message threads that homosexuals in China, whether gay males or lesbians, would emphasize more on their respective gender roles in a relationship than homosexuals in the United States. Chinese homosexual males were found valuing more the appearance than the sex performance of a partner while American homosexual males were found demonstrating the opposite preference. American homosexuals tend to be more willing to acknowledge their partners in their families and social circles than their Chinese counterparts. Despite these differences, many commonalities were identified between the homosexual relationships observed in these two countries. In particular, similar to most straight people, many homosexuals in both China and the United States indeed would favor long-term and committed relationships, if their cultures would provide them an environment for such a relationship to foster.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgement i  
Abstract iii  
Table of Contents iv  
Introduction 1  
Part One – Overview  
1. Evolution of homosexual culture in the two countries 3  
2. Portrayal of the homosexual community and homosexual relationship found in academic and popular sources 6  
3. Purpose and scope of this project 16  
Part Two – Research  
1. Research questions 17  
2. Methods 18  
Part Three – Results  
1. Sex appeals 21  
2. Emotional Attachment 23  
3. Roles in the relationship 24  
4. Social life 26  
5. Pledge and vision 27  
Part Four – Discussion 28  
Part Five – Limitations of the Project 33  
References 34  
Appendices 36
INTRODUCTION
In the past few years, the United States has seen a distinct increase of homosexual characters in primetime television shows and Hollywood movies. This increase in visibility is believed by many people, straight or gay, that homosexuality should now be better understood, and more accepted, by the general populace. But this is just one side of the story. What many homosexual activists see it is another interpretation: it is true that visibility has been growing but the homosexuals have not been more understood. The mainstream media are just re-defining the homosexuals from their previous set of stereotypes with a whole new set of labels, “labels which are more appealing to many homosexuals that they will be pleased to exchange with their money” (Baldwin, 2003).

On the other side of Pacific Ocean in China where homosexuality was a taboo not to be mentioned since the Cultural Revolution, open discussions of homosexuality in mainstream media have also been increasing in these few years. Yet it is still prohibited in public cinemas and television operas, the Chinese populace have witnessed in 2005 the first homosexuality feature programme broadcasted on the state-owned CCTV station during its primetime hours. Both the homosexuals and the general populace are expecting more to come so that a more representative depiction of the same-sex community can be revealed. Before then, the birth and rapid advancement of the internet technology should be able to shed new light on the public’s understanding of this community.

Typing “homosexuality” in the Google search engine, one will find more than 42,270,000 results in 0.11 second. Associated Press (1996) found that homosexuals were among the first to realize the potential of the internet technology. “It’s the unspoken secret of the online world that gay men and lesbians are among the most avid, loyal and plentiful users of the internet”. The cyberspace provides a common platform for millions
of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who may be reluctant to associate in public. For those who are afraid or unable to visit homosexual establishments or subscribe to homosexual publications, homosexual online services help bringing the community into their homes, where they are shielded from their neighbours and coworkers. Beyond the organizations and the electronic magazines lie the vast majority of the “chat rooms” and bulletin board discussion groups where homosexuals can meet with their peers, exchange feelings and thoughts, and resume the “mainstream” position without any hesitation (Associated Press, 1996). As a mass medium, the internet offers the best openness, interaction and anonymity which perfectly match with the characteristics for subculture communication. This means of communication enables the homosexuals to take back their active roles to speak for themselves instead of to have the mainstream media to speak for and/or about them.

In this project, communications on three China-based and two the United States-based homosexual message boards will be used as a reference point for an intercultural comparison of the relationship between homosexual partners in these two countries. The project will also attempt to conduct an analysis to evaluate the level of resemblance between the depiction of the homosexual relationship found in previous literature and mainstream media, and the first-person descriptions offered by the homosexuals in the message boards.
PART ONE - OVERVIEW

1. Evolution of homosexual culture in the two countries

The distinction between behavior and identity is critical to the understanding of contemporary gay male and lesbian life. Jeffrey Weeks described it well:

“Homosexuality has existed throughout history. But what have varied enormously are the ways in which various societies have regarded homosexuality, the meanings they have attached to it, and how those who were engaged in homosexual activity viewed themselves. … As a starting point we have to distinguish between homosexual behavior, which is universal, and a homosexual identity, which is historically specific – and a comparatively recent phenomenon.” (Weeks, 1977: P.11)

The United States – In pre-industrial America when economy was primarily family-centered, heterosexual relations equaled individual survival as production was based on the cooperative labor of husband, wife and their children. Heterosexuality was undefined because it was truly the only way of life. Though evidence of homosexual activity in the colonial era was revealed in later years, nothing indicated that men or women could make their erotic or emotional attraction for the same sex into a personal identity. The presence of gay men and lesbians was literally inconceivable.

The decisive shift to industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century provided the conditions for a homosexual identity to emerge. The free labor system and the expansion of commodity production created an environment in which an autonomous personal life could develop (D’Emilio, 1992). Men and women could then devise an identity and a way of life out of their sexual and emotional attraction to members of the same sex. As industrial capitalism established its supremacy, the potential for homosexual desire to come into an identity gradually grew.

The institutions and networks that constituted the subculture of homosexuals slowly
grew, stabilized and differentiated during the first half of the twentieth century but the process had gone through much oppression. Any form of homosexual expression was severely devalued by the mainstream culture. Until World War II, the evolution of a homosexual identity and of urban homosexual subcultures was miserably slow but the war immensely hastened the process as it uprooted millions of American men and women from families and deposited them in a variety of sex-segregated, non-familial environments: men in armed services and women in labor force. For a generation of Americans, World War II created a setting in which to experience same-sex love, affection and sexuality, and to discover and participate in the group life of gay men and women. It properly marked the beginning of the nation’s modern homosexual history. For a generation of Americans, World War II created a setting in which to experience same-sex love, affection and sexuality, and to discover and participate in the group life of gay men and women. It properly marked the beginning of the nation’s modern homosexual history.

Since 1970s Americans have become alerted to the importance of sexuality as an area of political contention. Both women’s liberation and homosexual liberation became major social forces in part by their assertion that the personal was political (D’Emilio, 1992). They succeed in mobilizing millions of women and men around sexual concerns and stimulated intense debates. In many cases substantive changes in policy and public attitudes took place. As more and more well-accepted celebrities and respected scholars came out and declared their homosexual identity in the last two decades, homosexuals, and homosexuality, have gained greater than ever presence and influence in American mainstream culture.
China – The evolution of homosexual culture in China did not follow a similar pattern as in the United States. Traditional Chinese culture has been comparatively benevolent to love between the same sex. This is reflected in many ancient sex portraits and literature\(^1\). Sex is considered a natural part of one’s living, just like eating. Unlike western scholars, such as Sigmund Freud, who treat sex as the center of living and define one’s identity according to sexual behavior and orientation, the Chinese culture does not tie one’s sexual orientation with one’s identity. “Doing” does not equal “being” (Zhou, 1996).

Homosexual life has not been seen as a threat to the traditional heterosexual family system as long as the family lineage can be continued. Heterosexual marriage is not an option but a must in this culture. Marriage and reproduction have never been a matter of individual preference or choice, but a massive system interlocking politics, economy and human morality (Zhou, 1995). This system is intimately tied with the survival of this country which is founded upon traditional morals and ethics, family kinship and heritage, and household economy. Under these traditional mandates, marriage to Chinese is not for the sake of sexual and emotional intimacy but to fulfill the moral and family responsibility, and to inherit the material benefits that come with the married status.

Except a very small proportion of young and well-educated homosexuals centralized in the few major cities, most Chinese homosexuals, especially males, still surrender to heterosexual marriage. Moral pressure and material considerations, for example, organization housing accompanied with the married status, do not leave them much room

\(^1\) In ancient China, terms describing same-sex love included "the passion of the cut sleeve" and "the bitten peach". Other less obscure terms included "male trend", "allied brothers" and "masculine-dragon preference". All major religions in ancient China have some sort of codex, which have traditionally been interpreted as being against exclusive homosexuality when it interferes with continuation of the family lineage. However, none of the Chinese major religions condemn homosexuality as a sin as many Christian churches do. As long as a man does his duty and produces children, it is his private affair to have other male lovers.
for personal choice. Yet many of them do continue homosexual behavior outside their marriage.

The social environment for homosexuality came to a change after the formation of the People’s Republic of China in the late 1940s. The Communist regime persecuted homosexuals, especially during the Cultural Revolution, when many homosexuals were punished with imprisonment or even execution. Social tolerance of homosexuality started to decline. Since the policy of Reform and Opening Up in 1979, the Communist party has been loosening its control over this kind of behavior. But the practice of homosexuality is still labeled as a “moldering life style of capitalism” (Lau, 2005). Although there is no explicit law against homosexuality, neither are there laws protecting the homosexuals from discrimination, nor are there any gay rights organizations established in China. Under the Communist regime where “politics”, “movements” and “human rights” are widely endorsed as the most sensitive issues, homosexuals in China do not see any value, but harm, to direct their liberation to the political arena like what the Americans do (Li, 1998). For today’s Chinese homosexuals, liberation means: to get a more realistic and fair representation of this community among the general public and the media, so that homosexual relationship will be better understood and accepted in this culture.

2. Portrayal of the homosexual community and homosexual relationship found in academic and popular sources

Gay men do not simply like other men, they are like other men. This is probably most homosexuals would want the general straight populace to understand them (Schulman, 1994).
The United States – Academic study of homosexuality has begun since late nineteenth century. Among all scholars and related studies, four have established the most influential impact on the general public’s understanding of homosexuality. German-jewish sexologist Hirschfeld introduced the concept of “the third sex” putting homosexuals onto the equivalent position as the other two sexes and making this third sex become legitimate and be able to enjoy the rights as the other two sexes. Not long after Hirschfeld, Freud repudiated the general belief that homosexual love is sinful and immoral, and further ascertained that this is not an illness. Freud’s notion was widely accepted by most psychiatrists and the American Psychiatric Association eventually announced to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in 1973. In 1948, when the Kinsey Study\(^1\) presented in front of the American populace a statistical evidence of the proportion of homosexuals existing in their society, the astonishing figures had made the Americans not be able to escape re-configuring the homosexual presence in their country (Appendix 1). Regarding the impact on changing public attitudes towards homosexuality, McCarthy’s proposition should be the most important milestone. McCarthy’s primary claim was one’s whole body, not just the sex organ, should be considered the subject and purpose of sexuality. The scholar pointed out that homosexuality should not be rejected; it is indeed a protest of one’s sexual desire against the reproduction order (Murray, 1996). The release of these studies did help win more forbearance for homosexuals among the American populace in early twentieth century. However, most of these studies were centered on establishing the legitimacy of homosexuality. Not until the last two decades, more was

\(^{1}\)Kinsey claimed that it was impossible to determine the number of persons who are ”homosexual” or ”heterosexual”. It was only possible to determine behavior at any given time because one’s sexual orientation was a fluid continuous spectrum of gradations between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual. For this reason, “homosexuals” in Kinsey’s study were defined by having at least one same-sex experience to orgasm.
done to start investigating the life patterns, romantic relationships and demographic profiles of the homosexuals (Gross, 1999).

Murray’s study on American homosexual relationships was the first comprehensive and inspiring one conducted in the mid 1980s, and the first seriously acknowledged by both the straight and the homosexual populace. According to Murray, in homosexual relationships gay men try to be like, or at least to look like, what they seek to have: masculine men. Sexual practices, especially those involving demonstrations of endurance, produce for many a strong sense of communion and identification with the new vision of tough, masculine gay roles (Harry, 1984; Murray, 1996). “For all practical purposes, they are the rites and rituals of a quasi-religion, the glorification of the malo” (Clum, 2002: P.81). This strong conviction in masculinity, also called essential manhood, deeply inherited in the American culture, is observed just as fervent among gay men as for straight men. For this reason, given the importance of gender as an organizing principle when many Americans routinely assume that for a relationship to exist, distinct gender roles must be enacted, that is, one partner must play the part of the wife and the other be the husband, this is indeed not the case for most American gay couples.

“Most contemporary gay relationships do not conform to traditional “masculine” and “feminine” roles; instead, role flexibility and turn-taking are more common patterns. Only a small minority of homosexual couples engage in clear-cut butch-femme role-playing. In this sense, traditional heterosexual marriage is not the predominant model or script for current homosexual couples.” (Peplau, 1988: P.34)

Specifically a preference for butch-butch relationships increasingly typifies North American urban gay men. It is found that men who value masculinity in themselves also seek masculine-appearing partners.

For lesbian relationships, the proportion of partners adopting distinct roles of butch
(Tomboy) and femme (Tomboy girl) is much higher than that observed in gay relationships. It is generally not difficult to differentiate tomboys from tomboy girls by their outlooks, gestures and behaviors. Lesbians, when compared with gay men, tend to keep a much lower profile in searching partners and usually limit their circles within specific venues and social groups (Murray, 1996). Unlike gay relationships in which sex plays the primary role, lesbian relationships are mostly built upon emotional attachment and fulfillment of psychological needs. Various studies have found that lesbian couples are more likely to live together than gay male couples. The extent to which this is a result of temperament or a difference of economic resources is though not clear from the available data.

At least prior to the outbreak of AIDS, many men in gay couples were relatively casual about “extramarital” sex. For some, extramarital sex often replaced sex between partners and was not considered as a threat to the relationship. In contrast, lesbian partners conceived extramarital sex as dissatisfaction with and lack of commitment to the relationship (Harry, 1984). Given cultural prohibitions against women engaging in casual sex, women, including lesbians, tend to develop love affairs more than one-time sexual encounters with little emotional investment sought by men. Affairs represent a greater threat to a relationship than casual encounters, so that lesbian non-monogamy is more serious for primary relationships than gay male sexual encounters outside relationships.

Though little empirical evidence exists, choice of long-term partners in same-sex relationships is based on similarity of social characteristics and on opportunities for contact, just as in the usual choice of heterosexual marriage partners and of lesbian and gay best friends – many of whom are former sexual partners (Schulman, 1994).

In mainstream media, sexual minorities have long been invisible on screen and in
print (Gross, 1999). While in the last two decades, gay men and lesbians had become more frequent figures in the American media, they were still found in limited, and often demeaning or negative roles. Above all, a television network or a media conglomerate is a public corporation and must return a profit to its owners. That means whatever else they do in terms of providing information or entertainment, the media’s cultivation of advertisers is necessarily a top priority. In the logic of the media ratings game, this often means that it is more profitable to serve only a fraction of the total possible audience – namely those with the most spending power, the right “psychographics,” socially approved values, and whatever other attributes make them attractive to advertisers (Connolly, 2003). Certain classes and social groups have less population, or money, than others and are thus of less interest to advertisers.

When homosexuals do appear as characters on television programmes or films, they are usually depicted as villains or victims of ridicule. The programmes tend to adopt a certain set of visual and aural signs of “gayness” in order to portray the characters’ sexualities as quickly as possible, including signs such as certain gestures, clothings and even codes of languages, and then connote the qualities associated, stereotypically, with it (Tyler, 1993). In depicting homosexual characters, the programmes and films reduce everything about the characters to sexuality (Gross, 1999). Gay men in particular are frequently described as predators constantly looking for sexual pleasure and worshippers believing only in promiscuity. For example, Brian in Showtime’s series Queer as Folk1, focusing totally on the world of gay singles, lives to “have sex like a man” – with men.

1 Queer as Folk was the first prime time series adopting love and life of homosexuals as the primary subject in an American paid television channel. The storyline surrounded a group of gay men and lesbians living in Pittsburgh and their daily encounters. The first series released in 2000 gained uproarious response from the homosexual community and was rated “the foremost programme achieves to depict the complexity of homosexual life without biases and self-censorship”.
His surroundings are always the gay bars and clubs where he can find an endless supply of sexual partners. According to the writers of this series, urban gay life centers on sex without hindrance of relationships, which Brian thinks is what really annoys straight people; what is against the mainstream culture. “I don’t do relationships,” he says, because he thinks that the natural state for men is promiscuity (Clum, 2002). His only morality is detestation for any form of hypocrisy in others.

Ironically, these negative stereotyping or marginalization of the homosexual characters in mainstream media has directed a dramatic shift to much more positive and prominent representations since the year 2003. Most critics attributed this dramatic change to the enormous success of the “reality TV show” Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, debuted on the cable network Bravo in July, 2003. Each week the Fab 5, an elite team of gay men who have dedicated their lives to extolling the simple virtues of style, taste and class, will transform a style-deficient and culture-deprived straight man “from drab to fab” in each of their respective categories: fashion, food and wine, interior design, grooming and culture (Baldwin, 2003). The success of the show has triggered media networks and ad agencies’ recognition of the viable homosexual niche market. Supported by market researches showing that upper-middle-class white gay men in particular earn slightly more than their heterosexual counterparts (especially in two-income households), a growing number of marketers have reached out with advertising that specifically targets the gay community. Meanwhile, an increasing number of cautiously positioned gay men and lesbians have been appearing in family hour television programmes and mainstream motion pictures acting as talented professionals, caring neighbours, loyal friends and committed lovers.
China – Despite the fact that documentation of same-sex love was first recorded more than a thousand of years ago, serious academic studies of homosexuality did not begin in China until the 1980s, when AIDS had aroused much more attention towards homosexuality from both the government and the public populace. The first pioneer scholar, still the most influential one in mainland China in the pursuit of public’s better understanding and acceptance for homosexuality, is Li Yinhe, a sociologist at Peking University. During the years 1989 to 1991, Li conducted a research on gay males in Beijing, by means of individual interviews and a questionnaire (Appendix 2). The results were published in the book *Ta men de shi jie (Their world)* in 1992. Yet as most scholars did, Li also categorized the “causes” for homosexuality into nature versus nurture; Li was the first to posit against the dominant stance of most Chinese academics at the period that being homosexual is a mental illness and homosexuals should, and could, actively seek professional therapy to correct their sexual “disorder” (Zhou, 1996). More important to the understanding of the homosexual community in China, Li’s research has offered the first detailed examination of the love relationship and the surviving environment faced by what she called this sub-cultural group.

Li’s findings revealed that a gay male’s attitude towards love relationship is primarily determined by two factors: his personal view towards same-sex relationship and his demographic profiles. Gay males with negative or guilty feelings about homosexuality demonstrate a much lower tendency in developing same-sex relationships, either short-term or long-term. Those with higher education level and social status are found more likely to develop emotional attachment with their same-sex partners.

Long-term relationships (referred to continuous acquaintance for more than two years by Li) among gay males are highly exceptional in China. Many interviewees
reflected that the situation in China does not allow long-term relationships to survive. Due to the traditional mandate to continue the family legacy, all men, straight or gay, have no choice but to get married before a certain age. Career development, social status and ancillary benefits are all tied in with one’s family condition.

A vast majority of gay males reflected that they do not assume a fixed role in sexual practices with their same-sex partners. They will take both the active/giver and the passive/receiver roles interchangeably. Role flexibility is an assumed “norm” among the homosexual community as an endeavor of “fair play” in the relationship. However, Li emphasized that it is important to make a clear distinction between the active/passive roles in sexual practices and the masculine/feminine roles, that is the gender roles, one assumes in a homosexual relationship. The two do not have a necessarily corresponding association. More studies have yet to be conducted to examine the gender role assumption observed among China’s homosexual couples.

Most gay males in China, as their American counterparts, also value masculine-appearing partners. In terms of the first and second sexual features including the sex organs and the body build, Chinese gay males do not have much difference in preferences from the Americans. An interesting finding, nonetheless, indicated that in terms of the third sexual features including the facial outlook, personalities, social style and costumes, Chinese gay males tend to show a much higher unanimity towards characteristics like being gentle, elegant, stylish and good-looking\(^1\). All respondents in the study agreed that men should also pay attention to their dressings and styles, and most

\(^1\) When asked “Which type of male stars you will find sexy?”, a vast majority chose Tomokazu Miwura (三浦友和, a Japanese actor in the 80s highly favored as being handsome looking, gentle and thoughtful) instead of Sylvester Stallone (史泰龍, an American actor most renowned as a war hero full of muscles, power and courage in the movies).
respondents do adopt this practice themselves.

Figures based on Lou’s clinical experiences with 1,000 homosexuals during the period 1981 to 1991 supported Li’s findings in the perspectives of assumption of sex roles, duration of relationships and selection criteria of same-sex partners (Zhang, 1994; Lau, 2005). In terms of gender role assumption, lesbians in Lou’s study were found demonstrating a much higher proportion playing a fixed gender role than their male counterparts. Husband-and-wife relationship is the most common pattern observed in lesbian couples. The reasons for this phenomenon were not further investigated but case studies of particular lesbian respondents reflected that their preference for a specific gender role is closely related to their previous experience with the opposite sex. Sex fulfillment is not considered as important as emotional commitment and loyalty among lesbians, who tend to develop more stable and long-term relationship than gay males.

Upon the 1990s, even though there were still prohibitions of publications on homosexuality, the releases of articles and books on this subject had experienced a bloom. Academics, journalists, writers and homosexuals (mostly anonymous) joined their efforts to create a time in Chinese history when homosexuality would be openly discussed and life of the homosexuals would have a channel to be revealed to the public (Lau, 2005). Nonetheless, the flourish in homosexuality publications did not lead its way to the more important mainstream media including the newspaper, the television, the radio and the film industry (Li, 1998). Visibility of the homosexuals in this period was still confined to the print media. When stories of homosexuality did appear in newspapers or on television stations, which were mostly controlled by the government, they were always reports of homosexuals being caught acting indecently in public toilets or behaving with violence in love disputes (Zhou, 1996). If it was not about criminal acts, the issue of homosexuality
would then be attached to AIDS. There were critics that the government’s approach in
dealing with the publicity of homosexuality was the main reason causing the
representation of homosexuals in mainstream media being “sexualized”, “abnormalized”
and “pathologized”. Homosexuals were portrayed as “machines living only for sex and
the culprits for the spread of AIDS” (Li, 1998).

Films are usually regarded as the pioneer of all forms of media in dealing with
homosexuality. However, visibility of homosexual characters in Chinese films is minimal.
Without a formal film rating system, the Chinese government has the full authority to
forbid homosexual films to be shown on television or in cinemas because they are
considered “inappropriate” and “detrimental” to the public morality (Zhou, 1996). In
earlier Chinese films produced by mainland directors, homosexual characters were most
often depicted as victims with miserable fortunes. In Chen Kaige’s Farewell My
Concubine, for example, a young actor with the Beijing Opera was condemned to be a
sexual plaything of a lustful mandarin. Or else the storylines would focus on how the
characters were discarded by their families, friends and the society, such as the gay males
in Zhang Yuan’s film East Palace, West Palace\(^1\) (Lou, 2005).

Indeed most of the films featuring homosexuality are neither written nor directed by
homosexuals. Because of their ignorance about and/or stereotype of the homosexual
community, as well as their major concern not to annoy their primary audience, it is
common practice for the straight film makers to adopt the heterosexual perspective to
portray homosexuals. Representations in these films: the homosexuals engaging in
same-sex prostitution, promiscuous relationships, drug abuse and cross-dressing, then

---
\(^1\) Films with homosexuality as the main theme are not allowed to be shown in cinemas in mainland China. Most of the homosexual films will be brought to international film festivals by their directors to gain publicity first and then be transformed into VCD/DVDs for launch into the mainland market.
gradually become the stereotypes of this community among the public. Very few of these “straight-directed” films would tell stories from the standpoint of the homosexuals. Homosexual characters in these films in many cases will end as strange objects which existence is only for satisfying the straight audience’s desire for peeping and novelty hunting (Zhou, 1997). The heterosexual perspective has also imposed a predominantly heterosexual prototype on the same-sex couples in the films. It is common to observe that the more masculine, strong looking partner in a couple will assume the commander, protector role (the butch) and the more delicate, fragile looking partner will assume the follower, being protected role (the femme). Box-winning homosexual films such as Lan Yu, Farewell My Concubine and Bishonen are all framed under this heterosexual prototype and the femmes are all played by male actors (Liu Ye, Leslie Cheung and Daniel Wu) renowned for “pretty” looking.

Many scholars and media players observed that 2005 was a turning point in Chinese media’s attitudes towards homosexuality, marking the end of the invisibility of homosexuals in China (Lou, 2005). CCTV’s programme In the Name of Life took many people by surprise when it aired and soon created a huge uproar all over China. A reporter in Beijing responded to this shift of attitude in this way, “It is not the content of the programme that is so important but that a programme on this issue can be broadcasted on a state-owned national television station is the biggest news.”

3. Purpose and scope of this project

The purpose of this research project is to identify the intercultural differences between the homosexual communities in China and the United States. In order to construct an analysis which is grounded on the first-hand perceptions of the homosexuals in the two cultures,
communications between the homosexuals on the internet will be adopted as the data for the study. The descriptions shared by the homosexuals on the internet will also be compared with the representations found in the literature and the mainstream media to establish if the homosexuals’ real experiences bear any resemblance to those contained in the latter. Due to time and resource constraints, as well as the comparatively less effort by previous scholars on the study of the relationship between homosexual partners, the scope of this project will primarily focus on this aspect of the homosexual community.

PART TWO – RESEARCH

1. Research questions

Based on the review of the preceding literature and the mainstream representation, the following research questions are developed to identify the cultural differences between the homosexual relationships in the United States and China.

1. Are Chinese homosexual couples more likely to adopt the heterosexual butch-femme model in their relationship than American homosexual couples?

2. Do Chinese homosexuals emphasize more on the appearance of a partner than American homosexuals?

3. Do American homosexuals emphasize more on the sex performance of a partner than Chinese homosexuals?

4. Are American homosexuals more likely to acknowledge their partners in the family and social circles?

5. Do Chinese homosexuals expect loyalty from their partners more than American homosexuals?
2. Methods

Samples

The following five message boards, three based in China (including Hong Kong) and two based in the United States were selected for this study. Message threads posted onto the boards for the period from 1 April to 14 April 2006 were adopted as the samples for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Message Board</th>
<th>Registered Members</th>
<th>Age Range of Members *</th>
<th>Total Postings (1 - 14 Apr)</th>
<th>Estimated % of unique postings **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>GayStation BBS (Hong Kong)</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>17 – early 30</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gay-Way</td>
<td>110,000</td>
<td>20 – early 30</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GayChina.com</td>
<td>320,000</td>
<td>20 – early 30</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Gay.com</td>
<td>6,580,000</td>
<td>15 – 40 something</td>
<td>42,000 ***</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>JustUsBoys.com</td>
<td>120,000</td>
<td>16 – 30 something</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>&lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The smallest age was obtained by referring to the personal particulars of the visitors who had posted messages during the period to be studied.
**Unique postings were messages identified to be relevant to the research questions.
***Total postings on all sections of Gay.com for the period exceeded 140,000. For this study, only the postings under the Relationship section were examined.

The age range of members in the China-based message boards was found more limited than that observed in the United States-based message boards. Indeed, it could be inferred from some of the messages (e.g. exchange of opinions about school sports teams, questions asking the locations of exam centres) that a significant proportion of members in the China-based message boards were high school and college students. Membership of the United States-based message boards was more evenly spread across the age range.

The estimated percentages of unique postings across all five boards were from < 1% to 2%. It seemed relationship with a partner, or issues of homosexuality in general, were not in particular a frequent topic to be discussed among the members on the message
boards. More often members were exchanging casual talks about newly released products, games and movies, views on current affairs, and jokes and stories they heard from somewhere.

Due to the large numbers of total postings and the time constraint faced by the author to go through all postings in details, two levels of screening were used to identify the unique postings for the analysis. First, the title (or subject) of the head posting was evaluated to determine whether the message was relevant to the study. If it was deemed not relevant, the message would not be opened and read. For example, a message with the title “The online store for cheapest ticket to Spain” would be discarded. If the title passed the first screening, the head message would be opened and examined whether it was relevant to the study. If the message content was found not related to the study, it would be discarded. For example, a message with the title “My heart was broken” would pass the first screening but the content “I gave up the football match to prepare for the exam but he gave me a ‘D’” would make the message fail the second screening. Only the postings which passed both screenings would be adopted for the study.

**Methodology**

Thematic analysis was adopted to conduct an essentially qualitative study of the relationship between homosexual partners. Rather than using quasi-experimental methods, the qualitative study was intended to get a detailed picture by collecting data in the setting in which the homosexuals’ communication naturally occurred. This approach was more likely to uncover the subjective experiences of the homosexuals and discover their perceptions of their relationship with their partners. It was also more likely to focus on the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. The author wished to collect the
homosexuals’ first-person perceptions and construct a conclusion based on their point of view. Having constructed a conclusion grounded upon the homosexuals’ point of view, the author would be ready to compare this conclusion with the way homosexual relationship was presented in the literature and in the mainstream media.

The following steps were followed to carry out the thematic analysis.

**Step One**: From the identified unique postings, common patterns of experiences of the homosexuals in each country were listed. For example, a pattern of experience listed was the process of the members posting a message for meeting new friends on the message boards. Another pattern of experience listed was the way the members describing a person of the same-sex they met on the street.

**Step Two**: The next step was to identify all data related to the already classified patterns. All of the postings that fit under a specific pattern were placed with this pattern. To continue the meeting new friends example, many members somehow introduced their “personal particulars or features” while they were calling for new friends. Some stated their “outlook”, some mentioned their “age” and some talked of their “interests”.

**Step Three**: The third step would combine and catalogue related patterns into themes such as “sexual appeals”, “social life”, “pledge”, to name a few. Themes that emerged from the members’ stories were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience.

**Step Four**: The final step was to build a conclusion based on the collective experience of the members on the theme.

About 800 postings from the China-based message boards and 900 postings from the United States-based boards were identified and examined using the thematic analysis.
PART THREE – RESULTS

Five themes were concluded from the thematic analysis: 1) sex appeals, 2) emotional attachment, 3) roles in the relationship, 4) social life and 5) pledge and vision (Appendix 3). The collective experiences observed from the homosexuals in the two countries would be compared with regard to each theme.

1. Sex appeals

Some of the anticipated preferences of sex appeals held by Chinese homosexuals were found. In line with the findings by Li, the experiences described by the message board members showed that the appearance of a partner, including his or her facial features, skin tone, body figure (slim/fat, tall/short, proportion), clothing and accessories were of significant concern to Chinese homosexuals. It was very common for Chinese homosexuals to request others sending them pictures first before they considered whether to make friends with them. When describing his or her partner, a same-sex stranger or celebrity he or she admired to other members on the message board, Chinese homosexuals tended to concentrate listing the appearance-related features more than other qualifications such as interests, education background and the like.1

On the other hand, despite the common stereotype depicted in mainstream media that sex is of vital importance in a homosexual relationship, there were quite a number of Chinese homosexuals expressing that they would not give up a “same-sex partner of their dreams” only because they were impotent. For instance, when there were members (mostly identified as males) stating that they were upset because they were not capable to make love due to reasons like physical defects, many members responded that with real

---
1 Chinese lesbian members were found mentioning more about personalities and common interests than gay males when describing a same-sex partner or a celebrity she found attractive. When compared with mainland lesbians, lesbians in Hong Kong were found more sensitive to their partners’ appearance.
love a couple could still stay happily together even without sex life.

Compared to their Chinese counterparts, American homosexuals communicated much more about sex on the message boards. Many male members even posted their naked pictures showing their sex organs on the boards. When posting messages to invite new friends, there were a significant number of members who would introduce themselves with a description of the size of their sex organ or their sexual performance. When describing their initial encounter with a homosexual partner, many American members tended to recall the details of the sex experience with that partner; less would be mentioned about the outlooks (except the body build) of the partner. It was also interesting to note that postings related to sex medicine and sex instruments were much more common in the Unites States message boards. This emphasis on sex by American homosexuals seemed parallel with the depictions found in most earlier mainstream media like *Queer as Folk*. Despite this strong emphasis on sex, there were also American homosexuals indicating that they could do without sex if they really fell in love with someone.

Other than appearance and sex related appeals, appeals frequently referred by members on the message boards in both countries included also personalities, characters, common interests, material resources and education background. In these aspects, homosexuals in the two countries did not show significant differences. The homosexuals’ preference towards partners possessing similar demographic backgrounds with themselves, as found in Li’s, Lou’s and Schulman’s studies, was also supported by the communications observed in this study.

**Conclusion**: Chinese homosexual males were more concerned about the appearance of a partner than his sex performance. American homosexual males demonstrated the opposite
preference. Similar to most heterosexuals, homosexuals in both countries also tended to choose partners having the similar demographic backgrounds as themselves.

2. Emotional attachment

When comparing the proportion of postings related to a member’s feelings or emotions towards his or her partner (potential, present or former), Chinese homosexuals demonstrated a much higher percentage in the postings of this category. Many Chinese homosexuals, gay males and lesbians, shared that their emotions would easily get affected by their partners. When something good happened to their partners, they would feel as happy as their partners. If things went wrong with their partners, they would feel as if it happened to themselves. Worthwhile to note was that this tendency of shared feelings was common not only among younger homosexuals but also among homosexuals at their middle ages. Many homosexuals had developed very strong feelings towards their partners that they would become very upset, disappointed and/or angry when they got separated with their partners. There were members sharing that they had tried to hurt, or even, kill themselves when their partners left them. Many members found it hard to forget their former partners and were still very concerned about their lives, especially love life, even after a long period of separation.

Postings related to emotional attachment with their partners were less observed in the communication among American homosexuals on the message boards. But this did not mean that American homosexuals would develop little feelings toward their partners. American homosexuals also shared their partners’ feelings when something happened to them. For example, a member shared that he worried about his partner a lot because his partner had been laid off for quite a while and was getting to lose all his self-confidence.
The major difference between Chinese and American homosexuals in this aspect was the level of emotions or feelings developed. It was much less frequent to observe American homosexuals describing themselves as “I could not sleep for nights when we were having a fight”, “I am so happy that it seems I am the one get promoted” or “I cannot forget him even though we have separated for a year”. It seemed American homosexuals found it easier, or faster, to separate their own feelings with those of their partners.

From what the author had observed from the postings in this category, the mainstream media’s descriptions of the homosexuals as “people who do not treasure relationships” and “sex machines without any feelings” in the United States and China before the turn of the century were extremely distorting. The more positive and human portrayals of the homosexual partners appearing in the television programmes and motion pictures in the United States would serve a more realistic depiction.

**Conclusion:** Homosexuals in both countries did develop emotional attachment with their partners. Relationship between same-sex partners were filled with feelings and concerns just as heterosexual couples.

3. Roles in the relationship

When describing their roles in a homosexual relationship, in most instances Chinese homosexuals, especially the males, would naturally refer to their sex roles in the sex behaviors with partners. Very often the Chinese homosexuals indicated that they did not assume a fixed role in their sex life but keep changing their roles depending on their partners’ and/or their own preferences. This finding corresponded to the results of Li’s and Lou’s studies cited earlier in the literature review. In postings related to their respective responsibilities (where the word “role” rarely occurred) in a relationship,
especially those relationships of a longer-term, more traditional heterosexual distinctions between the responsibilities assumed by the two partners were identified. For example, it was not uncommon to have a Chinese member describing himself or herself as “the one being protected”, “the bread consumer”, “the housekeeper”, “the decision follower” while his or her partner was assuming the opposite “roles” as “the protector”, “the decision maker” and “the bread winner”. In fact there were Chinese homosexuals listing expectations in this regard in the postings as their partner selection criteria. This heterosexual pattern was applicable not only to couples having a comparatively large age or financial difference, but was fairly common among general Chinese homosexual couples. It is worthwhile to note that the deemed gender role of a particular member may change when he or she changes the partner; however, the heterosexual pattern of role assumption will still exist¹.

Similar to their Chinese counterparts, most American homosexuals also tend to adopt different sex roles depending on their partners’ and/or their own preferences. The finding was consistent with the literature reviewed earlier in the paper. With regard to the issue of gender roles in a relationship, American homosexual males differed a lot from their Chinese counterparts that the heterosexual pattern was hardly observed among American male couples. American homosexual males were more inclined to take the masculine role, to make his own decisions, to earn his own livings, to depend on himself for protection and to take care of his own business no matter which partners they were matching with. Butch-butch relationship was the most common pattern found among American gay male couples. Despite the fact that heterosexual pattern was still the dominant model found among American lesbian couples, there were lesbians sharing that they would try

¹It was much more common for lesbians to remain in the same gender role even her partner changed.
discarding this pattern and let the responsibilities of both partners get more balanced.

Conclusion: Chinese homosexuals were more likely to adopt a gender role in a relationship than American homosexuals.

4. Social life

Both Chinese and American homosexuals described gatherings with their friends in the same-sex circles as their primary social life with their partners. Outside the same-sex circles, Chinese homosexual couples tended to have few common friends and little social life together. Chinese homosexuals seemed mentioning very little about their partners’ non-gay friends or their encounters with these friends on the message boards. The similar pattern was also observed around the family circles of the two partners. Postings on the boards indicated that it was highly exceptional for a Chinese homosexual to introduce his or her partner to the family members, needless to say to disclose their relationship, or to involve the partner in his or her family events. This observation was consistent with the inference from the literature that it was very uncommon and costly to have a Chinese homosexual disclosing the same-sex orientation to his or her family members, colleagues and friends.

Yet getting together with their common homosexual friends was also the primary social life American homosexuals would have with their partners, postings by American homosexuals showed that the couples would also commonly get involved in other social events outside of their same-sex circles. There were many members on the United States message boards sharing with other members their encounters with the family members of their partners and stories of these family members. Although disclosing the same-sex orientation to the parents was still a very difficult problem to most American
homosexuals, almost all of them would not hesitate to introduce their partners to their family members and friends once they had come out of the closet. In fact, many American members commented that introducing their partners to their family members was an indication of their respect for their partners as well as their being honest to their families and themselves.

Conclusion: American homosexuals were more likely to acknowledge their partners in their family and social circles than Chinese homosexuals.

5. Pledge and vision

It was common to observe that homosexuals would share various forms of pledges, visions or hopes with their partners, both in China and the United States. Pledges were found more common among Chinese homosexuals. For example, pledges like “I will love you and only you all of my life” was frequently noted on the China-based message boards. Visions or hopes, instead of pledges or promises, were more popular on the United States message boards. American homosexuals were more likely to describe their common goals with their partners, for example, owning a boat together in the near future, in the postings. Many members in both China and the United States indicated that they would take these pledges and visions seriously. Although many members would somehow express that they were not very optimistic about the future of a homosexual relationship, they did wish to find their “true love” and stay with him in the long-run. For instance, there were many members who shared that they were jealous of the close couples they met on the streets and wished that the relationship with their partners could last like those couples.

Regarding the reactions and feelings towards a betrayal by the partner on a pledge, which could be an “extramarital” affair or a request for separation without a convincing
reason, most members reflected that they would feel being hurt, being cheated and being disappointed. In most cases, the disappointed member would get it over after a while. For some extreme cases, members might not recover after years or might commit suicide.

Conclusion: Many homosexuals in both China and the United States did believe in true love. Yet they might not be so optimistic about the future of homosexual love, they did wish, as most heterosexuals, that they could develop a committed and long-term relationship with their partners.

PART FOUR – DISCUSSIONS

As John Bodley puts it, people learn culture. That is the essential feature of culture the author cannot deny by referring to the results of this study. Many characteristics of individual homosexuals in China and the United States may be inborn, the collective patterns observed in the group as a whole cannot, however, be explained genetically; instead, they can only be explained as a learned response to their surrounding cultures.

There should be little doubt that the mainstream media’s depictions of homosexuality, and of sexuality and gender in general, do have an effect on not only the heterosexuals’ but also the homosexuals’ understanding of homosexuality. Though the depictions are often criticized by many, gay and straight, as not representative, their impact on the homosexual community, especially those who are still at the stage of confirming and clarifying their identity as a homosexual, cannot be ignored. Traditions of the two countries inherited by their people should also be considered when the differences identified between the homosexuals in the two cultures are to be analyzed.

In the analysis of the sex appeals to homosexuals, Chinese homosexual males were found more concerned about the appearance of a partner while American homosexuals
cared more about the sex performance. The stereotypes portrayed in most Chinese homosexual films may help give a reason. In a film, one of the methods of stereotyping is through iconography (Gross, 1999). That means a certain set of visual and aural signs which immediately bespeak homosexuality and connote the qualities associated are expressed in the film. One of the stereotypical connotations frequently depicted in Chinese homosexual characters is the over-concern with appearance and association with a sense of “good taste” (Zhou, 1996). Moreover, in Chinese traditions, sex is deemed as individual privacy and should not be openly discussed. One’s sex life is regarded as a prohibited topic not to be touched on even between very close family members. The purpose of sex in traditional Confucianism is considered for procreation, the continuation of the family lineage, instead of recreation, the pursuit of personal pleasure. Therefore it is not difficult to understand why Chinese homosexuals will tend to focus less on sex organs or sex performance as an appeal on their postings on the message boards.

In contrast, the American culture is much more relaxed to the open discussions and the personal pursuit of sex. Sex can be a common topic between parents and children, classmates and friends at casual settings; or it can even be a broadcasted conversation between the guests and the hosts on television or radio. Advertisements, films and television programmes are often overflown with sex-implicated messages and scenes. When sex is so commonly communicated as a life-long aspiration in one’s life in their mainstream culture, it is not so difficult to understand why the American homosexuals would put such an emphasis on sex performance as an appeal from a partner.

The assumption of a gender role in the relationship was another aspect where Chinese homosexuals and American homosexuals demonstrated a significant difference. The former were observed more likely to adopt a gender role in a relationship than the
latter. As described by Clum (2002), masculinity is desired in gay male partners to the extent that it is valued in the self. Essential manhood, a man’s assumption of his power role in his domestic place can never be a bargain to a man in American culture. This strong conviction in masculinity, as reflected in the literature review, makes both American male partners in a relationship remain in their gender role as the “man” while take turns to fulfill the shared responsibilities. There are also critics that the “trivialization of the differences between men and women” in pop culture, politics and law in recent years is directing the Americans to an increasingly obscure distinction of the traditional gender roles (Baldwin, 2003). Most attributed this trivialization to the emotional quest for equality through sameness of the feminists. If the faith in masculinity could no longer answer the American homosexual males’ disregard of the opposite gender, the trivialization might be an alternative explanation.

On the other hand, the fundamental differences of the two genders and their associated responsibilities has never been challenged in China. The husband-and-wife family relationship still stands firm on the soil of China. In ancient China, all major religions had some form of rules which condemned exclusive homosexuality when it interfered with continuation of the family lineage. For instance, Confucianism has the teaching that a man should behave according to somewhat traditional male gender roles and a woman likewise. Therefore a man who has only same-sex partners is deemed not fulfilling his duties (Li, 1998). That explains why the homosexuals in China are so determined to get married, to a woman, when they reach a certain age. On the other hand, none of the Chinese religions categorize homosexual love as a sin. While a man does complete his duty, it is his own affair to have other partners, female or male. The author would assume, though without much evidence for the argument to ground upon, under the
interwoven effects of the deeply rooted conviction on the distinction of two genders in a relationship and the fulfillment of the “male” gender role through marriage, Chinese homosexuals would tend to be more “flexible” in adopting either gender role in the same-sex relationship.

For the justifications of the differences in social life and recognition of partners found between Chinese homosexuals and American homosexuals, the author has identified a number of possible social and cultural explanations. First, in the American mainstream media of recent years, most of the homosexual characters are portrayed as a “perfect” lover with almost no defects. For example, Rupert Everett’s role in My Best Friend’s Wedding is handsome, beautifully dressed, humorous, professionally successful, and charming – the gay stereotype for the turn of the twenty-first century. This stereotype of homosexual perfection is important because it is challenging not only previous stereotypes of homosexuality, more importantly it is revealing the inadequacies of straight masculinity (Baldwin, 2003). This re-definition of homo perfection definitely would help boost the social image and recognition of homosexuals (though there are other critics commenting this is just a new unrealistic label for the homosexuals), hence the more opening up of the homosexuals to the family and social circles.

It is very common to find homosexual associations in American colleges and universities. In China, this is hardly imaginable. The United States has provided its young homosexuals a safe place to begin facing their homosexuality when they come to college where they can find acceptance and develop social circles at a young age (D’Emilio, 1992). This serves as a solid foundation for the homosexuals to further develop their social recognition in later years.

Another important reason that makes social recognition so different for the
homosexuals in these two countries is the traditional family pattern. In the American

culture, most young people will move out of their parents’ families around the age of 20. Usually they only meet with their parents a few times a year. Even the homosexuals disclose their sex orientation to their parents and introduce their partners to the them, the homosexuals do not have to face much pressure when their parents get upset with this truth. They do not have to care much about how to handle their parents’ negative responses. Moreover, in the United States, individual rights and democracy are the most sacred things above all matters, even parents do not have the absolute power and are expected to respect their children’s own choices. Another point is in the American culture, honesty and sincerity are highly valued. People are encouraged to openly express their true feelings and this is regarded as the ideal personality model. Therefore, homosexuals will have the strong urge to let their parents, friends and colleagues know about their sex orientation and their lovers because this is an act of being sincere and honest.

In contrast, traditional Chinese culture has a totally different definition of “sexuality”, “family”, “sincerity” and “ideal personality”. In Chinese culture, an “ideal person” absolutely is not an individual, separate identity but a “unit” within a harmonious relationship network. If one brings disharmony to the relationship network which could be one’s family, one’s work place or one’s social circle, one’s deeds will be condemned. Many Chinese homosexuals strongly express that they do not want to “hurt” their parents who will have to face extreme pressure from the networks of relatives and neighbours if their children are found homosexuals. They will encounter a total loss of face. Moreover, most Chinese homosexuals still live with their parents (either because of the Chinese tradition or the lack of financial resources), so it is very hard to them to come out to their parents, needless to say introducing their lovers to them.
PART FIVE - LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

The author’s choice to investigate the homosexual community was primarily prompted by her own interests in this area, a field which she had had some preconceptions before the study. This could project an effect of subjectivity into the analysis. The choice of questions and method of analysis might as well be influenced by the existing concepts and theories which the author held about homosexuality. Readers are advised to go through the literature review in Part One in more details to follow the approach developed by the author.

There are other limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples the author would like to point out in this section. First, the age range of the members visiting all the five message boards in both countries is quite limited around 15 to 40. Homosexuals exceeding this age range, which may not be small in number, are excluded from this study. Second, in the boards in both countries, males are the dominated majority of visitors. The proportion of male versus female members has not been calculated but could be very significant. Therefore, most conclusions inferred from the analysis would better apply to homosexual males only. Third, as it is possible for members on the message boards to fake their sex orientation, as well as their personal particulars, it would be difficult for the author to have full confidence that the results would represent the true homosexual community.
REFERENCE


Clum, J. (2002). “*He’s All Man*”. New York: Palgrave Publishers Ltd.


Zhang, B. (1994). *Tong xing ai (Homosexual love).* Jinan Shi: Shandong ke xue ji shu chu ban she.


Appendix 1

Findings of Kinsey Study on Homosexuality

Kinsey said in both the *Male* and *Female* volumes that it was impossible to determine the number of persons who are "homosexual" or "heterosexual". It was only possible to determine behavior at any given time.

**Instances of at least one same-sex experience to orgasm:**

- 37% of males
- 13% of females, (p. 650, *Male*, p. 475, *Female*)

Males:

- 10% of males in the sample were predominantly homosexual between the ages of 16 and 55
- 8% of males were exclusively homosexual for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. (p. 651, *Male*)
- 4% of white males had been exclusively homosexual after the onset of adolescence up to the time of their interviews, (p. 651, *Male*).

Females:

- 2 to 6% of females, aged 20-35, were more or less exclusively homosexual in experience/response, (p. 488, *Female*)
- 1 to 3% of unmarried females aged 20-35 were exclusively homosexual in experience/response, (Table 142, p. 499, and p. 474, *Female*).

Appendix 2

Questionnaire Survey
(translated into English by the author)

This survey is conducted by the Department of Sociology of Peking University and is solely for academic purpose. What you need to do is to check the box of each question you find the most appropriate to you; basically your handwriting will not be recognized. What you fill in in this questionnaire definitely will not be connected to your name in whatever situations, therefore please complete this questionnaire as the truth. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. How many brothers do you have?
   - One  - Two  - Three  - Four or more

2. How many sisters do you have?
   - One  - Two  - Three  - Four or more

3. In which position are you among your siblings?
   - The oldest  - The smallest  - Others

4. How is your relationship with your siblings?
   - Good  - Fair  - Bad

5. Were you spoiled by your family when you were small?
   - Yes  - No

6. Were you brought up by your grandparents?
   - Yes  - No

7. Did your parents have a divorce?
   - Yes  - No

8. How was the relationship between your parents?
   - Good  - Fair  - Bad

9. How do you feel about your parents?
   - I like my father more  - I like my mother more  - I like both of them
   - I do not like either of them
10. How do your parents feel about you?
☐ My father likes me more ☐ My mother likes me more
☐ Both of them like me ☐ Neither of them likes me

11. How was the financial condition of your family when you were small?
☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Bad

12. How is your present financial condition?
☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Bad

13. How was your physical health when you were small?
☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Bad

14. Did you have any serious illnesses (e.g. tuberculosis, heart disease etc.) when you were small?
☐ Yes ☐ No

15. Have your parents ever indicated that they wish you were a girl?
☐ Yes ☐ No

16. Have you ever had the thought that you wish you were a girl?
☐ Yes ☐ No

17. Have you ever had the following experience?
Having your ears pierced: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Wearing floral clothes: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Doing needle work: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Knitting: ☐ Yes ☐ No
Playing girls’ games: ☐ Yes ☐ No

18. Did you like joining the girls for leisure when you were small?
☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Have your family ever prohibited you from contacting the girls when you were
20. Have you ever had a girlish nickname?

Yes    No

21. When did you have your first ejaculation?

☐ 11 years old or before ☐ 12 years old ☐ 13 years old ☐ 14 years old

☐ 15 years old ☐ 16 years old ☐ 17 years old ☐ 18 years old

☐ 19 years old ☐ 20 years old or after ☐ Never have an ejaculation

22. When did you have your first masturbation?

☐ 11 years old or before ☐ 12 years old ☐ 13 years old ☐ 14 years old

☐ 15 years old ☐ 16 years old ☐ 17 years old ☐ 18 years old

☐ 19 years old ☐ 20 years old or after ☐ Never have a masturbation

23. When did you start having the feeling about sex (whether towards the same sex or the opposite sex)?

☐ 11 years old or before ☐ 12 years old ☐ 13 years old ☐ 14 years old

☐ 15 years old ☐ 16 years old ☐ 17 years old ☐ 18 years old

☐ 19 years old ☐ 20 years old or after

24. When did you start understanding the knowledge about sex?

☐ 11 years old or before ☐ 12 years old ☐ 13 years old ☐ 14 years old

☐ 15 years old ☐ 16 years old ☐ 17 years old ☐ 18 years old

☐ 19 years old ☐ 20 years old or after

25. What was the primary means by which you acquired the knowledge about sex?

☐ From parents ☐ From siblings ☐ From relatives ☐ From friends of
26. Did the opposite sex arouse your interest when you were small?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

27. Do the opposite sex arouse your interest now?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

28. Will the opposite sex arouse your interest in the future?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

29. How many times did you have a love relationship (with the opposite sex)?

__ times

How did you feel?

☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Bad

30. Have you ever had the experience of love failure (with the opposite sex)?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

If yes, did the experience have a great impact on you?

☐ Great  ☐ Little  ☐ Nil

31. Do you think men should pay attention to their costume and outlook?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

32. Do you yourself pay attention to your costume and outlook?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

33. Do you like the following items?

Jewellery (e.g. ear rings, necklace, bracelet) :  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

Perfume:  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

Cosmetics:  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

Women’s clothes:  ☐ Yes  ☐ No

34. Which type of male stars you will find sexy?
Appendix 2

☐ Sylvester Stallone  ☐ Alain Delon  ☐ Tomokazu Miwura

35. Who is your most favourite male actor? Do you find males possessing the following characteristics sexy?

Raw and tough:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Gentle and elegant:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Quiet and pretty:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

36. Do you think the following characteristics sexy?

Having a beard:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Muscular:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Delicate skin:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

White skin:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Well built:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Broad shoulder and slim bottom:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

Narrow shoulder and broad bottom:  ☐ Sexy  ☐ Not sexy

37. When did you start to know about homosexuality?

☐ 11 years old or before  ☐ 12 years old  ☐ 13 years old  ☐ 14 years old

☐ 15 years old  ☐ 16 years old  ☐ 17 years old  ☐ 18 years old

☐ 19 years old  ☐ 20 years old  ☐ 21 years old  ☐ 22 years old

☐ 23 years old  ☐ 24 years old  ☐ 25 years old  ☐ 26 years old

☐ 27 years old  ☐ 28 years old  ☐ 29 years old  ☐ 30 years old and after

38. How did you get to know about it?

☐ Others taught me  ☐ I read it from books  ☐ I understood it naturally
39. Do you date with acquaintances or strangers?

☐ Only date with familiar acquaintances  ☐ Will make new friends occasionally

☐ Only date with strangers met from the society

40. Around how many homosexual friends you have ever made?

☐ 1  ☐ 2  ☐ 3 to 5  ☐ 6 to 10  ☐ 11 to 20  ☐ 21 to 30

☐ 31 to 50  ☐ 51 to 100  ☐ 101 to 200  ☐ 201 to 300  ☐ 301 to 500

☐ 501 to 1000  ☐ 1001 or more

41. How many among these friends you have dated for less than three times?

____ %

How many among these friends you have developed a longer relationship?

____ %

42. How many among these friends you have had both emotional attachment and sexual relationship?

____ %

How many among these friends you have had only sexual relationship but no emotional attachment?

____ %

How many among these friends you have had only emotional attachment but no sexual relationship?

____ %

43. How long is your longest relationship with a stable friend?

☐ 1 month or less  ☐ 2 to 3 months  ☐ 4 to 6 months  ☐ 6 to 12 months

☐ 1 to 2 years  ☐ 2 to 3 years  ☐ 3 to 5 years  ☐ 5 years or more

44. How many places for making homosexual friends you frequently visit?

☐ 1  ☐ Less than 10  ☐ More than 10  ☐ Never visit these places

45. Have you ever visited places of this kind outside Beijing?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

46. How frequent you pay visits to these places?
47. How frequent do you have sexual activities (your own or your partner’s every ejaculation is counted as once)?
- A few times everyday
- Once everyday
- Twice per week
- Once per week
- Twice per month
- Once per month
- Once in a few months

48. How frequent are the following behaviors you have demonstrated when you meet with your homosexual friends?
- Kissing: Frequent, Not frequent, Never
- Caressing: Frequent, Not frequent, Never
- Mutual-masturbating: Frequent, Not frequent, Never
- Oral sex: Frequent, Not frequent, Never
- Anal sex: Frequent, Not frequent, Never

49. What role do you play in these sexual relationships?
- Always play the active role
- Always play the passive role
- Sometimes active sometimes passive

50. What role do you prefer playing in these sexual relationships?
- Prefer playing the active role
- Prefer playing the passive role
- Prefer playing either role

51. Do you think there is a level difference between the active role and the passive role?
- The active role is higher than the passive role
- No difference

52. How is your marital status?
Appendix 2

☐ Married ☐ Not married

If not married, do you plan to get married in the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No

53. Do you have any children?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what is the sex of your child?

☐ Boy ☐ Girl

If no, do you plan to have children in the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No

54. Have you ever got divorced?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not married

55. Do the following people know your sexual orientation?

Father: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Mother: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Brothers: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Sisters: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Spouse: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Colleagues: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Department head: ☐ Yes ☐ No

56. Do you think your life is a satisfying one?

☐ Yes ☐ No

57. Do you have any spiritual burden because of your sex orientation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

58. Do you think your homosexual behavior has violated the moral values?
Appendix 2

59. Do you think your homosexual behavior is normal or abnormal?

☐ Normal  ☐ Abnormal  ☐ Do not know

60. Do you think your homosexual behavior is consistent with the human nature?

☐ Consistent  ☐ Not consistent  ☐ Do not know

61. Do you think your sexual orientation is an illness?

☐ An illness  ☐ Not an illness  ☐ Do not know

62. Do you think there is a need to rectify your sexual orientation?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Do not know

63. Have you ever tried rectifying your sexual orientation?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Do not know

If there are ways for rectification, do you want to try?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

64. Have you ever thought about having a medical operation to change your sex?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

65. Do you think your homosexual behavior is dangerous?

☐ Dangerous  ☐ Not dangerous  ☐ Do not know

66. What are the consequences you will expect if your homosexual behavior is revealed?

Legal sentence:  ☐ Possible  ☐ Not possible  ☐ Do not know

Rehabilitation:  ☐ Possible  ☐ Not possible  ☐ Do not know

Custody:  ☐ Possible  ☐ Not possible  ☐ Do not know

Administrative punishment:  ☐ Possible  ☐ Not possible  ☐ Do not know

Divorce:  ☐ Possible  ☐ Not possible  ☐ Do not know

67. Which do you think will lead to more serious consequences within a marriage if it
is revealed, a heterosexual extra-marital affair or a homosexual affair?

☐ Heterosexual affair    ☐ Homosexual affair    ☐ No difference between the two

68. Do you worry about getting sexual diseases?

☐ Yes    ☐ No

69. Have you ever adopted the following preventive measures?

Use of instruments:    ☐ Yes    ☐ No

Regular body check:    ☐ Yes    ☐ No

70. Personal particulars:

Year of birth _______    Race _______    Province ________

Place of birth _______    Political status ________    Occupation ________

Monthly salary _______    Education level ________

Father’s education level _______    Mother’s education level ________

Father’s occupation _______    Mother’s occupation ________

Please write down your feelings and thoughts about homosexuality, if any, in the following space:
### Summary of Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Patterns of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Appeals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting messages to make new friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing same-sex partner, admired celebrity, stranger to others members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listing selection criteria for a same-sex partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking for personal information from members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they met their partners at the first place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Attachment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt about their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt when they observed other same-sex partners behaving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt when they separated with their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt when something happened (good and bad) between him/her and the partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roles in the Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing their roles in the relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing what they were responsible for / supposed to fulfill in the relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing what they expected the partner to be responsible for / to fulfill in the relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the power status / dominance level of the two partners in a relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing their feelings about the opposite sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing their partners with gender-related terms or adjectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Life</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listing the usual social or entertainment activities they did with their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the people known to both of themselves and their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the stories of common encounters by them with their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing things they knew about the friends, families, colleagues of their partners</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Pledge and vision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describing things the friends, families, colleagues of their partners knew about them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalling the pledges they made to their partners or vice versa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt about the pledges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they would expect about their relationship with their partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt when they were betrayed by their partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they thought about same-sex marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing how they felt about love in general</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For patterns of experience, only the more frequent patterns were listed in the table.