

How Sociocultural Context Matters in Self-Presentation: A Comparison of U.S. and Chinese Profiles on Jack'd, a Mobile Dating App for Men Who Have Sex With Men

LIK SAM CHAN

University of Southern California, USA

Theorizing profiles on mobile dating applications (apps) as self-presentation, this study examines how men who have sex with men (MSM) presented themselves on Jack'd, a dating app tailored to this population. This research takes a cross-cultural perspective by comparing 204 profiles from the United States and 204 profiles from China. The results show that Chinese MSM were less likely to show their faces on Jack'd than American MSM because of the stronger stigma of homosexuality in China. In addition, the average number of relational goals mentioned by Chinese MSM was smaller than that mentioned by American MSM, supporting the low- and high-context cultural difference. However, more Chinese MSM mentioned looking for relationships specifically, suggesting that they seem to regard Jack'd as a non-romance-seeking platform and have to make their goals explicit. Sex was not often mentioned as the relational goal in both countries, implying "slut-shaming" is in force. This study demonstrates the value of examining online self-presentation of MSM to understand sociocultural differences between the United States and China regarding homosexuality.

Keywords: mobile dating app, men who have sex with men, gay, self-presentation, cross-cultural, China, United States, stigma, high-context, low-context

Sexual minorities have been making friends, looking for romance, and seeking sex online since the early age of the Internet. With advancements in mobile technologies, applications (apps) running on smartphones were developed to provide an even more convenient platform for sexual minorities to connect with one another. Using the global positioning system receivers built into many smartphones, Grindr, the first mobile dating app for men who have sex with men (MSM), was released in 2009. It enables users to discover other MSM who are physically nearby, changing the networking scene of this community because it makes "invisible" members visible (Gudelunas, 2012).

Many location-based dating apps for MSM share a similar interface. Once a user logs onto the app, he sees an array of photographs, each representing a different user nearby. From left to right and top to bottom, these photos are arranged according to the distance between the users. A text-based profile of each user, the "bio," is available by clicking the photo. This profile usually includes the user's

Lik Sam Chan: likamch@usc.edu

Date submitted: 2016-05-09

Copyright © 2016 (Lik Sam Chan). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

age, weight, height, and ethnicity, plus a short self-introduction. Users can exchange text messages, photos, and geo-information via the app.

This study considers profiles on mobile dating apps as a type of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Similar to dating website users, app users have to present themselves in such a way as to create a certain impression in others' minds (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). As Miller (2015a) points out, little is known about how MSM present themselves on these dating apps. Moreover, a majority of the studies on dating apps for MSM were conducted in the United States (e.g., Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2015; Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2014; Chan, 2016; Crooks, 2013; Gudelunas, 2012; Landovitz et al., 2013; Miller, 2015a, 2015b; Rice et al., 2012; Roth, 2014; Van de Wiele & Tong, 2014). Few paid attention to the cross-cultural aspect of this global phenomenon. Therefore, this study examines how MSM present themselves on Jack'd, a mobile dating app that operates internationally. Through comparing profiles created by American and Chinese MSM, this study explores the sociocultural forces that shape MSM online self-presentation, shedding light not only on the online self-presentation of MSM but also on the differences and similarities between the two cultures.

Literature Review

Selective Self-Presentation in Computer-Mediated Communication

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) discusses in the way in which people construct and maintain their public image through interactions. Using a dramatic metaphor, he distinguishes "front stage," where various kinds of "expressive equipment" are available for "actors" to use for their performance, and "backstage," where "actors" learn, practice, and refine their performance and express part of themselves that their audience may not accept. A self-presentation, therefore, is a product appearing on the front stage, consisting of what is "given" (i.e., communicated deliberately) and "given off" (i.e., communicated unintentionally).

In conventional face-to-face settings, people manage their impression through a combination of verbal and nonverbal cues (E. E. Jones & Pittman, 1982). In computer-mediated communication (CMC), users are also motivated to use whatever cues that are available to manage their image (Walther, 1992). Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal CMC model suggests that CMC users draw on the unique interface and characteristics that CMC provides to enhance their self-presentation. Four features of CMC particularly facilitate CMC users to selectively present themselves in a preferential way (Walther, 2007). First, because of its asynchronous nature, CMC is always editable. Users change and polish whatever they have written before the message is sent or made available to the public. Second, CMC users can spend more time to construct and refine their messages without creating social awkwardness. Third, because CMC users are usually physically apart, they can hide their involuntary cues that may indicate undesirable attitude or affect. Last, users in CMC do not need to attend to the environment and manage their nonverbal cues. This allows them to concentrate their cognitive effort to the message production. The hyperpersonal CMC model, therefore, suggests mobile dating apps provide a platform of selective self-presentation for their users.

Online Self-Presentation of Gay Men and MSM

Gonzales and Meyers (1993) argue that studying sexual minorities by analyzing the personal ads they post is an ecologically valid method due to its unobtrusive nature. Various studies were conducted to examine how gay men and MSM present themselves in personal ads in magazines and newspapers (Deaux & Hanna, 1984; Epel, Spanakos, Kasl-Godley, & Brownell, 1996; Hatala & Prehodka, 1996; Reige-Laner & Kamel, 1977). Moving from traditional media to the Internet, Gudelunas (2005) analyzed the personal ads posted by gay men and lesbian women on a Web portal called PlanetOut. He found that people from large cities were more likely to self-identify as gay, lesbian, or queer than those from small towns. People from small towns were also less likely to post a photo in their personal ads. Gudelunas pointed out that being identified as gay or lesbian in a small community might have negative consequences in job security and housing.

Mobile dating apps also provide the gay community with a viable alternative to reaching others. Fitzpatrick, Birnholtz, and Brubaker (2015) studied the relationship between personal disclosure—whether a user shows his face—and social disclosure—whether he shares his personal information—on Grindr. The team collected 25,365 profiles mechanically from the app. Their logistic analysis showed that users who were younger, had a higher body mass index, did not disclose their race, or were looking for friends or relationships were more likely to show their face. The researchers argue that youth is an important asset in determining attractiveness on this platform. App users with a higher body mass index may prefer cropping out their “bulky” body and showing only their face. One’s race is often determinable from a photo; therefore, those who show their face may not have to disclose their race. Finally, the researchers suggest that app users looking for more lasting relationships, such as friendships and romance, prefer to individualize themselves by showing a face photo.

Examining profiles on Jack’d across the world, Miller (2015a) found that masculinity was valued by app users either describing themselves as masculine or physically fit or posting shirtless photos. App users who noted their masculine traits or fitness tended not to post photos including their face. Therefore, there was a trade-off between posting shirtless photos and photos with a face. In addition, Miller noted that Asian MSM tended not to disclose their desired sexual position. He argues that these profiles were mainly collected from Asian countries where homosexuality is illegal, such as Singapore. Thus, to protect themselves, app users in these countries may choose not to include sexual elements on their profiles. Following Fitzpatrick et al. (2015), Gudelunas (2005), and Miller (2015a), this study considers profiles on mobile dating apps as self-presentation that MSM curate for their audience (Goffman, 1959). In particular, the user’s photo is the most dominant element in this type of self-presentation. Mowlabocus (2010) calls the online profile “an externalizing of the interior” (p. 92). He argues that embodiment is key to gay digital communication because the relationship between the digital body and the real body is constructed through gaze. Whether the app users post a “face-pic” or a shirtless torso, this indicates how he wishes to be viewed by others. The first research question asks:

RQ1: How do American and Chinese MSM present themselves photographically on Jack’d?

Stigma of Homosexuality in Modern China

In China, homosexuality has had negative connotations since the Qing Dynasty. It was once associated with the weakening of national power (Jeffreys & Yu, 2015). When the Communist Party of China (CPC) founded modern China in 1949, no law criminalized same-sex practices. However, if people were found to engage in these activities, they would be sanctioned by the party and workplace (Davis & Friedman, 2014). It was not until 1978 that male same-sex practices were put under the umbrella term, "hooliganism," constituting a criminal offense. In the medical realm, homosexuality was also pathologized in the second edition of the *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* in 1989. The year 1986 marked the first AIDS case in China; since then, China had blamed AIDS as a downside of becoming liberal. Even in late 1980s, homosexuality was associated with the capitalist class (Li, 2014). With the stigmatization of homosexuality, MSM living their adult lives during the 1980s could not express their sexual desires and orientation openly (Li, 2006).

A critical change happened in 1997, when the law against male homosexuality was abolished. The 2001 *Chinese Classification of Mental Disorders* also removed homosexuality as an illness. Since 1992, many nongovernment organizations that promote HIV prevention among the gay community were set up with the endorsement of the CPC (Kong, 2011; Wei, 2015). In 2014, there were more than 300 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organizations in China (Davis & Friedman, 2014). Nevertheless, Kong (2011) reminded us that, these measures did not mean that the party-state completely legalized homosexuality. For example, the current marriage law made no room for same-sex marriage; the Beijing Queer Film Festival in 2001 was cancelled at the last minute by Beijing University (Kong, 2011). In fact, activities organized by LGBT organizations were occasionally stopped by police, and their members were harassed or detained (Davis & Friedman, 2014).

The current status of homosexuality in China is complicated. On the one hand, the party-state has loosened its regulation of sexual behaviors between consenting adults in private spaces; on the other hand, homosexuality is not officially endorsed. Moreover, Li (2006) argues that the strongest sanction against homosexuality today does not come from the party-state but from the family. Parental expectations for marriage and grandchildren have hindered the development of positive gay and lesbian identities (Hu & Wang, 2013). The gay community in China also criticizes itself (Zheng, 2015). This social stigma may make MSM in China less comfortable with disclosing their personal identity on dating apps. Therefore, this study has the following hypothesis:

H1: On Jack'd, fewer MSM in China reveal their faces than MSM in the United States.

Difference in Communication Styles Between China and the United States

Apart from photographs, written statements about relational goals are also important "expressive equipment" available in the front stage of Jack'd that users can make use of to create and manage their image (Goffman, 1959). Intercultural scholars have been keen to identify critical differences between cultures that may influence communication styles (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Lim & Giles, 2007). Hall's (1976) differentiation between low- and high-context culture is one of the most influential

theoretical frameworks in conceptualizing cultural differences between East and West. Although, this contexting model is not without critiques (see Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2010), it has been shown to still be relevant in the context of international communication (Cardon, 2008). In a low-context culture such as the United States, fewer social norms are imposed on individuals; therefore, people tend to express themselves more directly and explicitly. In contrast, in a high-context culture such as China, a stable social hierarchy from which people can derive meanings exists; therefore, people are more likely to communicate in an implicit and simplified manner.

Empirical studies have confirmed this culture difference in communication styles. In terms of emotional expressions, Caldwell-Harris, Kronrod, and Yang (2013) found that Chinese students were less likely to express the feeling of love than American students. Moreover, although American students felt more comfortable saying "I love you" to parents than to romantic partners, the opposite was true for Chinese students. The authors explained that in a high-context culture like China, the expression of love to parents was less important because of the stable parent-child relationship, but voluntary romantic relationships required maintenance by saying "I love you." Culture also influences the expression of gratitude. Bello, Brandau-Brown, Zhang, and Ragsdale (2010) found that their U.S. participants expressed significantly more appreciation than their Chinese participants and tended to use direct, verbal methods.

Extrapolating this implicitness to the scenario of networking apps, Chinese MSM may be less likely to explicitly identify particular relational goals, assuming their goals are implied in the context of the apps. Therefore, this study has the following hypothesis:

H2: MSM in China mention fewer relational goals on Jack'd than MSM in the United States.

Method

Platform

Following Miller (2015a), profiles from Jack'd, a mobile dating app tailored for MSM, were collected. Jack'd was chosen for two reasons. First, it is a popular app in both the United States and China. At the time of the research, Grindr was blocked in China. Blued, Grindr's Chinese counterpart, was not popular among American MSM. Therefore, Jack'd was a better platform for collecting profiles. Another unique function of Jack'd made this app a stronger candidate for research purposes: Grindr only allows users to locate others who are physically nearby, whereas Jack'd allows a user to type in the name of a city and search for MSM in that place (see Figure 1). This function enabled the research team to gather geographically diverse samples from the United States and China.

Data Collection

A total of 408 profiles were collected from Jack'd from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. on the same Friday in June 2014. Keeping this temporal dimension constant is crucial because relational goals and the choice of photos may change depending on the time of the day. Geographically diverse samples of profiles from the

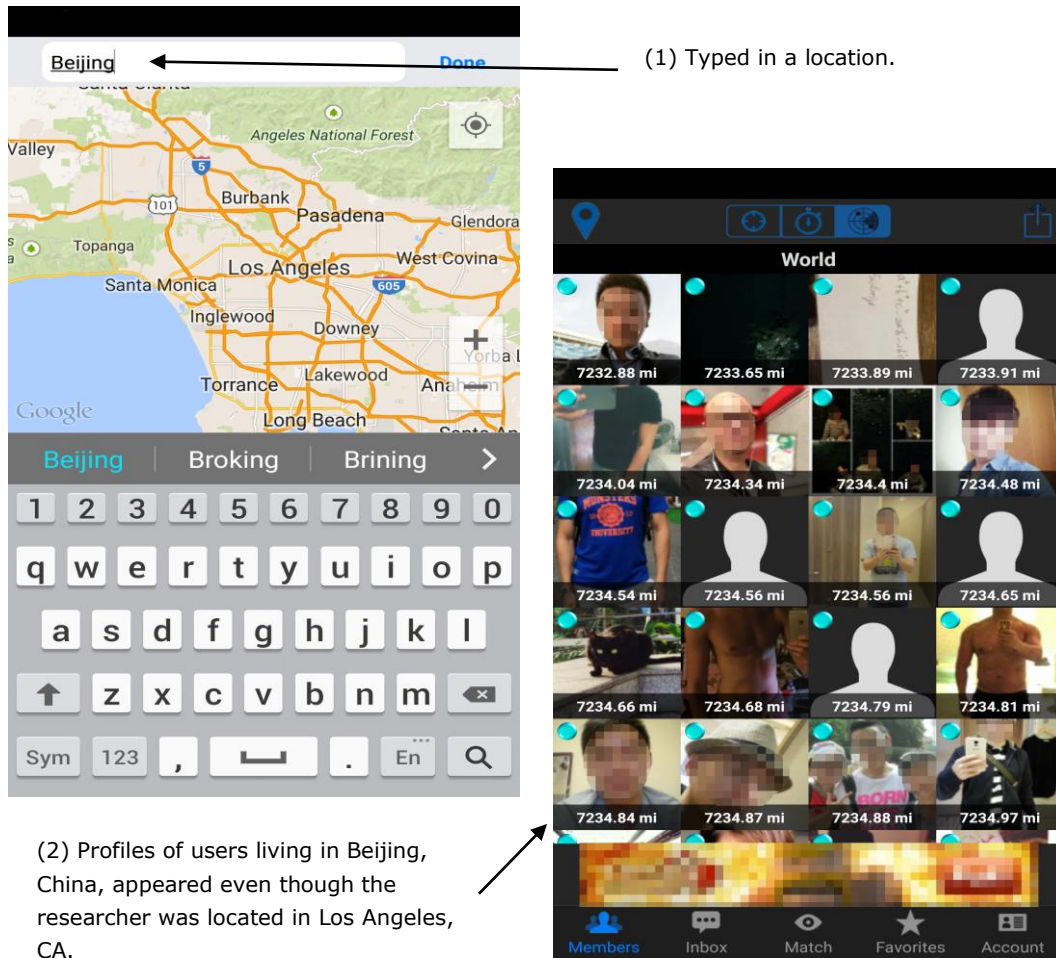


Figure 1. Using the location function of Jack'd to locate profiles in different cities across the United States and China.

United States and China were collected. For the U.S. sample, the research team logged onto Jack'd and typed in the most populated city in each of the 50 states and Washington, DC¹ In each city, four profiles were randomly selected from the first 20 profiles appearing on the app (by default, a maximum of 20

¹ This is based on the 2010 United States Census (<http://www.census.gov/2010census/>).

profiles are displayed on the screen at a time).² This added up to 204 profiles collected from the United States. In the case of China, following the same procedure, six profiles were collected from the most populated city in each of the 27 provinces and autonomous regions, four direct-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Chongqing), two Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau), and the largest city in Taiwan.³ This yielded another 204 profiles. These 408 profiles were screen-captured and used as data for analysis. It is acknowledged that the sample only consisted of profiles from large cities. Gudelunas's (2005) study of personal ads on PlanetOut found that people from small towns were less likely to post a photo. He attributed this phenomenon to a stronger stigma associated with homosexuality in rural areas than in urban regions. Therefore, results of this study cannot be generalized to the whole countries.

Coding Protocol

A content analysis was conducted in this study. A content analysis is a systematic technique for identifying the characteristics of a message. Following Berelson (1952), the profiles were coded for their manifest content, but not their latent meanings. The unit of analysis was each profile.

Photographs. Jack'd allows users to post up to three photos. Each photo was coded according to whether it showed a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, nonhuman objects, or a celebrity/model (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015).

Relational goals. Profiles were coded as either *mentioning* or *not mentioning* each of the following three definite relational goals: friends (including chat and networking), sex, relationships (including dates; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Apart from these three definite goals, the profiles were also coded as either *mentioning* or *not mentioning* any "ambiguous" goal. This includes app users mentioning looking for "fun" or "a good time" and using phrases that hinted at diverse sexual or relational possibilities, such as "no agenda," "everything goes," and "see where it goes." As Birnholtz, Fitzpatrick, Handel, and Brubaker (2014) pointed out, "fun" is a coded word for casual sex, but it may also literally means activities that are fun. Phrases such as "no agenda" could mean that the app users welcome any activities or any kinds of relationships, whether sex partners, romantic partners, or simply friends.

Procedure and Intercoder Reliability

To ensure cultural sensitivity and coding reliability, a bicultural coding team was employed. The principal researcher of this study (gay identified, culturally Chinese, and living in the United States) developed the coding protocol. He trained an American male colleague (a gay-identified PhD candidate)

² In Billings, Montana, only 16 profiles showed up; therefore, only three profiles were randomly selected from this city. The fourth profile was selected from Montana's second most populated city, Missoula.

³ This is based on the 2010 Population Census of the People's Republic of China (http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjcbw/201303/t20130318_451531.html).

and a Chinese male colleague (a gay-identified PhD holder) on this coding protocol. The principal researcher first coded 40 U.S. profiles and 40 Chinese profiles (about 20% of the total number of profiles). Then, the American second coder double-coded the 40 U.S. profiles, and the Chinese second coder double-coded the 40 Chinese profiles independent of the principal researcher.

Krippendorff's α was used for assessing intercoder reliability because it accounts for both observed disagreement and disagreement due to chance; it also allows for multiple coders (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The intercoder reliability for all variables was acceptable: the first photo, .98; the second photo, .96; the third photo, .94; friends, .91; sex, .94; relationships, .95; ambiguous goal, .84. Based on the coding protocol, the second coders independently coded the remaining profiles.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

In the U.S. sample, 33.8% reported as White; 32.4%, Black; 10.8%, Mixed; 9.8%, Latino; 9.3%, Asian; 3.4%, Other; and 0.5%, Middle Eastern. No one reported himself as Pacific Islander. The median age was 25 years (IQR = 21–30 years, range = 18–99 years), the median height was 5 ft 10 in (1.78 m; IQR = 5 ft 8 in to 6 ft [1.73–1.83 m], range = 1 ft to 6 ft 6 in [0.30–1.98 m]), and the median weight was 165 lb (74.84 kg; IQR = 145–185 lb [65.77–83.91 kg], range = 10–283 lb [4.54–128.37 kg]).⁴ In the Chinese sample, a majority (99.0%) self-reported as Asian. Only 0.5% reported as Mixed, and another 0.5% reported as Pacific Islander. The Chinese sample had a median age of 26 years (IQR = 23–29 years, range = 18–99 years), a median height of 5 ft 8 in (1.73 m; IQR = 5 ft 7 in to 5 ft 10 in [1.70–1.78 m], range = 11 in to 8 ft [0.28–2.13 m]), and a median weight of 143 lb (64.86 kg; IQR = 132–154 lb [59.87–69.85 kg], range = 11–264 lb [4.99–119.75 kg]).

Answering Research Question

RQ1 asked how American and Chinese MSM presented themselves photographically on Jack'd. Two aspects were explored. First of all, the number of profiles having at least one photo showing a particular type of image was counted. Table 1 shows the counts for the U.S. and Chinese samples, respectively. In the U.S. sample, 64.2% of the users had revealed their face. The number of users who uploaded their headless torso image was 11.3%. Another 10.8% of the users showed at least one photo of their body parts without a clear face or a torso. In short, more people were comfortable in showing their face than their shirtless torso. A similar, yet not exact, pattern is observed in the Chinese sample. More users were willing to show their face (36.8%) than their shirtless torso (5.4%). However, more users included a photo that shows their other body parts (17.6%) than their shirtless torso.

⁴ All users reported their age, height, and weight. Although some people reported an age, height, or weight that apparently fell outside of a reasonable range (e.g., 99 years old, 1 ft 8 in, 10 lb), it was less certain whether 72 years old, 7 ft 2 in, or 99 lb were truths or lies. Given that there was no objective way to determine the authenticity of the information, the information was retained. To avoid the influence of extreme values, medians but not means were reported.

Table 1. Photographic Self-Presentation in Jack'd Profiles.

Showing	At least one photo (%)	
	United States (<i>n</i> = 204)	China (<i>n</i> = 204)
A recognizable face	64.2	36.8
A headless, shirtless torso	11.3	5.4
A headless, clothed torso	5.4	7.8
Human body parts besides a face or torso	10.8	17.6
Nonhuman objects	8.8	25.5
Celebrity/model	0.5	7.4
Blank	56.9	72.1

The first photo of each profile is more significant because it is the first photo displayed to others. A user can first show his face in the first photo and subsequently includes other kinds of images as the second or third photos in his profile, or a user can first show his torso and then reveal his face in the second or third photo. The second aspect of photographic self-presentation explored here is how users make use of this affordance. As Table 2 shows, in the U.S. sample, nearly three quarters (74.0%) of the users whose first photo was a face-pic (*n* = 128) also uploaded another face-pic as their second or third photo. Very few users (6.3%) showed a headless, shirtless torso in their second or third photos after they have revealed their face in the first photo. Looking at the second column of Table 2, the majority (83.3%) of users whose first photo was a headless, shirtless torso (*n* = 12) left at least one of the second and third photo spaces blank (and 75% left *both* spaces blank). Among those who uploaded an image as their second or third photo, only 16.7% included at least one face-pic and another 16.7% included another headless torso image.

Table 2. Photographic Self-Presentation of the Second and Third Photos in the U.S. Sample.

Showing	At least one of the second and third photo spaces (%)	
	First photo shows a recognizable face (n = 128)	First photo shows a headless, shirtless torso (n = 12)
A recognizable face	74.0	16.7
A headless, shirtless torso	6.3	16.7
A headless, clothed torso	7.1	0.0
Human body parts besides a face or torso	7.1	0.0
Nonhuman objects	1.6	0.0
Celebrity/model	0.0	0.0
Blank	38.6	83.3

In the Chinese sample (see Table 3), for those who uploaded a face-pic in the first photo ($n = 67$), more than half (59.7%) also showed another face-pic in the second or third photo. No one included a headless, shirtless torso image as their second or third photo. In contrast, 20% of the users whose first photo was their headless, shirtless torso ($n = 10$) uploaded another torso image as their second or third photo. The majority of them (90%) left at least one of the second and third photo spaces blank (and 70% left *both* spaces blank).

Table 3. Photographic Self-Presentation of the Second and Third Photos in the Chinese Sample.

Showing	At least one of the second and third photo spaces (%)	
	First photo shows a recognizable face (n = 67)	First photo shows a headless, shirtless torso (n = 10)
A recognizable face	59.7	10.0
A headless, shirtless torso	0.0	20.0
A headless, clothed torso	6.0	0.0
Human body parts besides a face or torso	11.9	0.0
Nonhuman objects	10.4	0.0
Celebrity/model	0.0	0.0
Blank	46.3	90.0

Hypotheses Testing

H1 hypothesized that fewer MSM in China revealed their face than MSM in the United States. The numbers of U.S. and Chinese profiles that had at least one photo showing a face were compared. In the U.S. sample, 64.2% of the profiles had at least one face photo, whereas in the Chinese sample, only 36.8% had at least one face photo. The chi-square test showed that this difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 30.75$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, no cells having expected counts less than 5). H1 was supported, indicating that American MSM were overrepresented in profiles that had at least one face-pic and that Chinese MSM were underrepresented.

H2 hypothesized that Chinese MSM mentioned fewer relational goals than American MSM. An index of relational goals was computed by summing the four goal variables. A t test was conducted to compare the average number of relational goals mentioned by American and Chinese MSM. The Levene's test indicated that equal variance was not assumed ($F = 13.03$, $p < .001$). The t test showed that the average number of goals mentioned by American MSM ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.79$) was significantly higher than that mentioned by Chinese MSM ($M = 0.43$, $SD = 0.63$), $t(387) = 2.37$, $p < .01$. H2 was supported. This result is suggestive of the effect of culture on mentioning relational goals.

Further probing was conducted into the occurrence of each goal in the profiles. Four independent chi-square tests were run to examine whether American MSM mentioned more of each goal than their Chinese counterparts. As Table 4 shows, significantly more American MSM mentioned seeking friends and stated an ambiguous goal, but significantly more Chinese MSM mentioned looking for relationships. No difference was found in mentioning seeking sex.

Table 4. Chi-Square Tests for Mention of Relational Goals in Jack'd Profiles of American and Chinese Men Who Have Sex With Men.

Goals	United States <i>n</i> = 204 (%)	China <i>n</i> = 204 (%)	Chi-Square (All <i>df</i> = 1)
Friends	22.5	14.2	4.72*
Sex	10.8	7.8	1.05†
Relationships	7.4	14.2	4.99*
Ambiguous goal	18.6	6.4	14.01***

Note. No cells had expected count less than 5.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

†Not significant.

Discussion

This research examined how MSM presented themselves on a mobile dating app, Jack'd. Scholars have analyzed personal ads posted by gay men and lesbians in magazines or on the Internet as self-presentation. The recent research by Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) and Miller (2015a) extended this approach to the study of profiles on Grindr and Jack'd, respectively. However, these studies focused on platforms in

the United States and on the U.S. population. Building on the cross-cultural research tradition, this study enriched the scholarship of self-presentation by examining whether the stigma of homosexuality and low- and high-context cultures influence profiles created by American and Chinese MSM.

Either Face or Torso, Not Both

Mobile dating apps are visual driven (Birnholtz et al., 2014). When a user logs onto an app, he can immediately see a series of photos. Therefore, photos are critical in this space. Although some MSM choose to show off their handsome faces or their fit torsos to attract eyeballs, some prefer to remain completely anonymous, posting nonhuman photos or leaving the space blank. The first part of the answer to RQ1 looked at overall photographic self-presentation by Jack'd users.

In discussing the use of online gay chat rooms in the pre-app era, R. H. Jones (2005) identified the norm of exchanging photos. A face-pic, together with age, race, relationships sought, and sexual role, forms a holistic package from which a person decides if further interaction is desired. Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) also regards a face-pic as personal disclosure because a face is biologically unique and is used to differentiate people. In this study, profiles with a face-pic are the most common photographic self-presentation in both U.S. and Chinese samples. Unlike the interviewees in R. H. Jones (2005), the profile owners reveal their face before any interaction. This is partly due to the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in the past decade in both countries; therefore, current app users are more willing to reveal their personal identity. Besides, by posting a face-pic, users also convey the message that they are looking for noncasual relationships. Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) found that Grindr users who mentioned looking for friendships or romantic relationships tended to show their face on their profiles.

Approximately 10% of the U.S. profiles and 5% of the Chinese profiles had at least one photo showing a headless, shirtless torso. Tziallas (2015) offered an insightful interpretation to these kinds of sexually explicit photos. He argues that creating and uploading sexual images to mobile dating apps is a type of do-it-yourself "pornification." Through this kind of self-pornification, users are rewarded by experiencing erotic chats and receiving nude images from others. Chan and Tsang (2014) also found that exposing one's body on social media is intrinsically rewarding to people who have a narcissistic tendency. Mowlabocus (2010) suggested that these sexually explicit images simultaneously serve as the "narcissistic gaze of the subject" and "the voyeuristic gaze of the Other" (p. 94). If revealing one's shirtless torso implies looking for casual sex, the data here suggests that fewer people on Jack'd, in both the United States and China, present themselves as seeking sex than seeking relationships.

On Grindr, the first mobile dating app for MSM, users have to choose between showing their face or their torso because only one photo can be uploaded. However, Jack'd allows up to three photos. The architecture creates no trade-off between showing a face and showing a torso. The second part of the answer to RQ1 explored whether Jack'd users used this affordance to display their face and torso in their profile. The answer is negative. The statistics in both samples show that users who revealed their face in the first photo uploaded even more face-pics than torso images as their second or third photo. If a face-pic represents a more intimate kind of disclosure, the users who have posted a face-pic are those who are motivated to establish meaningful relationships with others; therefore, it makes sense for them to upload

even more face-pics to their profiles. Cassidy (2013) found that Gaydar users distanced themselves from being associated with sex seeking by uploading only lifestyle photos.

In contrast, users who showed their shirtless torso in the first photo were not interested in including any face-pics. In fact, most of them left other photo spaces blank. Based on uncertainty management theory (Brashers, 2001), Corriero and Tong (2016) found that Grindr users seeking sex tended to demand *more* uncertainty about other Grindr users and therefore carried out less information-seeking behavior. As information-seeking and self-disclosure are reciprocal (Dindia, 2002), seeking out less information about others implies giving out less information to others. This may explain why users who posted a headless, shirtless torso—implying they are looking for casual sex—in their first photo did not even bother revealing their face and left other photo spaces blank. These people may simply be interested in anonymous sex.

Stigma of Homosexuality and Maintaining Anonymity in China

This study shows that 64.2% of the U.S. profiles had at least one photo showing a face, but only 36.8% of the Chinese profiles had at least one such photo. The percentage in the U.S. profiles was closer to what Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) observed on Grindr. The gap between the U.S. and Chinese profiles is consistent with the argument that a stronger stigma toward homosexuality exists in China (Wu, 2003). In her ethnography of gay men living in Dalian, a city in northeast China, Zheng (2015) found that many gay men strongly identified with heterosexual masculinity and aligned “their individual desires with the national desire of heteronormativity” (p. 143). Being associated with homosexuality is detrimental to one’s family and career.

This sociocultural discrepancy between the United States and China results in a sharp difference in the significance of having a face-pic online. In Western gay urban online culture, having a face-pic is essential. Mowlabocus (2010) writes,

The face-pic articulates the issues of self-identification, honesty and integrity and many users value this form of self-representation most highly, not least because they see it as validating profile; to many it is an act of investment and confirmation that can never be afforded a faceless profile. (p. 103)

So, a face-pic signifies authenticity and pride in the West. Nevertheless, in China, given the ambiguous policy toward homosexuality and the social sanction against being gay (Li, 2006), revealing one’s identity on mobile dating apps such as Jack’d is a risky act. This study did not investigate whether a face-pic will be exchanged in later interaction, but the apparent absence of a face-pic on the app may further discourage users to reveal their face.

Goal Expression in Different Cultures

Communication scholars have pointed out that people look for various types of relationships on mobile dating apps (Gudelunas, 2012; Miller, 2015a; Van de Wiele & Tong, 2014). This study explores

how cultural differences affect the kinds of goals that are expressed on the dating profiles. China, a high-context culture, is characterized by subtlety and implicitness in communication. In contrast, the United States, a low-context culture, is characterized by explicit communication (Hall, 1976). The results show that the average number of relational goals mentioned by Chinese MSM was smaller than that mentioned by American MSM, supporting this contexting hypothesis (Cardon, 2008). Probably, Chinese MSM believe their relational goals can be communicated through the photos they post and through conversations later. For example, in one Chinese profile, the user wrote, "I have been together with my bf for almost three years. we love and cherish each other. Expecting to know you the kind and nice you [*sic*]." No goals were explicitly stated at all; however, the user, apart from admitting he had a boyfriend, also uploaded three headless, shirtless torso images, suggesting that he was looking for casual sex.

Interestingly, more Chinese MSM mentioned seeking relationships than American MSM. Interpreting this result with the high- and low-context cultural framework, Chinese MSM seem to regard Jack'd as a non-romance-seeking platform. Therefore, when it comes to seeking relationships, Chinese users have to make their goals clear and explicit.

Furthermore, there was no significant difference between the number of American MSM and that of Chinese MSM that seek sex. This is surprising as the result goes against the perception that the West is more sexually liberal than the East. However, as Rubin (1993) powerfully argues, even in the West, "sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent" (p. 11). The strong sex negativity perpetuated in the Western culture sets up a structural valuation of sex acts that places casual sex toward the lower end of the hierarchy. "Slut shaming" is common in the American gay community. Birnholtz et al. (2014), for example, found that fewer profiles from college towns mentioned sex-related goals than profiles from cities. They suggest this difference is due to "the concerns around slut shaming and community that are likely more prevalent in college environments or smaller communities" (p. 9). Therefore, looking for casual sex is also stigmatized in the United States, effectively limiting users to state that their goal is sex and to post their shirtless torso image.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, although it captured profiles from various cities in China and the United States, the profiles were not a true random sample. In particular, profiles from small cities and towns were ignored. Given that people from rural China are more conservative about homosexuality (Koo et al., 2014), future research can examine whether this urban-rural discrepancy in disclosing one's face found in Gudelunas (2005) exists among Chinese MSM.

Second, as Livingstone (2003) points out, cross-national research struggles between adopting a universal measurement and contextualizing meanings. This study is not perfect in making a cross-national comparison. The face value of terms such as "fun" and "let's see what happens" in Chinese and in English were taken without exploring the possible connotative differences. Future research can consider the so-called backstage of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Interviewing MSM on their rationale behind what they present and why they choose some terms instead of others can provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between motivations and culture.

It should be noted that queer and postcolonial scholars have made extensive critiques of the social construction of Asian male bodies as effeminate and inferior under the gaze of white men (e.g., Hoang, 2014; Lim, 2013). Although this study acknowledges this critique, it did not consider race for the reason that it concerns profiles created by Chinese MSM living in China. It is very likely that the main audience of these Chinese MSM is other Chinese MSM who are in the immediate vicinity (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015). This is sharply different from Chinese American MSM living in the United States who aim to connect with American MSM of other races. Therefore, the postcolonial critique does not apply to this study. Nevertheless, further study can explore how the self-presentation of Chinese MSM is affected by the globally circulating images of white gay men.

As one of the first studies to empirically compare self-presentation of MSM in two countries, this study considers profiles created by Jack'd users as a Goffman-type self-presentation (1959). Photographs and written statements about the relational goals are two important "expressive equipment" that users can use to create and manage their image. Results show that sociocultural environment does play an influential role in self-presentation on mobile dating apps. First, more Chinese MSM chose to remain anonymous on Jack'd than their U.S. counterparts. Second, although Chinese MSM mentioned fewer relational goals than American MSM, more Chinese mentioned looking for relationships than their U.S. counterparts. Both the photographic and written elements suggest sex seeking is discouraged in both countries. This study demonstrates the usefulness in studying online self-presentation of MSM. As Gonzales and Meyers (1993) suggest, such an unobtrusive approach is capable of providing ecological valid observations. It is also particularly useful to reach marginalized communities (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2013; Child, Low, McCormick, & Cocciarella, 1996)—in this case, MSM in China.

References

- Alterovitz, S. S., & Mendelsohn, G. A. (2013). Relationship goals of middle-aged, young-old, and old-old Internet daters: An analysis of online personal ads. *Journal of Aging Studies, 27*, 159–165. doi:10.1016/j.jaging.2012.12.006
- Bello, R. S., Brandau-Brown, F. E., Zhang, S., & Ragsdale, J. D. (2010). Verbal and nonverbal methods for expressing appreciation in friendships and romantic relationships: A cross-cultural comparison. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 294–302. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.02.007
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Birnholtz, J., Fitzpatrick, C., Handel, M., & Brubaker, J. R. (2014). Identity, identification and identifiability: The language of self-presentation on a location-based mobile dating app. *Proceedings of the 16th international conference on human-computer interaction with mobile devices & services* (pp. 3–12). doi:10.1145/2628363.2628406

- Blackwell, C., Birnholtz, J., & Abbott, C. (2015). Seeing and being seen: Co-situation and impression formation using Grindr, a location-aware gay dating app. *New Media & Society, 17*, 1117–1136. doi:10.1177/1461444814521595
- Brashers, D. E. (2001). Communication and uncertainty management. *Journal of Communication, 51*, 477–497. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02892.x
- Brubaker, J. R., Ananny, M., & Crawford, K. (2014). Departing glances: A sociotechnical account of “leaving” Grindr. *New Media & Society, 1*–8. doi:10.1177/1461444814542311
- Caldwell-Harris, C., Kronrod, A., & Yang, J. (2013). Do more, say less: Saying “I love you” in Chinese and American cultures. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 10*, 41–69. doi:10.1515/ip-2013-0002
- Cardon, P. W. (2008). A critique of Hall’s contexting model: A meta-analysis of literature on intercultural business and technical communication. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 22*, 399–428. doi:10.1177/1050651908320361
- Cassidy, E. (2013). *Gay men, social media and self-presentation: Managing identities in Gaydar, Facebook and beyond* (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology). Retrieved from http://eprints.qut.edu.au/61773/1/Elija_Cassidy_Thesis.pdf
- Chan, L. S. (2016). The role of gay identity confusion and outness in sex-seeking on mobile dating apps among men who have sex with men: A conditional process analysis. *Journal of Homosexuality*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1196990
- Chan, L. S., & Tsang, H. W. E. (2014). “Hey, look at my body!”: An exploratory study of body display on Facebook among Hong Kong young adults. *International Journal of Interactive Communication Systems and Technologies, 4*, 31–46. doi:10.4018/ijicst.2014010103
- Child, M., Low, K. G., McCormick, C. M., & Cocciarella, A. (1996). Personal advertisements of male-to-female transsexuals, homosexual men, and heterosexuals. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 34*, 447–456. doi:10.1007/BF01547812
- Corriero, E. F., & Tong, S. T. (2016). Managing uncertainty in mobile dating applications: Goals, concerns of use, and information seeking in Grindr. *Mobile Media & Communication, 4*, 121–141. doi:10.1177/2050157915614872
- Crooks, N. R. (2013). The rainbow flag and the green carnation: Grindr in the gay village. *First Monday, 18*. Retrieved from <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4958/3790>
- Davis, D., & Friedman, S. (2014). Deinstitutionalizing marriage and sexuality. In D. Davis & S. Friedman (Eds.). *Wives, husbands, and lovers: Marriage and sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and urban China* (pp. 1–38). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Deaux, K., & Hanna, R. (1984). Courtship in the personals column: The influence of gender and sexual orientation. *Sex Roles, 11*, 363–375. doi:10.1007/BF00287465
- Dindia, K. (2002). Self-disclosure research: Knowledge through meta-analysis. In M. Allen, R. W. Preiss, B. M. Gayle, & N. A. Burrell (Eds.), *Interpersonal communication research: Advances through meta-analysis* (pp. 169–185). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 11*, 415–441. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00020.x
- Epel, E. S., Spanakos, S., Kasl-Godley, J., & Brownell, K. D. (1996). Body shape ideals across gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, and age in personal advertisements. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 19*, 264–273.
- Fitzpatrick, C., Birnholtz, J., & Brubaker, J. (2015). Social and personal disclosure in a location-based real time dating app. *Proceedings of the 2015 48th Hawaii international conference on system science* (pp. 1983–1992). doi:10.1109/HICSS.2015.237
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Gonzales, M. H., & Meyers, S. A. (1993). "Your mother would like me": Self-presentation in the personals ads of heterosexual and homosexual men and women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 19*, 131–142. doi:10.1177/0146167293192001
- Gudelunas, D. (2005). Online personal ads. *Journal of Homosexuality, 49*, 1–33. doi:10.1300/J082v49n01_01
- Gudelunas, D. (2012). There's an app for that: The uses and gratifications of online social networks for gay men. *Sexuality & Culture, 16*, 347–365. doi:10.1007/s12119-012-9127-4
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Hatala, M. N., & Prehodka, J. (1996). Content analysis of gay male and lesbian personal advertisements. *Psychological Reports, 78*, 371–374. doi:10.2466/pr0.1996.78.2.371
- Hoang, N. T. (2014). *A view from the bottom: Asian American masculinity and sexual representation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. London, UK: McGraw-Hill.

- Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2010). *Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book for students*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Hu, X., & Wang, Y. (2013). LGB identity among young Chinese: The influence of traditional culture. *Journal of Homosexuality, 60*, 667–684. doi:10.1080/00918369.2013.773815
- Jeffreys, E., & Yu, H. (2015). *Sex in China*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol. 1, pp. 231–262). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Jones, R. H. (2005). “You show me yours, I’ll show you mine”: The negotiation of shifts from textual to visual modes in computer-mediated interaction among gay men. *Visual Communication, 4*, 69–92. doi:10.1177/1470357205048938
- Kong, T. (2011). *Chinese male homosexualities: Memba, tongzhi, and golden boy*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Koo, F. K., Chow, E. P. F., Gao, L., Fu, X., Jing, J., Chen, L., & Zhang, L. (2014). Socio-cultural influences on the transmission of HIV among gay men in rural China. *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care, 16*, 302–315. doi:10.1080/13691058.2014.883643
- Landovitz, R. J., Tseng, C. H., Weissman, M., Haymer, M., Mendenhall, B., Rogers, K., . . . Shoptaw, S. (2013). Epidemiology, sexual risk behavior, and HIV prevention practices of men who have sex with men using GRINDR in Los Angeles, California. *Journal of Urban Health, 90*, 729–739. doi:10.1007/s11524-012-9766-7
- Li, Y. (2006). Regulating male same-sex relationships in the People’s Republic of China. In E. Jeffreys (Ed.), *Sex and sexuality in China* (pp. 82–101). Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Li, Y. (2014). *Xin zhongguo xing huayu yanjiu* [Studies of new Chinese sexual discourse]. Shanghai, China: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe.
- Lim, E.-B. (2013). *Brown boys and rice queens: Spellbinding performances in the Asias*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Lim, T. S., & Giles, H. (2007). Differences in American and Korean evaluations of one-year age differences. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 28*, 349–364. doi:10.2167/jmmd496.1
- Livingstone, S. (2003). On the challenges of cross-national comparative media research. *European Journal of Communication, 18*, 477–500. doi:10.1177/0267323103184003

- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research, 28*, 587–604. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00826.x
- Miller, B. (2015a). "Dude, where's your face?" Self-presentation, self-description, and partner preferences on a social networking application for men who have sex with men: A content analysis. *Sexuality & Culture, 19*, 637–658. doi:10.1007/s12119-015-9283-4
- Miller, B. (2015b). "They're the modern-day gay bar": Exploring the uses and gratifications of social networks for men who have sex with men. *Computers in Human Behavior, 51*, 476–482. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.05.023
- Mowlabocus, S. (2010). *Gaydar culture: Gay men technology and embodiment in the digital age*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Reige-Laner, M., & Levi-Kamel, G. W. (1977). Media mating I: Newspaper "personals" ads of homosexual men. *Journal of Homosexuality, 3*, 149–162. doi:10.1300/J082v03n02_04
- Rice, E., Holloway, I., Winetrobe, H., Rhoades, H., Barman-Adhikan, A., Gibbs, J., . . . Dunlap, S. (2012). Sex risk among young men who have sex with men who use Grindr, a smartphone geosocial networking application. *Journal of AIDS Clinic Research, 1*(S4), 005. doi:10.4172/2155-6113.S4-005
- Roth, Y. (2014). Locating the "scruff guy": Theorizing body and space in gay geosocial media. *International Journal of Communication, 8*, 2113–2133. Retrieved from <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/2286/1192>
- Rubin, G. S. (1993). Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In H. Abelow, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *The lesbian and gay studies reader* (pp. 3–44). London, UK: Routledge.
- Tziallas, E. (2015). Gamified eroticism: Gay male "social networking" applications and self-pornography. *Sexuality & Culture, 19*, 759–775. doi:10.1007/s12119-015-9288-z
- Van De Wiele, C., & Tong, S. T. (2014). Breaking boundaries: The uses & gratifications of Grindr. *Proceedings of the 2014 ACM international joint conference on pervasive and ubiquitous computing* (pp. 619–630). doi:10.1145/2632048.2636070
- Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research, 19*, 52–89. doi:10.1177/009365092019001003
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research, 23*, 3–43. doi:10.1177/009365096023001001

- Walther, J. B. (2007). Selective self-presentation in computer-mediated communication: Hyperpersonal dimensions of technology, language, and cognition. *Computers in Human Behavior, 23*(5), 2538–2557. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2006.05.002
- Wei, W. (2015). Queer organizing and HIV/AIDS activism: An ethnographic study of a local *tongzhi* organization in Chengdu. In E. L. Engebretsen, W. F. Schroeder, & H. Bao (Eds.), *Queer/tongzhi China: New perspectives on research, activism and media cultures* (pp. 192–216). Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.
- Wu, J. (2003). From “Long Yang” and “Dui Shi” to *tongzhi*: Homosexuality in China. *Journal of Homosexuality, 7*, 117–143. doi:10.1300/J236v07n01_08
- Zheng, T. (2015). *Tongzhi living: Men attracted to men in postsocialist China*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.