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Queer Belonging in Chinese Society:

A Case study of LGBTs Negotiation of Belonging

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Abstract

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In this study, possibilities to belong in the contemporary Chinese society are recognized to differences along axes of sexual orientation. Lesbians and gays in the LGBT group are exposed to violations of their human rights in forms of discrimination and lack of legal protection. The aim of this thesis is to critically explore "politics of belonging" by highlighting processes of inclusion and exclusion in the Chinese society. From material collected in a field study among LGBT movement organizations in Beijing, this research maps out lesbians and gays own negotiations of belonging.

The thesis employs queer theories when exploring heteronormative structures in society. In lesbians' and gays' negotiation of these structures, the study finds that belonging in the Chinese society is dependent on embodying heteronormaive values. The study goes into practices of protest and LGBT movement participants' activities to change politics of belonging.

Key words: LGBT, Belonging, China, Social movement, Queer

List of Abbreviations

PGU   -   Politics for Global Development

LGBT   -   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans

PRC   -   People's Republic of China

SIDA   -   Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

UN   -   United Nations

CSO   -   Civil-Society Organization

CCP   -   Chinese Communist Party

NGO   -   Non-governmental organization

GONGO -   Government-operated non-governmental organization

HIV   -   Human Immunodeficiency Virus

AIDS   -   Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

CDC   -   Center for Disease Control

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In the Swedish government's politics for global development (PGU) LGBT rights is a prioritized issue and it is considered a human right's issue. According to the Swedish development agency SIDA, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in most countries of the world are "subjected to cultural and juridical injustice, which leads to economic injustice" (SIDA 2006: 2, my translation). SIDA continues by saying that due to this marginalization and cultural stigmatization, LGBT people are denied equal access to society (ibid.). A pressing issue stemming from implications of marginalization and stigmatization in urban People's Republic of China (PRC) is LGBT people's social and cultural rights. The issue of self-determination, i.e. for people to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" is at risk. As secured by the UN, social and cultural rights are essential to human rights and cannot be discriminated based on sexual orientation (OHCHR (2014): article 1(1) and 2(2)). The topic of LGBT is therefore a question of human rights and human development. In this study, this situation is explored from the LGBT movement participants' point of view.

The civil society in the PRC is growing in number of organizations and influence. The government increasingly recognizes civil-society organizations (CSOs) working with social services as potential partners that can contribute to development and social stability (The Economist 2014). When the door has opened for more people to be part of society and citizenship, the door is still closed in some areas. There is resistance towards human rights organizations that hinders them in their work (ibid.). In todays China, structures oppressing lesbians and gays remain strong and they are still a marginalized group in society. Normalization of heteronormativity is the foundation of unequal opportunities of non-heterosexual people. The point of departure in this thesis is the understanding that heteronormaitve power relations influence lesbians' and gays' sense of belonging in a society. To this can LGBT movements be seen as a counterforce towards. In the following thesis, the concept of belonging will be explored based on where and when LGBT people can and cannot belong, and how lesbians and gays in the LGBT movement discuss belonging. Hence, this study explores the Chinese society as inclusive and exclusive of certain groups of people.

1.1 Research Objectives and Research Question

This thesis explores LGBT movement participants' interactions with the surrounding mainstream society. "Mainstream society" refers to the society that is shaped by its cultures' most typical or common ideas. In the case referred to are the hegemonic values and ideas that construct norms of gender, body and sexuality excluding of homosexual people and groups. It investigates how lesbian and gay people can experience a sense of belonging to the movement as well as to the mainstream Chinese society. In addition, it goes into the issue of what here will be referred to as 'politics of belonging'. Politics of belonging concern the topic of who can belong and not belong in society as a result of social interactions in society and social groups in society. Belonging is therefore a tool to explore justice and equality in society. This is studied from a queer theoretical point of view to analyze belonging in the context of heteronormative power relations.

To explore negotiations of norms and expectations within the LGBT movement in Beijing, I conducted a case study involving interviews and observations with participants in LGBT organizations in Beijing. From my field experiences I explain how relations between the surrounding Chinese society and the LGBT movement influence participants' senses of belonging.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how power relations in society influence non-heterosexuals' sense of belonging in mainstream society and how participation in the movement provide or do not provide belonging. This is done through exploring how lesbian and gay movement participants describe social interaction. The research question of this study can be articulated as:

> *How do Chinese LGBT movement participants negotiate belonging in*
> *contemporary Beijing?*

The research question consist of two sub-questions that are developed to explore the research problem:

> *What do participants negotiate when they negotiate belonging?*
> *How do participants speak about belonging?*

1.2 Definitions

The term "LGBT" is used in this research, which covers lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. However, while some of the organizations included in this study

state that they work with the transgender group, there is little representation of them in the organizations. Homosexual and bisexual people were sampled in this research, but no transgender people were included. Due to this, this research mainly regards issues relating to gender and sexuality in relation to heteronormativity. When the people I met in the field spoke English, LGBT was the term most frequently used when referring to the own group. I have therefore chosen to apply this terminology when discussing the LGBT movement. However, since the material collected has been based on lesbian and gay participants, the terms lesbian and gay will be used when analyzing personal stories in order to be attentive to intersectional interpretations.

In this study I apply the concept of "heteronormativity" and discuss this as a fundamental system that organizes society. Informed by queer theory, heteronormativity is viewed as a system of power relations that organize people along axes of sexuality. In my approach to the field I understand that in most societies, institutions normalize heterosexuality and reward this type of life while categorizes non-heterosexuality as deviant (Ambjörnsson 2006: 51-52).

1.3 The Context of China

The context of this research is Mainland China. China is centrally planned and governed in a one-party rule by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The government and human rights organizations have conflicting views on the situation concerning freedoms and rights in China. The state has ratified UN:s declaration on human rights. Nonetheless, according to many NGOs monitoring human rights in China, violations of human rights do take place (for example see: Human Rights Watch 2013; Amnesty International 2013; Chinese Human Rights Defenders 2014). Some violations mentioned are the government's arbitrary curbs on freedom of expression and religion, as well as prohibitions of independent labor unions and human rights organizations (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Family and marriage is a vital institution in Chinese society, underpinned by social, political and economic factors. The absence of social welfare strengthens the need of marriage. As a result of this, the family is becoming increasingly important as a provider of economic and social support, it is therefore crucial for many families to

ensure elderly care by having a child. A strong sense of "familism" springs from this. This means that the "social and economic relations within the family are strong and mutually dependent" (Eklund 2013: 64). Within the family unit, family interests sometimes displace individual interests. Parents and relatives' views are often considered on mate selection and marriage (Eklund 2013: 67-68). In the legal system, the CCP secures the institution of marriage by benefitting childbearing within marriage. Since same-sex marriage is not legal in China, the Chinese marriage is only a heterosexual institution. Due to the importance of (heterosexual) marriage, it is an institution that includes and excludes citizens. Thus, marriage is a way of conditioning citizenship (Eklund 2013: 66). Since the heterosexual family institution has an elevated status in society, same-sex relations are seen as a potential threat that can disrupt its constructing heterosexual power relations.

Elisabeth L. Engebretsen describes marriage as structured by parental obligations. Despite socio-economic transformations this is maintained by family planning such as China's One Child Policy (Engebretsen 2009: 5). This policy has led to a family structure of 4-2-1, where two sets of grandparents with one child each have only one grandchild. This structure means that there is a very high pressure placed on the one offspring. These social, political and economic underpinning of the norm of marriage it has resulted in a society where marriage is nearly universal (Eklund 2013: 66, 68).

1.3.1 LGBT in China

The Chinese legal system involves regulations on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and government-operated NGOs (GONGOs). Organizations need to be registered in a system that does not allow registration on associations that pursue activism in areas "officials have found worrying" (The Economist 2014). This is most likely due to the fact that they are perceived as a threat to social stability. Consequently, many organizations work as unregistered organizations (ibid.).

The general acceptance of same-sex sexual behavior has in the past been extremely low. Social norms today are more liberal but yet relatively more conservative than in Western countries. This can be illustrated by the figure from 2005 stating that 90 percent of Chinese men aged 30 years and older who had same-sex sexual relations were married to a woman to hide their homosexuality (Yang,

Attané, Li & Yang 2012: 486). Up until 1997 there were laws criminalizing same-sex activities and by the year 2001 homosexuality was no longer considered an illness. While removing this law and pathologization, no legislation has been added to include or protect LGBT people. Consequently, there is no inclusion of LGBT in Chinese legislation on discrimination (UNDP China 2013).

In media, there are examples of censorship on material considered inappropriate or sensitive. One such type of material is sexual or pornographic. For example, the Korean movie "the King and the Clown" from 2006 and the American "Brokeback Mountain" from 2005 was banned from cinemas due to the "gay theme" (The Guardian 2006). LGBT visibility in official newspaper, magazines and TV is limited. Legislations of this type therefore have implications on the spread of information and knowledge on LGBT matters in society as well as on strategies by the LGBT movement. In the meantime however, films and news are spread through the Internet and through unofficial channels (The Guardian 2006).

1.3.2 Case Study Area: LGBT Movement in Beijing

The LGBT movement in Beijing consists of several organizations with varying focus and strategies. There are formal organizations that work with gender and health and organizations that work with issues relating to human rights. The last group of organizations, with their focus on human rights issues, is often working outside of government control. Health oriented LGBT organizations, which most often engage in HIV/AIDS work, are viewed more positively by the government. These organizations are therefore more often formally registered as NGOs and are working in dialogue with the governmental Center of Disease Control (CDC) (Yuanhui 2012).

1.4 Disposition of Thesis

This thesis consists of 6 sections. The first section introduces the area of research and relevance of the study. It provides a context for the research where China forms the social, cultural and political background for lesbian and gay people and the LGBT movement. The next section, "Previous Research" provides a survey of the field. In this section, literature that has not only served as inspiration to this research but also contributed with important knowledge of the field is presented and discussed. Most of

the literature has also contributed with important queer theoretical reflection that is used in the theoretical framework.

The third section called "theoretical framework" begins with an overview of queer theory's contributions in understanding heterosexual norms and performativity. Queer theory is used as a common theme in the theoretical framework when it is used to connect remaining theories to queer theory and forms the basis for analyzing belonging and interaction in modes of performativity.

In the fifth section, the methodology is presented. Methods for interviews and observations as well as method for analysis is reviewed and discussed. The sixth section features the analysis. This section is divided into four themes that analysis negotiation of belonging based on what is negotiated and how it is negotiated. The analysis leads us into the last section called "concluding discussion". That is where themes will be connected to one another and findings as well as questions regarding further research will have room to be discussed.

2. Previous Research

Lisa Rofel and Elisabeth L. Engebretsen have conducted research on the topic of LGBT in China. In this section I review their work in the light of belonging where some of their central arguments have been useful to this thesis. A research by Mikki van Zyl is also included in this overview since she emphasizes aspects of LGBT's people's negotiation of belonging in context of strong kinship systems.

In *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture* (2007), anthropologist Lisa Rofel investigate people as "desiring subjects" in post-Mao's China in the context of the global market economy. Throughout the book, Rofel illustrates how these factors interact to produce a new ideal for human beings as cosmopolitan beings in the global order (Rofel 2007: 198). Rofel finds that cultural productions and liberal policies have pushed the role of desire in China. She discusses citizenship of gay and lesbians as a form of cultural belonging. Cultural belonging is connected to practices of desire that is a political site "on which citizenship is meaningfully defined, sought or denied" (Rofel 2007: 94). In other words, in order to belong people have to be proper citizens and proper gays and lesbians. Desire has to be embodied properly; that is to say that the gay identity has to embody transnational

symbols and desire for a cultural citizenship within "Chineseness". There are exclusionary boundaries to this where people that cannot embody desire in the right way risk being turned into "low quality" persons (Rofel 2007: 198).

While Rofel's research puts forward theories on desire and citizenship in relation to belonging my study will contrast belonging to mainstream society with the social group of the LGBT movement. Concepts of citizenship and Chineseness as put forward by Rofel are central in this.

The organization Tongyu is one of the associations in Beijing's LGBT movement. Anthropologist Elisabeth L. Engebretsen has, based on her field research on *lala* (lesbian) members in Tongyu, made important contributions on explaining conditions for lalas in terms of familial relations, citizenship and normative structures. She demonstrates how deeply seated cultural meanings of the marital status and moral values influence belonging. The marital status ensures both insurance (in economic independence and social) and continuity within the family and "saving face" in front of neighbors and relatives (Engebretsen 2009: 11, 13). While her findings have inspired me in my study, I use her findings to deeper explore the experiences and negotiations of belonging.

Engebretsen takes a critical standpoint towards Anglo-US domination in queer theory and queer studies on sexuality. She argues that research is often based on the "explicit assertion of fixed individual identity based on an innate ("true") sexual orientation situated on a homo-hetero axis ("coming out")". She critiques the global applicability and relevance of this model and argues that this hegemony results in the tendency of reproduction of a Western queer identity. From her research she finds that alternative sexualities exist outside of this (Engebretsen 2009: 110).

A research that focuses explicitly on gays and lesbians' experiences of belonging in a heteronormative society is queer scholar Mikki van Zyl's study *Are same-sex marriages UnAfrican? Same-Sex Relationships and Belongings in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2011). In this research, the concept of belonging is used to analyze how underlying values attached to marriage position people differently as citizens along axes of power. She looks into the question of "who belongs to Africa?" by studying how gay and lesbian couples discuss marriage by contemplating or rejecting it. Alike my study, this research concerns sexuality in a non-western context and therefore discusses non-western family values and relations. In the South African case, van Zyl recognizes lesbians and gays' struggles with relations to the culture of

being African, gay or lesbian and a family member of a kin. The researcher argues that gay marriage provides a "social protection to hegemonic forms of kinship and duplicates culturally hegemonic forms of monogamous, committed couple relationships. It may also signal an incorporation of heteronomative values and create new levels of exclusion, especially of transgendered and intersex individuals" (van Zyl 2011: 353). In this way, marriage is a part of a "heterosexual Africa", where the equality of marriage not only includes but also excludes. Politics of belonging therefore illustrates structures of risk of differentiation and exclusion of citizenship.

Important in her findings are that where participants form their lives depend on their varying communities such as class and racial identifications. This intersects with their identity and result in social divisions (van Zyl 2011: 351). While there are many differences between China and South Africa they also intersect since heteronormative power structures influence belonging. This is an aspect that has inspired directions taken in my study on the case of China.

3. Theoretical Framework

In the theoretical framework of this study, queer theories are used as a common thread connecting the theories. Social interactionism as described by Mead and Goffman are used as a background for theorization on social interaction. Lastly, Vanessa May's theories on the concept of belonging are described and connected to queer theories of belonging in heteronormative contexts.

3.1 Queer Theory and Intersectionality

3.1.1 Heterosexual Matrix and Performativity

In a study of social interaction in relation to queer and mainstream society, theories that concern social norms on gender, sexuality and identity are useful. Queer theorist Judith Butler takes an anti-essentialist position and argues that the social context of rules and prohibitions that are internalized by individuals is what shapes body and behavior (Butler 2007: 213). Heteronormativity is recognized as central in organizing bodies and behavior into gendered categories. This perspective challenges the belief that gendered behavior is natural.

Judith Butler puts forward theories of the heterosexual matrix. The matrix forms a frame in which bodies, gender and desires are organized with the only available positions as man and woman. These are organized as each other's opposites; they are opposites in terms of bodies, behavior and are expected to desire each other. In order to be perceived as comprehensible, each individual need to perform the right type of connections between biological sex, gender and desire (Ambjörnsson 2006: 112). The matrix is described as a system that is naturalized in most societies and results in a compulsory heterosexuality. Ellen Mortensen in the forewords of Butler's *Gender Trouble* describes the proceedings and results of this:

> Our conceptions of gender and sexuality occur as an effect of a truth regime that is organized and licensed by a power political system. Via a complex interplay between power and discourse - in the form of rules and prohibitions – the culture secures a compulsory heterosexuality. Identities are formed and governed primarily by being part of a series of practice forms. Specific actions are repeated until we confuse cause with effect. (Mortensen in Butler 2007: p 9, my translation)

From recognizing that the body is not passive or pre-discursive and instead always inside a discourse and marked by a cultural authority, Butler develops theories on performativity. In the confusion of cause and effect, people are unaware of the fact that behaviors that produce the idea of an inner essence are in fact fabricated. They are performative acts that repeat previous acts (Butler 2007: 205, 2014). In other words, depending on social norms on how to behave depending on a biological sex, people need to carry out the right ("straight") performative acts which is perceived as "natural". As a result of this, the power structure of this imagination is "discursively maintained to regulate sexuality inside the reproductive coercive frames of heterosexuality" (Butler 2007: 214, my translation).

Butler opens up for the possibilities of subverting discourses that shape the meaning of gender. Parodying the idea of an original gendered identity can do this. By performing the "wrong" gender or behavior, the idea of the "normal" as the "original" is uncovered as a copy of an idea of gender. By applying theories of subversion, behavior that parodies gendered behavior can be interpreted as protesting or altering ideas of gender that construct the "normal" (Butler 2007: 217).

3.1.2 Sexual Hierarchies

Sexuality forms an additional area of research within queer theory. Gayle Rubin is a feminist scholar on sexuality that explores how heterosexual norms on sexuality excludes "deviant" forms of sexuality. Rubin explains a diagram that illustrates how expressions of sexuality are valued differently based on how they fit into categories that are seen as "normal", "good" and "natural". Sexuality should for example be heterosexual, marital, reproductive, involve no sex toys and occur at home. Sex that transgresses this imaginary line is "deviant", "abnormal and "unnatural". This sex may involve same-sex participants, be casual, involve pornography, fetish objects or occur outdoor (Rubin 2002: 201). Hence, there are strong normative regulations on "accurate" sexualities where homosexuality is always subordinated heterosexuality, but from these regulations can also types of heterosexual sexual behavior deviate (Rubin 2002: 202). In order for sexuality to be a part of a comprehensively performed gender, sexuality needs to be performed in a right way to be accepted in society.

3.1.3 Critical Perspectives on Queer Theory

Important to note is that queer theories are developed in an Anglo-western context, which has limitations when applying it to a non-western context. As recognized by Rofel and Engebretsen, queer identities cannot be understood as universal. Queer theories describe a model of queer as a project of individualized sexual subjectivity based on certain practices such as "coming out", being visible and proud etc., which might not be as central to LGBT people in non-western cultures as in western. Because of this, it is of great importance to look at alternative approaches to sexuality, as opposed to looking at universal "gayness" or "lesbianess". Important is to consider the local context of queer life and be adaptive to what is considered desirable queerness locally (Engebretsen 2008: 90, 92).

3.1.4 Intersectionality

Queer theory as well as many other feminist theories applies an intersectional perspective. By emphasizing the social context as crucial in constructing the subject, the intersectional perspective is decisive to employ to grasp how factors influence an individual depending on his/her circumstances. The intersectional approach explains how people are influenced differently from social and political structures and culture.

Rather than structures in society being stable, they are created in relations of power where people are positioned in hierarchical organizations. Thus, in social interactions people have unequal access to power, and due to this, unequal possibilities to act as subjects in society (De los Reyes & Mulinari 2005: 16, 24). This perspective emphasizes factors such as class, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality and disability.

3.2 Symbolic Interactionism and the Self

This section provides important contributions on social interactionism by two sociologists; George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman. The theory explains social interactions in which performative acts take place.

Social interactionism, as initiated by Mead and later contributed to by Goffman, finds that the self does not exist previous to the social context in which the individual lives. Judith Butler has the same existential approach but seldom use the term "self". This can cause confusion in her analyzes on the subject's ability to act in conflict with current social norms. Here can theories of social interactionism be of use. In this theory, a self develops from interactions with other people. It is a self that has the capacity of thought and can be reflective of her own thoughts and actions (Mead 1947: 140-141). This insight is useful in conceptualizing the agency of negotiating belonging.

According to Mead's theory, meaning arises from the relation between the person who uses a symbol (for example an act or language) and the receiver. In other words, people learn meanings and symbols through social interaction. People are able to modify or alter meanings and symbols based on interpretations in different situations. This is important in how the individual acts in social structures and their ability to produce social change (Mead 1947: 75-78).

Goffman builds on Mead's theories of the self with concepts that build on the understanding that and contributes to the understanding that a person, from partaking in social interactions, adopt norms and pursue the social projects the social group carries out (Mead 1947: 158) Goffman finds that the self arises form "dramatic interaction between the actor and the audience" (Rizer 2000: 362). In his theories, he describes the individual as performing an act in front of an audience, attempting to carry out a performance the audience will accept (Goffman 2014: 25). In order to do this, the actor negotiate the self and perform the self differently depending on the

social environment in order to present a moral self in varying situations into unwritten social rules. These performances are acted in everyday interactions with other people. In these theories, the self is both interactive and performed.

Moreover, people need to make social interaction under "felicity conditions". Gestures in interactions need to fit the right occasion, otherwise the person risk being questioned in her performance or be seen as odd or strange (Goffman 2014: 53; Brickell 2005: 30-31). Risk that comes with interactions in Goffman's theories can be linked to queer theories where the individual need to perform a comprehendible connection between sex, gender and desire. Since the subject is also able to reflect on actions, she can also make resistance by transgressing norms.

Lastly, what the theories of Mead and Goffman lack is consideration of implications of heteronormativity (Brickell 2005: 29). By not considering heteronormativity as a fundamental power structure these theories are not able to explain large parts of human behavior in many societies. Here, Judith Butler's theories and theories of social interactionism complete each other.

3.3 Belonging

The concept of belonging as described by sociologist Vanessa May explains the relationship between the self and society from the viewpoint of the individual. She defines belonging as "a sense of ease with the self and the surrounding" (May 2011: 368). Belonging is a concept helpful in order to investigate how LGBT movement participants construct and are constructed by both materialistic and symbolic notions of society. Hence, this theory allows me to explore both social structures' and social cultural norms' impact on participants' sense of belonging.

This theory is contributing "belonging" as a concept to the sociological attempt to link the self and the social. The social consists of "concrete, imagined or virtual relationships with people, collectives, the symbolic or abstract sense of "culture", objects and as well as our built or natural environments" (May 2011: 374). The view of the self in relation to society and social structures origins from Mead's and Goffman's view of the self. The self and society are recognized as mutually constitutive through people's interactions with each other and social structures (May 2011: 366). The society and the individual, or the official and unofficial, are often viewed as two separate spheres, but can according to the theory not be separated.

Belonging is in this study used to link the two together by reviewing how belonging is performed and discussed. Consequently, it does not attempt to define actual belonging but how belonging is negotiated.

People have a need to sense belonging and do this through a process of creating a sense of identification and recognition. Belonging can be sensed at several levels; recognition with people/groups, with locations and with social or political values or structures. It can be sensed with different social communities simultaneously. Consequently it is possible to belong to more than one group (May 2011: 368, 370).

Belonging comes from interaction with people and by knowledge of unwritten rules of how to behave. People do this based on an idea of who "we" are. Theories on performativity helps us to understand belonging as a way to "fit in" based on one's ability to performatively act a comprehensible member of the "we". Social norms include norms on connections between biological sex, gender and desire. As a result from this, in order to belong in a group, performative acts need to embody a correct heterosexual behavior. To not "fit" with the surrounding can cause uncomfortable experiences of feelings of exclusion. However, May argues that the sense of belonging not necessarily is an ideal state. The sense of not belonging can foster political action and be a drive for change that the feeling of belonging does not foster in the same way (May 2011: 373).

4. Methodology

This study was carried out as a case study on the LGBT movement in Beijing. During two months in Beijing, time was spent with LGBT movement participants at informal get-togethers as well as during interviews at my request. Inspired by the social constructivist approach, the foundational idea was to let the participants talk and the strategy is therefore to "locate research within the meanings people give to their worlds and to allow this meaning to emerge" (Holliday 2007: 17). The method is designed to reflect understandings and negotiations of experiences of informants by employing qualitative methods that allow for in-depth analysis of the collected material.

The empirical material involves primary data that is collected from interviews and observations with participants from various organizations. An ethnographic approach has been applied to the research method. Essential to the method was to spend time with people participating in the movement to become familiar with discussions and ideas in the movement and get personal contact with individuals. This is crucial in order for my interpretations to be able to stay as close as possible to the informants' subjective perception. In this way, performative actions negotiate belonging can be investigated. I lived as a roommate with one key Chinese participant in the movement and I also spent time with participants in their spare time. One of my ways to "give something back" to the movement was by taking part as a lecturer in a queer gender discussion at a lesbian organization.

4.1 Sampling

The empirical material is based on observations and interviews with participants from a variety of organizations in Beijing with diverse focus on LGBT matters. This area in China was chosen since it has a relatively rich group of LGBT organizations. As discovered in the field, organizations involved in the Beijing LGBT movement have interconnected networks. They are often cooperating with each other in events and participants often take part in more than one organization. As a result of this, organizations cannot be fully separated from each other. The initial intention of focusing on participants in one or two organizations was therefore proved unrealistic when I arrived in the field.

To exemplify the focus of the organizations sampled in this research, some can be described as working with the whole "LGBT group" with diverse focus on this group. Others have more specific focus on lesbians. Groups also represented in this sample are a choir and a magazine. By interviewing key informants, views of people that held specific positions in the movement or international organizations outside the movement have been collected.

By using snowball sampling, organizations and interviewees were accessed. By accessing one organization previous to the field study, the organization and later on key informants recommended new interviewees from their own or other organizations. The snowball sampling technique was completed with semi-purposive sampling. One of the purposes was to achieve a gender balance in the sample. Since

many expatriates are involved in the LGBT movement in Beijing, I was faced with the question of whether or not to include them in my sample. Without knowing much about expatriates' role in the movement, the choice was made to interview two expatriates from Europe in the beginning of the research. This purposive choice was made with the motive of finding out as much as possible of the area of research, and let what seems relevant to the participants uncover new dimensions to research. Following these emerging findings, the research steered in the direction towards a focus on Chinese born participants' experiences of belonging.

4.2 Interviews

Since wanting the objective of the research to develop from understandings of the participants, semi-structured interviews were held in the meeting with informants. The semi-structure was a very loose structure with only some central prepared themes to discuss during the interview. This was in order for the interview to concern what was interesting for the interviewee to talk about (Bryman 2008: 438). At two occasions, once with movement participants and once with key informants, I held interviews with two informants at the same time. At the time for the interview with the two participants, this was not planned but became convenient since another colleague of my interviewee shared table with us.

The aim in interviews with LGBT movement participants was to discuss experiences from participating in the movement as well as to relate this to the context of China. The same strategy applies for interviews with key informants. However, as opposed to focus on personal experiences, with these informants the broader topic of social and political situation and trends was discussed.

The interview material is based on interviews with 21 people, out of which four are key informants. The interviewees were of mixed gender groups, and refer to themselves as gay, lesbian and bisexual. As previously mentioned, no transsexual people were included in the material due to difficulties of accessing any member of this group. The age span of interviewees varies from the age of 22 up to mid 40s. In this study, the term "participants" refers to the people participating in the movement. This is chosen instead of using the term "activist" which can imply participants taking action using certain, and often radical, methods. All participants are active in the movement in different ways and to varying degrees; some had formal positions at

organizations, others were volunteers and while others mostly participate in informal networks and gatherings.

Most members of LGBT organizations included in this research are educated at university and are representatives of an upper middle social class. It is therefore the view of people with this social background that is the empirical basis of this study. This does however not imply an obvious bias since this pattern is likely to exist in most LGBT organizations in urban China due to their more resourceful position in taking action in NGOs (The Economist 2014). Most participants in the research spoke English and I do not speak Chinese. It was therefore possible to do most interviews in English. At one occasion the interviewee expressed discomfort in speaking English and a translator was used.

4.3 Observation

It is possible to say that all social research is participatory observations (Holliday 2007: 17). This can be true for this research since a lot of background material was gathered from spending time with movement participants. Participatory observations enabled me to become familiar with discussions among participants. The method of observation became very convenient at occasions when I was invited to contribute to their work. At one occasion I was asked to participate in an advocacy event since they were in need of another participant. At that occasion I was happy to be of use to them, and simultaneously gather useful material. During observations, my focus laid on exploring who participates and how; what do people do? How is this done/spoken about? How are people included or excluded? Moreover, it was interesting to observe what people talked about and how they related to the context, and so forth.

It was a struggle to get access to many activities at the organizations such as discussions, movie screenings and meetings for staff and visitors. Therefore are the larger shares of the observations experiences from events, or "out of the ordinary" practices. However, some observations have been made with at events with a crowd representing ethnic Chinese lesbians and gays, which is the group usually visiting LGBT organizations in Beijing.

4.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

During my stay in Beijing I felt welcomed and accepted by people I met in the LGBT community. Since the LGBT community is tightly connected in a network, a lot of participants seemed to have heard of me from friends or colleagues. When asked to participate in my study, they were given some information of the topic of the research and were assured that they will be anonymous. With their explicit consent me and participants met for an interview.

As a result of choosing this method, biases such as the researcher's influence on the interviewees and participants during observations are natural consequences. Characteristics of the researcher, for example in my case that I'm young, female and white can have implications for what type of information is collected (Bryman 2012: 227). However, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, to find out people's personal views call for qualitative methods. Methods with more distance between the researcher and researched could have been employed to limit risks of this bias. This could have resulted in more generalizable findings, but that is however not the aim of this research. In terms of researcher biases, since I in this study apply a social constructivist approach to research, I view this as a part of the co-construction of reality by the participant and researcher (Punch 2005: 173). Thus, this is not viewed as resulting in any "false" findings compared to a "true" reality where the researcher is absent. Material and findings are produced with a present researcher and material is treated as an interpretation made by me. However, attempts to prevent participants from self-censoring during interviews were done. The ethnographic approach enabled me to construct an equal relation in the researcher-interviewee meeting. By familiarizing myself with the context and participants, they could familiarize with me. It was my hope that this allows me to be less of a "stranger" and that participants I met would feel comfortable to share thoughts and experiences during interviews (Holliday 2007: 12).

A result from the snowball sampling technique, the sample was to a large extent dependent on key informants perspectives on what could be of interest in my study. I found this to be the most effective way to contact volunteer movement participants but also participants in leading positions. A result from this snowballing is that many people in the sample are employees at organizations. The sample is therefore slightly skewed in this direction. It is likely that if more non-employed

participants had been represented in the sample, experiences of people that are less influenced by western ideas would have been expressed. In a study with that kind of sample, the findings could possibly be different.

Observations were carried out at occasions I was invited to participate in. It is possible that I was not invited to some gatherings, for example organizations' events in Chinese, one of the reasons may be my inability to speak Chinese. It is also likely that interesting material have been missed out on during conversations in interviews and observations. This is an issue of getting access to some information and is a weakness in the empirical material.

4.5 Method of Analysis

The analysis of collected material has been done thematically. The basic idea was to let my data speak to me and submit myself to emerging patterns in the data (Holliday 2007: 93). Inspired by Adrian Holliday's (2007) description of data analysis, simultaneously as raw material was reviewed and organized, theory and previous literature was studied. This has led to a process where arguments are developed in a constant dialogue with the data (Holliday 2007: 93). Based on questions of "what is said or done" and "how are things said or done", I have developed emerging key themes from the material. Based on this, a storyline of the data have has developed (Holliday 2007: 94).

The empirical material in the analysis is organized into themes that reflect what is negotiated and how it is negotiated concerning LGBTs' senses belonging. Quotes from interviews are incorporated into the analysis in the process of developing arguments. I have changed the language in some of the quotes where needed in order for the reader to more easily understand the meaning of the quote.

5. Analysis

The analysis section consists of four themes. The first two themes "System of marriage and success" and "Good and Bad Sexual Behavior" concern aspects of society that is central for who and how people can belong. The following themes

"Sameness versus Difference" and "Heteronormative Space in Social Interactions" are themes that concern how people negotiate belonging.

The purpose of the analysis is to map out aspects of the mainstream society and the movement involved in negotiating belonging. The analysis is based on *how* people speak about these aspects. From analyzing the material as performances in social interactions, this analysis will lead to a conclusion on some central aspects in how belonging is negotiated.

5.1 System of Marriage and Success

Many testimonies have been made in the interviews and observations that describe the importance of family and marriage. What is described as a system of marriage and success is something central to most people as a breaking point in their negotiation of belonging.

Sun is a 36 years old woman who founded a lesbian organization in Beijing. She describes values of family in her mother's point of view:

> Like for example, for my mom, the only kind of being successful was to have a family. Have a husband, have a child, have a good job and have a lot of money. That's the only way to be successful for my mom, and actually for a lot of Chinese people. They both [mother and the Chinese people] think about that. And even for love. Lots of people are thinking that kind of living is love. (Interview with Sun)

In the view of Sun's mother are marriage, family, a job and money components of success. This is described as a model for success, which according to Sun applies for a lot of people in China. This is a point around which all my interviewees speak; the social pressure of creating a family and taking care of the family (often the own parents). Among the interviewees it therefore seems to be a consensus that the system of marriage and success is central in life and a part of an individual's performance as a member of the Chinese society.

5.1.1 Struggle to Belong

The marriage system involves strong norms on how to behave heterosexually. This is something many participants in the movement struggles with. Du is a 28 years old man who has been working for an organization for five years. He lives in Beijing but comes from a small town in a Southern province in China where his parents still live. He confirms that what he calls the family system, in which success come from marriage, is important in the Chinese society. The people who have power in the family today are grandparents and second after them is parents. He discusses the conflict he finds in this:

> You must listen to their [grandparents'] rules and you must obey their rules. To live the life they want you to. But for me, right now I don't want to get married to a straight girl. That is very bad for me [to do]. Yeah I don't want to hurt another girl because I'm gay. So yeah [sighs]. I don't know how to persuade my parents. (Interview with Du).

In this quote, Du tells us about his awareness of that it is expected of him to obey the will of grandparents and parents. He later tells me that this is the culture both in urban and rural areas. Du negotiates his belonging in relation to the marriage norm by on the one hand taking into consideration his own feelings about getting married heterosexually. This is done while he on the other hand finds that his mother would feel sad if he doesn't get married, which she often tells him over the phone. He knows that if he told her he is gay "she would feel so sad" (Interview with Du). When telling me about his situation, the deep sigh he gave up contributes to my understanding of the trouble he experiences the heterosexual marriage system to be. When Du tells me that since he sees his mother and other relatives seldomly, since they live in his hometown, it is possible to interpret that the distance to parents enable for urban migrated LGBT people to live as gay. He says, "it's not so hard" to not make his own choices on what lifestyle he will have. Hence, Du finds heteronormative structures of marriage a troubling factor when debating how to "come out" to his parents.

Cooping with norms of marriage is central in how some of the younger participants discuss coming out. Li is a 22 years old man who is employed at an

organization in Beijing. He lives in Beijing while his parents live in his hometown in Sothern China. He discusses under what conditions he can come out to his parents:

> At least I have to have a job so that I can tell my family that I can be independent now. And then I have to have a partner that I think it can last with for my whole life. And then I can know if it's the right time to come out or not. I want to come out to my parents. (Interview with Li)

In the view Li shares, he expresses the idea that independence is achieved through having a partner and an acceptable job. This will show independence, which will facilitate for his parents to accept his life with a same-sex partner and that he will not marry heterosexually. What Li discusses is that he is aware of the need to repeat ideals of the heterosexual lifestyle. He discusses under what condition he can risk breaking norms of what is considered "normal". Having a good job and life-lasting love with one partner are recognized as the factors important in achieving acceptance. It enables him to perform homosexuality in a comprehensive way by successfully repeating social values of "coupleness". From this discourse I interpret that being a part of the system of marriage and happiness legitimizes homosexual love. By doing this, belonging in society is maintained.

An interesting note to make is also a class perspective of possibilities to live as LGBT. In Du's description above, migrating to a large city has enabled him to live as gay and to not marry heterosexually. For Li, having a job that gives him independence is crucial. Social and economical capital seems to be a pre-condition to perform homosexuality in acceptable ways to parents or to escape the pressure from the marriage system.

To summarize the visible pattern, to be accepted into a system of traditions, in which being a member of a family is a crucial, gives a person a sense of belonging. To borrow the concept Lisa Eklund, to be part of a sense of familism is essential for people to fit into the Chinese society (Eklund 2013: 64). Therefore, Chinese people belong in the social group of society through belonging in family and kin relations. However, the system is based on heteronormative practices of reproduction and involves heteronormative values of family. Therefore are ideals of coupleness and family performatively repeated by LGBT people. I can interpret this as an attempt to belong based on conditions of "Chineseness" as put forward by Lisa Rofel (Rofel

2007: 198). In line with Rofel's findings, interviewees describe a need of embodying the right desire in heteronormative traditions. People need to desire and perform the right version of success, which include job, partner and membership in a family. The marriage system is therefore a fundamental aspect in people's negotiation of belonging.

5.1.2 Protest Against Heteronormative Conditions for Homosexuality

An important aspect to attend to is the silences in participants' reflection on the marriage system. Participants in all ages reflect on pressure and negotiate their possibility to fit in to the heteronormative marriage system. What is not visible in this discourse is the option of rejecting the marriage system.

A few participants put forward another view. Sun, a lesbian woman who was mentioned earlier tells me about that she and many other lesbians cannot fit into the heterosexual system. She talks about how she finds the idea of gay marriage to be a repetition of the heterosexual system. She says that "gay marriage is marriage and marriage is a system. The system is a straight people's system. And we are lesbians, we are queer; why should we go to get that?" (Interview with Sun). According to Sun, LGBT people cannot and should not try to fit into the heterosexual system of marriage and relations. Sun subverts norms of coupelness by telling me:

> We cannot just be like good lesbians; have a girlfriend, go to work and get married, be happy. That's one kind of lesbian, but not all people are like that. That's not to be successful. That is not the only successful way. (Interview with Sun)

In this way, Sun shows her protest against the naturalized idea of finding life-long relations and marriage. She shows that she does not necessarily belong through having lifelong relations to fit into structures of marriage and happiness.

5.2 Good and Bad Sexual Behavior

During an interview with two key informants that represents international organizations working in China, sexuality was raised as an issue relating to LGBT people's situation in the Chinese society. What they told me is that there is little openness concerning sexuality in the Chinese society with little expression of

sexuality by individuals and almost no sexual education in schools. At LGBT organizations, sexuality is an emphasized area of focus. As a result from this, in many heterosexuals' meeting with LGBT organizations they can react with little understanding towards the focus on sexuality (interview with key informants at international organization). What is put forward in this interview is that sexuality is a topic that is strictly regulated on how it should be expressed in social interactions. Jin, a 22 year old woman employed at an LGBT organization in Beijing, also describes this view. She starts talking to me and lets me know her analysis of the situation in China:

> [S]exual behavior is between a man and a woman and can only happen inside a marriage. And things happening outside are bad. They will be judged as lower status, or not fitting in, in social relations. There are many, many patterns. As long as sexual relations happen in a marriage and between man and a woman [it is all right], but when the sexual behavior happens in the kitchen and not in the bedroom, then it's too bad! You will teach children a bad behavior. And if you use a not very traditional position, like in S/M, in straight people's view that is too bad. In the Chinese society people think sexuality is not just sexuality, they say that sexuality is equal to marriage and family. (Interview with Jin)

What Jin tells me is that there is a hierarchical system that organizes sexualities into "good" and "bad" sexual behavior that people need to position themselves in relation to. Homo- and bisexual sexual behaviors are therefore viewed as bad sexualities in the Chinese society.

Sexuality is a central part in how gender is done. A person needs to comprise the right ("straight") desire and sexuality. In this way sexuality, and how sexuality is performed, become essential parts in citizenship as Chinese. As Jin tells us, heterosexuality, marriage and bedroom sex in "traditional" (or in Gayle Rubin's terminology; "vanilla") positions are central in this. Hence, in the Chinese society's hierarchy of sexualities, only heterosexual couples that perform acceptable versions of sex can belong (Rubin 2002: 201).

Based on what was told in the interview with key informants and what have been told in other interviews, the topic of sexuality is taboo. In social interactions in everyday life, a silent sexuality is performed. Homosexuals as embodiments of "bad"

sexual behavior that are not silent make this group incomprehensible to most people in mainstream society since gender is performed in a wrong way (Ambjörnsson 2006: 112).

Since lesbians and gays differ in fundamental ways from norms and ideals of sexuality, their senses of belonging are influenced by this structure. To express sexuality is part of a "bad" sexuality; this might be a reason to why not many people spoke about this in my interviews. I interpret this as a way of performing Chineseness by embodying a correct, silent sexuality. Jin's freely talk of the subject shows me how she breaks norms of sexuality by not keeping the topic silent. When she discusses the topic she says that due to these narrow categories of sexual behavior "I don't think that LGBT people will finally fit in" which shows her protest towards the structure (interview with Jin).

An experience I had at my first dinner with movement participants illustrates a version of how sexuality is performed as expressed, as opposed to silent. The dinner was in a small restaurant with a group of around eight gays and lesbians in the ages from 20 to 30 that are employed or interns in some of the organizations in Beijing. At this occasion, a condom for lesbians (to use over the fingers during sexual acts) was given to me and later blown up and played with at the restaurant (observation at dinner). Gender and sexuality was subverted in this performance when norms for how sexuality is expressed were transgressed (Butler 2007: 217). Sexuality that "should" have been silent and kept inside a relationship was now homosexual, visible and played with, both on a theoretical as well as practical level.

The sexual behavior expressed at the restaurant can be seen in an intersectional perspective where the fact that they are quite young, employed (or interns) in the movement intersects with their sexual orientation. Participants that are not as active in the movement can be interpreted as not as rooted or belonging in this group. Among this group I have seen more silent and sometimes more insecure sexual expressions. I would therefore interpret that the freer sexuality is more accessible to younger people and that the movement participation influences this behavior.

5.3 Sameness versus Difference

Among LGBT movement participants, there are divergent discourses that concern whether gays and lesbians are "the same" as or "different" from straight people. This

concerns how people speak about themselves when negotiating belonging to society. Especially important in this is how the movement influences participants' negotiation.

5.2.1 Belonging Through the Movement

Ye is a young lesbian movement participant who when we meet is an intern at one of the LGBT organizations. She, as well as many other participants, tells me about the comfort and courage she feels from meeting people in the movement that, alike her, are homosexual. This gives her great comfort and feelings of security that she does not find in many straight friends. She also tell me that "[m]ost people in China are homophobic and traditional. The only way I can make myself comfortable is to stay away from them" (Interview with Ye). Ye's feelings of safety and comfort together with gay and lesbian people in contrast to her sense of being different in straight contexts show her varying feelings of belonging in different environments. This illustrates feelings that many participants have described to me. In contrast to the gay community, Ye describes a heteronormative structure in which people are homophobic towards lesbians and gays. Ye physically distance herself from this structure by avoiding interaction with the straight society. This shows how gays' and lesbians' feelings of being different in heteronormative structures distance them from the mainstream society, a process that also enables senses of belonging within the "opposite" gay community.

Xie is a 31 years old woman who identifies herself as lesbian. In an email conversation we had she discusses her identification and relation to society and tells me "the sense of difference cannot clear away in my mind. I subconsciously think that I am different from others" (personal email conversation with Xie). She also describes fear of discrimination that she says is all around in society. She discusses heteronormative power structures that affect her negatively. This shows the complexity of not being able to belong due to her "difference" as lesbian. While she has these sad and fearful feelings, she also talks about change and a will to fight for LGBT people and against discrimination. To her, friends in the movement are crucial to her will to fight. She tell me "If I didn't know [NAME], Victoria and you, I think I would surrender… At the first try, I would surrender […] I have the courage to fight. I want to. And now I even think I have to" (interview with Xie). This illustrates that even though Xie senses her difference and not belonging to society, she sees herself

as member of her own group of friends in the movement. While she cannot belong in the "sameness" of Chinese society this contributes to a discourse of changing the premises of belonging (May 2011: 373). Peng is a 41 years old man employed at an organization in Beijing and he advocates for the rights of gay people:

> Actually in my view, I just want the people know one important thing. The gay people and lesbian people, we are same. I think we are the same as other people. We should have the same rights, for example the marriage right, the medical treatment rights and education rights. We have the same rights, this is very important. In China in some areas, some gay people are facing and experiencing these things you know, discrimination. So we just want the people to know we are the same. (Interview with Peng)

When Peng discusses rights he connect the right to not be discriminated based on the idea that "we are the same". What I understand from this discussion is that since Peng finds LGBT people to be the same as heterosexuals and cannot be discriminated because of difference, he negotiates their sameness in politics of belonging. What I interpret from discussions concerning rights and social change is that what is being claimed is the right to belong.

5.2.2 Inclusion of Difference

A contradiction can be discerned between gays' and lesbians' repetition of the system of marriage and the view of LGBT people as different, and the recognition of the need to change how people can belong. On the one had participants repeat norms that dictates how to act in order to belong; on the other they fight to change the situation.

Another view that also proclaims change is put forward by Sun. However, her ideas on sameness critique the idea of lesbians and gays as belonging in society. Sun discusses her belonging as LGBT as "different" and how she can belong outside of ideas of being "the same" as heterosexual people.

> I think us in the LGBT movement; we should show a different situation. To show that everyone is different. And it is not only for the LGBT movement; it is for this Chinese culture. For this country. As a message it is important. It is

> not that we want to be normal people. I hate that. I think we should show that everyone is different and everyone can choose their life. (Interview with Sun)

What Sun tells me is that when LGBT people are discussed as the same, people performatively act straight based on straight people's norms of "sameness". What I interpret is that many participants in the LGBT movement act based on norms of how to behave, which are often copied from straight versions of love and relationships. Sun show strong feelings about this when she tells me that she "hates" current structures. This uncovers Sun's sense of self that is built on this difference (May 2011: 374). Based on this understanding she feels that she cannot belong either in the heteronormative society or normative versions of a "same" gay or lesbian. Therefore, she discusses as if she wants to change the society and the LGBT movement, so that anyone can belong outside the concept of normality.

5.4 Heteronormative Space in Social Interactions

This theme concerns how people interact in the heteronormative context of society. Heteronormativity determines peoples' actions and how people perceive, define and redefine the context. Interaction in a context of heteronormative structures has been discussed throughout the analysis. What this theme discusses explicitly is how actions that are both consisting and conflicting with structures are performed and discussed as a part of negotiation of belonging.

5.3.1 Passing

In the social context of being born Chinese, people struggle to performatively act "Chinese". I conclude this based on the understanding that when norms are heteronormative, so is space. In social interactions outside of the LGBT community are performances always dependent on the context of heteronormativity. This is visible in participants' negotiation of social and physical space in their social interactions. What many informants have described are strategies for passing as a comprehensive heterosexual Chinese, a way to performatively assimilate in the current culture that determines how gender is performed (Butler 2007: 57). Strategies are applied in performances that can include language, silence or to pretend. Language is used to hide meanings from people in the mainstream society, for

example by using the term *lala* for lesbian, or *tongyu* for homosexual. As described to me at observations, the general public does not know the meaning of the term lala. The term *tongyu* has been adopted from a previous socialist context where it meant comrade (Observation at gender discussion). By loading these terms with preferred meanings, language constitutes a strategy of passing. Silence is a strategy relating to this. Silence is used by simply not expressing one's sexual orientation or identity. Xie, a lesbian woman that has been a volunteer at organizations tells me that she is not out to her friends; "I don't hide that I'm interested in girls. I just don't say. Like 'don't ask, don't tell'" (Interview with Xie). Another way of passing is by not only keeping silent about one's sexuality, but by also pretending to be heterosexual. This is very common among participants, where cooperative marriages are one example, meaning a marriage between a gay man and a lesbian woman to please relatives. Ye tells me about an everyday example at a job interview where she was asked about a boyfriend.

> When the interviewer asked me about my boyfriend, I just pretended to be straight. No choice. You cannot say you are lesbian. I think, about how people can understand you, in their world there are no gays or lesbians. So it's hard to tell and describe what person you are to them. (Interview with Ye)

Strategies for passing are effective to maintain belonging in society by avoiding discrimination. However, as Ye describes does strategies of passing also result in isolation. When you cannot express yourself people cannot relate to you, according to Ye. She tells me that there are no gays and lesbians in "their" perspective of the world and refers to the heterosexual mainstream society. In many lesbians' and gays' perspective, the concept of what they are does not exist in the Chinese society. This limits their space for expression and possibilities for normalization of non-heterosexuals in mainstream society.

5.3.2 Not Passing

Mao is a 43 year old woman and is one of the female interviewees who describe how she has left LGBT material around in her house, which she is aware of can "out" her. In the case of Mao, she was is married to a man who she had not yet told of her newly found lesbian sexuality. While laughing, she tells me that she left material almost

everywhere in their house and that she knew that he could read it (interview with Mao). Mao as being of biological female sex would have been expected to only desire a man within her marriage. Instead, Mao carries out acts that makes her heterosexual desire questionable and thereby her performance as a woman questionable in the heteronormative social context of mainstream society in Beijing. This shows that the space that was previously heterosexual is claimed by Mao when she stretches her space as a lesbian. Heterosexual space is redefined not by her "coming out" but by her breaking norms of female desire.

Many informants show a sense of belonging in their social environment of a family, among friends, in schools or workplaces even though they have not actively "come out". To come out is a practice I see most among younger participants around the age of 20-30. Sui is a 30 year old man who has come out to his family except for his mum. He is waiting to tell her until she has recovered from an illness. He is involved in a cultural LGBT association and shows me that he does not want to use strategies of passing since it limits his space for expression. As he puts it when asked how he talks with his friends about coming out: "coming out is not about asking for the approval of the parents, it's like… sharing your life with them" (Interview with Sui). Sui perceives society as heteronormaitve, but contrasting to this he still suggests people to not ask for belonging. To not hide the sexual identity is in Sui's opinion not to ask for belonging, but to express oneself in the same way that heterosexual people express themselves. This illustrates how Sui alters the meaning of "coming out" from being a reveling of something unusual or abnormal that need acceptance to belong in society, to the meaning of already being a part of the "normal" and acceptable. In this way, participants understand society as heteronormative, but by not giving recognition to the heterosexual norm in social interactions, they can redefine meanings to enable belonging.

6. Concluding Discussion

What has been shown in this study are different aspects of what belonging concerns and how lesbian and gay members of the LGBT movement negotiate it. There are strong regulations of how people can belong in the Chinese society due to its deeply rooted system of marriage and happiness as well as on hierarchies of sexuality. These

organizations of social life (re)produces ideas of what Chineseness is and how it is done. Hence, the marriage system and regulations of sexuality condition belonging. What has been shown is that this normative system is excluding towards LGBT people, who also senses their difference.

To be a part of society means to belong on conditions of familism and gender performances. Most participants from all ages struggle in different ways to embody conditions for belonging. Most participants do not critique this but only express concern or trouble. They are aware of how performances of "Chineseness" ensure belonging. What demonstrates their critique of this system is however how participants distance themselves from ideas that normatively regulate belonging. This is done by referring to them as "traditional", heterosexual or that it's their parents' or grandparents' views. In this way, homosexuality can be interpreted as performed inside heteronormative conditions.

An interesting aspect that has not been put forward in previous research on LGBTs belonging in China is movement participants' claims for belonging. Many gays and lesbians try to change politics of belonging. A part of negotiating belonging is how people behave in social interaction; how they perceive space, what space they claim and how they take it. Processes to redefine heteronormative social space are one of the strong forces I can see in my material. In interaction where social space is claimed, the gay or lesbian attempts to alter meanings that were previously naturalized on the common ground where the interaction takes place. In this way is LGBTs belonging negotiated in awareness of their "difference" but at the same time claim inclusion in the social group as "normal". This is a counterforce towards naturalization of heteronormativity. Belonging is negotiated both as an individual project but also as a collective protest against heteronormative power relations that limit queer belonging. While the empirical material of this study has focused on mapping out how lesbians and gays can belong and not belong, this study does not cover a full account on strategies to change of politics of belonging. However, these findings open up for future research questions.

Lesbian and gay people participate to varying degrees in the LGBT movement. Being a member of the movement can be understood as central in the will and/or ability to fight. The movement offers support and strengthens people in their trust in themselves. This seems to be an important aspect in how people negotiate their current belonging and perspectives on their future belonging. Belonging is

viewed as something they lack. The movement itself is a medium for resistance where the claim of rights can be understood as the right to belong. This strengthens people in their perspective on their right to belong.

However, most perspectives on the right to belong are not critical or confrontational towards heteronormative politics of belonging in mainstream society. These strategies are not "less queer" than other strategies, only they are shaped in within its culture. This can be related to the political context in which the movement exists. Limited rights to association and expression influence strategies. In addition to this, LGBT people are not legally protected. This increases concerns of being discriminated as well as senses of belonging in society.

Another factor influencing people's negotiation of belonging is age. Differences can be discerned between younger and older movement participants. Younger people are more likely to openly express behaviors that transgress social norms on gender and sexuality. Where strategies of passing are used among this group, they are also more prone to come out and to express sexuality and sexual orientation in social interactions. This finding contradicts results in previous research by Elisabeth L. Engebretsen who showed that practices of "coming out" are not as relevant in the non-western context of China. In my analysis I find it likely that younger people active in the LGBT movement are more influenced by western ideals of gay and lesbian performances. This is visible for example in their references to other countries and their usage of internet. This does now form a shift in the LGBT culture in China. The pattern that can be seen do I interpret as that they have more expanding claims to belong in "expressive" ways to the Chinese society. They therefore make moves to claim this space. Transnational influences on the LGBT movement are related to the liberal policies as well as globalization and the spread of internet in China. Researching this further can tell us more about the future of LGBT livelihoods as well as the political and social development in China. To conclude any findings on this would be too early with the material in this research. It could therefore be an interesting topic for future research.

In their exclusion from central institutions in society, lesbians and gays are a marginalized group. Being treated as a deviant group they are not *as* belonging as heterosexuals. However, the LGBT group expresses demands to belong which demonstrates their sense that they *should* belong. What can be concluded from this is

that the exclusion of LGBT groups creates a force among them that makes efforts to destabilize power relations in societies.

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Appendix

1. Informants Matrix

Below is information about interviewees provided. Due to anonymity, they have been given fictitious names. Information provided is: gender, age, employment in the movement, what position they hold in the movement/organization as well as where the participant comes from. It is unfortunate that some information is lacking concerning from where the informant originates. The information is presented since it provides a description of each informant as well as the sample in general while at the same time not intrude on participants anonymity.

Given Name	Gender	Age	Movement employment?	Occupation	From
Victoria	F	32	No	Volunteer	Europe
Bianca	F	34	No	Volunteer	Europe
Zhang	F	27	Lesbian organization	Part-time employee	Beijing

Ping	M	30	LGBT organization	Full time employee	Hunan province
Sui	M	30	No	Cultural LGBT association	Hunan province
Li	M	22	LGBT organization	Part-time employee	Guanxi province
Zhu	M	28	No	Free-lance and board member of LGBT organization	Jiangsu province
Mao	F	43	Lesbian organization	Founder of lesbian organization	Unknown (China)
Deng	F	28	Lesbian organization	Full time employee	Unknown (China)
Xie	F	31	No	Volunteer	Southern China
Sun	F	36	No	Founder of lesbian organization	Southern China
Du	M	29	LGBT organization	Administrative & project officer	Fujian province
Peng	M	41	LGBT organization	Project officer	Jiangsu province/Hunan province
Jin	F	22	LGBT organization	Part-time employee	Unknown (China)
Ye	F	24	LGBT organization	Intern	Beijing
Key informant international organization	F		International human rights organization	Head of China office	Europe
Key informant International Organization	F		International human rights organization	Head of China office	Europe
Key informant UNDP	M		International human rights organization	LGBT human rights officer in China	Unknown (China)
Key informant Song	M	55	No	Founder of LGBT organization	Unknown (China)
Key informant Wang	F	40	Yes	Founder of lesbian organization	Beijing

2. Interview Guides

Interview guides were used in an unstructured manner and changed previous to each interview. The guides below are compilations of varying interview guides used in interviews with participants and key informants.

2. 1 In-depth Interview with LGBT Movement Participants

Basic:

Can you tell me a little about yourself?

Can you tell me about your family?

Own Activism:

Can you tell me a little bit about your engagement in the movement?

What motivated you to become involved?

Why is it important to you?

What do you think about "coming out"/being open? What reactions did you get?

Have you experienced any issues – in that case what?

About problem

What do you think of the Chinese society? How do you feel about living in China?

What do you think of the possibility to choose how you want to live your life?

How would you like to live your life?

How you want LGBT people to be seen?

How do you think you yourself are seen? How do you feel about that?

What are the main challenges?

Do you think the LGBT movement is related to politics in some way? Why? How?

How would you like LGBT people to be seen in society?

2.1 Key Informant

Background

Can you tell me about yourself and this organization?

How would you describe the LGBT human rights situation in China?

How do you work on human rights?

<u>Movement</u>

What are the goals and why?

What force can civil society organizations be?

How would you describe the different strategies of organizing for LGBT rights? →

How can they work? What is most beneficial? Why?

How do you think the organizations participate in discussion on political power?

<u>Problem</u>

What are the challenges? – Politically, socially, culturally? How visible?

How do you think the context of China affect the work? What do you think is special about being queer in China?

How do you think the culture in China influence members in how the engage?