



Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**ADVERTIMENT.** L'accés als continguts d'aquesta tesi queda condicionat a l'acceptació de les condicions d'ús establertes per la següent llicència Creative Commons:  [http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page\\_id=184](http://cat.creativecommons.org/?page_id=184)

**ADVERTENCIA.** El acceso a los contenidos de esta tesis queda condicionado a la aceptación de las condiciones de uso establecidas por la siguiente licencia Creative Commons:  <http://es.creativecommons.org/blog/licencias/>

**WARNING.** The access to the contents of this doctoral thesis it is limited to the acceptance of the use conditions set by the following Creative Commons license:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/?lang=en>

**MOBILE DATING IN THE DIGITAL ERA: SELF-  
PRESENTATION ON GAY DATING APP BLUED**

**A Dissertation**

**presented to**

**the Department of Communication and Journalism  
at the Autonomous University of Barcelona**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy in**

**Communication and Journalism**

**By**

**LIANG HE**

**Dr. Santiago Giraldo Luque, Dissertation Supervisor**

**Dr. Xiaoya Zhang, Dissertation Co-Supervisor**

**Feb, 2021**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Prof. Dr. Santiago Giraldo Luque, who guided me all the way through this wonderful journey. You devoted a large amount of your time and energy helping me with this project. Your expertise was beneficial to my personal growth as a young researcher, and your patience and efficiency made my doctoral studies smooth and easy. It has been a great honor to work under your supervision.

My sincere thanks go to Prof. Dr José Manuel Pérez Tornero who enrolled me in this Ph.D program, and my co-supervisor Xiaoya Zhang who helped me a lot. I am also indebted to all the professors in the doctoral committee and professors who gave me great suggestions in the annual doctoral evaluation panel.

Many thanks to all my friends and family members who have motivated and encouraged me all the time. That really supported me a lot when I felt sad and depressed.

Finally, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to the 30 interview participants. Your contribution is essential for the dissertation. Thank you for your honest and thoughtful responses to the questions that are very personal. Without your commitment, I would not have drawn meaningful conclusions in this dissertation.

## ABSTRACT

This study examined Chinese gay men's self-presentation on dating app Blued by utilizing a mixed-methods approach. Two studies were conducted. In Study 1, 930 profiles were collected and analyzed to gain a quantitative understanding about how Chinese gay men utilize both photographic and textual elements to present themselves on Blued. To further investigate how and why Chinese gay men present themselves visually and textually in certain ways, 30 Blued users were interviewed in Study 2.

According to the findings of Study 1, only about a third of Chinese gay men's profiles contained at least a recognizable face photo in their Blued profiles. Correlations between demographics and face disclosure were test. Older gay men are less likely to disclose a face photo on Blued than younger gay men. Frequencies and percentage of masculinity, body and sport language were counted, and correlations between demographics and different types of language use were test. The percentage of masculinity, body and sport language used in Blued profiles are 37.6%, 20.9% and 6.2% respectively. Age, height and weight was found to be correlated with different types of language use. People who like using masculinity language are more likely to use body and sport language.

The results of Study 2 showed that Chinese gay men have five major motives of constructing a Blued profile: looking for casual sex, looking for romantic/long term relationships, looking for friends, entertainment and seeking psychological comfort.

Chinese gay men use a series of strategies to construct their profiles: paying attention to small cues, balancing authenticity and deception, establishing credibility, and bypassing technological constraints. Chinese gay men have different reasons for not disclosing a face photo in their Blued profiles. Worrying about exposing gay identity is the most frequently reported reason. Other reasons include: the design feature of the platform, location of the user, relational goals, lack of confidence in personal appearance, and concerns of photos being misused. Impression evaluation of other's profiles have also impacted Chinese gay men's Blued profile construction. When evaluating the profiles constructed by other gay men, Chinese gay men use three strategies: paying attention to small cues, filtering, and believing in rampant deception.

This study fills the gap in the research regarding Chinese gay men's self-presentation on mobile dating apps and indicates that self-presentation is sensitive to cultural and institutional factors.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....  | <i>I</i>  |
| <i>ABSTRACT</i> .....  | <i>II</i> |
| <b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....  | <b>1</b>  |
| A History of Gay Men’s Online Dating .....   | 2         |
| Gay Dating Apps.....   | 7         |
| Gay Men in China.....  | 10        |
| Chinese Gay Men’s Online Dating.....   | 12        |
| Research Context: Blued.....   | 15        |
| Statement of the Problem.....  | 18        |
| Main Objectives .....  | 19        |
| Overview.....  | 20        |
| <b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....   | <b>21</b> |
| Self-presentation .....  | 21        |
| Self-presentation in Online Dating Advertisements .....  | 23        |
| Motivations of Using Dating Apps among Gay Men.....  | 28        |
| Textual Self-presentation of Gay Men on Dating Apps .....  | 33        |
| Photographic Presentation of Gay Men on Dating Apps.....   | 37        |
| Deceptive Self-presentation in Online Dating Profiles .....  | 41        |
| <b>CHAPTER 3 METHODS</b> .....   | <b>48</b> |
| Research Questions.....  | 48        |
| Rationale for Mixed-Methods Research Design .....  | 49        |
| Method of Study 1: Content Analysis .....  | 50        |
| Method of Study 2: In-depth interviews.....  | 59        |
| <b>CHAPTER 4 RESULTS</b> .....   | <b>71</b> |
| <b>Study 1: Content Analysis of Chinese Gay Men’s Blued Profiles</b> .....   | <b>71</b> |
| Demographic Statistics of the Sample:.....   | 71        |
| Research question 1: How do Chinese gay men present themselves photographically on Blued?<br>.....                                       | 74        |
| Research question 1b: Will there be difference by demographics in the disclosure of face photos<br>among Chinese gay men on Blued? ..... | 80        |
| Research question 2: How do Chinese gay men use masculinity, body and sport language to<br>present themselves on Blued? .....            | 82        |

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Research question 2a: Will there be difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued?.....                | 83                |
| Research question 2b: Will there be correlations of the use of masculinity language, body language, and sport language, among Chinese gay men on Blued?..... | 84                |
| <b>Study 2: In-depth Interviews with Chinese Blued Users .....</b>   | <b>86</b>         |
| Research question 3: What’s Chinese gay men’s motivation of creating a Blued profile? .....  | 86                |
| Research question 4: How do Chinese gay men construct their Blued profiles? .....  | 94                |
| Research Question 4a: What’s the reason non-disclosure of face photos on Blued?.....   | 107               |
| Research question 5: How do Chinese gay men evaluate the profiles of others? .....   | 116               |
| Conclusion.....  | 127               |
| <b><i>CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION .....</i></b>   | <b><i>129</i></b> |
| <b>General Research Questions.....</b>   | <b>130</b>        |
| <b>Motives of Constructing a Blued Profile .....</b>   | <b>131</b>        |
| <b>Textual and Visual Presentation .....</b>   | <b>135</b>        |
| <b><i>CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....</i></b>  | <b><i>154</i></b> |
| <b><i>REFERENCES.....</i></b>  | <b><i>160</i></b> |
| <b><i>APPENDIX 1.....</i></b>  | <b><i>180</i></b> |
| <b><i>APPENDIX 2.....</i></b>  | <b><i>183</i></b> |
| <b><i>APPENDIX 3.....</i></b>  | <b><i>184</i></b> |
| <b><i>APPENDIX 4.....</i></b>  | <b><i>186</i></b> |
| <b><i>APPENDIX 5.....</i></b>  | <b><i>188</i></b> |

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For three decades now, gay men have been using the Internet to seek friendships, sexual partners and relationships (Groves et al., 2014). However, during the most recent decade, technology has boosted the development of mobile dating apps due to the proliferation of smartphones equipped with global positioning systems (GPS). Since the first gay dating app, Grindr, was launched in 2009 (Hull et al., 2016), various gay dating apps have emerged. Blued, Scruff, Jack'd, Hornet, etc. are just a few among the most popular gay dating apps in the world. Often referred to as location-based real time (LBRTD) dating apps (Birnholtz et al., 2014), or People-Nearby Apps (PNA) (Toch & Levi, 2013) or geosocial-networking apps (GNA) in the academic context, mobile dating apps are unique in their mobility, localization, easy use and immediacy features (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015; Lehmler & Ioerger, 2014; Miller, 2015). As dating apps are developed for mobile use instead of personal computers, they “bridge the gap between online and offline interactions, as well as public and private space” (Batiste, 2013, p.113). These advantages allow users to interact with nearby potential partners at convenient times and places that facilitate offline encounters with ease and immediacy. It provides the opportunity for gay men to communicate with other men from all over the world, and it allows gay men to know the exact distance between them and other gay men (Batiste, 2013). It is very common for a gay man to find that someone is 0.00 kilometers away (Batiste, 2013). Blued is the most popular gay dating



app in China, while there is a lack of research on gay men's self-presentation on it. This study seeks to fill the gap in existing literature. This introduction will briefly review the history of gay men's online dating, discuss the features of gay dating apps, present gay culture in China and Chinese gay men's history of online dating, and give a brief introduction about the research context Blued. Statement of problem, main objectives of the study will also be presented in this chapter. At the end of this introductory chapter, the document will make an overview of the next chapters that develops the conducted research on the self-presentation of Chinese Blued users.

### **A History of Gay Men's Online Dating**

Before the emergence of the Internet in the 1990s, gay men sought and met with other men in various sites like saunas, bars and parks (Bérubé, 2003). For instance, in the 1970s, many gay men used implicit symbols like colored handkerchiefs to indicate their sexual preferences to their potential targets (Snyder, 1989). There are several drawbacks of meeting in offline places, for example, gay men have the risk of encountering violence or rape, or they may be arrested by police, or they might have the danger of being outed (Groves et al., 2014). Besides, gay men in rural or suburban areas usually do not have the access to the aforementioned gay cruising places which are often a part of city life (Gray, 2009).

After the Internet become popular in late 1990s, the way how gay men met and connect with each other has been greatly changed. The LGBT community are among the first to use Internet to seek sexual or romantic relationships (Gauntlet, 1999). According to

a study by Valentine (2006), the ten most popular chat rooms on America online (AOL), are all sexual, and three of them are gay. For marginalized people, online relationships are of special significance to them because they can potentially remove socio-political barriers such as geography, sexual orientation, age, class, gender and race (Hillier, 2001).

With more and more gay men turning to Internet to seek potential partners, the offline cruising venues has dramatically decreased (Weatherburn et al., 2005). A study in 2007 showed that 82% of gay men had sex with an individual whom they met online (Chiasson et al., 2007). The internet not only helps maintain and sustain familiar relationships, but also helps create new intimacies. The internet has three advantages. First, it is easily accessible, users have access to millions of websites 24 hours per day and seven days per week. Second, it is affordable for most of the users. Third, users can communicate on Internet anonymously (Cooper et al., 2000).

As an important tool for gay men to seek romantic relationships and casual sex, the internet also allows gay men to express and to satisfy their sexual desires in online space, for example, gay men can enjoy sexual activities like erotic chatting or watching pornographic videos online (Tikkanen & Ross, 2003). The sexual roles performed by gay men are not so obvious as those performed by heterosexual partners and therefore usually need to be negotiated. The internet provides gay men with an ideal environment to negotiate their sexual roles before they meet face to face in offline places. Moreover, the casual sex is on average much more desired and accepted among homosexuals than

among heterosexuals (Peplau, 2003). The Internet provides gay men with abundant choices of potential partners, therefore gay men who sought partners online generally had more sexual partners than those men seeking partners offline (Groves et al., 2014).

For gay men who are socially or geographically isolated from offline gay communities (Haag and Chang, 1997) or for young people who are prevented or afraid of going to an offline place, the Internet is very important for gay men to express their emotions or experiment with their sexual identities. It helps gay men foster a sense of self-identity and establish intimate relationships. It even serves as a safe hub for gay men to avoid hostility which may occur in offline everyday life (Valentine 2006). Internet make communities feel closer knit because ICT appear to collapse space and time (Adams & Ghose, 2003). Such kinds of online community are especially important in cultures where homosexuality is a taboo, because the Internet which is a medium without physical borders offers more freedom to gay men (Graham & Khosravi, 2002). Furthermore, the Internet is important for those gay men who are unsure of their sexual orientation or struggling with their sexual identity, and it provides a space for gay men to seek support from gay peers or gay communities (Valentine, 2006).

The internet has been providing gay men with a variety of tools to look for dating or sexual partners. These tools include chat rooms, dating websites, social networking sites, instant messengers and relay chats (Albright, 2008; Daneback & Ross, 2011; Wakeford, 2002). In the earliest days of Internet dating, chat rooms and bulletin boards had been frequently used by gay men to seek sexual or romantic partners (Livia, 2002).

Before the emergence of location-based dating apps, chat and dating sites served as the most common platform for gay men to search for romantic and offline sex partners. Dating websites started to emerge in the end of 1990s, popular dating websites like Gaydar and Match.com took dating towards a ‘self-service, data driven model (Gibbs et al., 2006b, Light et al., 2008). Companies such as eHarmony also began to make use of psychologically informed algorithms by deploying profiling questionnaires, referencing the dating agencies they sought supplant (Albury et al., 2017).

Lemke & Weber (2017) summarized 5 characteristics for chat and dating websites. First, users need to establish a personal profile that is available to other users within the websites. Second, the dating profiles on the websites usually contained a set of personal information along predefined categories like age, height, weight, sexual preference and city. Third, members use anonymous names when they connect with other users. Fourth, the websites usually provide a messaging tool for users to conduct private conversations. Fifth, members can filter and categorize the profiles of other users by offline local structures, for example, they can filter other users by city or by physical proximity in ascending order. Even if in the age of website dating, data related to the users’ location is especially important. Unlike the GPS-enabled location presentation of dating apps, users manually input their postcode or city of residence in dating websites (Albury et al., 2017).

Chat and dating sites are equipped with three distinctive features which are “accessibility, anonymity and affordability” (Cooper & Griffin-Shelley, 2002). The

anonymity features afforded by the Internet provided gay men with a safer environment than in offline places. They can seek their potential partners at their home without travelling to cruising places, which has reduced the risk of being harassed or assaulted (Hennelly, 2010). Moreover, for gay men who want to hide their sexual identity, dating sites offer them a suitable environment to seek their sexual desires. According to a research carried out by The EMIS Network, gay men who are deep in the closet or out to only a few are less likely to visit offline gay cruising places like bars or saunas than those gay men who are “out to more than a few” (The EMIS Network, 2013, p. 43). On the contrary, they are more inclined to have recently visited gay dating sites.

Compared to newspaper dating advertisements, dating sites advertisements are much better in several aspects. First, dating sites advertisements are more flexible in length while dating advertisements are usually constrained in length due to space limit. Second, newspaper dating advertisements which list an inventory of personal attributes are usually formulaic, while dating sites advertisements offer the users opportunities to tell a self-reflective story about themselves, in which they can present how they see themselves at present but also what kind of person they want to become in the future (Burke, 2000). Third, dating sites advertisements has a broader user base. Fourth, users of dating sites have the option to use different multi-media forms to present themselves, for example, texts, photos and videos. Fifth, they can use both asynchronous and real-time communication tools like email, instant messaging and chat rooms to interact with each other (Gibbs et al., 2006).

## **Gay Dating Apps**

The first gay location-based dating app is Grindr which was launched on March 25, 2009 (Conner, 2019). There are a variety of gay dating apps which target different sub-communities, sexual interests or identities. For example, Scruff is developed for men who are obsessed with facial and body hair, GROWLr is developed for the bear community, Recon is for the leather and general fetish community, and Skout is specially developed for younger men looking for gay social networking (Groves et al., 2014). Grindr has long been regarded as the most widely used gay dating apps in the world. It has had 80 million registered users in 196 countries and regions at the end of 2018, and most of its users are in Europe and the US. While in China, Blued has always been the most frequently used dating app among gay men. It attracted 6 million monthly active users and 49 million registered users, about half of the users are outside of China.

Unlike dating websites, gay dating apps use the technology of global positioning system to help gay men find sexual or romantic partners physical nearby, therefore making “invisible” community visible (Gudelunas, 2012). In addition, unlike dating websites where users may spend a lot of time communicating and interacting with each other on the Internet before they meet face-to-face, dating apps facilitate immediate social or sexual encounters (Handel & Shklovski, 2012).

Chan (2017) summarized 5 affordances of LBRTD apps, and the five affordances include mobility, proximity, immediacy, authenticity, and visual dominance. First, users can log onto dating apps any time and anywhere because dating apps are installed

on smart phones. While in the era of online dating websites, users have to sit in front of a personal computer to log onto the websites. Second, users of dating websites can only filter potential partners via broad regions like city or province, but users of dating apps can connect with others on the basis of proximity. Third, users of dating app can meet immediately either for romantic or sexual purposes. Fourth, some dating apps request the users to register with their Facebook account, which makes dating profiles somewhat authentic. Fifth, photos are especially important on dating apps because the first impression of a profile comes of the main photo of the profile.

In western countries, dating apps have proven to be more frequently used than other online social networking sites and traditional methods for gay men to seek partners (Miller, 2015). Badal et al. (2018) conducted a survey among 3000 gay men and found that 78.2% of them sometimes or very often use general dating websites and apps. The result of their study also showed that 60.2% of the participants reported some or frequent use of Grindr, 44.1% reported some or frequent use of Adam4Adam, 35.6% reported some or frequent use of Jack'd, and 34.3% reported some or frequent use of Scruff (Badal et al, 2018). In another study, 54.5% of the gay men reported that they had at least one dating app installed in their smartphone to seek sex or dating (Lehmiller & Iorger, 2014). The study also found that gay men logged on to the dating apps 3 times per day and spent an average of 12 minutes with the apps each time (Lehmiller & Iorger, 2014). In a nationwide study carried out by Hull et al, (2016) in Australia, the percentage of gay men who use mobile dating apps to seek partners increased from 23.9% in 2011 to 42.5% in 2014.

A major challenge for gay men using LBRTD apps is self-presentation. Unlike dating websites where users can craft a very detailed profile to present themselves, LBRTD apps mainly depend on profile images and very limited information to present themselves (Birnholtz et al., 2014). Due to the physical constraints of smart phone like the screen size, gay men have to present themselves in a concise way (Brinholtz et al., 2014). This reduced cue environment is similar to that of the online chat rooms, where users start form textual representations and then move to photos, videos, and may end with face-to-face interactions (Jones, 2005). However, unlike online chat rooms where users reveal the information progressively after the conversation was initiated, LBRTD apps allow users to reveal comparatively more information before conversation starts (Birnholtz et al., 2014).

Gay men's history of using dating apps shows two attributes of gay men. First, wanting to have sex with other men is an invisible trait, so LBRTD apps can help gay men find each other. Second, gay men are willing to show their interest to have sex with men to others, self-presentation is a useful tactic for gay men to avoid stigma or unwanted attention (Birnholtz et al., 2014). The two attributes are important in the process of gay men's identity development, sexuality exploration and coming out. They are also very important for gay men who like to seek casual sex which is often acceptable among users of gay dating apps but stigmatized by others.



## **Gay Men in China**

In ancient China, homosexuality was tolerated, and homosexual activities were documented and appreciated among the elite class and literati (Wu, 2003). After the establishment of People's republic of China in 1949, homosexuality was for a long time being viewed as a capitalist lifestyle imported from western society, and people engaged in homosexual activities were punished under the name of hooliganism (Cao & Lu, 2014). In 1997, the criminal law in China abolished the crime of hooliganism which marks the decriminalization of homosexuality in China (Worth et al., 2019). In 2011, homosexuality as a kind of illness was removed from Chinese Classification of mental disorders (Worth et al., 2019). The removal of hooliganism from criminal law and mental illness classification doesn't signal homosexuality are officially endorsed by the government. The Chinese government takes an attitude of "not encouraging, not discouraging and not promoting" towards homosexuality (Hung, 2011). Public discussion of homosexual issues is still a taboo in official media (Lau, 2010).

Among Chinese society, discrimination against homosexuality prevails, and most people still holds a conservative opinion about homosexuality. A recent survey carried out by Xie & Peng (2018) with more than 10000 participants from 31 Chinese provinces and municipalities showed that about 78.53% of the respondents believe homosexuality is abnormal or deviant. A qualitative research conducted by Liu and Choi (2006) with 30 gay men in Shanghai also found that social discrimination against homosexuality is prevalent.

With the conservative attitude from both the institutional and societal level, Chinese MSM (men who have sex with men) perceive a strong stigma associated with homosexuality, which has been evidenced by various studies (Liu et al, 2009; Liu & Choi, 2006; Liu & Choi, 2013). For example, the findings of Liu and Choi (2013) show that 97% of the respondents (N=461) in their quantitative research “had perceived some stigma at least once in their lifetime” (p. 279). Chinese MSM’s felt stigma originates from various groups including family members, friends, co-workers and employers (Liu & Choi, 2006). The stigma related to homosexuality has prevented many men from disclosing their sexual orientation to others (Zhou, 2006), and only a small percentage of Chinese MSM disclosed their gay identity to others when compared to gay men in western countries (Koo et al., 2014).

The discrimination against homosexuality and gay men’s perceived stigma in Chinese society are influenced by the traditional Chinese culture, especially the Confucianism. Adamczyk & Cheng (2015) found people in Confucian countries have a less tolerated attitude towards homosexuality than people from non-Confucian countries. A core value of Confucianism is xiao (filial piety) (Hwang, 1999). For a son, getting married and bearing children to carry on the ancestral line are considered a central part of performing xiao to his parents (Zhou, 2006). These expectations from parents contribute to stigma associated with gay identity, which possibly makes Chinese MSM reluctant to come out (Gill, 2002). As a result, many Chinese MSM choose to hide their identity by entering heterosexual marriage (Zhou, 2006) or resorting to xinghun (formality marriage formed by a gay man and a lesbian) to perform a heterosexual

identity, fulfil the expectations of their parents and conform to the social norms (Liu, 2013).

In addition, under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese society is more oriented towards collectivistic culture. Though a culture or an individual usually has varying degrees of individualism and collectivism at the same time (Turiel, 2004), collectivism is usually prioritized over individualism in China. People attach great importance to their social identity and interpersonal relationships, and they tend to conform to the group value and those who fails to do it will be devalued by the group. Gay identity is considered deviant from the group value, it brings stigma to Chinese MSM, which discourages them from disclosing their gay identity.

### **Chinese Gay Men's Online Dating**

In China, the Internet has also been changing how gay men meet and connect with each other. China has largest number of Internet users in the world. According to Jiang et al. (2019), a majority of (80%) Chinese gay men's dating practices are conducted via the Internet. The Internet has been quickly replacing traditional offline places like gay saunas, bars and parks as the prioritized site for gay men to seek sexual or romantic partners (Bien et al., 2015). According to a study carried out among 403 gay men in China, 69.7% of Chinese gay men met last sex partner online (Sun et al., 2020).

While socializing in these places was not always a safe option for Chinese gay men, they were often threatened and even arrested under the crime of hooliganism which was

not abolished from the criminal law until 1997 (Worth et al., 2019). Besides, for Chinese gay men who were afraid of exposing their gay identity or those who live in rural areas, they have limited ways to find a date. The reason why more Chinese gay men than western gay men use online dating might be that they feel a strong stigma associated with their homosexual identity in Chinese society (Liu & Choi, 2006), and the anonymity afforded by Internet can provide them with a comfortable and safe virtual environment in which they don't need to worry too much about their gay identity being exposed.

In China, gay dating websites started to gain popularity in late 1990s. Until 2001, there had been more than 250 Chinese websites dedicated to gays, lesbians and bisexual people (UNAIDS, 2002). These websites usually use tongzhi in their names, for example, Gztz.org “Guangzhou Tongzhi” from which the users can know it targeted at gay men who are in Guangzhou; Jrtz.Net (Junren tongzhi, solider tongzhi), a website that specially targeted at gay soldiers or who are interested in gay soldiers (Wong, 2011). On these gay websites, there are usually sections where gay men can post their dating advertisements, and there are also online chatrooms in which gay men can exchange instant messages with each other.

Feng et al. (2010) conducted a research about gay men communities in Chengdu, and their study showed that most gay men regularly used the Internet at home or in their offices. Those gay men who did not own a personal computer use low-cost internet cafes. Most gay men utilized instant chat software or chatrooms on websites to seek partners. The major reasons why gay men in Chengdu started to use the internet are

“convenience, anonymity and safety”. Internet has also expanded the social circles of gay men in Chengdu and offered them more opportunities to seek friends and casual sex. In addition, the Internet has transformed the gay venues in Chengdu. Gay men no longer go to bars, tea bars and public parks to seek sexual partners, but for recreation with friends (Feng et al., 2010).

Besides gay websites, various online forums like Tianya, Baidu Tieba, Douban, etc. also have communities or sections that specially cater to the needs of Chinese gay men who can post their dating advertisements there. QQ, which was once a very popular instant messaging software, was also frequently used by Chinese gay men to socialize with each other, although is not a computer software specially targeted at gay groups. As it provides chat rooms and interest groups for people who have different interests, gay men can create and join gay chat groups on QQ. Through the late 1990s and 2000s, internet dating has been on the rise. Gay websites, chat rooms, online forums and QQ groups were increasingly utilized by Chinese gay men to find dates and mates, while offline cruising places gradually lost its popularity.

Accompanying the occurrence of smart phones in the late 2000s, mobile dating apps were also developed and launched. The Chinese gay men were among the first to use the newly emerged gay dating apps like Grindr and Jack’d which was launched in 2009 and 2010 respectively by American companies. Blued was launched in 2012. By copying Jack’d, it soon became the most popular mobile dating app in China. One reason why Blued has always been dominating the Chinese market is that Grindr is not allowed to operate in Chinese market due to the Great Firewall, which gives benefits to Blued’s quick rise. According to Wei et al. (2019), dating app use among Chinese MSM in Shenzhen has greatly increased from 12.5% in 2015 to 52.6% in 2017. Blued (97.2%)

is the most commonly used dating app among Chinese MSM in Shen, following Aloha (18.4%), Jack'd (14.1%) and Zank (14.1%).

According to a recent study carried out by Hu et al., (2020), there are approximately 8,288,536 MSM in the mainland of China, accounting for about 1.732% of adult men aged between 18 and 64 years in China. “The proportion of daily online MSM among adult men in different cities varied from 0.049% to 0.96%, with a mean of 0.20% and a standard deviation of 0.14%” (Hu et al, 2020). In terms of provincial level distribution of online daily MSM, the top ten cities are Guangdong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Beijing, Sichuan, Henan, Shanghai, Hebei, Hunan. In terms of city level distribution of online daily MSM, the top ten cities are Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Hangzhou, Suzhou, Xi'an, Nanjing, Tianjin and Changsha. Most of these cities are provincial capitals or municipalities, and most of the provinces or cities are located in eastern China where the economy is much better than the rest of China (Hu et al., 2020).

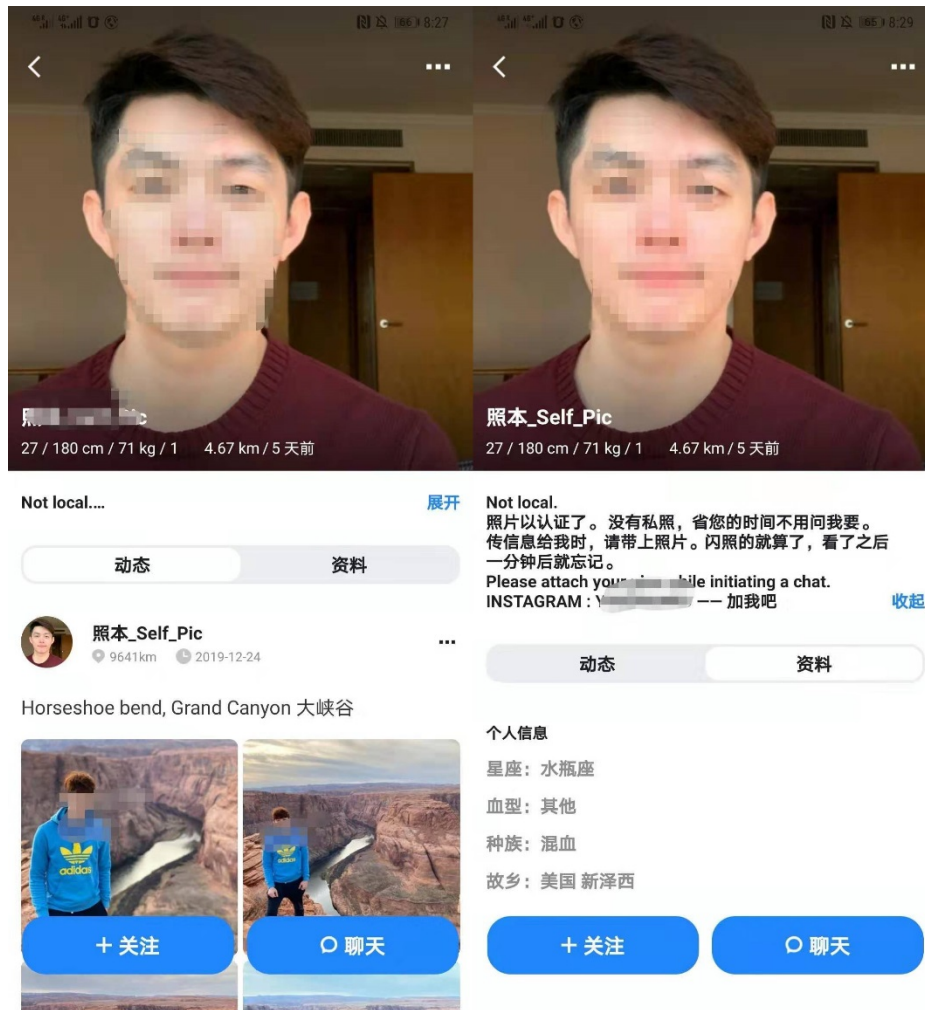
### **Research Context: Blued**

Launched in 2012 and based in Beijing, Blued claims to have 40 million registered users globally, among whom about seventy percent are located in China. The interface design of Blued is similar to that of Grindr or Jack'd. When a user logs into Blued, a grid of thumbnail photos is displayed on the phone screen. Each thumbnail photo represents an individual's profile whose detailed information including demographic information (age, height, weight, sexual role, relationship status, constellations, blood type, ethnicity, hometown), a short textual description and supplementary photos can be viewed if the thumbnail photo is tapped. The user can also choose tags to describe

their body type, their personal characteristics, their ideal type and their relational goals. Except age, height and weight are mandatory information, as for other information including personal photos the users can voluntarily choose to disclose or not.

The default displaying order of the thumbnail photos are based on proximity, with the nearest users being displayed first. There is also the filtering option through which the users can filter potential matches by criteria like distance, sexual role, age, height, weight, relationship status, etc.

The users can also chat and exchange information in private conversation on Blued. Blued also incorporates live streaming, moments sharing, HIV-related health information dissemination and gaming into its design. It also should be noted Blued had been a totally free app for a long time, but in recent few years, more and more functions can only be available to the paid VIP member. For example, Non-VIP members can only upload one photo which is the main photos, but VIP members can upload 6 more photos in the supplementary photos. Besides, VIP members can filter via age, height and weight and can search potential mates via map, which are not available to non-VIP members.



**Figure 1: Screenshot of a Blued user's profile**

I select Blued as the research context because: (1) it is the largest gay dating app in China, which means it can indicate the trends of online gay interactions, (2) it is a typical and useful case of an LBRTD application with significant consequences for self-presentation. (3) Third, the search-people via map function embedded in Blued made it possible for the researcher to get a diverse geographical sample. The researcher can type the name of a city or a location into the app and the view the profiles and collect data without having to travel there. (4) None of previous research has examined Chinese gay men's self-presentation on it.



## **Statement of the Problem**

Self-presentation or impression management takes place both face-to-face and in mediated forms. Before a date, an individual brushes hair, wears make-ups and dresses his/her most beautiful clothes. On Blued, a gay man chooses his most attractive photo as the main photo in his profile. In real world, self-presentation begins prior to face-to-face meetings, while on dating apps self-presentation begins with the selecting of a photo or with the descriptive profile selected by users. The emerging of dating apps has brought a totally new environment for self-presentation, mainly as a result of lessened cues and increased control, local proximity and a reduced filtering process. As Miler (2015) pointed out, little is known about how MSM (men seeking men) present themselves on dating apps, and a majority of the studies on dating apps for MSM were carried out in the USA (e.g., Blackwell et al., 2015; Brubaker et al., 2014; Chan, 2016; Crooks, 2013; Gudelunas, 2012; Landovitz et al., 2013; Miller, 2015; Rice et al., 2012; Roth, 2014; Wiele & Tong, 2014), while only a few (e.g. Chan, 2016) paid attention to how Chinese gay men present themselves on dating apps.

Therefore, in order to fill the gap in the existing literature, it is very necessary to investigate Chinese gay men's self-presentations on dating apps. Specific issues like motivations for using dating apps, textual and visual presentation techniques will be addressed in the research. Through this research, we hope to contribute to the literature about gay men's self-presentation in the era of mobile dating and shed light on gay

men's dating behavior from both the communicative, sociological and cultural perspective.

### **Main Objectives**

The general objective of this research is to characterize Chinese men Blued users' self-presentation on the mobile phone app, describing their motivations of constructing impression on Blued, how they construct their profiles both textually and photographically, and how do they evaluate the profiles of others.

By considering this objective, this research aims to fill in the gap in the existing literature about gay dating app studies, which will further advance the development of overall studies of this topic in the field of computer-mediated communication.

The specific objectives of this research include:

first, to know how Chinese gay men present themselves visually on Blued and explore the difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued;

second, to know how Chinese gay men use masculinity, body and sport language to present themselves on Blued and explore the difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued;

third, to know Chinese gay men's motivations of using Blued;

fourth, to know how Chinese gay men's construct their profiles on Blued, including what strategies they utilize, the reasons behind non-disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued, and how they evaluate profiles of potential mates.

## **Overview**

The next chapter (Chapter 2) provides a literature review that focuses on gay men's motives of using dating apps, self-presentation in dating advertisements, textual and visual self-presentation on gay dating apps, deceptive presentation and non-disclosure of face photos on gay dating apps. Chapter 3 introduces the mixed methods approach used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings. Finally, Chapter 6 draws a conclusion of the project, present implications and limitations, and identify areas that needs additional research. The data obtained in this study will help us gain an understanding of a poorly studied population in the field of communication and contributes to the literature in smartphone and Internet mediated communication.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a comprehensive literature review of relevant research on gay men's self-presentation and their use of dating apps. It will demonstrate the need to expand upon research about Chinese gay men's self-presentation on dating app Blued. The first section of this chapter will review the self-presentation in online dating advertisements. The second section will review gay men's motivation of using dating apps. The third and fourth sections will cover gay men's textual and photographic presentation on dating apps respectively. Then deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles will be reviewed. Lastly, a conclusion will be made.

#### **Self-presentation**

Goffman (1959) defines self-presentation as effort spent to manage the impressions people make on others in his analysis of the presentation of self in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). According to Toma & Hancock, self-presentation is the "packaging and editing of the self during social interactions to create a desired impression in the audience" (2010, p.336). Goffman's work on self-presentation describes how a person can participate in strategic activities "to convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (Goffman 1959, p.4). These impression management behaviors consist of expressions given and expressions given off. Expressions given refers to verbal and linguistic communication cues, and expressions given off refers to unintentional communication, such as nonverbal communication cues. In traditional

face-to-face meetings, people manage their impression through both verbal and nonverbal cues (Jones & Pittman, 1982).

The two-component model of self-presentation proposed by Leary and Kowalski (1990) consists two processes: impression motivation and impression construction. Impression motivation processes refer to the degree to which individuals are motivated to control how others see them, and impression construction processes refers to what impressions people want to convey and how to convey that impression. Self-presentation takes both the intended audience and the social settings into account, and does not only consider what information to reveal, but also what should be omitted and whether deception need to be employed (Schlenker, 2012). Therefore, self-presentation involves an element of strategic consideration to achieve the desired impression (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). When individuals construct an impression, they need to think about the values of the targeted audience (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

The processes of self-presentation and self-disclosure are important to the relational development in offline circumstances (Taylor & Altman, 1987), particularly in early stages because others will make use of this information to consider whether a relationship should be pursued (Derlega et al., 1987). Research shows that when people plan to meet a potential partner for the first time, they will adjust their self-presentational behavior according to the values expected by the potential dating partner (Rowatt et al., 1998). Even when communicating with strangers, people would like to enhance their self-presentation (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Self-disclosure can be

described as “the act of revealing personal information about oneself to another” (Collins & Miller 1994, p.457). Self-disclosure may consist of both descriptive messages, such as one’s hobbies, and evaluative information, like how an individual feels about a specific event in life.

### **Self-presentation in Online Dating Advertisements**

Individuals are presented with new challenges in regard to their self-presentation and self-disclosure behaviors when they utilize the Internet to seek potential dating partners. Although these techniques are similar in many ways, they may be different from those used in traditional face-to-face settings, which usually may not offer the same opportunities for deliberate self-presentation (Gibbs et al., 2006). Walther (1996) suggests that computer-mediated communication has two key features: reduced communication cues and potentially asynchronous communication. The two key features enable users to engage in “selective self-presentation” (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). First, computer mediated communication attaches greater importance on more controllable verbal and linguistic cues, which contribute to online self-presentation that is “more selective, malleable, and subject to self-censorship in the computer mediated communication than it is in face-to-face interaction” (Walther, 1996, p.20). Secondly, the asynchronous feature of CMC enables users to construct communicative information carefully and consciously.

Dominick (1999) described the personal homepages which all have similar structures as new chances for individuals to present themselves carefully. By constructing online

profiles, users can manage their impression more strategically than in face-to-face settings because they can think about which aspects of their characteristics should or should not be presented or which photos can best convey their attractiveness (Ellison et al., 2006). Moreover, in contrast to face-to-face communication in which individuals only present to one or only a limited number of audiences, online users need to present themselves to a broad audience. Therefore, online users cannot tailor their presentations to a specific communication partner, instead they must compromise several self-presentational goals, which could lead to stable personality characteristics being more important as a predictor for self-presentation.

The online dating environment is different from other CMC settings in critical aspects that may impact self-presentational strategies. For example, the expected future face-to-face meeting existed in most online dating interactions will reduce users' sense of visual anonymity, a significant variable in many online self-disclosure studies. An empirical analysis of online dating participants showed that those who expected greater face-to-face communication felt that they were more willing to disclose themselves and did not inhibit negative parts of self (Gibbs et al., 2006). Moreover, since the objective of many online daters is a romantic relationship, these individuals may be more inclined to disclose themselves honestly (Ellison et al., 2006).

The mediated feature of online dating helps users to present themselves favorably and deliberately. According to Goffman (1959), more expressions of self are "given" rather than "given off". This enhanced control over self-presentation does not mean it will

definitely cause misrepresentation online. As CMC has the “passing stranger” effect (Rubin, 1975) and the feature of visual anonymity (Joinson, 2001), under certain circumstances, the internet may allow participants to express themselves more freely and frankly than in face-to-face encounters (Ellison et al., 2006). The internet offered a way for people to share their genuine selves. The relative anonymity features of online communication and the lack of a shared social network will encourage people to disclose potentially negative parts of themselves online (Bargh et al., 2002).

Although the result of many studies suggested that online dating websites were unable to guarantee users’ authentic self-presentations, the interview data of Ellison et al. (2006) indicated that it is simplistic and inaccurate to judge that online daters frequently, explicitly and intentionally lie online. Instead, the result of their study showed that participants tried to present themselves accurately in the realm of online dating. Their study shows that constructing an authentic image of self is “a complex and evolving process” in which participants attempt to attract their potential partners but confront the limits of technological design and the constraints of self-knowledge (Ellison et al., 2006).

In some cases, the technical restrictions of the website may enable the users to misrepresent themselves unintentionally. For example, users will slightly change their information about some arbitrary data like age, because they want to increase their chance of being discovered by a desired partner (Ellison et al., 2006). Moreover, when users use subjective terms like pretty or average to describe themselves, it could also lead to unintentional misrepresentation because different people may have different



interpretation of these terms. As Shah and Kesan also point out, “defaults have a legitimating effect, because they carry information about what most people are expected to do” (2003, p.7). In the realm of online dating, the default settings in the search field (i.e., the age rang, whether filters are restricted to profiles containing photos) can affect how the users’ attractiveness is perceived by others and how others respond to the users (Ellison et al., 2006).

Research shows (Mckie et al., 2015) that young gay men constantly adjusted their online profiles to present their image as good as possible. Several participants in their study talked about dating sites or dating apps like Grindr, which enabled them to decide which photos they want to post in or to send to promote their desirability. Moreover, participants noted that they were able to edit messages before sending them via text or over the Internet, which further helped them management their impressions. This shows that gay men cared about the response of their desired partners and they strategized the most effective method to communicate in order to achieve their relationship goals (e.g., looking for serious relationship or seeking a sexual partner).

Because of the impersonal nature of online profile, “individuals may easily present themselves in what they perceive to be their best light (or embellish their positive attributes) while emphasizing those characteristics they see as most desirable to a potential partner” (Cheeseman et al., 2012, p.146). However, while advertisers strive to maximize their positive attributes, they often try to minimize their negative characteristics (Goode, 1996). Therefore, online daters’ self-presentation often is often

met with a dilemma in which they desire to enhance their self-presentation, but also expect to be authentic if a face-to-face meeting is possible in the future (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Therefore, individuals may engage in selective presentation (Walther, 1992) through exaggerating desired characteristics and minimizing unwanted characteristics (Walther, 1996).

While when selective self-presentation was first proposed by Walther, it was applied on textual communication in an online setting. Other researchers developed the concept to include the selective presentation of the visual self in online space. As is noted by Hancock and Toma (2009), profile photos are a very important element of online self-presentation, and these photos play a very important role in the success of a relationship. Profile photos, like textual self-description, are subject to selective self-presentation (Hancock & Toma, 2009). In visual profile communication, selective self-presentation can also occur because photos “can be edited and their staging and selection carefully controlled” (Hancock & Toma, 2009, p.369), enabling a rehearsed and strategic self-presentation.

Users of dating apps operate in a reduced cue environment where cues are static and not dynamic (Walther 1996). In other words, the information the users provide on their profiles is selective and under their control. Online users provide potential partners with a limited amount of information, namely photos and an optional text. Deceptions often occur in this environment. The result of the research conducted by Toma found that less attractive online daters were more likely to “take advantage of the medium of

communication to overcome attractiveness deficits in ways not possible in face-to-face contexts” (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

### **Motivations of Using Dating Apps among Gay Men**

In the research carried out by Wiele & Tong (2017), six themes emerged in the coding process regarding gay men’s usage and gratifications of Grindr. The six gratifications include socializing, sex, entertainment, romantic partnership, social inclusion and community. Socializing ranks as the most frequently reported gratifications, followed by sex. Socializing means using Grindr to communicate with strangers and looking for new friends. Sex involves seeking casual sex with other gay men. Entertainment means using dating apps to kill time or laughing at some of the weird profiles. Romantic partnership means using Grindr to find romantic relationships. Examples of Social inclusion include ego boost or getting compliment from others on Grindr. Community means using Grindr to seek social identification (Wiele & Tong, 2017).

The result of a survey conducted by Miller (2015) shows a variety of gratifications users sought on dating apps, including easiness, accessibility, safety, control, connectivity and versatility (Miller 2015). Safety means Grindr can provide gay men with a safe environment by ensuring everyone is gay. Control means gay men can decide with whom they will communicate on Grindr. Connectivity means Grindr can help gay men build a sense of community. Versatility means gay men can use Grindr for multiple purposes.

In a study about Pilipino gay men's motives of using Grindr, interview data showed four major themes: to socialize with other gay men, to share their experience as and with gay men, to learn more about their gay identity, and to experience dating other men (Castaneda, 2015). The findings of a study carried out by Rice et al. (2012) show that "killing time" is the most frequently reported motivation of gay men using Grindr, other motivations include: "making friends", "connect to the gay community", "meet people to have/sex/hook-up with" and "find someone to date."

According to a research carried out by Zervoulis et al. (2020), 72.1% of the participants in their study log onto gay dating apps at least once per day. The most popular option of logging onto dating apps is between 2 to 4 times per day. About half (49.2%) reported they use dating apps to seek sexual encounters. Another survey shows that 38% of the participants reported using Grindr to find casual sex, and the respondents logged onto Grindr over 8 times and spent 1.2 hours on it per day (Goedel & Duncan, 2015).

In another study, the findings show that gay men mainly use dating apps to look for casual sex (Holloway et al, 2014). Online social networks also provide convenience for gay men to start or end contact with others by avoiding awkwardness that comes from face-to-face interaction. For men who are in a relationship, seeking casual sex outside of their primary relationship has been a primary reason for their use of dating apps (Macapagal et al, 2020). The result of these studies shows that dating apps like Grindr has become an important part in gay men's daily life, and users who use gay dating apps are more sexually active than gay men who don't use dating apps.

In some regions, especially in rural areas, there are no offline gay venues, gay dating apps provide gay men with accessibility to the larger gay community (Chan 2016). In a study about French gay men's use of Grindr, Batiste (2013) found that the most significant aspect of dating app is that it provides the opportunity for gay men to see other gay men all over the city. Gay dating apps allow gay men to “resist heteronormativity and homophobia, asserting themselves through actions aimed at claiming autonomy and space for themselves” (Batiste 2013).

Similarly, in a study about gay apps use in Macau, the result shows that some gay men accept their gay identity after using gay apps, and before that they used to think themselves as “abnormal” (Dang et al, 2013). An interviewee in the study reported dating apps make him feel supported because he noticed from the dating app that he is not the only gay and there are some gay men near him (Dang et al, 2013).

Dodge (2014) found that gay dating apps like Grindr make it possible for young gay men to construct and develop a gay identity, partly because gay dating apps provides a safe environment for gay men to connect with each other. In another study of Grindr users, Blackwell et al. (2015) reported that Grindr enables gay men to establish relations in ways that transcend geographic boundaries and it often blurred “the boundaries around physical places and communities defined by shared interests in particular activities” (p.17). This overlap of physical space and online communities can provide new ways of constructing identity. For example, seeking casual sex is usually stigmatized in the offline world, but can be expressed more openly when one feels

belonged to a community of like-minded others (Jaspal 2016). Zervoulis et al. (2020) indicated in his research that gay men attain a sense of community through using gay dating apps.

Compared to homosexual's use of dating app, in a research about users' motivations of using heterosexual dating app Tinder, the result showed that participants use Tinder for entertainment, to boost their ego, to recover from a breakup and find new partners (Ward, 2017). In another study about Tinder users' motives, Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) found both heterosexual and homosexual participants have 13 motives of using Grindr. The 13 motives include seeking social approval, seeking relationship, looking for sexual experience, improving flirting or social skills, getting ready for travelling, getting over previous relationships, seeking belongingness, socializing, responding to sexual orientation, passing time, distracting from work or study and fulfilling curiosity (Timmermans and De Caluwé, 2017).

The motivations of using dating apps may change in different contexts (Ward, 2017). Even though gay dating apps are often regarded as "hookup" apps, many gay men use gay dating apps for multiple purposes and their motivations may change with the context changing (Gudelunas 2012; Blackwell et al., 2015; Birnholts et al, 2014). For example, some gay men may be more likely to seek casual sex when they are travelling in a new city and may adjust their profiles accordingly (Tziallas, 2015). Some gay men may want to look for long-term relationships but sometimes need to meet their sex demands immediately (Tziallas, 2015). Some gay men are frustrated that other gay

men's expectations are different with theirs, as some would like to find casual sex on a dating app, while others think dating app should be used to seek serious relationships (Tziallas, 2015).

Respondents in a study carried out by Chan (2017) reported that they may use different dating apps for different purposes. For example, Grindr, Tinder and Scruff were mostly regarded as hookup apps, while OKCupid, Tinder and Match.com were the top three apps for relationships. But this does not mean an app is only intended for one single purpose (Chan, 2017). The interface of design of dating apps like Grindr and Blued allows users to indicate multiple relationship goals. For example, on Grindr, users can choose more than one option in the "looking-for" checkbox, and the options include "chat", "dates", "friends", "networking", "relationship" and "right now." Looking for casual sex and social relationships can coexist (Birnholtz et al., 2014).

Shield (2017) find that gay immigrants to Copenhagen utilize gay dating apps to help them adapt to local life by developing social networks, as chatting with local gay residents is an effective way to integrate into local society. Some dating apps allow users to browse profiles in other cities or other countries, some potential immigrants would make use of this feature before they actually move to their destination. Through the function of the dating app, they learn the culture of their potential destinations and reevaluate their decision of immigration (Shield, 2017). Travelers would also take advantage of the function to help them gain travelling knowledge before they actually travelling to their destinations. By viewing the profiles of gay men living in their travel

destinations and communicating with local gay men, travelers are able to get familiar with local customs and cultures. For urban residents, a dating app “is often used as a mapping device for the reading of urban space” (Stempfhuber & Liegl, 2016). In a research about gay sex worker in Dublin, Ryan (2016) found that dating app Grindr offer male sex worker a entry point into sex work, because it requires little effort and no cost to set up a profile and it expand the real-time space where they can advertise their service.

### **Textual Self-presentation of Gay Men on Dating Apps**

In a previous research conducted by Bartholome et al. (2000), the most prevalent theme throughout their sample of personal ads is body language. Body language includes “references and direct discussion of an individual’s appearance, stature, and size” (p.317). Eighty-one percent of all dating advertisements contained either a description of the advertiser or a description of their potential partners. This is the most frequently included type of information in their sample of gay personal ads. Sixty-six percent gay men in the study mentioned their own appearance, one-third of all advertisers included both a description of themselves and the desired physical appearance of their potential partners (Bartholome et al., 2000).

Masculinity is a term used to refer to typical practices and behaviors associated with men in society, behaviors that are seen to be more valuable than those considered to be feminine or associated with women (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). Miller (2015) investigated 300 profiles from Jack’d and found 7% of men indicated a preference for



masculine or feminine partners. In consistent with their self-descriptions of masculinity and feminist, masculinity is overwhelmingly privileged over femininity. Of the 21 men who mentioned their preference for masculine or feminine partners, only one man indicated in his profile that he was interested in feminine partners, while 14 gay men directly indicated that they liked masculine partners, and eight gay men directly mentioned they did not like feminine partners.

Miller (2018) investigated the masculinity language and associated types of language use on Grindr, and he found that 4.7% of profiles included masculinity language. All the profiles containing masculinity language indicating looking for a partner who was traditionally masculine, none of them indicated they were looking for a feminine partner (Miller, 2018). Rodriguez et al (2016) also found that when users were given the option to write “what I’m looking for” in their own words, the word ‘masculine’ was repeated as the most prominent and desired trait in a potential partner. It is usually regarded as less desirable if a man’s body is not fit enough. There were also profiles containing expression indicating an interest in facial and body hair in desired partners.

Miller (2015) also found that 19% of gay men described their body, fitness level or interest in working-out in the textual description of their dating profile. In consistent with the findings of his own studies (Miller, 2015), Miller (2018) showed that 6.8% of profiles included body language. Some men discussed their own or other’ muscularity, while some men discussed not conforming to the widely desired body type for gay men. There is a possibility that gay men admitted they were not masculine as a way to

highlight their perceived disadvantages in order to make those who would contact them have realistic expectation on them.

Rodriguez et al (2016) found that gay users' self-description primarily centered on masculinity and body. Their profiles repeatedly emphasized the body and its sexual and athletic functions. The users' profiles also even made the penis a discursive symbol of masculinity. Similarly, in previous research, Bartholome et al. (2000) also found that male genitalia are frequently mentioned and emphasized in gay men's dating advertisement. Nearly half (45%) of all ads used explicit genital language.

Sports language is another type of language that gay men present themselves on dating app to confirm their masculinity. Because sports, fitness, and the gym are closely related to both bodily abilities and hegemonic masculine interests, it was regarded as an extension of more generalized body language. Rodriguez et al. (2016) has found gay men does not only describe fit and muscular bodies to stress their masculinity, but also gym activities and athletic abilities. Among all the profiles analyzed by Miller (2018), 13.7% of them contained language with regard to sports, working out or fitness, which reflects that gay men prioritize fit male body because visiting the gym or doing working out can help them build an image of having a fit male body.

Miller (2018) also found that the use of body language was related to age, relationship status, and geographic region, and the use of sports language is associated with education level and geographic region. For example, older men were more likely to use body language in their dating profiles, which may indicate that men use this to

compensate for their perceived disadvantages. Men who were single were more likely to use body language in their profiles, while non-single men were less likely to use body language. Men from north America were more likely to use body language than men who were from outside of America. The use of masculinity was also related to the use of body and sports language (Miller, 2018). There was a positive relation between the use of masculinity language and sports language, and between the use of masculinity language and sports language.

A study of gay dating apps use in Macau showed that about 65% (73% on Jack'd) gay men used sex suggestive terms in their profiles, such as “look for fun”, “strong, top, desire for control”, “let me give you message”, and so on. Bartholome et al (2000) investigated one hundred and sixty-seven phone advertisements and found that more than one-third (38%) of all dating advertisements claimed that the advertise was searching for sexual acts. The mentioned sexual acts include oral and anal sex, masturbation, spanking, kissing, fondling, and cuddling. Oral sex was the most popular referenced act among the advertisements that listed sexual acts (79%).

Birnholtz et al. (2014) collected 69,950 Grindr profiles from 12 different locations in the United States and Canada and explored what kinds of information the users disclosed on their profiles and how they dealt with stigma related to MSM identity and sexual behavior. They found that some users avoided being explicit or publicly linked with stigmatized identities or actions by using euphemistic expressions or utilizing private channels to convey their real intentions.

## **Photographic Presentation of Gay Men on Dating Apps**

On dating apps, an individual is primarily judged by his profile which contains his photographs, the basic personal information, and a short textual description. An app user needs to click on a thumbnail photo on the main screen in order to access that user's self-description presented on another screen. It only takes a few seconds for an online dater to assess the profile of his potential partner. Thus, the profile photo of the potential partner is very important in the process of assessment. Unlike dating websites, dating apps are inherent visual platforms (Chan, 2017).

In Chan's research (2017), most of the participants admitted that they first evaluated the photos before they started a conversation or replied to someone's message on dating apps. It is also very common for gay men to look at body photos when they are looking for casual sex. Gay men who look for long-term relationships also believe that a nice photo is very important (Chan, 2017). In general, 66.1% of the participants thought that photos were the most important elements in others' dating profiles (Chan, 2017). Though 73.1% of the participants believed that profiles were very superficial, 80.4% of the participants admitted that they crafted their profiles very carefully and seriously (Chan, 2017).

Jaspal (2016) found that it provided chances for gay men to construct their identity when they are able to change their profile photos. In previous research with gay men, participants were anxious about their physical attractiveness and body image before entering gay scenes (Duggan & McCreary, 2004). However, in a study carried out by

Filice et al. (2019), four participants out of 13 participants interviewed believed that most of Grindr users are modifying their photos, and two participants believed that the practice is very common and widely accepted. According to Jaspal (2017), a participant in his research acknowledged that the selfies he posted on Grindr did not always exactly match the reality because of digital enhancement. This kind of behavior enabled him to forge and to present to other users a particular version of himself.

Grindr provided users more flexibility in self-presentation as some participants pointed out that “selfies” enabled them to present themselves consistently with their desired selves. For users who wanted to form a genuine and attractive impression, they opted to craft their profiles by using facial photos. However, for users who were oriented more towards casual sex, they were more likely to put torso pictures in their profiles (Blackwell et al., 2015). According to Jaspal (2017), a gay man re-constructed his identity by making his physique the most prominent feature because he believed physique photos would be more attractive than his face photos. The photo can help some individuals “set the tone” for future interactions.

Although photos are the most important element of gay dating profiles, there are many gay men who do not post a face photo in their profiles. Previous studies have reported several reasons of non-disclosing face photos in gay men’s dating profiles.

A qualitative research has shown that gay men, who are not out, do not post their face photos because of fearing to disclose their identity through mobile dating apps (Blackwell et al., 2014). For users who were concerned about being recognized by

people nearby, they used a selective disclosure strategy by means of blocking undesired users or sending facial photos through private messages instead of displaying them publicly (Blackwell et al., 2014). In addition, Miller (2019) also found that gay men who do not have a clear face photo in their Grindr profiles have a lower level of outness than those who have a face photo. However, gay men, who have been out of closet on some occasions especially in the workplace, do not disclose a face photo when their professional image is conflicted with a hook-up image created by Grindr (Blackwell et al., 2014).

Fear of being slut-shamed is another reason to non-disclose the face photos among gay men (Blackwell et al., 2014; Jaspal, 2017). Some gay men have a perceived stigma associated with casual sex which was afforded by the dating apps. Therefore, they don't want their identity to be known by their acquaintances (Blackwell et al, 2014; Jaspal, 2017). In response, they either use fake photos or torso photos instead of personal face photos (Blackwell et al., 2014; Jaspal, 2017).

Gay men's face-disclosing strategies may vary in different locations. As different locations have different norms and cultures, the stigma associated with gay identity of gay men varies in different locations which has impacted gay men's willingness to disclose or not to disclose a photo (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). In previous research, result also showed that people from small towns were less likely to post a photo in their personal advertisements (Gudelunas, 2005).

Face disclosure on dating app were also related to relational goals. For example, gay men who look for casual sex are less likely to disclose their photos than those who look for friends and long-term relationships (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Cassidy (2013) also found that men who are seeking casual sex do not often use a photo on Grindr. Similarly, Blackwell et al. (2014) reported that gay men use face photo to avoid making an impression of looking for casual sex.

Gay men who spend less time on dating apps are less likely to disclose their photos than those who spend more time (Miller, 2019). Because face photos are a sign of investment of authenticity (Mowlabocus, 2010), it is reasonable that people who spend more time on dating apps would employ this kind of photographic presentation. Besides, it might be that those gay men who spend more time on the apps are more comfortable with their gay identity, and with disclosing their sexual orientation in a public manner (Miller, 2019).

Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) also found gay men who are older or have a lower BMI tend not to disclose their face photos, and gay men who were younger or have a higher BMI were more likely to show a face photo. In a study examining profiles on Jack'd, Miller (2015) found that “there was a trade-off between posting shirtless photos and photos with a face”. Gay men who foregrounded their masculine traits or fitness were less likely to post photos showing their face.

Chan (2016) made a comparative study between Chinese and American gay men and found that contrary to gay men in the USA, a majority of Chinese MSM (63.2%) did

not show their face on Jack'd. Chan's study (2016) shows a big gap (36.8% versus 64.2%) between Chinese MSM and American gay men when it comes to face-disclosure on dating apps. However, photos and profiles do not always reflect the real intentions of others reliably. Users' actual behaviors are not always consistent with the descriptions in their profiles, and users do not always update their profiles after their goals change (Blackwell et al., 2015).

### **Deceptive Self-presentation in Online Dating Profiles**

Although online dating is very popular, it is often considered to be full of deception (Toma et al., 2008). Gonzales and Meyers (1993) found that "to enhance the odds of initiating and maintaining a viable relationship, advertisers in personal ads are likely to offer those characteristics they believe a potential date or partner would find rewarding and to solicit those characteristics they themselves find rewarding" (p. 131). When advertising for a future partner, an advertiser aims to optimize the advantages. In other words, they want to date the most attractive partner possible. To achieve their goal, advertisers not only optimize positive characteristics, but also minimize their negative characteristics (Goode, 1996).

Many regard deceptions as the biggest shortcoming of online dating (Brym & Lenton, 2001; Madden & Lenhart, 2006). The editable nature of self-presentational elements in online dating profiles combined with the platform's ability to facilitate selective self-presentation make deception a simple and convenient stage for impression construction (Ellison et al., 2006; Hancock et al., 2007). The features of computer-mediated



communication promote selective self-presentation and avoid the expression of potentially unwanted nonverbal cues. This is especially important with regard to deception, as nonverbal conduct is usually least controllable and the most likely to betray deception (Ekman, 1988; Vrij, 2000). Face-to-face communication involves contextual, visual and receptor's cues. Users of the dating app in an environment operate with reduced cues, and cues are static and not dynamic (Walther 1996).

Self-presentation is a creative initiative that takes both the target audience and the social interaction context into account, and it involves deciding what information to include, what to leave out, and whether to be dishonest (Schlenker, 2012; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). The most common reason for engaging in deceptive communication lies in self-presentational concerns (De Paulo et al., 2003). For example, when meeting a potential partner for the first time, a self-presentational purpose to appear likeable or knowledgeable will dramatically increase the possibility that someone will lie (Feldman, et al., 2002).

A 2001 study found that over 25% of online daters admitted misrepresenting some information about themselves, most commonly the age (14%), marital status (10%) and appearance (10%) (Brym & Lenton, 2001). In a study carried out by Gibbs et al (2006), 86% of online daters think that others misrepresent their physical appearance. The concern may originate from the separation between the self-presented online image and the embodied self. As users of online dating websites or dating apps do not have direct

physical contact, they may misrepresent their height and weight, manipulate their profile photos, and exaggerate their status and income.

The result of a study carried out by Toma & Hancock (2008) also showed that deception was found very common among online daters. About 81% lied on at least one of the characteristics observed. Weight was the most commonly lied, followed by height and age. Participants reported being most honest with their relationship status and whether they have children. The high accuracy of this kind of information reported by online daters shows that these information are very critical in developing romantic relationships. With regard to photos, participants reported being least accurate as photo allows considerable editing. In reality, before and after the photos were shoot, they can be easily perfected through framing, posing, lighting, making-up or design software like Photoshop (Toma et al., 2008). Perceptions that other people are lying may lead to mutual deception, because users believe that others are exaggerating or deceiving (Fiore & Donath, 2004).

In another study carried out by Toma and Hancock (2010), the result showed that less attractive daters are more likely to post self-enhancing images that enhanced their attractiveness, and they are more inclined to verbally lie about their physical attractiveness. A significant finding of their study is that, when given the options to enhance their appeal by (a) directly enhancing their attractiveness or (b) increasing their social status in an effort to compensate for lower physical attractiveness, less attractive online daters are likely to choose the former (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Online displays of physical attractiveness such as photographs can be strategically manipulated in line with users' hardwired evolutionary objectives of increasing their chances of finding the best partner. In this phase, the "honest indicators" of health and reproductive fitness advocated by evolutionary theory can be changed in online spaces. These honest indicators might not, in fact, be so honest online. A face-to-face appearance of youthfulness, clear skin and long, vibrant hair may for example be a truthful indicator of health and reproductive fitness (Scheib et al., 1999). But online this presentation can only signal the strategic efforts of the dater who posted photos of themselves that are slightly older (so that they look younger) or who used a digital camera with a low resolution which made their skin look better than it indeed is. Although the usefulness of "honest" is not completely lost, it can be diminished in online environments (Toma & Hancock, 2010).

Different motives were related to different self-disclosure behavior. Gay men who sought out social inclusion and casual sex were less inclined to convey truthful information about themselves to others. One explanation for these findings is that these different motivations cause differences in anticipation of future interaction among Grindr users. When the expectation of potential face-to-face contact is strong, it will increase feelings of credibility with regard to the information users reveal to others on the application. However, if users are to stay online to interact with each other, they will be less likely to expect face-to-face encounters and feel less pressure to share honest information (Wiele & Tong, 2014). For example, if gay men assume they are planning a one-time sexual experience, they may not be concerned with maximizing

the honesty of their disclosures, because subsequent experiences beyond that one-time encounter are not likely to occur and credibility is low (Ellison et al., 2012).

There are at least three reasons that people prefer to present themselves honestly, even when deception is an alternative. First, “it is anxiety producing and cognitively demanding to create and maintain false public images,” second, “it is possible to portray oneself both positively and accurately by strategically selecting the kinds of information one wishes to convey from the repertoire of accurate self-images”, and third, “there are significant social sanctions associated with being caught lying” (Toma & Hancock, 2008, p.12).

The majority of online daters claim they are honest (Gibbs et al, 2006; Brym & Lenton, 2001). There are social and technical reasons that may deter deception in computer-mediated communication. Recordability may retain proof of fraud or the ability to save and archive a profile (Hancock et al., 2004). Daters will not be comfortable to know that their profile includes a record of their lie. Judgements of online daters on whether to deceive should also be driven by relation. For example, desires of online daters to meet potential partners in person can be a disincentive to disappointment. Recent research shows that online daters are susceptible to this limitation. The more online daters expected an offline relationship, the more honest they behave in their online interactions (Gibbs et al, 2006).

Many online daters would maintain a balance between authenticity and deception especially when their goal of using online dating service is offline romance. Some

research confirms that people construct their images to other's perceived value (e.g., Gaes & Tedeschi, 1978). Under the circumstance of mediated dating environments, users have a strong motivation to control the impression they create (e.g., Toma et al., 2008). Ellison et al. (2006) explore how online daters can optimize their self-presentation and establish creditworthiness in this setting by promoting self in a desirable manner and at the same time being accurate. This motivation is due to the high possibility of meeting potential partners face to face. Therefore, it's a wise strategy to appear realistically appealing on a dating profile.

The interview data of the study conducted by Ellison et al. (2006) indicates that one's ideal self-combined with the increased credibility arising from expected face-to-face encounters will help to narrow the gap between their real and their ideal selves. The ideal self refers to characteristics or accomplishments that one aims to achieve in the future (Bargh et al, 2002). In the field of online dating, it is interesting to see that online daters reported they use the profile to formulate a version of themselves they want to become in the future. Some people may begin to create an online profile by trying to close the gap between the real and the ideal.

Although previous online dating literature (e.g., Ellison et al., 2006) discusses concerns regarding misrepresentation, and most of this literature discuss the physical attributes of the dater. The feature of dating app like Grindr and the multiple goals of dating app users indicate that they may concern themselves with other types of deception. In particular, in view of the importance of sexual objectives, users may also struggle with

mis-presentation of information about their health or serostatus. On gay dating apps, information about health/serostatus may be particularly relevant for those users who are involved in achieving casual sex objectives and, especially, because such a kind of deceitful information cannot easily be detected in a face-to-face encounter, unlike major physical misrepresentation (Corriero & Tong, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the literature on gay men's motivation of using dating apps, their self-presentation in dating advertisements, how gay men present themselves textually and photographically on dating apps, and deceptive self-presentation in gay men's dating advertisements. The research regarding the experience of Chinese gay men is very limited. Most of the studies reviewed were carried out in western countries. Due to the culture and platform difference, it is important to investigate gay men's self-presentation behaviors in a totally different context. As a result, the current research seeks to address this gap by offering insight into how Chinese gay men present themselves on dating app Blued.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

The following chapter will describe the methods used to answer the research questions.

The first section of this chapter will review the central research questions of the current study. The next section will provide a rationale for the use of a mixed-methods approach. The third section describes the research design of the content analysis. The fourth section provides an overview of the research design of the in-depth interview.

#### **Research Questions**

Existing research does not provide much information about gay men's self-presentation on dating apps. More importantly, prior research was carried out in the western context, and no research has been conducted in a Chinese context. In addition, none of studies has explored gay men's self-presentation behaviors on Blued. This leaves gaps in our research knowledge about the experiences of Chinese gay men. The current research explored Chinese gay men's self-presentation on dating app Blued in an effort to address the following questions:

1. How do Chinese gay men present themselves photographically on Blued?
- 1b. Will there be difference by demographics in the disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued?

2. How do Chinese gay men use masculinity, body and sport language to present themselves on Blued?

2a. Will there be difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued?

3. What's Chinese gay men's motivation of using Blued?

4. How do Chinese gay men construct their Blued profiles?

4b. What's the reason of non-disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued?

5. How do Chinese gay men evaluate the profiles of others?

Research question 1, 1b, 2 and 2b will be addressed using the content analysis methods.

Research question 3, 4, 4b and 5 will be addressed using the method of in-depth interviews. Content analysis is the first step of the study, and the in-depth interviews is partly based on the result of content analysis.

### **Rationale for Mixed-Methods Research Design**

The mixed-methods approach is designed to combine quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative methods will be used as a major tool to explore the diverse ways in which participants understood and made sense of their experience (Berger & Luckman, 1980) through their own rich descriptions and explanations (Miles &



Huberman, 1994). The quantitative approach will be used in the initial step of this study to serve as a complement for the qualitative study. The quantitative method used is content analysis, and the qualitative method used is in-depth interviews. The result of content analysis can help us gain a quantitative understanding about how Chinese gay men present them visually and textually on Blued. However, a qualitative method of in-depth interviews is needed to help us further understand how and why Chinese gay men present themselves in certain ways. For example, previous research mainly used content analysis to examine the correlation between self-reported profile data (e.g., age, BMI, relationship goals, etc.) and gay men's face-disclosure strategies (disclose or not), but it is hard to investigate the motivations of using non-face photos among gay men with the method of content analysis (Miller, 2015). More qualitative studies are needed to help deeply understand their rationale and the cultural implication (Chan, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). Therefore, a mixed-methods approach is suitable for the current study.

### **Method of Study 1: Content Analysis**

Holsti (1969) defined content analysis as a “technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p.14). Hansen et al. (1998) described content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p.94). This analysis identifies and counts the amount of specific characteristics in order to be able to say something about the messages, images,

representations of such texts and their wider social meanings (Hansel et al., 1998). Content analysis identifies specific characteristics from the content by verbal, visual and behavioral pattern analysis (Williams, 2007). In this study, content analysis helped the researcher to understand the content of Blued profiles constructed by Chinese gay men.

According to Krippendorff (2018), content analysis typically has six steps which define the procedures of this method. The first step is to design, which means the analyst need to define the context and what they are trying to address. The second step includes the choice of the units of analysis, since, for example, sample units make it possible to obtain representative samples to be taken from a population of available data. The third stage is sampling, where statistical biases must be eliminated, which are inherited from the material to be analyzed, and whether the sample is representative for the answer. The fourth step is the coding, which is to describe or categorize the recording units. This can be achieved with instructions to train coders or computer coding. The fifth step involves drawing inferences, which is the most critical stage in the analysis of material. The researcher draws a conclusion of the codes associated with the phenomenon, such as the frequency of a particular variable. The final step is the validity of the content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018).

### ***Data Collection and Procedure***

I followed Miller (2015) and Chan's (2016) sampling method of collecting profiles from Jack'd to collect profiles from Blued. According to the National Bureau of

Statistics of China (NBS), there are 34 provincial level administrative regions including Taiwan province, Hong Kong, and Macau as special administrative regions. However, as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau have a different political and economic situation from that of mainland China, I could only collect profiles from 31 provincial level administrative regions in mainland China in this study. These 31 regions consist of 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, and 4 municipalities (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing). I collected profiles from 31 of the most populated cities in each of the 22 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities. From 2pm to 6pm every Monday during May 2018, I logged onto Blued and typed the name of a city into the app, and the first 30 profiles that appeared on the mobile phone's screen were screenshotted. Profiles that were obviously from a non-Chinese man were excluded from the sample. A non-Chinese profile was usually identifiable by its construction in a foreign language, or by its self-identification as a foreigner. Therefore, 930 profiles were collected in total.

All the men in the sample were identified as Chinese. The average age of men was 29.3 (median age 27, range from 18 to 83). The average height of men was 174.6 (median 175. Range from 120cm to 230cm). The average weight of men was 67 kg (median 65 kg, range from 30 kg to 200kg). The average BMI was 21.94 (median BMI 21.46, range from 8.48 to 59.72). Concerning sexual role, 17.7% (n=178) of the sample identified as bottom; 25.4% (n=256) of the sample identified as top; about a quarter (20.5%, n=206) of the sample identified as versatile, and 36.4% (n=366) did not disclose their sex roles. 61.8% (n=622) of the men did not disclose their relationship status; 30.4% (n=306) indicated as single; 7.1% (n=71) indicated as being in a relationship and a minority of

men (n=7, 0.7%) indicated as being in a heterosexual martial relationship. In relation with their interests, 19.2% (n=193) of the sample had a goal of chatting; 16.6% (n=167) of the sample had a goal of dating; a quarter (n=216, 21.5%) of the sample had a goal of looking for boyfriend; 5.4% (n=54) had a goal of looking for bromeos; 5.6% (n=56) of the sample had a goal of looking for gym buddies; 1.4% (n=14) of the sample expressed a clear goal of looking for sex, and 1.5 (n=15) of the sample expressed an ambiguous goal.

### ***Units of analysis***

The coding unit in this study was the latest online profile constructed by Blued users. A Blued profile involves the photos uploaded by the users, and text descriptions written or chosen by the users. Blued allows its users to upload a main photo with 6 supplementary photos which are not mandatory. Besides, it also encourages its users to post moments which also contains photos. Blued allows users to write a few sentences freely to describe either himself or what he expects from other users. There are also some tags available to describe their body type and their expected body type. The tag for body includes: twink, neat, bear, and jock. Tags to describe the characteristic of the user himself and the expected type of man are also available.

### ***Operationalization of Variables***

The coding categories of the photographs on Blued followed Chan (2016), and the coding categories of the masculinity, body, and sport language followed (Miller 2018). The coding categories and variables were designed to determine the frequency/ratio of the subject (designation), the attributed features (attribution) and basic characterization

methods (assertions). The final coding schema included 17 variables. Down below I present the variables and their explanations. (See Appendix 1 for the codebook). I also screenshot a Blued profile for better understanding the coding categories. Please see figure 2.



**Figure 2: Screenshot of a typical Blued profile**



**Figure 3: Screenshot of a typical Blued profile**

V1. Which sexual role does the user have?

Sexual role includes bottom, top, versatile and undisclosed.

V2. What is the relationship status of the user?

Relationship status includes single, partnered, dating, married, undisclosed.

V3. What is the relational goal of the user?

Relational goal includes chat, date, friend, boyfriend, gym buddies, sex, ambiguous goal, undisclosed.

V4. What does the main photo show?

Main photo include: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V5. What does the first supplementary show?

The first supplementary photo include: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V6. What does the second supplementary show?

The second supplementary photo include: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V7. What does the third supplementary show?

The third supplementary photo: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V8. What does the fourth supplementary show?

The fourth supplementary photo: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V9. What does the fifth supplementary show?

The fifth supplementary photo: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V10. What does the sixth supplementary show?

The sixth supplementary photo include: a recognizable face, a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity/model, and no photo.

V11. Does the profile contain masculinity language?

The masculinity language consists of self-directed masculinity language and other-directed masculinity language. The self-directed masculinity language is used to describe the user himself. Examples include: “I’m pure top”, “I’m pure man”, or use the tag “pure man” (yemen) to describe themselves. The other-directed masculinity language is used to describe other users. Examples include: “No sissy man”, “I like masculine man”, or use the tag “pure man” to describe their ideal type of men.

V12. Does the profile contain self-directed masculinity language?



The self-directed masculinity language is used to describe the user himself. Examples include: “I’m pure top”, “I’m pure man”, or use the tag “pure man” (yemen) to describe themselves.

V13. Does the profile contain other-directed masculinity language?

The other-directed masculinity language is used to describe other users. Examples include: “No sissy man”, “I like masculine man”, or use the tag “pure man” to describe their ideal type of men.

V14. Does the profile contain sport/gym language?

Sports or gym language are usually used to describe the athletic side of the user. Examples include: “I like swimming”, “I like going to the gym”, “I’m looking for a gym partner”. “I like doing sports”, or “I like playing badminton, climbing mountains, and some other outdoor activities”. Profiles were coded if the texts include any sports or mention the gym activity.

V15. Does the profile contain body language?

The body language consists of self-directed body language and other-directed body language. The self-directed body language is used to describe the user’s own body shape. Examples include “I’m a muscular man” or use the tag “jock” to describe themselves.

V16. Does the profile contain self-directed body language?

The self-directed body language is used to describe the user's own body shape. Examples include "I'm a muscular man" or use the tag "jock" to describe themselves.

V17. Does the profile contain other-directed body language?

The other-directed body language is used to describe the body shape of other users. Examples include "I like muscular man", "I expect him to have a good body shape" or use the tag 'jock' to describe other users.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the quantitative variables mentioned above. Correlations were employed to identify between demographics and different variables. All quantitative analysis were conducted with SPSS.

### **Method of Study 2: In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviews enable researchers to gain a more complex understanding of social dynamics by encouraging the participants to use their own words to describe the phenomenon under consideration. This puts together a range of viewpoints to tell a diverse sociological tale. The semi-structured interview was chosen for its "purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p.6). It is a valuable data collection method in conditions "where little is known about the topic of interests – where the topic may be particularly sensitive" (Adams, 2010, p. 18). This is the case when it comes to the topic of this study. Not only there is very limited knowledge about Chinese gay men's online self-presentation experiences, but it also a very difficult and

sensitive one for the participants who are usually “hidden in the closet” to talk about their online impression management experience.

### ***Participants***

Participants were identified, recruited and selected for this study using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). In order to recruit a heterogeneous sample, I used maximum variation and snowball sampling which are two kinds of purposeful sampling. A maximum variation sample is “constructed by identifying key dimensions of variations and then finding cases that vary from each other as much as possible” (Suri, 2011). A maximum variation sampling yields: “(1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (Patton, 2002, p.235). The method of snowball sampling “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p.141). The method is “well suited for a number of research purposes and is particularly applicable when the focus of study is on a sensitive issue, possibly concerning a relatively private matter, and thus requires the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p.141). As gay men in China usually feel stigmatized about their identity and are hard to approach, a combination of maximum variation sampling and snowball sampling allowed for participation of gay men from a

variety of regions and backgrounds. Participants who were eligible in the study should meet the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) be a Chinese male
- 2) be over 18 years of age
- 3) self-identified as gay or bisexual
- 4) residing in the mainland of China
- 5) having a smart phone installed with Blued
- 6) having logged into Blued at least once within 30 days prior to the recruitment.
- 7) Willing and able to participate in a phone or voice call interview to describe their experience of using Blued

### ***Recruitment process***

After identifying the inclusion criteria of the participants, I developed a three-stage strategy to recruit eligible participants.

In the first stage, I set up a recruitment profile on Blued. In the personal description of the profile, I wrote “Hi, I’m a researcher at Autonomous University of Barcelona, and I’m conducting my doctoral research project about Chinese gay men’s use of Blued. I would like to invite you to share your experience of using Blued with me. If you are interested in participating in the interview, please contact me via private message. Thank you” (the description was written in Chinese). However, this profile advertisement received little response. Within two weeks, only 2 gay men approached me and expressed their willingness to join this research.

As the profile recruitment advertisement did not work, I quit the advertisement on Blued and tried to recruit participants from other channels like BBS, gay online chatting groups. I posted advertisements on Douban which is a popular Chinese online social networking site. On Douban, there are many different interest groups, I searched for the groups tagged “gay men” and posted recruitment advertisements there. The content of advertisements was similar to the advertisements that was previously posted on Blued. Through this channel, I recruited 9 eligible participants within two weeks. In addition, I used Tencent QQ to recruit participants. Tencent QQ is a kind of instant messaging communication tool in China. QQ group is one of the most frequently used functions of this software. It allows people to form different interest Chatting groups there. Hundreds of thousands of gay-themed groups were formed on QQ. I used key words like Tongzhi, jiyou, gay., etc. to search related gay men groups. I randomly applied to join 10 groups, in the end 4 groups accepted my request. I contacted the group leaders and got their permission to post recruitment advertisements in their groups. Via this channel, I successfully recruited 7 eligible participants within two weeks.

In the third stage, I asked the 18 original participants who were interviewed in stage 1 and stage 2 to help me contact their gay friends. Participants were presented with two options. First, they could send a message to their gay friends on WeChat or QQ asking for consent to pass on that gay friend’s WeChat or QQ ID to me. If consent was given, I could friend them on WeChat or QQ. Second, I could pass on a separate recruitment letter to the participants to be relayed to other individuals on social media. The letter had my WeChat ID and email address and encouraged individuals to contact me to

participate or ask any questions (See Appendix 2). Via this snowball sampling method, I successfully recruited 12 eligible participants within one month.

Overall, I recruited 30 eligible participants within two months. Two participants were recruited via profile advertisements on Blued, 16 participants were recruited via advertisements in gay groups on Douban and QQ, and 12 participants were recruited by referrals. Their ages range from 21 to 53. Their occupations vary and come from 21 cities in different parts of China. Twenty-four of them are single, four are in a homosexual relationship, one is in a heterosexual marriage and one is divorced from a heterosexual marriage. 16 participants reported a bachelor's degree, 4 reported a master's degree, 4 reported an associate degree, 4 reported a high school degree and 2 reported a middle school degree. Two participants have come out only to their parents, three participants have come out to both their parents and close friends. Ten participants have come out to either close friends or close siblings but not to their parents. The remaining 15 participants are deep in the closet. They have a history of using Blued between 1 to 6 years. A detailed summary of the participants' age, relationship status, come out status, education level, occupation, city of residing, and length of time using Blued is included in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Demographic Summary of Study of Participants**

| Name  | Age | Relationship status | Education         | Occupation                          | City                | App (Year of Use) |
|-------|-----|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Bao   | 42  | Partnered           | Associate         | Policeman                           | Aksu, Xinjiang      | 6Years            |
| Dan   | 24  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Graduate Student                    | Beijing             | 5Years            |
| Zhang | 30  | Partnered           | Middle School     | Property Management                 | Shanghai            | 5Years            |
| Jiang | 31  | Divorced            | Middle School     | Factory worker                      | Taizhou, Zhejiang   | 5Years            |
| Qing  | 24  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Bank Staff                          | Shenzhen, Guangdong | 5Years            |
| Wen   | 30  | Single              | Master            | Middle School Teacher               | Shanghai            | 2Years            |
| Wang  | 25  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Pharmaceutical sales representative | Fuzhou, Fujian      | 5Years            |
| Fu    | 23  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Graduate Student                    | Changsha, Hunan     | 3Years            |
| Du    | 29  | Single              | Master            | Bank Staff                          | Chengdu, Sichuan    | 4Years            |
| Han   | 27  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | tech-website journalist             | Shenzhen, Guangdong | 5Years            |
| Yao   | 24  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Bank Staff                          | Nanning, Guangxi    | 6Years            |
| Tang  | 22  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Bachelor Student                    | Lingyi, Shandong    | 3Years            |
| Xing  | 21  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Bachelor Student                    | Yangzhou, Jiangsu   | 1Years            |
| Luo   | 38  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Freelancer                          | Yanbian, Jilin      | 6Years            |
| Ling  | 25  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Student                             | Beijing             | 5Years            |
| Yuan  | 53  | Married             | Bachelor's degree | Administrative assistant            | Shaoyang, Hunan     | 4Years            |
| Hong  | 31  | Single              | High School       | unemployed                          | Zhuzhou, Hunan      | 6Years            |
| Feng  | 35  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | Marketing specialist                | Beijing             | 5Years            |
| Teng  | 28  | Single              | Bachelor's degree | IT industry Staff                   | Beijing             | 5Years            |

|       |    |           |                   |                                     |                      |        |
|-------|----|-----------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------|
| Liu   | 27 | Single    | Bachelor's degree | Pharmaceutical sales representative | Guangzhou, Guangdong | 5Years |
| Lee   | 27 | Single    | Master            | College Lecturer                    | Xiamen, Fujian       | 2Years |
| Ding  | 29 | Single    | Bachelor's degree | Flight Attendant                    | Nanchang, Jiangxi    | 6Years |
| Wu    | 28 | Single    | Associate         | Internet Merchant                   | Yiwu, Zhejiang       | 6Years |
| Cai   | 25 | Single    | Associate         | Civil Servant                       | Shijiazhuang, Hebei  | 4Years |
| Huang | 29 | Single    | Master            | Sales manager                       | Harbin, Heilongjiang | 5Years |
| Kai   | 36 | Partnered | Bachelor's degree | Network Engineer                    | Anshan, Liaoning     | 6Years |
| Zhou  | 36 | Partnered | Associate         | Foreign Trade Specialist            | Shanghai             | 5Years |
| Liao  | 27 | Single    | High School       | Restaurant Servants                 | Guangzhou, Guangdong | 5Years |
| Gu    | 23 | Single    | Bachelor's degree | Foreign Trade Specialist            | Guangzhou, Guangdong | 1Years |
| Guo   | 38 | Single    | Bachelor's degree | Bank Manager                        | Chengdu, Sichuan     | 5Years |



### ***Data collection:***

Before the interviews were conducted, a demographic information form was used to determine if the interested participants meet the selection criteria of the research. The demographic information form was hosted on Sojump, a Chinese online survey tool. The following information was collected in the demographic information form: age, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, education level, occupation, city of residence, length of using Blued, and what dating apps they are using. In the end of the form, the participants were also asked to provide their WeChat ID or QQ ID. The detailed content of the form can be seen from Appendix 4. The data collected from this form can be used for screening eligible participants and for analyzing the interview scripts.

Prior to the demographic information form, an electronic informed consent form was sent to the participants via WeChat or QQ. On the informed consent form, I gave a brief introduction about the research including the research topic, the research purpose, the estimated length of the interview. I also explained the participants should participate in this research voluntarily and they could withdraw at any time. The participants were also told that the interview would be recorded, and the confidentiality would be protected. The participants were also notified that the results of the interview would be used in my dissertation and journal papers. I asked each participant to read the consent form carefully and got their consent before the interview started (See Appendix 3).

### ***Interviews:***

The questions in the semi-structured interviews are designed on the basis of the two-component model of self-presentation proposed by Leary and Kowalski (1990). As

have been reviewed in Chapter 2, the process of impression management consists of impression motivation and impression construction (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). Therefore, I design questions focusing on the motives of constructing a Blued profile, and how and why they construct their profiles in certain ways. In addition, this in-depth interview is conducted on the basis of the result of content analysis. Through the content analysis, I found that non-disclosure of face photos is a common act among Chinese gay men (which will be explained in detail in Chapter 4). Therefore, when designing the questions for the semi-structured interviews, I included questions regarding face-photo disclosure to ask participants their reasons or opinions on non-face photo disclosure. (Please see Appendix 5 for detailed interview questions).

I conducted semi-structured interviews via the voice chat function of WeChat and QQ, which are two popular instant messaging apps in China. Interviews were conducted via voice chat because: 1) it respects the request of most participants because most of them are not willing to accept face-to-face interviews for fear of exposing their gay identity 2) it will avoid stigma and make participants feel at ease to talk about the topic 3) the participants recruited are from various parts of China, it is difficult to conduct interviews face-to-face.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese language, and each interview last from 30 to 90 minutes.

***Data Analysis:***

All the interviews are audiotaped and subsequently transcribed and translated into English. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant quoted in this study. The analysis of the transcripts was guided by a revised version of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The analysis of the text should be “grounded in interview data, which means the explanations should be resulted from participants” answer rather than relying on preexisting theoretical insights (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This process was revised in the sense that my understanding of the interview data was partly based on theoretical framework and interview questions.

All the transcripts were imported into NVivo 12, a software for managing and analyzing qualitative data. I used thematic analysis as a method for identifying the themes in the data. The use of a thematic analysis enabled me to recognize the overall themes of an extended phrase or sentence that identifies the meaning of a unit of a data (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic analysis is carried out in six steps: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the first step, I familiarized myself with the data by listening through the interviews and reading each participant’s interview transcript several times. This helped me gain a deeper and thorough understanding of the data and develop initial ideas for potential codes.

In the second step, I generated initial codes by analyzing the transcripts line-by-line to identify preliminary codes. For example, when talking about the photo selection in

Blued profiles, one participant said: “I would beautify my photo before I post it on Blued. It’s just a minor modification, like whitening a little bit. I can tell that others modified their photos a lot because these photos look too exaggerated.” This statement was coded as “photo beautification” to reflect the participant’s logic of dealing with the photos posted on his Blued profile. The initial coding process was conducted in this way.

In the third step, the researcher started the process of searching for themes after all the data had been coded. In this phase, the task of the researcher was to group similar established codes with shared patterns and commonalities into sets, aiming to say something related to the research question and “create a plausible and coherent thematic mapping” of the data (Clarke et al., 2015, p.236). This process also involves identifying concepts and categories in portions of coded data to then be presented in the final analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). For example, all codes related to “photo beautification” were examined in accordance with the initial theme “photo beautification”.

In the fourth step, I reviewed all the themes. The purpose of this step was to provide a ‘quality check’ “to ensure that both individual themes and the analysis as a whole captured key meanings and patterns in the data” (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 238). In this process, themes might be renamed, merged or discarded. For example, when talking about the motives of using Blued, one participant said “I use Blued to watch live streams. Some streamers are very funny, some sing very well, and some have a good appearance.” I previously coded this statement as “watch live stream”. Another

participant said “I used Blued every day to pass the time. I like using it just like I have been accustomed to online shopping. I do window shopping, but I never buy.” I originally coded this statement as “pass the time”. In this step, I grouped the code “watch live stream” and “pass the time” together and renamed the code as “entertainment”. This process continued until all of the themes were identified.

In the fifth step, the themes were once again reviewed. The aim of this phase was to identify the “essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92) and how each theme related to other themes and in the overall scheme. Another Ph.D. candidate helped the researcher to determine the essence of each theme. This step also involves identifying concepts and categories in portions of coded data to then be presented in the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the final stage, I produced the report based on the connections that were established between and across all themes. In this process, the “analytic narrative needs to go beyond description of the data” and make an argument in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p,93). Findings are presented in the section of results.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter will cover results for each research question in both study 1 and study 2 of the present research. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, in study 1, 930 gay men's Blued profiles were collected in the sample, which allowed the researcher to do a content analysis of the photographic and textual elements of their profiles. In study 2, in-depth interviews were employed to further explore Chinese gay men's motivation of using Blued, and to understand how they construct their Blued profiles, why some gay men do not disclose a face photo on Blued, and how they evaluate the profiles of others.

#### **Study 1: Content Analysis of Chinese Gay Men's Blued Profiles**

##### **Demographic Statistics of the Sample:**

In the sample that includes 930 Blued profiles of Chinese gay men, the median age of the users was 29.12 years (mean=29.12, standard deviation=9.221), The median height of the gay men users in the sample was 175 cm (mean=174.83, standard deviation=7.853). The median weight of the gay men users in the sample was 65 kg (mean=67.07, standard deviation=13.653). Most of the users had a BMI in the health range (n=698; 75.1%). About one-tenth of the users' sample had a BMI in the underweight range (n=90; 9.7%). Finally, 142 gay men users (15.3%) had a BMI in the overweight range (see Figure 5 & Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Age, Height and Weight**

|                    | Age   | Height | Weight |
|--------------------|-------|--------|--------|
| Mean               | 29.12 | 174.83 | 67.07  |
| Median             | 27.00 | 175.00 | 65.00  |
| Standard Deviation | 9.221 | 7.853  | 13.653 |

**Figure 6: BMI**

|             | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Underweight | 90        | 9.7     | 9.7           | 9.7                |
| Health      | 698       | 75.1    | 75.1          | 84.7               |
| Overweight  | 142       | 15.3    | 15.3          | 100.0              |
| Total       | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Figure 7 shows that around a third of the gay men (n=342; 36.8%) in the sample did not disclose their sexual role preference during sex encounters. A quarter of the gay men (n=238; 25.6%) reported their sexual role as Top. Around a fifth of the gay men (n=190; 20.4%) reported their sexual role as versatile. One hundred and sixty gay men (17.2%) reported their sexual role as Bottom.

**Figure 7: Sexual Role**

|             | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Bottom      | 160       | 17.2    | 17.2          | 17.2               |
| Top         | 238       | 25.6    | 25.6          | 42.8               |
| Versatile   | 190       | 20.4    | 20.4          | 63.2               |
| Undisclosed | 342       | 36.8    | 36.8          | 100.0              |
| Total       | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

More than half of the gay men (n=570; 61.3%) in the sample did not disclose their relationship status. Nearly a third of the gay men reported being single. A minority of

the gay men (n=35; 3.8%) were in a serious relationship. Similarly, only a small number of the gay men (n=32; 3.4%) reported being dating somebody. Only seven of the gay men in the sample reported being in a heterosexual marriage (See Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Relationship Status**

|             | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Undisclosed | 570       | 61.3    | 61.3          | 61.3               |
| Single      | 286       | 30.8    | 30.8          | 92.0               |
| Partnered   | 35        | 3.8     | 3.8           | 95.8               |
| Dating      | 32        | 3.4     | 3.4           | 99.2               |
| Married     | 7         | 0.8     | 0.8           | 100.0              |
| Total       | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Nearly half of the gay men (n=467; 42.5%) in the sample did not disclose their relational goals. Nearly one-fifth of the gay men (n=188;18.0%) reported looking for a boyfriend. One hundred and seventy-three of the gay men (n=173; 15.7%) reported looking for a casual chat. Just more than one tenth of the gay men (n=151; 13.7%) reported looking for a dating. A minority of the gay men (n=46; 4.2%) reported looking for besties, and a similar number of the gay men (n=53; 4.8%) reported looking for fitness partners. Only twelve gay men (1.1%) in the sample reported in their profile description that they were looking for casual sex (See Figure 9).



**Figure 9: Relationship Goal**

|                   |                          | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Relationship Goal | Undisclosed              | 467       | 42.5%   |
|                   | Looking for Chats        | 173       | 15.7%   |
|                   | Looking for dates        | 151       | 13.7%   |
|                   | Looking for besties      | 46        | 4.2%    |
|                   | Looking for boyfriends   | 198       | 18.0%   |
|                   | Looking for gym partners | 53        | 4.8%    |
|                   | Looking for casual sex   | 12        | 1.1%    |
| Total             |                          | 1100      | 100.0%  |

**Research question 1: How do Chinese gay men present themselves photographically on Blued?**

First, the number of profiles containing at least a recognizable face photo was counted. Just over a third of the profiles (n=346; 37.2%) contained at least a recognizable face photo. The number of profiles containing a recognizable face photo was also counted. The number of profiles containing a recognizable face photo in the main photo section, the supplementary photos section and the moments section was counted respectively. Around a third of the profiles (n=313; 33.7%) contained a recognizable face photo in the main photo section (See Figure 10 & 11).

**Figure 10: Whole profile contains a recognizable face**

|       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| No    | 584       | 62.8    | 62.8          |
| Yes   | 346       | 37.2    | 37.2          |
| Total | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |

**Figure 11: Main Photo contains a recognizable face**

|       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| No    | 617       | 66.3    | 66.3          |
| Yes   | 313       | 33.7    | 33.7          |
| Total | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |

In the main photo section, as only 33.7% of the gay men (n=313) in the sample uploaded a recognizable face photo, the rest in the sample uploaded various kinds of photos which can be categorized into five types: a headless torso with clothes, a headless torso without clothes, human body parts without a recognizable face and torso, non-human objects, celebrity and blank photos. Two hundred and fifty-eight gay men (27.7%) uploaded a photo of a non-human object. Another 13.1% (n=122) of the gay men uploaded a photo showing a headless torso with clothes. About one-tenth of the gay men (n=101; 10.9%) uploaded a photo of a celebrity in the main photo section. Another 6% of the gay men (n=56) uploaded a photo showing a headless torso without clothes. A small number of the gay men (n=46; 4.9%) didn't upload any photos. Another 3.7% of the gay men (n=34) uploaded a photo showing human body parts without a recognizable face and torso (See Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Main Photo**

| Showing  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| A recognizable face                                    | 313       | 33.7    | 33.7          | 33.7               |
| a headless torso with clothes                          | 122       | 13.1    | 13.1          | 46.8               |
| a headless torso without clothes                       | 56        | 6.0     | 6.0           | 52.8               |
| Valid  |           |         |               |                    |
| human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 34        | 3.7     | 3.7           | 56.5               |
| non-human objects                                      | 258       | 27.7    | 27.7          | 84.2               |
| celebrity/model  | 101       | 10.9    | 10.9          | 95.1               |
| Blank  | 46        | 4.9     | 4.9           | 100.0              |
| Total  | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

In the section of supplementary photos, a majority of the gay men (n=676; 72.7%) in the sample did not upload any photos there, and less than a third of the gay men (n=254, 27.3%) uploaded supplementary photos. The number of profiles containing at least a recognizable face in the section of supplementary photos was 93 (10%). Seventy-eight (8.4%) of the profiles contained a recognizable face in the first supplementary photo. The number of profiles showing a recognizable face photo in the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth supplementary photo was 58 (6.2%), 48 (5.2%), 39 (4.2%), 30 (3.2%) and 20 (2.2%) respectively. Overall, only a small number of gay men in the sample uploaded supplementary photos and the number of profiles showing a recognizable face photo in this section is also very limited. Figure 13-19 shows the specific percentage of each kind of photos in the supplementary photos.

**Figure 13: Supplementary Photos contain a recognizable face**

|       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| No    | 837       | 90.0    | 90.0          |
| Yes   | 93        | 10.0    | 10.0          |
| Total | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |

**Figure 14: First Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 78        | 8.4     | 38.2          | 38.2               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 20        | 2.2     | 9.8           | 48.0               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 10        | 1.1     | 4.9           | 52.9               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 15        | 1.6     | 7.4           | 60.3               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 58        | 6.2     | 28.4          | 88.7               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 23        | 2.5     | 11.3          | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 204       | 21.9    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 726       | 78.1    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

**Figure 15: Second Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 58        | 6.2     | 36.0          | 36.0               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 22        | 2.4     | 13.7          | 49.7               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 14        | 1.5     | 8.7           | 58.4               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 10        | 1.1     | 6.2           | 64.6               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 43        | 4.6     | 26.7          | 91.3               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 14        | 1.5     | 8.7           | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 161       | 17.3    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 769       | 82.7    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

**Figure 16: Third Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 48        | 5.2     | 38.1          | 38.1               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 10        | 1.1     | 7.9           | 46.0               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 5         | 0.5     | 4.0           | 50.0               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 10        | 1.1     | 7.9           | 57.9               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 39        | 4.2     | 31.0          | 88.9               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 14        | 1.5     | 11.1          | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 126       | 13.5    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 804       | 86.5    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

**Figure 17: Fourth Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 39        | 4.2     | 41.9          | 41.9               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 11        | 1.2     | 11.8          | 53.8               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 5         | 0.5     | 5.4           | 59.1               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 3         | 0.3     | 3.2           | 62.4               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 27        | 2.9     | 29.0          | 91.4               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 8         | 0.9     | 8.6           | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 93        | 10.0    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 837       | 90.0    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

**Figure 18: Fifth Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 30        | 3.2     | 39.0          | 39.0               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 8         | 0.9     | 10.4          | 49.4               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 5         | 0.5     | 6.5           | 55.8               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 5         | 0.5     | 6.5           | 62.3               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 23        | 2.5     | 29.9          | 92.2               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 6         | 0.6     | 7.8           | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 77        | 8.3     | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 853       | 91.7    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

**Figure 19: Sixth Supplementary Photo**

|         |  | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid   | A recognizable face                                    | 20        | 2.2     | 40.0          | 40.0               |
|         | a headless torso with clothes                          | 3         | 0.3     | 6.0           | 46.0               |
|         | a headless torso without clothes                       | 2         | 0.2     | 4.0           | 50.0               |
|         | human body parts without a recognizable face and torso | 2         | 0.2     | 4.0           | 54.0               |
|         | non-human objects                                      | 18        | 1.9     | 36.0          | 90.0               |
|         | celebrity/model  | 5         | 0.5     | 10.0          | 100.0              |
|         | Total  | 50        | 5.4     | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing | System   | 880       | 94.6    |               |                    |
| Total   |  | 930       | 100.0   |               |                    |

In the section of moments, nearly half of the gay men (n=436;46.9%) uploaded certain types of photos there. The number of profiles containing at least a recognizable face in the section of moments was only 75 (8.1%). Overall, only a minority of the gay men uploaded a recognizable face in the section of moments (See Figure 20 & 21).

**Figure 20: Moment Photos**

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | NO    | 494       | 53.1    | 53.1          | 53.1               |
|       | YES   | 436       | 46.9    | 46.9          | 100.0              |
|       | Total | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Figure 21: Moments Contain a Recognizable Face**

|       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| No    | 855       | 91.9    | 91.9          |
| Yes   | 75        | 8.1     | 8.1           |
| Total | 930       | 100.0   | 100.0         |

**Research question 1b: Will there be difference by demographics in the disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued?**

A correlation analysis was conducted to see the relationship between face photo disclosure and age, height and weight. A significant negative correlation was found between face photo disclosure and age ( $P < 0.05$ ), which means gay men at an older age are more unlikely to disclose a face photo in their dating profiles than those gay men at a younger age. However, no significant correlation was found between face photo disclosure and height, and no significant correlation was found between face photo disclosure and weight (See Figure 22 & 23).

**Figure 22: Correlations between Demographic Variables (Age, Height and Weight) and face photo disclosure**

|                |  |                         | Age     | Height | Weight |
|----------------|--|-------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| Spearman's Rho | Disclosing a face photo or not in the profiles | Correlation Coefficient | -.087** | -0.001 | -0.033 |
|                |  | Sig. (two-tailed)       | 0.008   | 0.978  | 0.316  |
|                |  | N                       | 930     | 930    | 930    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Figure 23: Correlations between Demographic Variables and face photo disclosure**

| Title  | Options      | N   | Disclosing a face photo or not |                | X <sup>2</sup> | P     |
|--|--------------|-----|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
|  |              |     | NO<br>(N=584)                  | YES<br>(N=346) |                |       |
|  | Do not share | 570 | 394                            | 176            |                |       |
| Relationship Status                                | Single       | 286 | 144                            | 142            | 30.524         | 0.000 |
|  | partnered    | 35  | 21                             | 14             |                |       |
|  | Dating       | 32  | 22                             | 10             |                |       |
|  | married      | 7   | 3                              | 4              |                |       |
| BMI  | Underweight  | 90  | 49                             | 41             | 3.690          | 0.158 |
|  | Health       | 698 | 449                            | 249            |                |       |
| Indicating a TOP or not                            | Overweight   | 142 | 86                             | 56             | 12.286         | 0.000 |
|  | NO           | 692 | 412                            | 280            |                |       |
| Indicating looking for serious relationship or not | YES          | 238 | 172                            | 66             | 0.001          | 0.982 |
|  | NO           | 624 | 392                            | 232            |                |       |
|  | YES          | 306 | 192                            | 114            |                |       |



## **Research question 2: How do Chinese gay men use masculinity, body and sport language to present themselves on Blued?**

First, Frequencies of a) masculinity language, b) body language and c) sport language used by Chinese gay men in their Blued dating profiles were examined (See Figure 22). Overall, among the 930 profiles, there were 350 (37.6%) profiles that contained masculinity language. There were 221 profiles (23.8%) that included self-directed masculinity language, and 251 profiles (27%) that included other-directed masculinity language, which means that 122 profiles (13.1%) used both self-directed and other-directed masculinity language.

A lower proportion of Chinese gay men used body language in their dating profiles. There were 194 profiles (20.9%) that contained body language. There were more gay men who used other-directed body language than those who used self-directed body language. Only 46 gay men (4.9%) used self-directed body language in their profile, while 173 gay men (18.6%) used other directed body language in their profile. Only 25 gay men (2.6%) used both self-directed and other-directed body language in their profiles. (see Figure 24)

A total of 58 Chinese gay men used sports language in their profiles. Among the 58 gay men, there were 46 gay men indicated in their profiles they were looking for gym partners or they were doing gym somewhere. Another 12 gay men indicated in their profiles they were fond of doing sports like running, basketball, tennis, swimming and badminton, etc.

**Figure 24: Frequency of the text of masculinity, body, and sports language (N=930)**

| Text                                | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Masculinity language                | 350       | 37.6        |
| Self-directed masculinity language  | 221       | 23.8        |
| Other-directed masculinity language | 251       | 27          |
| Body language                       | 194       | 20.9        |
| Self-directed body language         | 46        | 4.9         |
| Other-directed body language        | 173       | 18.6        |
| Sports language                     | 58        | 6.2         |

**Research question 2a: Will there be difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued?**

As shown in Figure 25 the findings indicate that age is significantly positively correlated with the use of masculinity language ( $r=.097$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and self-directed masculinity language ( $r=.137$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Older gay men are more likely to use masculinity language and self-directed masculinity language than younger gay men. There is a significant positive relationship between height and the use of masculinity language ( $r=.06$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and self-directed masculinity language ( $r=.078$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Gay men with a higher height are more likely to use masculinity language and self-directed masculinity language. Weight is significantly positively related to the use of masculinity language ( $r=.099$ ,  $p<.01$ ), self-directed masculinity language ( $r=.115$ ,  $p<.01$ ), other-directed masculinity language ( $r=.063$ ,  $p<.05$ ), self-directed body language ( $r=.076$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and sports language ( $r=.074$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Gay men with larger weigh are more likely to use masculinity language, self-directed masculinity language, and self-directed body language. In addition, BMI is significantly positively related to the use of masculinity

language ( $r=.067$ ,  $p<.05$ ), self-directed masculinity language ( $r=.080$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and self-directed body language ( $r=.082$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Gay men with a larger BMI are more likely to use masculinity language, self-directed masculinity language, and self-directed body language.

**Research question 2b: Will there be correlations of the use of masculinity language, body language, and sport language, among Chinese gay men on Blued?**

As shown in Figure 25, with regard to the correlations of the use of masculinity language, body language, and sport language, the use of masculinity language is significantly positively correlated with the use of body language ( $r=.292$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and sports language ( $r=.111$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while the use of body language is also significantly positively correlated with the use of sport language ( $r=.231$ ,  $p<.01$ ). People who like using masculinity language are more likely to use body and sport language. This is reasonable because body and sport language are two important aspects which indicate a man's masculine traits; therefore, masculinity language are related with both body and sport language. Interestingly, the use of self-directed masculinity language is correlated with the use of self-directed body language much stronger ( $r=.205$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than the use of other-directed body language ( $r=.083$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while the use of other-directed masculinity language is correlated with the use of other-directed body language ( $r=.279$ ,  $p<.01$ ) much strong than the use of self-directed body language ( $r=.171$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Although people who like describing their own masculinity are more likely to use body language both to themselves and others, more of them describing their own body than others'. On contrast, although people who like describing others'

masculinity are more likely to use body language both to themselves and others, more of them describing others' body than their own.

**Figure 25**  
Correlation coefficients of demographic variables and the text of sports, masculinity, and body language.

| Variables            | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      | 6      | 7      | 8      | 9      | 10     | 11 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| 1. age               | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |    |
| 2. height            | -0.061 | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |    |
| 3. weight            | .148** | .474** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |    |
| 4. BMI               | .233** | -0.044 | .826** | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |        |    |
| 5. masculinity_self  | .137** | .078*  | .115** | .080*  | 1      |        |        |        |        |        |    |
| 6. masculinity_other | 0.046  | 0.038  | .063*  | 0.052  | .379** | 1      |        |        |        |        |    |
| 7. masculinity       | .097** | .068*  | .099** | .067*  | .733** | .791** | 1      |        |        |        |    |
| 8. body_self         | 0.014  | 0.029  | .076*  | .082** | .205** | .171** | .188** | 1      |        |        |    |
| 9. body_other        | -0.029 | 0.036  | 0.039  | 0.036  | .083** | .279** | .215** | .222** | 1      |        |    |
| 10. body             | -0.031 | 0.045  | 0.056  | 0.051  | .126** | .292** | .244** | .441** | .936** | 1      |    |
| 11. sports           | -0.035 | 0.051  | .074*  | 0.058  | .112** | .111** | .101** | .246** | .212** | .231** | 1  |

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

## **Study 2: In-depth Interviews with Chinese Blued Users**

The quantitative result of study 1 is far from enough to know how Chinese gay men present themselves on Blued and the rationale behind their self-presentation on Blued. Therefore, in study 2, 30 participants were further interviewed to get a deep understanding of Chinese gay men's self-presentation behaviors on Blued. The interview seeks to understand Chinese gay men's motives of using Blued, how do Chinese gay men construct their profiles, and how do they evaluate other gay men's profiles, and why some Chinese gay men do not disclose their face photos on Blued. The result of the study 2 are presented in the following part.

### **Research question 3: What's Chinese gay men's motivation of creating a Blued profile?**

This research question seeks to address why Chinese gay men create a Blued profile. In the interviews, the participants were asked to discuss their ultimate goal of using Blued. After analyzing the interview data, five themes were emerged from the data, which are described in the following sections. The themes are: (1) looking for casual sex; (2) looking for romantic/long-term relationships; (3) looking for friends, (4) entertainment; (5) seeking psychological comfort.

#### ***Looking for casual sex***

According to the interface design of Blued, there is a column called "I'm looking for..." where five options are provided for its users to choose from: looking for chats, looking

for dates, looking for friends, looking for boyfriends, and looking for gym partners. Although looking for casual sex is not provided as an option on the profile pages, a majority of the participants in the interview admitted they used Blued to find casual sex.

For example, Hong, said:

For me, this app is mainly used for looking for one-night stand, my first impression of this app is that it's a magical tool for hook-up app (yuepao shenqi). When you are really horny, it can help you meet your sexual need immediately.

Mobile dating apps with the GPS function embedded in it, can help its users find other gay men nearby, which provides gay men with an immediate and convenient way to hook up with each other. Wen, 30-year-old gay man, had multiple motivations of using Blued, looking for casual sex is one of the major motivations. He told his experience:

I remember one time when I stayed at a hotel, I logged into Blued, and found a gay man was within a distance of only few meters away. According to the distance, I was sure that we lived in the same hotel. I said 'hi' to him on Blued and we exchanged photos. Then I went to his room. You know what happened next.

Jiang, a 31-year-old man said the greatest benefit of using Blued is that he can have a look at other gay men nearby anytime he wants and can have casual sex anytime. Similar to Jiang, Liao, a 27-year-old gay man, said Blued makes it possible for him to meet with those good-looking gay men in his city, and can help him solve his sexual needs very quickly.

Several participants installed Blued with the aim of finding love on it, but as they used it for a for a period, they regarded it as hook-up app. As Fu explained:

At first, I once dreamed of finding my love on it, while later on, I found it impossible to find serious relationship on it. When you have too many options, you will not have patience in maintaining a relationship. Gay men on it just wanted to have one-night stand with you. Because you can meet new person whenever you want.

Blued provides its users with a convenient and immediate way to find dates. While it also caused negative effect on maintaining serious relationships. The cost of meeting new person is low, meeting new person becomes easy, but maintaining relationships become difficult. Just as Fu, several participants gave up the hope of finding love on it and only aimed to find casual sex on it.

### ***Looking for romantic/long-term relationships***

Over half of the participants indicated that they want to find long-term relationships via Blued. However, most of them also did not have confidence in finding love successfully through it. They regarded it as an app famous for hookup, but they still had faith in Blued that they could find love on it.

Dan, a 24-year-old gay man, used to look for casual sex on Blued, but changed his mind:

Now I have a different opinion of the app, I think it's too promiscuous there. Most of gay men on this app is sexually active, who knows if they have HIV or any other sexually transmitted diseases or not. I don't think I have a strong need for sex now, actually I long for love.

Similarly, Ling, a 25-year-old gay man, originally have multiple purposes including looking for friends, long-term relationships and casual sex. As time changed, his motivation also changed. Ling said:

At first, I wanted to know as much gay men as possible, for example, sometimes, I would like to make some friends, sometimes I wanted to look for love, sometimes, I wanted to look for casual sex. Now, I don't use Blued as often as I did in the past, I have always been expecting a long-term relationship. Probably because as age increases, I become mature in mind, and I don't have a strong need for sex now.

Several participants complained that this app is full of gay men who only look for casual sex, while they had to admit this kind of app is one of the limited ways to look for a long-term relationship. They still have a hope they could find love through Blued. As

Ding said:

I feel it is very hard to find a boyfriend on Blued. On the one hand, most of the gay men will ask you out to have one night stand after they say 'hi' to you, on the other hand, there are many scams on it, but I cannot find other good ways to find love except via dating apps. I still have hope on Blued, even if the chances of finding love on it are very slim. But who knows? Maybe one day I will be the lucky man who really find my Mr. right on it.

### ***Looking for friends***

About half the of the participants used Blued as a tool to find friends. They are deep in the closet and have no one in their life to share their emotions and thoughts with.

Finding someone to talk with on Blued can help them find a sense of belonging.

Tang, a 22-year-old gay man, explained the reason why he wanted to find friends instead of finding love on Blued:



As I'm still a student, there are a lot of uncertainties in the future, so at present I don't want to start a relationship, I only want to find some friends with whom I can talk. I want to have some friends with whom I can share my secrets. Because there are many topics which I cannot discuss with my heterosexual friends around me. Even if I discuss those topics with them, they probably will not resonate with me.

Hong, a 31-year-old gay man, used Blued to find friends for comfort when he broke up with his boyfriend. He described his experience:

At that time, I just broke up with my ex-boyfriend, he went to Xinjiang, and I was in Hunan. I felt very sad. At that time, I was still deep in the closet. I didn't know who I can trust and talk to, so I downloaded and installed Blued on my smart phone. I wanted to meet some gay friends through Blued, because there is always something you would like to share with others. Because you are the same kind of person, you will feel relaxed if you discuss some gay issues with them. When I was not out of the closet, I didn't dare to discuss gay-related issues with my family members including my parents and my younger sister. I have nobody around me whom I can talk with in depth.

Some participants also used dating app to find friends with common interests. For example, Hong, a 31-year-old gay man, admitted he would update his profile bio like 'I'm looking for gym partners' when he wanted to find someone to do the workout together. Some participants also used Blued to find travel companions, as Feng articulated his experience:

I like travelling. As I'm single, I feel very lonely when I travel alone. Before I travelling to some places, I would write in my bio like 'From when to when, I would travel to which cities, anyone who wants to join me?'

## *Entertainment*

Several participants mentioned using Blued as a way to entertain themselves. They used Blued to pass the time when they feel bored. The live streaming service on Blued also make Blued as an entertaining platform in addition to a dating platform.

Bao, a 42-year-old gay man, who is in a relationship, did not have any relational goals. For him, using Blued is a kind of way to pass the time especially when he feels bored.

I don't have a specific goal. I like browsing the profiles on Blued, it's just like viewing a variety of products when I'm doing online shopping. It has become a daily habit for me. I just don't know what to do when I'm alone, so I log into it and have a look at the profiles of other gay men.

Liu, a 27-year-old gay man, had similar experiences:

Most of the time when I log into Blued, I don't have a clear goal in mind. I'm curious to see who is nearby, or to see how many gay men are within a certain range of distances. When I feel bored, for example when I'm in the toilet, I will log onto Blued, it's like checking Weibo account (Chinese equivalent of twitter).

Blued is itself a dating app, but it also provides live streaming to its users who can be live streamers or just viewers. Several participants admitted they are frequent viewers of Blued's live streaming.

Yao, a 24-year-old gay man, described his experiences of viewing live streaming on Blued:

There are a variety of shows on live streaming, for example, singing performance, talk show, cross-dressing, cosplay, etc. I like watching the shows of those live streamers who are good looking, I don't care the content of their shows, it's a kind of enjoyment when watching a good-looking guy talking online.

Feng, a 35-year-old gay man, said he liked watching live streaming nearly every day.

He explained his reason of being fond of live streaming.

The live streamers come from different backgrounds. Some of them talked about their life, their job, their hobbies, and they can interact with me. I can send messages to them when they are doing live streaming. I think one of the attractive features of live streaming is that it makes me feel like I'm integrated into the life of the live streamer. I would feel I'm very close to the live streamer, so I will not feel very lonely. I feel like I'm interacting with a celebrity. In the past, a celebrity only appears on TV and have no interaction with me. Live streaming makes me feel close to a 'celebrity', I can feel I'm integrated into this era.

### *Seeking psychological comfort*

For some participants who worried about their gay identity or those who are struggling with their gay identify, using Blued can help them become comfortable with their gay identity. As Tang, a 22-year-old gay man articulated:

At that time, I was not sure about my gay identity, I feel scared of being a gay man. I downloaded and installed Blued, I just wanted to know if there are other gay men who lives near me. Because when I was in high school, I was always thinking if I'm the only gay man in my school. So, my original purpose is to know if there are gay men around me. Knowing that there are

so many gay men existing around me, I feel at ease and gradually accepted my identity.

Luo, a 38-year-old gay man, who is single and lives alone admitted he used Blued to ease his loneliness. He said:

I feel lonely everyday especially when I come back home from work. I do not have gay friends in my life. When I log into this app, I feel like there are many gay men around there and I feel like they are accompanying me. It makes me feel less lonely.

Lee, a 27-year-old gay man, also use Blued to ease his feeling of loneliness when he travels alone.

I often travel alone, if I arrive at a new place or a new environment, I will feel much better. Honestly speaking, I'm not using to find casual sex. I hope to meet some friends. In April, I was travelling abroad, I felt a strong sense of loneliness. I very much would like to find someone who also came from China and talk to them. So, I log into Blued to see who are there.

Hong, a 31-year-old gay man also always worry about aging and feel uncertain about his future, said he would like to chat with old gay men to know their life so he can be prepared for the future. He explained:

I think I often worry a lot about future. I can become very anxious when I think about future. So, I want to talk to gay men who are older than me to know their opinion about life. Just casual talk with them, no sex, very pure motivation. I want to know what they are thinking and what are their attitudes towards life when they are at that age. I think this would help me know more about what the future is like, which can help me reduce my anxiety.

#### **Research question 4: How do Chinese gay men construct their Blued profiles?**

For interviewees, construction of Blued profiles is a very important task for them, as it represents “the first and primary means of expressing one’s self during the early stages of a correspondence and can therefore foreclose or create relationship opportunities” (Ellison et al., 2006, p. 423). In study 2, interviewees were asked to describe how they construct their profiles and why they constructed their profiles in that way. After coding and analyzing the data from the interviews, four themes emerged in the answer to this question. The four themes are: (1) paying attention to small cues; (2) balancing deception and authenticity (3) establishing credibility; (4) bypassing platform restrictions.

##### ***Paying Attention to Small Cues***

Blued profiles mainly consist of photos, demographic information and textual description. When Chinese gay men choose photos and write self-description on it, small cues become very important. Different types of photos can convey different education backgrounds, personal tastes and intentions to potential dating partners. Though the text description only allows 140 characters and is not mandatory, many users construct the content very carefully and have their own techniques of constructing it.

The small cues the participants pay attention to vary in different aspects. Some participants pay attention to the language they use, some participants pay attention to the settings of photos.

In China, mastering a foreign language can be a sign of having a good education background. On Blued, some participants would like to show their quality (suzhi) by using English language to construct their profiles. For example, Xing, a 21-year-old gay man, indicated he used English names in their profiles and wrote his self-description totally in English:

I would like to use English names and construct my profiles in English because I think those who can understand English usually have a good education background. I'm not interested in attracting those who do not understand English. If they can't speak English, they are usually poorly educated.

Although a majority of the participants (22 out of 30) did not post their personal face photos in their Blued profiles. They did select their photos very carefully and would like to select photos that show their hobbies, taste, or economic and educational background. For example, Hong, a 31-year-old gay man, often posted photos of doing sports, as he wanted to convey that he likes sports and wanted to attract potential mates who share similar interests. He described his experience:

I often post photos of myself doing sports, like playing badminton, running a marathon. I like taking part in these kinds of activities. If you want to find a partner, it would be very nice if he has similar interests with me. We would have many common topics to talk with each other. He would be interested in

me after seeing my camping photos, and we would start our conversation from the topic of camping.

Some participants who did not post face photos used object photos as their profile photos. Different objects usually imply different meanings. For example, Bao, a 42-year-old gay man, used a cartoon character as his profile photo, as he said: “I like this cartoon character, those who also liked this cartoon may talk to me if they see this photo.” Similarly, Xing, a 21-year-old gay man, used a photo of a Husky dog as his profile photo, as he explained: “my favorite dog is Husky, I think it’s very cute. I would like to find a partner who also likes pets.” Kai, a 36-year-old gay man, used a photo of a fancy car as his profile photo. Kai explained:

This photo is related to my job. I have a part-time job which is to organize wedding events. During these events, I had the opportunity to see a lot of fancy cars, so I took photos of these cars.

Several participants mentioned avoid using scenery photos because scenery photos were seen as an option usually chose by middle-aged and old gay man. Some photos can also implicitly convey the meaning of sexual needs. As bluntly writing looking for sex is prohibited on Blued, some gay men used sexy photos as a signal of looking for sex, while some gay men who are not interested in looking for sex avoid contacting with those who used sexy photos as their profile photos. For example, Jiang, a 31-year-old gay man, used a naked upper body photo without disclosing his face on Blued. When asked to explain why he used the naked upper body photo, he said he wanted to “seduce other gay men”. Jiang indicated in the interview he regarded Blued as a hookup

app. In his bio introduction, he wrote: “When you are young, you should seize the opportunity to have fun, but you should not be addicted to it, you need to learn to protect yourself and respect others.” Here “have fun” implied his motivation of looking for sex. Similarly, Teng, a 26-year-old gay man, used his personal face photo in the main photo of his Blued profile, but in the supplementary photos, he posts several photos which include naked upper body, photos of body parts like butt and leg. He said, “these photos can make visitors know I’m keen to looking for casual sex.”

Conversely, some participants directly mentioned in the interview that they avoided using any sexually explicit photos in their profiles because they think these photos send a signal of looking for casual sex. For example, Tang, a 22-year-old gay man, used a cartoon photo as his profile photo, he said:

I always think muscle photos, or some sexually explicit photos shows an impure intention, so I think cartoon photo can represent my aesthetic and show I’m not a horny gay man.

Dan, a 24-year-old gay man, was very strict with evaluating the profile photos of other users. He said that he would never talk to those who used a crotch photo as the profile photo, he thought “It’s too horny”. During the interview, Dan showed the researcher a profile which is a photo of a man standing in front of the mirror with upper body naked. “What’s wrong with him”, Dan said, “I’m not so crazy about having sex, I would never take risks.”

### ***Balance Deception and Authenticity***



On Blued profile, every gay man needs to input their weight, height and age. Participants who are not satisfied with their height and weight admitted in the interview that they falsify their self-reported data. But they all claimed that it was only minor modification, it will not make potential mates feel a big difference when they meet offline.

Age modification is very common among the participants who age over 30. They are fearful of age discrimination because they believe gay men over the age of 30 is not popular anymore. On the one hand, they tried to falsify their ages to a smaller age than their actual ages, on the other hand, they insisted they control their age modification in a tolerable range, because they think they look younger than their actual age, so it's no big difference if they lied about their ages.

Guo, a 38-year-old gay man, indicated 90% of the information is authentic, while 10% of the information provided is not real. When asked about what information is deceptive in his Blued profile, he admitted it was his age and explained:

Actually I'm 38 years old, but I wrote 33 years old in my profile. I think the modification is okay for me. If I say I'm 38 years old, nobody will believe in it because I look much younger than 38 years old. It is a disadvantage if you are over the age of 30, especially when you are a bottom.

Ding, a 29-year-old gay man, wrote in his profile that his age is 26-year-old, and his height 175cm weight 65kg and sexual role bottom. Ding admitted that except his age is deceptive, other information is all real. When asked why he lied about his age, he explained:

If you indicate in your profile that you are 29 years old or over 30, many people will have no interest in you. I look younger than my actual age. If you just have casual sex with someone, it's not a big issue if you lied a little bit about your age because they will not know it. If I look for serious relationship, I will tell him my real age in private conversation or offline meetings.

Ding's experience shows he tried his best to present an authentic image on Blued, while he concerned that his age is a disadvantage, so he lied about his age to make him appear more attractive. Besides, he utilized different disclosing strategies according to different relational goals. For serious relationships, he would disclose his real age to potential partners privately. When Ding was younger few years old, he never lied about his age on Blued, as he articulated:

Previously, I never thought age would be a disadvantage for me because I have always thought I look pretty young. But from the end of last year, around November or December, I suddenly found crow's feet started to appear around my eyes. I could not accept the fact that wrinkles started to appear on my face. Then I became crazy of buying all kinds of anti-aging skin-care products. From that time, I realized I time would leave footprint on your face, so I become sensitive to age.

Hong, a 31-year-old gay man, strengthened that he had always been trying to present an authentic image on Blued. He indicated he used his personal face photos which was also verified by the platform, his height and weight were also real except his age. He reported 29 years old in his Blued profile and he explained:

I have been using this app for like 5 or 6 years and had been insisted on presenting myself in an authentic manner. But a few months ago, I started to

falsify my age. If you are honest with your age and wrote 30 there, nobody will contact you.

Hong's motivation to falsify his age was also influenced by the fact that a majority of gay men more or less falsify their information in their Blued profiles.

A lot of gay men lied about their information in their profiles, when the real you encounter the unreal him, you will feel it's absolutely unfair. Gradually you are influenced by the environment, then you start to think about falsifying your profile information to make your profile look more attractive.

Hong repeatedly stressed that except his age, all other information including face photos are real. He did not think age deception is a big issue for him as he thought he looked much younger than his actual age. He said:

Previously I wrote my actual age, but when I met someone offline, they often don't believe I'm over 30 years old. I remember when I changed my job and went to a new company, many colleagues were very surprised to know that I'm over 30, they thought I was just over 20 years old. That's one of the reasons that I decided to falsify my age a little bit younger.

Among those who did not post their face photos, some participants admitted they used fake photos like photos of a celebrity or photos of another man downloaded from Internet. For example, Yuan, a 53-year-old gay man showed his profile to the researcher that he used a photo of Ning Zetao which is a famous Chinese Olympic swimming champion. He did not want to disclose his personal photo, so he used the photo. He explained: "I like sports. He is a world champion. He is very handsome; I like him very much. Thus, I put his photo as my profile photo."

When asked about if this photo will cause misunderstanding, he indicated it would not because he wrote in his profile “The photo is not mine” which is a reminder to potential mates because he did not want to cause misunderstanding if someone did not know Ning Zetao,

Gay men who disclosed their face photos on Blued also need to make a balance between deception and authenticity. Eight out of the 30 participants admitted they more or less beautified their face photos before they uploaded their photos on Blued. They all agreed it is very common act but insist they would on the one hand make their photos appear more attractive but on the other hand would control the beautifying degree on a reasonable level.

Huang, a 29-year-old gay man, uploaded a selfie on Blued, he explained how he chose and edit his face photo:

I think I’m good looking, my advantage is my face, so I’m willing to post my face photo. However, I will carefully select the selfie, because I look good in some fixed angles, so I will post selfies that are taken in fixed angles. Besides, I will use the beautify mode of my iPhone to edit my selfie. It will make my skin look much whiter and smoother.

Huang believed the beautifying act is very common and it is necessary because it shows respect to the profile page visitors. He explained:

I think it shows that you are respecting others. I think you should present your best aspect and status to others. For example, if you go to attend an interview, you definitely will dress in a decent manner. When you go for a date, you may need to brush your hair and wear makeups. I think beauty is a thing that

we all need to pursue, we all need to respect and insist. Therefore, I think beautifying my selfie is necessary.

Huang continued to explain how he maintain a balance between authenticity and desirability:

How to control the beautifying degree? For example, if your height is 175 cm, you'd better not make your photo looks like you are 185cm, but I would accept if it looks like your height is 180. Don't make it too exaggerated. In addition, I think it is acceptable if you make your skin look brighter and smoother, but do not do anything to the photo to make your eyes appear bigger and nose bridge look higher and chin appear sharpener. Just take my profile photo for example, I have eye bags, but I make use of the light and angle to make it looks like I have no eye bags. If you solely depend on the beautifying tools, it would be deceptive. In the end, you are going to meet offline, right?

Hong, 31-year-old gay men, strengthened that he tried to make his face photo as authentic as possible when he used the beautifying tools. He said:

Every time before I upload my face photo, I would beautify them. Most of the time, when you look at my profile photos and then look at me offline, I think there is no big difference between online and offline. I do not like to use too much beautifying tools, the slight beautifying function my OPPO smartphone's camera is enough for me. If you look carefully at my photo, you could still notice the blemish on my skin. I would never make it looks like my skin looks perfectly smooth and pure. I will make it look real.

Some participants mentioned that they do not want to contact with those whose face photos are beautified in an exaggerated manner. For example, Liao, a 28-year-old gay

man, said: “I would not click those profiles whose face photos were obviously beautified, although it looks very pretty, it is not authentic.” Zhang, a 30-year-old gay man, said: “I believe those who do not beautify their face photos are more genuine.” The way how they evaluate others’ face photos may also influence their own beautifying decision and techniques of face photos. Making face photos look too perfect is not a good option as it makes photos lose authenticity.

### *Establishing Credibility*

Blued allow its users to use limited information to present themselves. With a majority of the users not willing to disclose their face photos, credibility is a major concern for Blued users. In order to establish credibility of their profiles, some users take different strategies to construct their profiles. Some use verified face photos to establish credibility, some use moments to record their life and support their self-description about their personal interests, characteristics.

For some of the participants who disclosed their face photos on Blued, seeking verification certificate of their face photos on it can be seen as a way to establish credibility.

Hong, a 31-year-old gay man, used a verified photo as his profile main photo, and he explained why he wanted to use verified face photos:

I think a lot of gay men use fake photos in their profiles. Previously when my profile main photo was not verified by the platform, a lot of people came to

me and asked me if my profile photo is real. I was annoyed by these questions, so I decided to make my photo verified by the platform.

Hong would also give priority to the users who also used verified photos, he said:

When I browse the profiles of others, I will first click those profiles who have verified face photos, then I would click those profiles with face photos but not verified, I don't have much interest to those who did not have face photos in their profiles.

Similarly, Teng, a 28-year-old gay man, also used a verified face photo in his Blued profile, he explained:

I think if you use your personal face photo will attract more people to say hi to you. Make the face photo verified would make your profile look more authentic, you just make sure to those who have doubts about your photos that these photos are all real.

Some participants use moments to keep a record of their life, and also use the moments to establish credibility. The moments function of Blued is similar to Twitter on which the users can post photos and texts.

For example, Feng, a 35-year-old gay man, wrote in his bio that he likes doing gym. In order to establish credibility about his personal interests, he used the moments in Blued to record his gym activities. He posted like “day 660, swimming for 30 minutes, doing 50 pull-ups. Doing 50 deep squats” and “Day 661, finished running for 3 kilometers, accumulated 2333 kilometers. Finishing doing 50 pull-ups, 50 pull-downs”. In this circumstance, Feng makes his self-description about his interest more credible by recording his daily achievements in a detailed manner on Blued.

Similarly, Zhou, a 36-year-old gay man, wrote “I like travelling” in his profile. Besides just a simple sentence describing his personal interests, he also posted many photos which show his rich travelling history. In this circumstance, his photos make his interest become more credible.

Cai also mentioned he would not talk to those who don’t have moments on Blued. He said:

When I evaluate the profiles of others, First, I will see his profile photo, then I will see his basic information. If he doesn’t have any updates in the moments, I will not say hi to him. I think a person have his joys and sorrows, from the moments, I can know more about his characteristics, if he has nothing there, it would be difficult for me to know him.

### ***Bypassing Platform Restrictions***

Following the law of China, Blued has very strict rules for the users. In the terms of use of Blued, Blued regulated that users are forbidden to include any sexual cues in the profiles, for example words that mentioned casual sex, description about the sex organ, and sexually explicit photos are also forbidden. However, most of the participants admitted looking for casual sex is one of the motivations they use Blued. The interface design of Blued provide 4 relational goals options for users to choose from: looking for chats, looking for dates, looking for friends, looking for boyfriends and looking for gym partners. Looking for casual sex is not provided as an option, though it is major goal of many users. Some participants would express their goal of looking for casual sex in private conversation, some would use some homophones or euphemism to refer to



casual sex or kinkys. For example, Teng, a 26-year-old gay man, wrote in his profile: “farmer (nong), if you know it, contact me”. Here “farmer” means cum control and edging which is kind of sexual play and was fond of by a small group of gay men. Nong, in Chinese means farmer, and it is an euphemism of cum control. Using the word “nong” is a safe option, because it is not a sensitive word and will not be blocked by the platform. Some participants said they often notice some users writing in their profiles like ‘be direct if you want something’ which usually means they are open to casual sex. They know what kind of sensitive words are forbidden by the platform and instead they developed their code to refer to those sexual activities.

Dan, a 24-year-old gay man, explained how the platform shaped his self-presentation. He used a scenery photo which was taken during travelling as his profile photo, while originally, he explained his bare legs as profile photo which was later removed by the platform due to violation of the rules.

The app is also designed for adults which should be over the age of 18. While juveniles under the age of 18 usually need to fake their ages to circumvent the platform restrictions. Fu, a 23 years old gay man, remembered when he started using Blued, he was 17 and was still a high school student. He said: “At that time, all the information except my age are real. I faked my age older otherwise I would not be allowed to register in this app.”

#### **Research Question 4a: What's the reason non-disclosure of face photos on Blued?**

Twenty-two out of 30 participants admitted they did not disclose their photos on Blued.

After analyzing data from interview transcripts, the following seven themes are outlined to explain gay men's non-disclosure of face photos on Blued: (1) concern of exposing gay identity 2) Location of the user, 3) relational goals, 4) slut shaming, 5) lack of confidence in personal appearance, and 6) concerns about photos being misused has also influenced Chinese gay men's decision of no face disclosure in the relationship application.

##### ***Concern of exposing gay identity***

Twelve out of 22 participants explained the major concern of disclosing a face photo on Blued is that it might expose their gay identity to others which include family members, colleagues, friends, gay peers and curious people as the proximity function of Blued allow one's profile to be viewed by all the nearby users. All the 22 participants are either deep in the closet or have been out to only a few very close friends.

Wen, 31, lives in Shanghai and works as a teacher in middle school, said he does not post his face or body photos on Blued because it might ruin his career if his gay identity is exposed. He described his experience:

You know, as a middle school teacher, I'm worried my career would be ruined if I'm known to be a gay man. I'm not sure if my colleagues and my school will accept my gay identity. I once read a news that a teacher in Shandong was fired by his employer because children's parents worried a gay teacher would set a bad example to the students. I also heard one of my

colleagues said homosexuality is disgusting. I'm worried about this, so I will not post my face photo on Blued, instead, I use a fake photo in case someone who suspects my identity might find my profile on Blued. I even don't log into Blued when I'm working at school.

Ding, 29, works as a flight attendant in Nanchang, also concerned about being known by his colleagues.

There are many gay male colleagues in my company, I don't want to be known by them. I'm not out of the closet yet. If some gay male colleagues who are out of the closet notice my Blued profile and know it's me, they may gossip with other straight colleagues, it would be embarrassing.

College student Xing, 21, refrained from using his face photos because he does not want to be identified by other gay peers who do not have face photos either. Xing put it this way:

I live on campus where there are a lot of gay peers in my university. Every time when I log into Blued, I can see several users are just a dozen meters away. It makes me feel scary. Many of them don't have their face photos either, why would I upload my face photos there. If they know me, but I don't know whom they are, it's not gonna be fair. If I put my face photos there, it's just like I'm standing in the light, while they are standing in the shadow.

As Blued can be signed and logged in by anyone who knows this app, Kai 36, are fearful of being threatened or extorted if his gay identity is being known by some curious straight guys. He explained:

There was a period when I indeed posted my face photos there. At that time, I was thinking it doesn't matter because all the users are gay men, and I am not worried being exposed to other gay men on it. The other day, a gay friend

of mine saw my profile and warned me not to upload my face photos there. He believed that everyone knows this app can register and log into it and this app cannot guarantee every user is indeed a gay man. There might be some people who are not gay men but are curious about gay men's life may sign and log in to this app. If those kinds of people know you are gay, they might do something not good to you or even threaten you. You would be in trouble. I was convinced by him. As an ancient Chinese proverb goes: one shouldn't have the heart to harm others but must be vigilant so as not to be harmed. Then I deleted my face photos and upload a car's photo which I took during an event instead. Although the possibility of encountering these bad guys is small, if you meet once, he/she will screw up your life. If my neighbors or my colleagues know I am a gay man through Blued, I will feel ashamed and it will cause big trouble for me. I think being gay is not accepted in contemporary Chinese society.

Eleven of the participants revealed that, they are using another gay dating app called Aloha along with Blued. When asked about any difference in face disclosure strategies between the two platforms, 9 of the interviewed admitted they put their personal face photos on Aloha. This shows the platform itself can shape the strategies of how gay men present their photos on dating apps. The design of Blued make Chinese gay men feel the danger of exposing their gay identify.

Guo described the reason why he always disclosed his face photos on Aloha, while he did not disclose on Blued.

The two platforms are hugely different, Blued shows all the gay men geographically close to you, anyone you want to know, or you don't want to know, while Aloha utilized the swipe function similar to Tinder and incorporates the photo sharing function similar to Instagram. Only when you

are matched, you can initiate a conversation. The search function of Aloha is not based on people nearby, the disadvantage of Blued is that it is easy for to be identified by people nearby.

Ding explained Aloha's design features can avoid embarrassment:

First, Blued are location based, if I post my face photo on Blued and log into this app at my workplace, my colleagues who might be gay men using Blued without uploading their photos may know you, this feeling of unequal information disclosure is not good. The friending principles of Aloha randomly recommends gay men who might be near or far. And you can only start a conversation after you swiping a yes to each other. This kind of mechanism prevents embarrassment. After you have matched with another guy, you have 80% probability to chat with him, while on Blued, although you can say hi to anybody you want, sometimes I get no reply especially when I say hi to certain good-looking guys, which makes me feel very frustrating and embarrassing. I will miss those guys I like if I don't put my face photos on Aloha.

Wu explained that most of the people on Aloha did post their photos so did him, and he thinks the quality (suzhi) of the users on Aloha are much better than on Blued:

Aloha users tend to be younger and have a higher education level and even a higher level of physical attractiveness. Young people have a higher acceptance of gay identity, they are more willing to disclose their photos on Aloha.

### ***Location of the user***

Several participants mentioned the influence of location on their decision of disclosing their face photos. In small cities, on the one hand, gay men are bored with the limited

and unchangeable users on Blued, on the other hand, conservative social attitudes towards gay men also play a role in discouraging their face-disclosure.

Cai, 25, who lives in a small city in northern China's Hebei province articulated his experience:

The city where I live rarely have new incomers, so the gay men appearing on my Blued are always the same. I'm familiar with each of their profiles and have clicked them hundreds of times. Only during holidays when those guys who work or study in big cities come back, I can see some new faces. After using it for a few years, I'm no longer as excited as I use this app in the beginning, I see no hope of meeting new person in this city. It has no significance whether I put my face photos or not.

In addition, small cities usually have traditional norms and people are more reserved towards homosexuality than big cities. Gay men in small cities feel a strong stigma associated with homosexuality, which has made them reluctant to disclose a face photo on Blued. For example, Bao 42, who lives in Aksu which is a small city in China's far remote Xinjiang province have his explanations.

The demographic information including my age, height and weight posted in the profile are all real, but I will never upload my face photos in the profile. Because the county town where I live is so small that it is very easy to be recognized by other people if I post my own face photos. People here are very traditional and they would not accept and understand homosexuality. Gay men in my city are very protective, most of them don't have a face photo on Blued. If I live in metropolitan cities like Beijing or Shanghai, I might post my face photos, because when you walk in the streets there, nobody will care who you are.

For some participants, they may use different disclosing strategies in different locations.

Qing, 24, works for a bank in Shenzhen which is one of China's largest cities but comes from a small village in Quanzhou in China's southeastern province Fujian. His experience of going back home also confirms that gay men in small cities or towns consider the location as a problem. Qing usually use a photo of himself though with a blurry face, while he becomes more protective when he goes back to his hometown.

Qing described his experience of editing and constructing his profile photo on Blued:

When I am in Shenzhen, at least I would use my own photo as the profile photo such as a blurry face with body or a back photo, which can show at least my body type, though not disclosing my face. However, every time when I go back to my hometown, I become very cautious. I delete any photo that is recognizable and upload a photo of a flower or a tree or whatever. You know, I live in a small village, the neighbors all know me, and I have a lot of acquaintances. I don't want to be recognized.

Some participants use a face photo when they travel to a location that is far away from his familiar environment. Wen put it like:

I use a fake photo as my profile photo most of the time, however, when I spend my holidays overseas or in places that are far away from the city I live, I will upload my face photo there so as to make sexual hookup become easy and fast.

### ***Relational Goals***

The relational goal of using Blued can on some occasion influence the participants' decision to disclose a face photo or not. Participants have various goals, including

looking for friends, looking for casual sex and looking for long-term relationships. A majority of them have multiple purposes and their purposes may change over the time. Bao, 42, indicated that he had a boyfriend, so his purpose of using Blued is to pass the time when he feels boring. He looks for nothing. It is unnecessary to post his face photo otherwise his boyfriend will be mad. Guo, 38, also mentioned that relational goal is an important factor in not disclosing his face photos. He currently used a non-naked body picture without his face as the profile photo, and he explained:

The reason why I am not posting my photo there is not because of privacy concerns, I have been out to my parents, I do not worry about gay identity being known by others. It is because currently I'm in no mood to socialize or hookup via Blued. When I want to have something, I will put my face photo there because I want other people have a basic idea of my appearance before they send message to me.

Bao and Guo's experience showed that relational goal can be a factor influencing their willingness to disclose their face photos. With the relational goal changes, their photo presentation strategies also change.

### ***Slut shaming associated with the hookup app***

Several participants regard Blued as a magical tool for hookup (yue pao shen qi). Although these participants use Blued, they have a negative impression about Blued and they associate it with promiscuity or HIV. This kind of impression made some interviewees feel stigmatized to post a face photo on it. Those who put personal photo on Blued can be viewed as sexually promiscuous in the eyes of some participants. For



example, Dan, 24, don't allow himself to post any of his own photos, he even would not want to meet those guys who post their photo on Blued:

I will pass those who post their own face photos, this app is very vulgar and those who post their face photos might reflect they are out of the closet or they are sexually promiscuous. I like to have a relationship with those who are also deep in the closet. I have always been trying to keep a low profile. I would like to meet with straight acting gay men who are also deep in the closet. Do you think straight acting guys would post their photos on it?

Some participants believed Aloha are not so hook-up oriented as Blued. They regard Aloha as more a more serious app for making friends and looking for long-term relationships. For example, Wang emphasized that he put face photos on Aloha because it is more pure than Blued:

Because the 'searching people nearby' function, Blued provides a fast and easy way for people hookup, it strengthens meeting right now and the hooking up purpose of its users are very obvious. While if you use Aloha to hookup, it's not that convenient, so people concentrate on sharing their life on it and they have more time to know about each other, which is good for making friends and establishing long-term relationships.

### ***Lack of confidence in personal appearance***

No matter in heterosexual or homosexual dating world, appearance is always a priority for consideration. On dating apps, there are always some discrimination against elderly, fat and ugly-looking gay men. The culture of "what is beautiful is good" put a lot of pressure on many gay men, and those who are not confident in personal appearance

lacks the courage to put their photos on Blued. For example, Han who put a photo of a plane wing as his profile photo, explained why he did not use his face photo:

I put this photo because I like areophane. I don't put my personal photo because I think I'm not a good-looking guy. It makes no sense if I put my face photo there, it will attract nobody. I don't want to meet with those guys who only pay attention to appearance, I want to impress others with my good ethics and good personality characteristics.

Fu, 23, who is not satisfied with his body shape and appearance has similar reason as Han, he articulated:

I think I'm a little bit fat. I have no confidence in my body shape. I'm not willing to put my photo and to be judged by other people there. Many gay men use their body to attract others' attention, I don't have that kind of capital.

### ***Concerns about photos being misused***

Some gay men are worried that their photos might be downloaded and saved by other people who would use these photos as fake photos or cheat others. For example, Ling, 25, mentioned that he did post his face photo for a short time. However, a bad experience he encountered made him change his mind, he recounted:

I did put my selfie photo of doing gym on Blued and this photo was misused by another guy. I didn't know it until one day a gay friend of mine saw it on Blued and screenshot the profile asking if this account is mine. I was shocked about this, then I contact with that guy, he doesn't think it's a big issue, the guy even argued 'as long as you put your photo on a public social media, then it means everybody can use your photo. I use your photo because I think highly of you, you'd better not consider yourself as a celebrity'.

This kind of photo misuse is also confirmed by two participants because they admitted they used the internet photo as their own photos.

### **Research question 5: How do Chinese gay men evaluate the profiles of others?**

Constructing one's own profile and evaluating the profiles of others are interrelated. Chinese gay men's construction of profiles is affected by how they evaluate the profiles of others. Therefore, it is very important to ask interviewees how they evaluate the profiles of others. After analyzing the data, Chinese gay men are found to evaluate the profiles of others in 3 major ways: (1) Filtering; (2) Paying attention to small cues (3) Believing in rampant deception.

#### ***Filtering***

Blued allows its users to filter potential mates through a series of criteria such as age, height, weight, sexual role or distance.

Some gay men believed demographic statistics are very important when the profile did not include a face photo. They used the filtering function to filter out their ideal candidates. Wen, 30, described his experience:

When I evaluate the profiles of other, I think height, age and photos are three most important elements. In addition, the distance between each other is also very important. If his profile does not contain his personal face photo, I would also be willing to have a chat with him if his demographic statistics meet my

requirements. I think he might have similar condition like me who do not post a face photo there because of my job.

Age is the most frequently mentioned criteria when they evaluate the profiles of others among the participants. Yuan, 53, albeit his age is further above the average age of Blued users, still regarded age as the most important factor. He said:

I would filter by age, height and weight. But I think age is the most important factor to me. When I was younger than now, I was only interested in handsome boy under the age of 25. Although now I have changed my attitude towards age, I still have no interest in guys above the age of 40.

For users of Blued, when they evaluate the profiles of others, they will also see the geographical distance between each other. Most of the users will consider distance as an important factor when they decide whether they feel interested in others' profiles or not.

A majority of the participants would filter their potential mates within the range of a close distance. For example, Jiang, 31, said:

I would look for people on the basis of proximity. I care the distance very much. Because if we are close to each other, we can have sex directly after we are matched with each other. I have no interest in those who are far away. It is not convenient to have sexual hookup.

Similarly, Wen, said:

I think the distance between each other is an important factor when filtering the profiles. If our locations are close to each other, the chances of meeting, knowing or hooking up with each other will increase.

Hong, 29, said his social circle on Blued was also restrained by the distance. He described his experience: “Usually I would only check the profiles who are around my location. I am only willing to scroll a dozen profiles, then I don’t want to continue scrolling the profiles.”

### *Paying Attention to Small Cues*

When evaluating the profiles of others, participants have a lot of experience of judging the economic background, educational background and aesthetic level according to the small cues in the profiles. Du said:

First, I would have a look at the photos posted on their profiles. I think from the photos I can more or less have a basic understanding about their background. For example, those who post a lot of scenery photos in their profiles might not have a good taste. Then I would have a look at their text description, from which I can know their relational goal. From these cues, I can have a basic idea of what kind of this person is. If I feel I have the impetus to chat with him, then I will initiate a conversation on Blued.

Kai believed that photo can be a reflection of one’s inner mind, he said:

When I evaluate the profiles of others, I would be very interested in those profiles with muscle photos. If their profiles do not contain any face photos or body photos, I would prefer those profiles containing scenery photos. A photo can reflect the inner world of a person. If I have different options, I will choose those who post scenery photos.

When asked about how he reacted to the judgement that scenery photos are usually the options of middle-aged man, Kai continued:

I think this judgement makes sense. Because when I am at the age of 20, I would probably not post scenery photos. But with my age increasing, my aesthetic standard will change. I agree with the opinion that gay men who liked posting scenery photos are usually at an old age. I found several friends whose age is similar to mine would like to post scenery photos in their Blued profiles or in the moments of their WeChat.

Gay men who use scenery photos in their profile photos are usually considered having a poor education background and low taste. Cai, a 25-year-old gay man, said if he has no interest in those who used scenery photos as their profile photos. He explained:

I think those whose profile photos are scenery photos are usually men whose age are over 30 or 40. If those who used scenery photos reported a young age, I don't think their information is real. Probably they falsified their age. I would say so because I noticed from my WeChat that most of my colleagues who are aged over 35 used photos of a tree or a flower or sea as their profile photo. On the contrary, young people would like to use their personal photos or artistic photos downloaded from Internet.

Similar to Cai's opinion, Ding, a 29-year-old gay man, said:

Though some gay men do not post their personal photos. I can still infer their taste from the photos they posted. If they use photos like flowers or plants, I think they have a low taste. I find that gay men aged over 40 or 50 are fond of using scenery photos very much. For example, I like cartoon, if someone's profile photo used a cartoon photo, I would definitely click his profile instead of clicking those who used scenery photos.

Besides judging the aesthetic standards of other gay men through the profile photos, some participants would also judge different relational goals when they are evaluating

the photos of others. As explicitly indicating looking for sex is not allowed due to platform restrictions, some participants would use body photos like chest photo or muscle photos to showcase their masculinity or implicitly expressing they are looking for sex. When some participants evaluate the photos of others, they would think gay men who post sexy photos are usually looking for sex, and people who are looking for serious relationships would not post any sexy photos.

Dan, 24, showed the researcher a screen shot of a grid of users near him. He pointed to one profile which shows a man taking a faceless selfie in front of a bathroom mirror with his upper body naked. He said:

Look at this man, he is so horny. What's the matter with him? Do you know what he is looking for? He definitely wants to look for casual sex. I would not say hi to him because now I'm not crazy for sex. I will not take risks.

Similarly, Feng, 35, also thinks photos are the most important elements when evaluating the profiles of other, and he also regards that those who post sexy photos want to look for sex. He said:

Even though many gay men do not post their face photos. But no matter what kind of photos they post, these photos always say something. Usually if some gay men post muscle photos or chest photos in their profiles, they may want to look for casual sex.

Some participants would also judge the economic and social status of others from the cues reflected in the profile photos. For example, if the profile shows a lot of tourism photos, or if the settings of photos look fancy, the profile's owners would usually be

interpreted as having a good economic and social status in the eyes of some participants.

For example, Hong described:

I noticed that some gay men would like to post some fancy photos in their profiles, like the photos showing them travelling here and there, eating in expensive restaurants, or wearing fashionable clothes, carrying luxury bags. From my perspective, I can feel these guys are usually from big cities and they are kind of like socialites. On the other hand, you look at the photos of other gay men, and you can feel they come from small cities.

Similarly, Yao has the same feeling as Hong, he said:

I would pay attention to the photos when I evaluate the profiles of others. For example, if the photos he posted in his profile make feel like he is a socialite, then I would have no interest in him. Because for one thing, his lifestyle is not going to match mine. For another thing, is his life really like he showed on the photos. This kind of person is too boastful and they like show off himself, like where he has been travelled, what gourmet he had eaten, and how handsome he is. I don't think they have much inside except these super facial things.

Some participants would evaluate the profiles of others from the perspective of their hobbies. As many participants would put photos of their favorite cartoon characters or their favorite celebrities in their profiles. These kinds of photo don't mean they would not attract anyone's attention. Some participants admitted they sometimes can judge the hobbies of others from the profile photos. If they think they may have similar hobbies, they are still willing to initiate an online conversation to know each other further. For example, Bao would sometimes be willing to know someone if the guy's profile contained something that he is fond of, said:



I would decide who I want to chat with primarily on the basis of the photo. Because photos are direct, beautiful photos are feast for the eyes. They don't necessarily to have face photos there. For example, if he used a photo of Mickey mouse, I would be interested in talking with him. If he posts a photo of Shrek, I will not talk with him. Mickey mouse is my favorite cartoon character, while Shrek is not.

Teng, 26 admitted he had a foot fetish, so he would be interested in those profiles that contain photos of foot or legs. "I would be very interested in talking with guys whose profiles contain photos of foot. This means we have some hobbies, and we belong to the same group. I would have many common topics with them."

### **Believing in Rampant Deception**

When evaluating the profiles of others, many participants complained about the rampant deception issue on Blued. Du, 29, indicated:

When I view the profiles of others, I would not choose to believe in the numbers they provided. I would deduct at least 3 centimeters on the basis of their self-reported height. For example, if someone reports his height at 174 cm, probably his height is only 170 cm.

Similarly, Wen, 30, described:

I think the presentation on Blued profiles is just like an advertisement which is used to attract potential customers. For someone who is old, he might adjust his age to a younger age. For someone who is not confident in his height and weight, he might lie about his height and weight, which makes them look more higher and healthier.

Ding, 29, also attached great importance to age, height and weight. He also believed the authenticity of the information on Blued profiles is very low. He explained:

I think gay men would not honestly self-report their data. For example, for gay men who is as old as me, they would usually report 2-3 years younger than their actual age. For those who think they are not tall enough, they would add 2 to 3 centimeters to their actual height. Therefore, I think the authenticity is very low. I feel like even the face photos on Blued are fake.

Several participants also mentioned the deception of sexual role. Usually if a gay man's sexual role is top, he would report his sexual role honestly in his profile. However, some gay men whose sexual role is bottom, they would report it as versatile or choose not to report their sexual role. For example, Hong said:

I think ninety-five percent of the guys who report themselves as versatile are bottom indeed. Probably they are shy of being bottom, because in China being a bottom is sometimes associated with feminine. They report themselves as versatile because they want to behave like they have the masculine side. But when they look for sex or look for a long-term relationship, most of them would want to look for a top.

Zhang admitted he was bottom in the interview and he also indicated he was bottom in his profile. He had the experience of meeting a self-claimed versatile guy but in the end found the guy was actually bottom.

The guy indicated in his profile he was versatile. I trust it. I think it was nice if someone can play two roles. We chatted on Blued, and I asked him to have sex with me. But in the end, he told me he is only psychologically versatile but a bottom when having sex. What a joke.

Du, a bottom, said he would never be interested in versatile because he believed most of the gay men self-claiming as versatile are indeed bottom. He described:

I'm bottom, I'm only interested in pure top. Many gay men are bottom actually, but they write in their profiles that they are top. I think the women is at a disadvantageous position in the society, and many bottoms are very feminine. In order to cover themselves a protective umbrella, gay men self-claiming they are versatile would make them feel they are not in a disadvantageous position.

Wang had his explanation about why many bottoms like to self-report themselves as versatile on Blued profiles. He said:

I think in most of the cities, there are much more bottoms than tops. It's a very competitive situation for guys being bottom. If a bottom cheat they are versatile, that would bring them more chances of being attracted by both tops and bottoms. Usually, when compared to bottoms, versatile seems like more masculine, so versatile would be more popular among pure tops. That's the reason I think why many bottoms would like to label themselves as versatile in their dating profiles.

As using a beautifying app to edit the photo is very common among gay men. Nearly all the participants admitted they would beautify their photos before they post in their profiles or send it to others. When participants evaluate the face, photos posted in the profiles of others, they will usually lower their expectations.

Han, 27, described how he thought of the face photos posted by others on Blued:

I never beautified my photos, because I like to be real. But from my experience, I think most of the time photos look better than real person. I

barely meet someone who look better than photos. Beautifying the photos would definitely make you look much better.

Hong said he would lower his expectation when he viewing the photos posted by others on Blued after he had some unhappy experiences. He described his experience:

Last year when I went to the city of Shaoyang, a guy talked to me on Blued and asked me to hang out with him. His face and body photos look perfect, while when we met face to face, I felt very disappointed. He indicated in his profile that his height was 181cm, however his actual height was only around 172cm. His photos made me feel he had a good body shape and muscles, but when I met him, I didn't believe he has any muscles. His skin is not as bright and smooth as the photos show. I felt I was cheated. He just edited his photos to make him look more attractive.

Han continued to describe another experience of being cheated by the beautified photos:

I remember one time when I was on a business trip to the city of Huaihua. A college student talked to me on Blued, he wanted to have casual sex with me. I was satisfied with his profile photos, so I let him come to my hotel. When he arrived, I felt very disappointed. Although I know his photos might have been beautified, but I had never expected there was such a big difference between the photo image and the real person. I didn't expect a young college student's skin was that bad. His face skin was like lunar surface.

Cai did not have any doubts about the profile's photos before, but after encountering a few bad experiences, he became more skeptical of the photos presented by others on Blued. He said:

I think I'm an innocent person. I usually choose to totally believe what other people posted in their profiles. But after some unhappy experience, I became more skeptical. I remember one time one guy talked to me on Blued. He wrote

in his profile that his height was 180cm and weight was around 65kg. His profile photos look very handsome. That's the reason why I decided to meet him offline. But when I met him in person, I found his profile was totally fake, his height was just above 170cm and his weight was nearly 100kg. I talked with him for a few seconds and then left.

Yuan, 53, once had the experience of being cheated by others. He became more skeptical of the information provided by in other gay men's profiles. He said:

It's very difficult for me to believe in the things on the Internet. I think their reported height is higher than their actual height. For those whose age is old, they would report a younger age than their actual age. Usually, their weight is lighter than their actual weight.

Yuan was cheated several times by fake photos. One time he was scammed and lost a large amount of money. He described his experience as being seduced by good-looking photos:

A guy talked to me on Blued one night. I saw his profile photos, and he was young and handsome. He is definitely my type. He used the fake photos, seduce me and got my trust. After we got familiar with each other online, he persuaded me into an online gambling game in which I lost 35000 yuan. When I realized I was cheated, it was too late. In the end, I found his profile photos were fake, and they are photos of Internet celebrities. I didn't realize it at first. From then, I did not trust the profile photos, I will insist on verifying the photo through online video chat.

Some participants believe photo beautifying is a very common act among gay men, and they believe in their ability to differentiate the degrees of photo beautifying. For example, Wu said:

Usually, I could tell if the photos have been beautified. I would tell if the person's skin is good or not. Some of my friends have pores on their face, but their skin looks very smooth after the beautifying work.

## **Conclusion**

For Chinese gay met, their impression management include three processes: impression motivation, impression construction and impression evaluation. Chinese gay men's motivations of constructing a profile vary. There are five major motivations: 1) looking for casual sex, 2) looking for romantic/long-term relationships, 3) looking for friends, 4) entertainment and 5) convenience. When Chinese gay men construct their profiles, they use 4 techniques: 1) pay attention to small cues; 2) balance deception and authenticity; 3) establishing credibility; 4) bypassing platform restrictions. When Chinese gay men construct their profiles, most of them choose not to disclose their face photos. The reasons behind non-disclosure of face photos are: 1) Fear of exposing gay identity; 2) the design feature of Blued. 3) Location of the user, 4) relational goals, 5) lack of confidence in personal appearance, 6) slut shaming, and 7) concerns of photos being misused. Evaluation the impression constructed by others also affect Chinese gay men's impression construction. Chinese gay men use three ways in their evaluation process: 1) paying attention to small cues; 2) filtering; 3) believing in rampant deception. Figure 26 is the concept map of Chinese gay men's impression management on Blued.

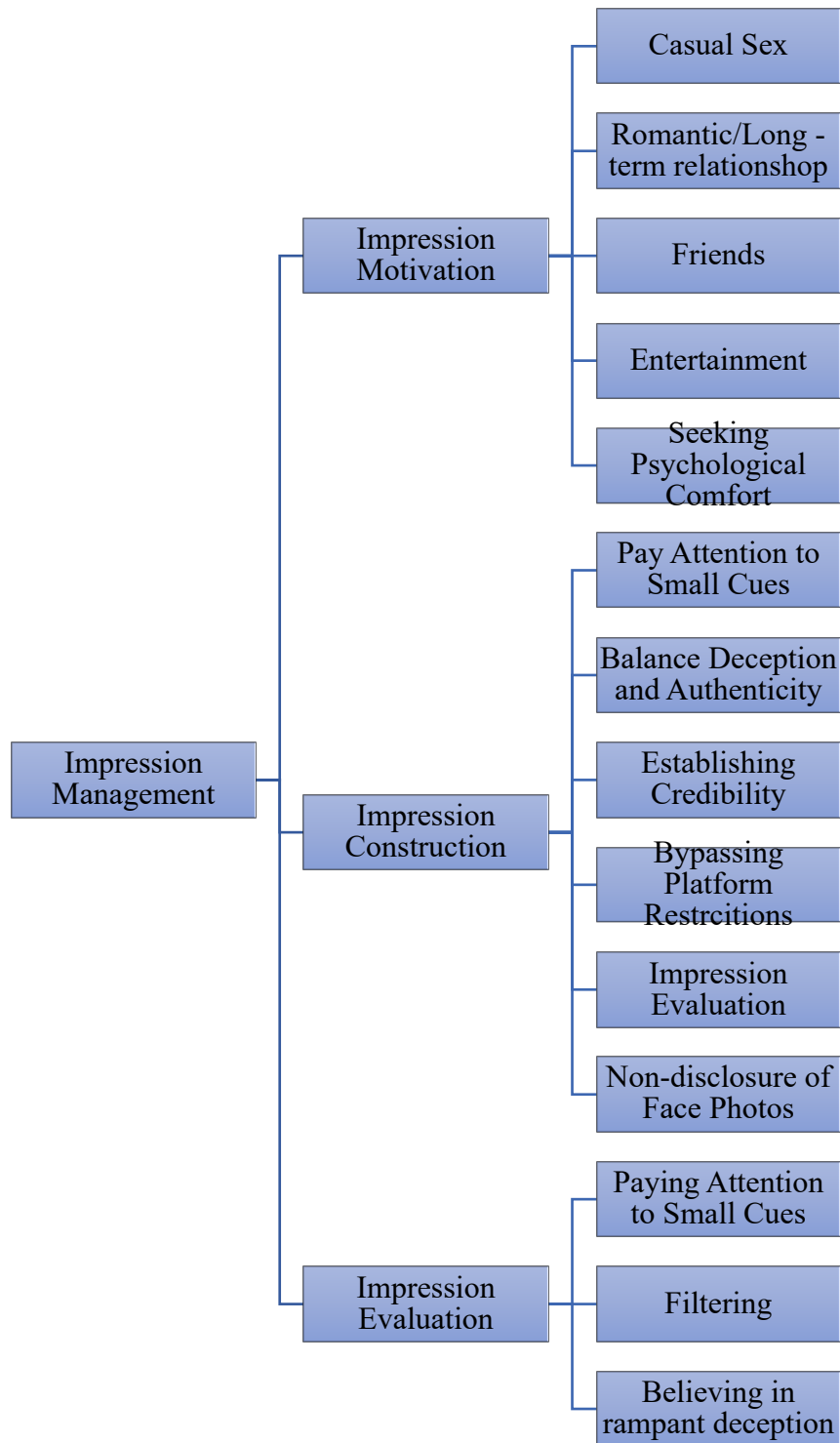


Figure 26: Concept Map of Chinese Gay Men's Impression Management on Blued

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways how Chinese gay men present themselves on China's largest gay dating app Blued. In this investigation, two studies were conducted. Study one was a content analysis of 930 Chinese gay men's Blued profiles. As a content analysis of profiles can only help us gain a quantitative understanding of the photographic and textual elements of Chinese gay men Blued profiles, thus in-depth interviews are conducted to facilitate a further understanding of how and why Chinese gay men present themselves in certain ways. In Study two, 30 participants self-identified as gay men were interviewed.

Few scholars have focused specifically on Chinese gay men's self-presentation on dating apps, and fewer still have done so by using a mixed methods approach. A handful of studies that exist focused on gay men's self-presentation on dating apps have included gay men in western countries especially in North America and Europe. However, the Chinese society differ in many ways from western societies, particularly for gay men. Thus, the current study adds to the literature on dating apps, as well as the literature on gay men's self-presentation, motives of using dating app, construction of masculinity, deceptive presentation and partner preference and non-disclosure of face photos.



## **General Research Questions**

The aim of the study was to explore Chinese gay men's self-presentation on Blued. In study one, a content analysis of 930 gay men Blued profiles sought to understand:

3. How do Chinese gay men present themselves visually on Blued?
  - 1b. Will there be difference by demographics in the disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued?
4. How do Chinese gay men use masculinity, body and sport language to present themselves on Blued?
  - 2a. Will there be difference by demographics in the use of different types of language among Chinese gay men on Blued?

In study 2, an in-depth interview was conducted to address the follow research questions:

3. What's Chinese gay men's motivation of using Blued?
4. How do Chinese gay men construct their Blued profiles?
  - 4a. What's the reason of non-disclosure of face photos among Chinese gay men on Blued?
5. How do Chinese gay men evaluate the profiles of others?

In this final chapter, I return to these central questions to discuss the major findings from this study. I begin by summarizing the major findings from the research and discuss the findings with relevant literature. Next, I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this study, Lastly, I discuss the limitations and recommendations for future research.

### **Motives of Constructing a Blued Profile**

In study 1, the results of content analysis of 930 profiles shows that 42.5% (n=476) Chinese gay men did not disclose their relational goals on their Blued profiles. Nearly one-fifth of gay men reported looking for a boyfriend. One hundred and seventy-three of the gay men (n=173; 15.7%) reported looking for a casual chat. Just more than one-tenth of the gay men (n=151; 13.7%) reported looking for romantic date. A small number of the gay men (n=46; 4.2%) reported looking for friends, and a similar percentage of the gay men (n=53; 4.8%) reported looking for fitness partners. Only 1.1% (n=12) in the sample reported looking for casual sex.

In study 2, the results show that there are four major relational goals which are looking for casual sex, looking for romantic/long-term relationships, and looking for friends, and seeking psychological comfort via chatting with others on Blued. Some participants don't necessarily have a relational goal, they use Blued to pass the time or for entertainment purpose. In addition, their relational goals are not static and may change in different time and circumstances.

Generally speaking, the types of relational goals self-reported in their profiles and the motives reported from the interviews are consistent. The findings are also generally in line with the results of previous studies about gay men's motives of dating app usage (e.g., Jaspal, 2017; Wiele & Tong 2014, Wu & Ward, 2019). However, there is a big contrast with regard to the relational goal of "looking for sex" between the results of content analysis and findings of the interview. In the content analysis of Blued profiles, only 1.1% of the profiles indicated looking for casual sex, while from the findings of interview data, a majority of the participants admitted they would use Blued to look for casual sex, which is the most prominent goal the participants reported in the interview data. This big difference shows the goals indicated on gay men's profiles does not necessarily reflect the real intentions of Blued daters.

The reason why there is a big contrast with regard to the relational goal of looking for casual sex may be related to the following factors:

Firstly, Blued is regulated by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC). The CAC was established in 2014 and is China's top Internet regulator. It is in charge of cyberspace security and Internet content regulation. Its main roles include directing, coordinating and supervising online content. In order to survive in this strictly regulated market, Blued has been strengthening its self-regulation by using AI technology and content management team to detect and delete content that are considered to be vulgar, obscene or pornographic. Any language related to sex is regarded as obscene. In the part of "I'm looking for..." on Blued, there is no option of looking for casual sex for

users to choose. In the text description part on Blued profiles, users are not allowed to write any words or phrases that are related to looking for sex. For example, phrases like yuepao (looking for casual sex) or 419 (for one night stand) is strictly prohibited. In order to get around the regulation, some users use implicit language or euphemism to refer to looking for sex. The 12 profiles out of 930 profiles indicating looking for casual sex all used implicit language or euphemism like yue (pinyin for hook-up) or “可”(can) to show their goal of looking for casual sex. Thus, the institutional regulation has shaped how Chinese gay men present themselves on Blued. Though a small number of Chinese gay men use “smart” ways to express their goal of looking for sex on their Blued profiles, most of the users are regulated to present their image in accordance with the rules of CAC and the platform. Since 1988, homosexuality has been thought as equivalent to pornography, obscenity and vulgarity, and is therefore regarded as illegal content in a regulation formulated by NWGCPIP —the National Work Group for Combating Pornography and Illegal Publications (NWGCPIP 2014). Wang (2020) indicated that “the principle that homosexuality is a measure of pornography, obscenity, and vulgarity has been in place ever since and serves as a protocol for today’s sexual censorship (p.550).”

Secondly, Chinese gay men might feel stigmatized to indicate looking for casual sex or hook up on their Blued profiles even they could use implicit ways to get around the strict rules with regard to sexually suggestive language. Birnholtz et al. (2014) suggested that “in theorizing about how people use mobile applications, we should consider the possibility of stigmatized behaviors or practices” (p.11). There is a tension

for people to directly express their needs for sex, especially with regard to potentially stigmatized behavior like casual sex or “hooking up” (Birnholtz et al., 2014). Jaspal (2017) suggested in his research that “Grindr, as a discreet means of connecting with others, restored the sense of self-efficacy that was sometimes challenged by the social stigma of casual sex among gay men” (p.196). This stigma related to sex is especially prominent in Chinese culture. Although homosexual activities are not illegal in China, sexual relations between men are often unaccepted and discriminated against in China (Yu et al., 2011). Therefore, Chinese gay men may suppress their need for casual sex when they construct their profiles on Blued, and they would express their sexual needs in a more discreet way, for example, they do not state in their profiles, but they would exchange their real intentions for sex in private messages on Blued. Just as Han expressed in the interview why he did not indicate the goal of looking for sex on Blued: “I think putting my sexual goal there may present a horny image, sometimes I want to look for relationships, so I indicate my sexual intention in conversations and may express different goals when I talk to different gay men.”

Another finding should be noted here is that Chinese gay men have multiple motives, and their motives may change with time and settings changing. The result of study 1 shows that 42.5% did not indicate a relational goal on their dating profiles, which might imply that it leaves more room for them to negotiate their relational goals when they interreact with other gay men on Blued. For those who indicated relational goals on Blued, many of them had multiple goals. This is consistent with the findings of the interview data that most of the participants interviewed had more than one motives. In

addition, the relational goal stated on one's Blued profile does not necessarily match his real relational goals when he interacts with other gay men on Blued. Just as previous studies found that online daters who seek casual sex can be open to romantic relationships, and vice versa (Chan 2018; Yeo & Fung 2017). Many gay men are flexible with their relational goals, which are usually negotiated when they interact with each other on dating apps (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2018). Different relational goals can coexist, for example intentions for casual sex can coexist with intentions for social relationships (Birnholtz et al., 2014; Blackwell et al., 2015; Mackee, 2016). Besides, for users who makes their relational goals look ambiguous and those whose description of goals is not consistent with their actual behavior can be understood as a way to maximize all the possibility of relations they could achieve on these apps (Chan 2018).

Chinese gay men have multiple motives of constructing a Blued profile. Different motives can coexist with one another. Their motives are not static and may change with the circumstances changing. The motives indicated on Chinese gay men's profiles may not always a true reflection of their intentions. This is very prominent for the sexual motive which is impacted not only by the cultural stigma associated with homosexuality but also by the governmental regulations on Internet content.

### **Textual and Visual Presentation**

*Masculinity language.* In study 1, the frequencies of language regarding masculinity, body and sports, and the difference by demographics in the use of different types of language were examined. The result shows that there is a high percentage of profiles

including language regarding masculinity, body, and sports. According to Miller (2018), 4.7% (15 out of 322) profiles contained either self-directed or other-directed masculinity language, 6.8% (22 out of 322) profiles contained either self-directed or other-directed body language. 13.7% (44 out of 322) contained language about sports or gym. In this research, the percentage of profiles containing language that mentioned masculinity, body and sports are 37.6%, 20.9% and 6.2% respectively, which from a general perspective is obviously much higher than the findings of Miller (2018). On the one hand, the proportion of Chinese gay men's profiles containing masculinity, body and sports is high, which is contrary to the stereotype long existed in Chinese society that gay men are usually feminine. The result showed that Chinese gay men prioritize masculinity in their profiles, which is also consistent with the culture among western gay men (Miller, 2015; Miller, 2018; Miller, 2019; Rodriguez, 2016). Another reason why China's gay men's dating profiles contained a higher percentage of masculinity and body language might also be related to the technological design of Blued, as Blued provide options for users to input their categories and body type. These settings create a culture that prioritize masculinity, as several options are related to masculinity, while none is related to femininity. The percentage of sport language use found among Chinese gay men is lower than that of gay men in the study carried out by Miller (2018), this may indicate not so many gay men in China like doing sports or workout as western gay men.

Rodriguez et al. (2016) has found gay men does not only describe fit and muscular bodies to stress their masculinity, but also gym activities and athletic abilities. The

result of study 1 found that age and BMI is significantly positively correlated with the use of masculinity language use and self-directed masculinity language use. It means that older gay men are likely to use masculine language to describe themselves to make up for the disadvantage in their ages. People with higher BMI are more likely to show their masculine traits in their height or weight and people who like using masculinity language are more likely to use body and sport language. It is in consistent with the findings of Miller (2018). This result is reasonable because body and sport language are two important aspects which indicate a man's masculine traits, therefore masculinity language are related with both body and sport language, as Miller (2018) noted: "Masculinity language and the connection between muscularity and masculinity are also evident in the way that men describe their bodies and the bodies they desire. (p.311)." In addition, as sports and gym are closely related to both bodily abilities and hegemonic masculine interests, this type of language was regarded as an extension of more generalized body language (Miller, 2018).

Although people who like describing their own masculinity are more likely to use body language both to themselves and others, more of them describing their own body than others'. On contrast, although people who like describing others' masculinity are more likely to use body language both to themselves and others, more of them describing others' body than their own.

As the language regarding masculinity, body and sport were analyzed on the basis of profile content. It cannot reflect the full picture of Chinese gay men's attitude towards



masculinity. While in in-depth interviews, participants did not talk much in this aspect. This is probably because the masculinity language are default settings by the platform. More qualitative studies need to be carried out to investigate Chinese gay men's masculinity construction on their dating profiles. As Rodriguez et al (2016) argued: "the manifestations of networked masculinities found primarily centered on companionship, sex, sexuality, and the dichotomy of power to reinforce masculine hierarchies. This process, that we have termed 'mascing,' is a way for gay males to reinforce their own masculinity while also to maintain masculine norms by seeking out masculine partners. 'Mascing' is a form of policing that reinforces a masculine elite within the gay dating app community, an elite that is predominately white, young, fit and healthy" (p. 260).

***Importance of cues.*** As computer mediated communication attaches greater importance on more controllable verbal and linguistic cues, which contributes to selective self-presentation (Walther, 1996), Blued users in this study paid attention to small cues in both their texts and photos. In traditional face-to-face meetings, people manage their impressions through both verbal and nonverbal cues (Goffman, 1959; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Dating app users are in an environment of reduced cues, and cues are static and not dynamic (Walther, 1996; Ward, 2017). On Blued, participants paid much attention to small cues in the text description to construct their profiles or evaluate the profiles of other gay men. For example, one participant in the interview believed gay men who could write English sentences or phrases in their text description might have a good education background. Therefore, he used English names and write

his self-description in English on his Blued profiles in order to prove that he has a good education background. He also believed that those who can understand the English description are more likely to have a higher education level.

Participants also paid attention to the cues of the photos they post on dating app. The cues drawn from the photo can convey the photo owner's aesthetic values, hobbies, economic background, education background and even relational goals. For example, if an individual post a photo of them doing sports, that may convey a masculine impression. If a gay man posts a photo of him travelling abroad, that could mean he is financially better off. Gay men who use a photo of a cartoon character may signal he is interested in watching cartoons. If a gay man uploads a photo showing naked body parts, that could mean he may look for casual sex. When they evaluate the profiles of others, the participants also refer to cues from other gay men's photos to judge if the owner of the photo is their type.

One interesting finding is that different participants have different perceptions about what is beauty when using photos to construct their profiles. The result of study 2 found that scenery photos are considered as rustic and are often related to middle-aged and old gay men. Many young participants will avoid talking to those gay men whose profile main photo is scenery photo because they think these gay men have a poor aesthetic value. The results show a mirroring of self-presentation with an online dater's potential matches. Ward (2017) found in her research that users like to search for people

like them. In the current study, Chinese gay men tend to search for potential partners who has similar aesthetic values with them.

There are two types of partner preferences, one is similarity preference, which means that “individuals feel most attracted to potential partners who, in important domains, are similar to themselves” (Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008, p.595). Another preference can be termed aspirational assortative preference, which means that ‘people ideally prefer partners with trait characteristics that are similar to—but better than— those that they themselves possess’ (Watson et al., 2014, p.118). Participants in the interviews noted they desire gay men who have similar aesthetic value with themselves, so they inferred from the cues shown on the photos other gay men posted on Blued. As scenery photo shows a poor taste, and every participant has their own definition of a ‘fancy’ photo. Condon & Crano (1988) proposed that people feel attracted by others who are similar to them because they want a positive evaluation from these similar others. People might seek similarity between themselves and their desired partners in different characteristics given the importance of close relationships for their development and well-being (Feeney, 2004).

***Balance deception and authenticity.*** When participants construct their profiles, many of them would use deceptive strategies. When they evaluate the profiles of other users, they believe in deception by other users and hold suspicion of other gay men’s information. Participants admitted deception in their demographics like age, height, weight, sexual roles.

Deception in weight or height and age was also reported by the participants. Participants who are not confident in their height or weight choose to adjust the numbers to make them appear more desirable. Age deception is found to be very common among many participants, especially among gay men aged over 30. While participants who admitted deception in their age believed that their age deception is not easy to be identified by others because they thought they looked younger than their actual age and they only did a minor modification. This shows that they tried to maintain a balance between deception and authenticity with regards to age deception.

Age deception reflects that youth is a very important trait appreciated among Blued users. Several studies have also found that youth is an important trait appreciated among gay men seeking partners (Valocchi 1999; Weinberg and Williams 1974). In the study conducted by Conner (2019), gay men who were older than 29 were regarded old in some profiles. Some participants also expressed fear of turning 29, because for them 29 means they are no longer young, and they are no longer be considered attractive by other gay men (Conner 2019). Conner (2019) also observed in his study that many gay men indicated a disdain for other gay men whose age is older than them in their Grindr profiles. The result of the current study is consistent with previous studies. Youthfulness is usually regarded as equivalence to attractiveness, and age is often used as an indicator of youth and attractiveness (Kaufman & Phua, 2003). Gay culture prioritizes youth (Kaufman & Phua, 2003), that's the reason why participants in the study concerned about ageism and reported age deception in their Blued profiles.

Another interesting finding of this study is that several participants in the interview mentioned the sexual role deception when they evaluate the profiles of other gay men. In study 1, the result of the content analysis shows that 36.8% of the gay men in the sample did not disclose their sexual role, 25.6% of the gay men reported their sexual role as Top, 20.4% reported their sexual role as Versatile, and 17.2% reported as Bottom. Several participants indicated in the interview that if a gay man is top, then he would honestly report it in his profile, while for some gay men whose actual role is bottom, they would report it as versatile or choose not to report it in their profile. There are several reasons that Chinese gay men misrepresent their sexual role. First, some gay men are stigmatized of self-labelling as bottom, so they choose to misrepresent their sexual role on Blued. It might also gay men who indicate as versatile or did not report their sexual role might maximize their chance of being contacted by other gay men.

The meanings of sexual roles are embedded in discourses of gender and power (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2018). Men whose sexual role is top are usually ascribed characteristics related with hegemonic masculinity—power, dominance and physical strength, however, bottoms are commonly believed to be passive and effeminate (Johns et al., 2012; Kippax and Smith, 2001). Tops are perceived as more masculine than bottoms who have the same stereotypically masculine features (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). A versatile label may provide some men the opportunity to escape the gender-role stereotypes related with sexual roles (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). This may explain why some interviewees in this study experience bottom shaming. Some gay

men are not willing to disclose their sexual role as bottom on Blued, as Chinese gay men prioritize and pursue hegemonic masculinity (Kong, 2020).

Photo beautification is a common act among gay men who posted face photos on their profiles. Participants believed it is necessary to beautify their photos before they post them on Blued. While many of them indicated they would control the degree to which their face photos are beautified, and make their photos appear authentic. Some participants avoided making their photos too perfect and showed a disdain to those who conduct exaggerated facial alterations. For some participants who did not post their face photos and used a celebrity photo or a photo of others', they would indicate "the photo is not mine" in their text description. This shows that on the one hand, some participants would like to try their best to make their photos appear attractive, on the other hand they avoid editing their photos in an exaggerated way or being deceptive.

The editable nature of self-presentational elements in online dating profiles combined with the platform's ability to facilitate selective self-presentation make deception a simple and convenient stage for impression construction (Ellison et al., 2006; Hancock et al., 2007). A self-presentational purpose to appear likeable or knowledgeable will dramatically increase the possibility that someone will lie (Feldman et al., 2002). A 2001 study on heterosexual's online dating have shown that 25% of online daters admitted misrepresenting some information about themselves. Toma & Hancock (2008) found about 81% of online daters lied on at least one of the characteristics observed. A previous study has also showed that 86% of online daters think that others misrepresent

their physical appearance (Gibbs et al., 2006). In consistent with previous studies, the current study found Chinese gay men admitted misrepresentation of their information like age, height, weight, and sexual role and photo beautifications. Similarly, they also believed others misrepresent their information and held suspicion on other gay men's profiles. As Du said in the interview:

I would not believe other gay men's profiles are 100% authentic. For example, I will deduct 3 to 4 centimeters on the basis of other gay men's height reported on their Blued profiles. For the face photos other gay men posted, I definitely think their profile photos flatter them.

Previous studies have also found that many online daters try to maintain a balance between deception and desirability (e.g., Toma et al., 2008; Ellison et al., 2006). The motivation of maintaining somewhat accurate is due to the high possibility of meeting potential partners face-to-face. In consistent with previous studies, Chinese gay men are found to balance their deception and authenticity. It is because the immediacy nature of Blued allows users to meet face to face immediately, they need to control the extent to which they exaggerate their information and photos. Ellison et al., (2012) found that if gay men are for one night stand, they may not be concerned with maximizing their deception because subsequent encounters are not likely to happen. In this study, participants who misrepresented their age also reported they would also not tell their true age to their one-time sexual partners. Therefore, the editable and immediacy features of the app, their relational goals impact how Chinese gay men balance the deception and authenticity.

The editable nature of self-presentational elements in online dating profiles along with the medium's ability to facilitate selective self-presentation makes deception a simple and convenient strategy for impression construction (Ellison et al, 2006; Toma & Hancock 2010). Several participants admitted use deceptive strategies when posting their information like age, weight and height, sexual role and some admitted beautifying their photos. This is because Blued allows the user to edit their information freely and conveniently. While the use of deceptive self-enhancement as an impression management strategy usually involves minor rather than small deceptions, particularly if face-to-face meetings with the potential target of self-presentation is expected (Leary, 1996; Toma et al., 2008; Toma & Hancock, 2010; Walther, 1996). Just as several participants noted in the interviews, they would control the extent to which they improve their physical traits because they concerned that a big deception would make them stigmatized and leave a bad impression when they meet their potential targets in offline settings.

***Filter and bypass technological Constraints.*** Gay men's self-presentation was also impacted by the interface design of the dating app, just as Ellison et al. (2006) found that technological constraints impacted people's self-presentation on dating websites. When Chinese gay men evaluate the profiles of others on Blued, they attach much importance to demographics like age, weight, height and sexual roles of their potential partners. Usually, some dating app users would have some expectations about the traits of their potential partners, so they would filter potential daters' profiles by age, weight,



height and sexual roles. As Blued is a location based real time dating app, the users could also filter others' profiles by proximity and online time.

Participants who are not confident in themselves concerned they would be in a disadvantaged position when others use the filter function. In order to maximize their possibility to be found by other users, they would adjust their information. Just as previously discussed in the deception part, gay men who are old may input a younger age on their profiles, so they would have a higher chance of being found by others. Filter functions provide users with convenience to seek potential partners, while it also shaped how some Chinese gay men present themselves on Blued. Chinese gay men who are concerned filter would put them in a disadvantaged position would use their own strategies like modifying their information to bypass the filter and maximize their opportunities.

In previous studies about online dating websites, Ellison et al (2006) found technical restrictions of the dating websites may enable the users to mispresent themselves. The default settings in the search filed like age range or height range can affect how the users' attractiveness is perceived by others and how others respond to the users (Ellison et al., 2006). Chinese gay men's self-presentation on Blued were also impacted by the technical restrictions. The default settings of Blued signal to its users what is desired in this dating environment. Gay men who do not fit into this standard might use their ways like deception or text-description to bypass the filter.

Chinese gay men's online self-presentation on Blued is constrained by technological constraints allowing only limited options or categories with regard to online presentation. Filtering function afforded by Blued provided convenience to the users, while to some extent it also restricted gay men's self-presentation and defined how their impressions are evaluated by others. Bypassing filtering is a 'smart' way Blued user use to fight against the technological constraints, which shows technology itself cannot totally determine the way how people present themselves.

***Establishing credibility.*** Participants on Blued are anonymous, credibility is a major concern for many participants as fake photos and scams are common on Blued. In order to establish credibility, participants use various strategies including photo verification, more self-disclosure in the section of moments. Participants who disclose their face photos can use the photo verification system to verify the authenticity of their photos. Online daters whose profile photos are verified will be marked a "V" following their ID. For some participants especially those who do not have a face photo in their profiles, one way to establish credibility is to share more about themselves in the section of moments, as more self-disclosure will help them gain trust from other gay men.

Previous studies have demonstrated that when there is a high expectation of face-to-face meetings, online daters are more likely to establish credibility on the application (Wiele & Tong, 2014). Reduced cues and selective presentation on dating apps means a higher concern for authenticity. Users who worried about this choose to establish credibility in their own ways to make up the shortage of the dating apps. They would

seek facial verification from the app, and they would do more self-disclosure in the sections of moments to establish their credibility. As Du expressed in the interview:

I like to update the moments to let potential Mr. Right know more about me. For example, I post photos when I took during my travelling, I recoded my daily lives, share my sorrow and happiness in the moments. When others read my moments, they can know this is a real person with flesh and blood instead of a cold profile.

Ellison et al. (2006) noted that ‘the increased ability to engage in selective self-presentation, and the absence of visual cues in the online environment (p.429)’ meant that accuracy of self-presentation was a prominent issue for online daters. Just as participants in this study admitted that they are recognizable of the affordances of Blued and its relations with deceptive presentation strategies, and therefore they managed to present their profiles in a more credible way.

***Non-disclosure of face photos.*** The result of Study 1 showed that 62.8% of Chinese gay men did not have a face photo on their Blued profiles, which is in line with Chan’s (2016) findings observed from Jack’d that 63.2% of Chinese gay men did not have a face photo on their profiles. It also confirms there is a big gap between Chinese gay men and Western gay men in terms of the percentage of face-disclosure on dating apps, as several studies have shown that 68.8% to 87.9% of Western gay men had a face photo on their dating profiles (Chan, 2016; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015; Holloway et al., 2014; Miller, 2015, 2019). The result of Study 2 suggests that the prominent reason behind the non-disclosure of face photos on Blued among Chinese gay men was due to

privacy concerns about exposing their gay identity. Just as Fu noted in the interview: “I would never upload a face photo on Blued, if my gay identity was known an acquaintance, that would be a disaster for me.” Relational goal also impacts Chinese gay men’s face photo disclosure, as Guo said in the interview that he did not have any specific goals. He just used Blued to pass the time, so he did not post a face photo there. Several participants are afraid of slut shaming when they disclose their face photos, as one Wang indicated in the interview: “If I put my face photo on Blued, others will think I am a horny man.”, A lack of confidence in personal appearances is also one reason, as Han noted that he felt himself was not good-looking, so he concerned of being ridiculed by others if he disclosed his face photos on Blued. In addition, concerns of photos being misused were also found to be related to Chinese gay men’s non-disclosure of face photos on Blued, as some participants shared in the interviews that they had the experiences of photos being stolen and misused by others.

Though Blackwell et al. (2015) found that the fear of disclosing identities is one of the reasons that gay men did not disclose their face photos, this factor is especially prominent among Chinese gay men. In China, only a small minority of gay men disclose their sexual identity to others (Koo et al., 2014) while in Western countries like Australia and the USA, 92% of gay men disclose their sexual identity to others (Bauermeister et al., 2014; Higgins, 2002; Meites et al., 2013). Most participants in the study reported being ‘deep in the closet,’ therefore disclosing face photos on Blued meant the risk of exposing their sexual identity. This kind of privacy concern might be closely related to China’s sociocultural environment. As Liu and Choi (2006) noted that

homosexual activities conflict with mainstream Chinese culture, Chinese gay men experience prevalent discrimination from various parties. Just as the participants in the present study demonstrated, they worry that their identity could be known by their colleagues, family members, and acquaintances. In addition, under the influence of Confucianism, Chinese society is more oriented toward collectivistic culture. Though a culture or an individual usually has varying degrees of individualism and collectivism at the same time (Turiel, 2004), collectivism is usually prioritized over individualism in China. People attach great importance to their social identity and interpersonal relationships, and they tend to conform to group values, with those who fail to do so being devalued by the group. Gay identity is considered deviant from group values and brings stigma to Chinese gay men, which discourages them from disclosing their gay identity. This better explains why participants worried that disclosing face photos on Blued may risk disclosing their gay identity.

The findings of the present study show the design features of Blued escalates participants' privacy concerns, as Blued presents its users with a grid of gay men's profiles based on their geographic proximity which brings convenience but also poses privacy threats. In line with the findings of Blackwell et al.'s (2014) study on Grindr users, participants chose not to disclose their face photos when they did not want their identity to be known by nearby known or unknown users. As Blued and Grindr share similar design features, it is not surprising that users of the two apps had common concerns. A new finding from this study is that of participants who used both Blued and Aloha, most chose to disclose a face photo on Aloha but not on Blued. This further

confirms that the proximity feature afforded by dating apps like Blued and Grindr prohibit some users from disclosing their face photos. When Aloha uses artificial intelligence algorithms to match users instead of presenting users with a grid of nearby users, gay men become more at ease to upload their face photos on their profiles. Though Blued allows its paying members to have the option of hiding their distance from being seen by nearby users, it still cannot eliminate the concern of the participants. This result may offer some practical implications for dating apps like Blued to address gay men's concerns in the optimization of the app.

The findings of the present study show that location plays a role in escalating some participants' privacy concerns about disclosing a face photo. In line with the findings of Fitzpatrick et al. (2015), gay men's face disclosing strategies vary in different locations due to the different norms and positions toward homosexuality or casual sex. In this study, some participants in small cities reported that they did not dare to disclose their face photos because they felt the local norm was more conservative toward homosexuality there than in big cities. In addition, this study further extended the finding about location and found that gay men change their face-disclosing strategies when they are in different locations. Some participants reported being more likely to upload their face photos if they lived in big cities or traveled to a place where there were no acquaintances. This again confirms the impact of the Chinese sociocultural environment on gay men in China. When Chinese gay men are in locations where they feel less discrimination and stigma, they become more willing to disclose a face photo.

The findings of the present study suggest relational goals influence some participants' decisions toward face-disclosure on Blued. Previous research found that gay men looking for sex were less likely to disclose a face photo than gay men looking for friends and long-term relationships (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). In this study, having no relational goals were found to be the reason behind non-face disclosure. Participants who simply used Blued to pass the time or had no intention to look for anything reported a lack of motivation to upload their photos onto their Blued profiles. Moreover, with relational goals changing over time, some participants change their face-disclosing strategies.

In line with previous findings (Blackwell et al., 2014; Jaspal, 2017), the 'slut shaming' associated with dating apps was also found to exist among Chinese gay men. While mobile dating apps make it convenient for hookups and the cost of meeting people is very low, Blued was viewed as a promiscuous platform among many Chinese gay men, and therefore its fast reputation makes some gay men unwilling to disclose their face photos on it. They think that by doing so will create an impression that they are looking for casual sex, and that they are sexually promiscuous. Participants thought that Aloha was purer, as Ling noted in the interview: "Aloha promotes an environment of making friends and sharing daily lives, it's like the Instagram where we present ourselves instead of only looking for sex on Blued." In this app culture, Ling admitted he is willing to share his face photos on Aloha, which shows how the culture of platform can affect gay men's facial disclosing strategies.

The findings of the present study also extend the scholarly discussions that a lack of confidence in personal appearance and concern about face photo being stolen also discouraged some participants from disclosing their face photos. Sergios and Cody (1985) found that gay men consider physical attractiveness as the most important factor when they decide whether to date a partner or not. Silberstein et al. (1989) also noted that gay men's subculture attaches great importance on personal attractiveness. Under the influence of this subculture, gay men who are not satisfied with their personal appearance might not have the courage to disclose their face photos. Besides, as previous studies found that gay men were sometimes catfished by fake photos on dating apps (Lauckner et al., 2019), participants in this study reported the experience of photos being stolen by catfishers, which made them become more protective of their own photos.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current study investigated Chinese gay men's self-presentation on dating app Blued. It utilized a mixed-methods approach. In study 1, a content analysis of 930 profiles was conducted. The result showed how Chinese gay men use different types of photos to visually present themselves on Blued. Frequencies of each type of photo were counted. Only about a third of Chinese gay men's profiles contained at least a recognizable face photo in their Blued profiles. Correlations between demographics and face disclosure were tested. Age was found to be negatively correlated with face disclosure on Blued, suggesting that older gay men are less likely to disclose a face photo on Blued than younger gay men. The result of content analysis also showed how Chinese gay men use different types of language to textually present themselves on Blued. Frequencies and percentage of masculinity, body and sport language were counted. The percentage of masculinity, body and sport language used in Blued profiles are 37.6%, 20.9% and 6.2% respectively. Correlations between demographics and different types of language use were tested. Age, height and weight was found to be correlated with different types of language use. People who like using masculinity language are more likely to use body and sport language.

In study 2, 30 Blued users were interviewed. The thirty participants shared many significant experience and reflections from their use of Blued. The interviews further

investigated how and why Chinese gay men present themselves visually and textually in certain ways. Chinese gay men's motives of constructing a Blued profile varies. There are five major motives: looking for casual sex, looking for romantic/long term relationships, looking for friends, entertainment and seeking psychological comfort. Some gay men even have multiple motives which usually coexist with one another and may change in different circumstances. The Chinese gay men are found to use a series of strategies to construct their profiles. They pay attention to small cues, try to balance authenticity and deception, when constructing their profiles, establish credibility, and bypass technological constraints when constructing their Blued profiles. Non-disclosure of face photos is found to be a common behavior among the interviewees, which confirmed the results of content analysis. Chinese gay men have different reasons for not disclosing a face photo in their Blued profiles. Concern of exposing their gay identity is the most frequently reported reason. Other reasons include: the design feature of the platform, location of the user, relational goals, lack of confidence in personal appearance, and concerns of photos being stolen. Impression evaluation of other's profiles have also impacted Chinese gay men's own Blued profile construction. When evaluating the profiles constructed by other gay men, Chinese gay men use three strategies: paying attention to small cues, filtering and believing in rampant deception. Utilizing a mixed method, it not only helps us gain a quantitative understanding about Chinese gay men's visual and textual element presented in their profiles, but also help us gain a qualitative understanding about why and how Chinese gay men construct their profiles in certain manners. The two methods are complementary to each other. For

example, the content analysis revealed that a majority of Chinese gay men are unwilling to disclose a face photo on Blued, while the detailed reasons cannot be found without in-depth interviews. Only knowing the frequencies of each type of photos and language use in Blued profiles and the correlations between different variables is far from enough. In-depth interviews help us further understand Chinese gay men's self-presentation strategies beyond photos and texts on Blued profiles. Without in-depth interviews, we could not know the fact that what they present on Blued profiles are sometimes not a reflection of their true motives, one example is the sexual motive, which was influenced by several factors such as culture, regulations. Through in-depth interviews, we also know that gay men's use deceptive strategies in their profile construction, which might indicate the profile data collected in content analysis should be understood from a critical perspective.

On the basis of previous theories on self-presentation (Goffman, 1959, Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ellison et al.,2006), this study confirmed previous findings that the reduced cues online daters operate in a reduced online environment focus more on nonverbal cues when they construct their dating profiles. The reduced cue environment and editable nature of Blued facilitate deception. While due to the high possibility of meeting face-to-face provided by dating app, Chinese gay men strive to maintain a balance between deception and authenticity when constructing their dating profiles. Rampant deception also makes some participants try their best to establish credibility on Blued. The technical constraints also impact Chinese gay men's self-presentation. As sub-topics under self-presentation, issues like masculinity are also

discussed. However, due to the focus of this research, this study has not fully studied the masculinity issue, especially in the qualitative part. For example, the issue of bottom shaming appeared in the interviews when investigating sexual role deception. Bottom shaming is a very interesting topic to be further studied, as this topic has not been studied in the literature. Future research could specifically look into this phenomenon.

It should be noted that this study also expanded the theory of self-presentation. It is the first study that investigated Chinese gay men's self-presentation on Blued, which fill the gap in existing literature that is western oriented. One significant finding of this study is that institutional restrictions and the cultural factors plays a very important role when Chinese gay men construct their profiles. For example, as mentioned in previous sections, the laws and rules strictly regulating online content has prohibited some Chinese gay men from expressing their sexual needs or posting sexual photos. Another example is that a high percentage of non-disclosure of face photos were found among Chinese gay men. They two examples cannot be fully explained without considering the cultural and institutional factors, which are often neglected by western researchers as they often do their research from a western perspective. In addition, this study found further developed the two-component impression management model proposed by Leary & Kowalski (1990). As the results showed in Chapter 4, the study found impression evaluation is also a step that help Chinese gay men construct their profiles, it is added in this study as a component of impression management which previously consisted of two process— impression motivation and impression construction.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

There are some limitations in the present study. First, although the sample size of both the content analysis and the interviews is a little larger than in previous studies, the research findings still cannot be generalized to a larger population. The findings are important for understanding Chinese gay men's self-presentation behaviors on Blued. However, this study is far from complete. Replication or continuation of the current study is needed to be able to generalize the valuable findings generated from this research. Future researchers can explore more innovative ways like experiments and surveys to study this topic.

Second, the current study lacks a diversity in the sample. The current study focuses on urban gay men without paying much attention to rural gay men. In study 1, 930 profiles were collected from the urban area of 31 cities, and most of these cities are among the most developed areas in China. Similarly, in study 2, most of the participants interviewed are from big cities, and all of them live in the urban area. Besides, nearly two-thirds of the participants are under the age of 30, old gay men are understudied. In addition, nearly two-thirds of the participants have at least a bachelor's degree, gay men with a lower education background are understudied. Future researchers could pay more attention to rural gay men, old gay men, and gay men with low education level to fill the gap in the current study.

Third, the content analysis of the profiles is dependent on self-reported data, the veracity and exactness of the results of content analysis data cannot be 100% assured.

Participants admitted in the interviews that sometimes they would misrepresent their information, which means the self-reported data analyzed in the content analysis is not one hundred percent accurate. Future researchers need to explore more innovative methods to investigate Chinese gay men's textual and photographic deception on dating apps. Like they could invite participants in the laboratory and let them write down their information and then compare the information with that provided on their Blued profiles.

Last but not the least, Blued, like other gay dating apps, has been updated very quickly, which means similar studies need to be carried out along with the changing environment. The profiles in the content analysis of the current study were collected in 2018, and the interviews were conducted in 2019. While, within the past two years, new features and new affordances have been added to the app, and new rules for the content published by users has been implemented. As noted in this study, the technological and institutional factors have an impact on Chinese gay men's self-presentation behaviors, thus future researchers need to keep up to date with research development in this field.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, E. (2010). The joys and challenges of semi-structured interviewing. *Community Practitioner*, 83(7).
- Adams, P. C., & Ghose, R. (2003). India. com: The construction of a space between. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27(4), 414–437.
- Albright, J. M. (2008). Sex in America online: An exploration of sex, marital status, and sexual identity in Internet sex seeking and its impacts. *Journal of Sex Research*, 45(2), 175–186.
- Albury, K., Burgess, J., Light, B., Race, K., & Wilken, R. (2017). Data cultures of mobile dating and hook-up apps: Emerging issues for critical social science research. *Big Data & Society*, 4(2), 2053951717720950.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717720950>
- Badal, H. J., Stryker, J. E., DeLuca, N., & Purcell, D. W. (2018). Swipe right: Dating website and app use among men who have sex with men. *AIDS and Behavior*, 22(4), 1265–1272.
- Bargh, J. A., McKenna, K. Y., & Fitzsimons, G. M. (2002). Can you see the real me? Activation and expression of the “true self” on the Internet. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(1), 33–48.
- Bartholome, A., Tewksbury, R., & Bruzzone, A. (2000). “I Want a Man”: Patterns of Attraction in All-Male Personal Ads. *The Journal of Men’s Studies*, 8(3), 309–321.  
<https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.0803.309>

- Batiste, D. P. (2013). "0 Feet Away": The Queer Cartography of French Gay Men's Geo-social Media Use. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 22(2), 111–132.  
<https://doi.org/10.3167/ajec.2013.220207>
- Bauermeister, J. A., Yeagley, E., Meanley, S., & Pingel, E. S. (2014). Sexting among young men who have sex with men: Results from a national survey. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 54(5), 606–611.
- Berger, P. and T. Luckmann (1980). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Bérubé, A. (2003). The history of gay bathhouses. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 44(3–4), 33–53.
- Bien, C. H., Best, J. M., Muessig, K. E., Wei, C., Han, L., & Tucker, J. D. (2015). Gay Apps for Seeking Sex Partners in China: Implications for MSM Sexual Health. *AIDS and Behavior*, 19(6), 941–946. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-014-0994-6>
- Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 10(2), 141–163.
- 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*, 3–12.  
<https://doi.org/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(7), 1117–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814521595>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). Conducting an interview. *Interviews. Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 149–166.
- Brym, R. J., & Lenton, R. L. (2001). Love online: A report on digital dating in Canada. *MSN. ca, February*, 6.
- Burke, S. K. (2000). In search of lesbian community in an electronic world. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 3(4), 591–604.
- Cao, J., & Lu, X. (2014). A preliminary exploration of the gay movement in mainland China: Legacy, transition, opportunity, and the new media. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 39(4), 840–848.
- Cassidy, E. M. (2013). *Gay men, social media and self-presentation: Managing identities in Gaydar, Facebook and beyond* [PhD Thesis]. Queensland University of Technology.
- Castañeda, J. G. M. (2015). Grindr-ing the self: Young Filipino gay men's exploration of sexual identity through a geo-social networking application. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 48(1), 29–58.

- Chan, L. S. (2016). 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. *International Journal of Communication*, 10(0), 20.
- Chan, L. S. (2017a). 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*, 64(5), 622–637.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1196990>
- Chan, L. S. (2017b). Emerging Currents in Communication/LGBTQ Studies: A Review of LGBTQ-Related Articles Published in Communication Journals from 2010 to 2015. *International Journal of Communication*, 11(0), 22.
- Chan, L. S. (2018). Ambivalence in networked intimacy: Observations from gay men using mobile dating apps. *New Media & Society*, 20(7), 2566–2581.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817727156>
- Cheeseman, K., Goodlin-Fahncke, W., & Tewksbury, R. (2012). “Looking for a married hookup”: An examination of personal ads posted by men seeking sex with married men. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 20(2), 144–157.
- Chiasson, M. A., Hirshfield, S., Remien, R. H., Humberstone, M., Wong, T., & Wolitski, R. J. (2007). A Comparison of On-Line and Off-Line Sexual Risk in Men Who Have Sex With Men: An Event-Based On-Line Survey. *JAIDS Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 44(2), 235–243.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/QAI.0b013e31802e298c>

- Clarke, V., Braun, V., & Hayfield, N. (2015). Thematic analysis. In J.A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (3rd ed., pp.222-248). London, England: Sage
- Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 116*(3), 457.
- Condon, J. W., & Crano, W. D. (1988). Inferred evaluation and the relation between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*(5), 789.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). Politics of changing men. *Radical Society, 25*(1), 135.
- Conner, C. T. (2019). The Gay Gayze: Expressions of Inequality on Grindr. *The Sociological Quarterly, 60*(3), 397–419.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00380253.2018.1533394>
- Cooper, A. (2002). *Sex and the Internet: A guidebook for clinicians*. Psychology press.
- Cooper, A., McLoughlin, I. P., & Campbell, K. M. (2000). Sexuality in cyberspace: Update for the 21st century. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 3*(4), 521–536.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*(1), 3–21.
- 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*(1), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157915614872>
- Daneback, K., & Ross, M. W. (2011). The complexity of internet sexuality. *Sexual Dysfunction: Beyond the Brain-Body Connection, 31*, 121–134.

- Dang, H., Cai, S., & Lang, X. (2013). *Location-Based Gay Communication: An Empirical Study of Smartphone Gay Apps Use in Macau* (SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 2257253). Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2257253>
- DePaulo, B. M. (1992). Nonverbal behavior and self-presentation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *111*(2), 203–243. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.111.2.203>
- Derlega, V. J., Winstead, B. A., Wong, P. T., & Greenspan, M. (1987). *Self-disclosure and relationship development: An attributional analysis*.
- Dijkstra, P., & Barelds, D. P. (2008). Do people know what they want: A similar or complementary partner? *Evolutionary Psychology*, *6*(4), 147470490800600420.
- Dodge, M. T. (2014). *Investing in Grindr: An exploration of how gay college men utilize gay-oriented social networking sites*.
- Dominick, J. R. (1999). Who do you think you are? Personal home pages and self-presentation on the World Wide Web. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *76*(4), 646–658.
- Duggan, S. J., & McCreary, D. R. (2004). Body image, eating disorders, and the drive for muscularity in gay and heterosexual men: The influence of media images. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *47*(3–4), 45–58.
- Ekman, P. (1988). Lying and nonverbal behavior: Theoretical issues and new findings. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, *12*(3), 163–175.
- Ellison, N. B., Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2012). Profile as promise: A framework for conceptualizing veracity in online dating self-presentations. *New Media & Society*, *14*(1), 45–62.

- Ellison, N., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 415–441. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.00020.x>
- EMIS (2013). EMIS 2010: The European Men-Who-Have-Sex-With-Men Internet Survey-Findings from 38 countries. *European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control*.
- Feeney, B. C. (2004). A secure base: Responsive support of goal strivings and exploration in adult intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(5), 631.
- Feldman, R. S., Forrest, J. A., & Happ, B. R. (2002). Self-Presentation and Verbal Deception: Do Self-Presenters Lie More? *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 24(2), 163–170. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324834BASP2402\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15324834BASP2402_8)
- Feng, Y., Wu, Z., & Detels, R. (2010). Evolution of MSM community and experienced stigma among MSM in Chengdu, China. *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes (1999)*, 53(Suppl 1), S98-103. <https://doi.org/10.1097/QAI.0b013e3181c7df71>
- Filice, E., Raffoul, A., Meyer, S. B., & Neiterman, E. (2019). The influence of Grindr, a geosocial networking application, on body image in gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men: An exploratory study. *Body Image*, 31, 59–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2019.08.007>
- Fiore, A. T., & Donath, J. S. (2004). Online personals: An overview. *CHI'04 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1395–1398.

- Fitzpatrick, C., & Birnholtz, J. (2018). "I Shut the Door": Interactions, tensions, and negotiations from a location-based social app. *New Media & Society*, 20(7), 2469–2488.
- Fitzpatrick, C., Birnholtz, J., & Brubaker, J. R. (2015). Social and personal disclosure in a location-based real time dating app. *2015 48th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 1983–1992.
- Gaes, G. G., Kalle, R. J., & Tedeschi, J. T. (1978). Impression management in the forced compliance situation: Two studies using the bogus pipeline. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 14(5), 493–510.
- Gauntlett, D. (1999). Digital Sexualities: A guide to internet resources. *Sexualities*, 2(3), 327–332.
- Gibbs, J. L., Ellison, N. B., & Heino, R. D. (2006). Self-Presentation in Online Personals: The Role of Anticipated Future Interaction, Self-Disclosure, and Perceived Success in Internet Dating. *Communication Research*, 33(2), 152–177.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650205285368>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (2017). *Discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Routledge.
- Goedel, W. C., & Duncan, D. T. (2015). Geosocial-networking app usage patterns of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men: Survey among users of Grindr, a mobile dating app. *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance*, 1(1), e4.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor. 1963  
*Stigma*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

- 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(2), 131–142.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167293192001>
- Goode, E. (1996). The ethics of deception in social research: A case study. *Qualitative Sociology*, 19(1), 11–33.
- Graham, M., & Khosravi, S. (2002). Reordering public and private in Iranian cyberspace: Identity, politics, and mobilization. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 9(2), 219–246.
- Gray, M. L. (2009). *Out in the country: Youth, media, and queer visibility in rural America* (Vol. 2). NYU Press.
- Grov, C., Breslow, A. S., Newcomb, M. E., Rosenberger, J. G., & Bauermeister, J. A. (2014). Gay and Bisexual Men’s Use of the Internet: Research from the 1990s through 2013. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(4), 390–409.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2013.871626>
- Gudelunas, D. (2005). Online Personal Ads. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49(1), 1–33.  
[https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v49n01\\_01](https://doi.org/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(4), 347–365.
- Haag, A. M., & Chang, F. K. (1997). The impact of electronic networking on the lesbian and gay community. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 7(3), 83–94.

- Hancock, J. T., Toma, C., & Ellison, N. (2007). The truth about lying in online dating profiles. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 449–452.
- Hancock, J. T., & Toma, C. L. (2009). Putting your best face forward: The accuracy of online dating photographs. *Journal of Communication*, 59(2), 367–386.
- Handel, M. J., & Shklovski, I. (2012). Disclosure, ambiguity and risk reduction in real-time dating sites. *Proceedings of the 17th ACM International Conference on Supporting Group Work*, 175–178.
- Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R., & Newbold, C. (1998). *Mass communication research methods*. NYU Press.
- Hennelly, S. (2010). Public space, public morality: The media construction of sex in public places. *Liverpool Law Review*, 31(1), 69–91.
- Higgins, D. J. (2002). Gay men from heterosexual marriages: Attitudes, behaviors, childhood experiences, and reasons for marriage. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 42(4), 15–34.
- Hillier, L., Horsley, P., & Kurdas, C. (2001). “It’s Just Easier”: The Internet as a Safety-net for Same Sex Attracted Young People. Australian Research Centre in Sex Health and Society Melbourne.
- Holloway, I. W., Rice, E., Gibbs, J., Winetrobe, H., Dunlap, S., & Rhoades, H. (2014). Acceptability of smartphone application-based HIV prevention among young men who have sex with men. *AIDS and Behavior*, 18(2), 285–296.



- Holsti, O. R. (1969). Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities. *Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley (Content Analysis)*.
- Hu, M., Xu, C., & Wang, J. (2020). Spatiotemporal Analysis of Men Who Have Sex With Men in Mainland China: Social App Capture-Recapture Method. *JMIR MHealth and UHealth*, 8(1), e14800. <https://doi.org/10.2196/14800>
- Hull, P., Mao, L., Prestage, G., Zablotska, I., de Wit, J., & Holt, M. (2016). The use of mobile phone apps by Australian gay and bisexual men to meet sex partners: An analysis of sex-seeking repertoires and risks for HIV and STIs using behavioural surveillance data. *Sexually Transmitted Infections*, 92(7), 502–507.
- Jaspal, R. (2017). Gay Men’s Construction and Management of Identity on Grindr. *Sexuality & Culture*, 21(1), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9389-3>
- Johns, M. M., Pingel, E., Eisenberg, A., Santana, M. L., & Bauermeister, J. (2012). Butch tops and femme bottoms? Sexual positioning, sexual decision making, and gender roles among young gay men. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 6(6), 505–518.
- Joinson, A. N. (2001). Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness and visual anonymity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(2), 177–192.
- Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. *Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, 1(1), 231–262.
- 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(1), 69–92.

- Kaufman, G., & Phua, V. C. (2003). Is Ageism Alive in Date Selection among Men? Age Requests among Gay and Straight Men in Internet Personal Ads. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 11(2), 225–235. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1102.225>
- Kimmel, M. S. (2011). *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 1996. New York City. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kippax, S., & Smith, G. (2001). Anal intercourse and power in sex between men. *Sexualities*, 4(4), 413–434.
- Kong, T. S. (2020). The pursuit of masculinity by young gay men in neoliberal Hong Kong and Shanghai. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(8), 1004–1021.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.
- Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(1), 34.
- Leary, M. R. (1996). *Self-presentation: Impression management and interpersonal behavior*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Lehmiller, J. J., & Ioerger, M. (2014). Social networking smartphone applications and sexual health outcomes among men who have sex with men. *PloS One*, 9(1), e86603.
- Lemke, R., & Weber, M. (2017). That Man Behind the Curtain: Investigating the Sexual Online Dating Behavior of Men Who Have Sex With Men but Hide Their Same-Sex Sexual Attraction in Offline Surroundings. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64(11), 1561–1582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1249735>

- Light, B., Fletcher, G., & Adam, A. (2008). Gay men, Gaydar and the commodification of difference. *Information Technology & People*.
- Livia, A. (2002). Public and clandestine: Gay men's pseudonyms on the French Minitel. *Sexualities*, 5(2), 201–217.
- Macapagal, K., Kraus, A., Moskowitz, D. A., & Birnholtz, J. (2020). Geosocial networking application use, characteristics of app-met sexual partners, and sexual behavior among sexual and gender minority adolescents assigned male at birth. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 57(8), 1078–1087.
- Madden, M., & Lenhart, A. (2006). *Online dating: Americans who are seeking romance use the Internet to help them in their search, but there is still widespread public concern about the safety of online dating*. Pew Internet & American Life Project Washington, DC.
- McKie, R. M., Lachowsky, N. J., & Milhausen, R. R. (2015). The Positive Impact of Technology on Young Gay Men's Dating and Sexual Relationships in Canada: Results From a Focus Group Study. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(1), 19–38.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2014.935552>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.
- Miller, B. (2015). "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(4), 637–658.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-015-9283-4>

- Miller, B. (2018). Textually Presenting Masculinity and the Body on Mobile Dating Apps for Men Who Have Sex With Men. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 26(3), 305–326.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826518773417>
- Miller, B. (2019). A Picture is Worth 1000 Messages: Investigating Face and Body Photos on Mobile Dating Apps for Men Who Have Sex with Men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 0(0), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1610630>
- Mowlabocus, S. (2010). Look at me! Images, validation, and cultural currency on Gaydar. *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, 201–214.
- UNAIDS. (2002). *AIDS: China's titanic peril*. Beijing: The UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in China.
- NWGCPIP. 2014. “Interim Provisions on the Identification of Obscene and Pornographic Publications.” [in Chinese]. Accessed Feb 4, 2020.  
<http://www.shdf.gov.cn/shdf/contents/708/202884.html>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3), 261–283.
- Peplau, L. A. (2003). Human sexuality: How do men and women differ? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(2), 37–40.
- Ravenhill, J. P., & de Visser, R. O. (2017). Perceptions of gay men's masculinity are associated with their sexual self-label, voice quality and physique. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 8(3), 208–222.

- Ravenhill, J. P., & Visser, R. O. de. (2018). "It Takes a Man to Put Me on the Bottom": Gay Men's Experiences of Masculinity and Anal Intercourse. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 55(8), 1033–1047. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1403547>
- Rice, E., Holloway, I., Winetrobe, H., Rhoades, H., Barman-Adhikari, A., Gibbs, J., Carranza, A., Dent, D., & Dunlap, S. (2012). Sex risk among young men who have sex with men who use Grindr, a smartphone geosocial networking application. *Journal of AIDS and Clinical Research, Suppl. 4*.
- Rodriguez, N. S., Huemmer, J., & Blumell, L. E. (2016). Mobile Masculinities: An Investigation of Networked Masculinities in Gay Dating Apps. *Masculinities & Social Change*, 5(3), 241–267. <https://doi.org/10.17583/mcs.2016.2047>
- Rowatt, W. C., Cunningham, M. R., & Druen, P. B. (1998). Deception to get a date. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24(11), 1228–1242.
- Rubin, Z. (1975). Disclosing oneself to a stranger: Reciprocity and its limits. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 11(3), 233–260.
- Ryan, P. (2016). #Follow: Exploring the role of social media in the online construction of male sex worker lives in Dublin, Ireland. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 23(12), 1713–1724. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2016.1249350>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Scheib, J. E., Gangestad, S. W., & Thornhill, R. (1999). Facial attractiveness, symmetry and cues of good genes. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, 266(1431), 1913–1917.

- Schlenker, B. R. (2012). *Self-presentation*. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (p. 542–570). The Guilford Press.
- Schlenker, B. R., & Pontari, B. A. (2000). *The strategic control of information: Impression management and self-presentation in daily life*.
- Shah, R. C., & Kesan, J. P. (2003). Manipulating the governance characteristics of code. *Info*.
- Shield, A. D. (2017). New in town: Gay immigrants and geosocial dating apps. In *LGBTQs, media and culture in Europe* (pp. 244–261). Routledge.
- Silberstein, L. R., Mishkind, M. E., Striegel-Moore, R. H., Timko, C., & Rodin, J. (1989). Men and their bodies: A comparison of homosexual and heterosexual men. *Psychosomatic Medicine*.
- Snyder, S. (1989). Cruising: The Semiotics of S & M. *CTheory*, 13(1–2), 102–114.
- Stempfhuber, M., & Liegl, M. (2016). Intimacy Mobilized: Hook-Up Practices in the Location-Based Social Network Grindr. *Österreichische Zeitschrift Für Soziologie*, 41(1), 51–70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-016-0189-7>
- Sun, S., Hoyt, W. T., & Pachankis, J. E. (2020). Sexual risk behaviors in the internet age: The case of Chinese men who have sex with men. *AIDS Care*, 32(3), 302–309.
- Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal*.
- Taylor, D. A., & Altman, I. (1987). *Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes*.

- Tikkanen, R., & Ross, M. W. (2003). Technological tearoom trade: Characteristics of Swedish men visiting gay Internet chat rooms. *AIDS Education and Prevention, 15*(2), 122–132.
- Timmermans, E., & De Caluwé, E. (2017). Development and validation of the Tinder Motives Scale (TMS). *Computers in Human Behavior, 70*, 341–350.
- Toch, E., & Levi, I. (2013). Locality and privacy in people-nearby applications. *Proceedings of the 2013 ACM International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing*, 539–548.
- Toma, C. L., & Hancock, J. T. (2010). Looks and Lies: The Role of Physical Attractiveness in Online Dating Self-Presentation and Deception. *Communication Research, 37*(3), 335–351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650209356437>
- Toma, C. L., Hancock, J. T., & Ellison, N. B. (2008). Separating fact from fiction: An examination of deceptive self-presentation in online dating profiles. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34*(8), 1023–1036.
- Tziallas, E. (2015). Gamified Eroticism: Gay Male “Social Networking” Applications and Self-Pornography. *Sexuality & Culture, 19*(4), 759–775. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-015-9288-z>
- Valentine, G. (2006). Globalizing Intimacy: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Maintaining and Creating Relationships. *Women’s Studies Quarterly, 34*(1/2), 365–393. JSTOR.
- Valocchi, S. (1999). The class-inflected nature of gay identity. *Social Problems, 46*(2), 207–224.

- 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 - UbiComp '14 Adjunct*, 619–630.  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/2632048.2636070>
- Vohs, K. D., Baumeister, R. F., & Ciarocco, N. J. (2005). Self-Regulation and Self-Presentation: Regulatory Resource Depletion Impairs Impression Management and Effortful Self-Presentation Depletes Regulatory Resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(4), 632–657. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.4.632>
- Vrij, A. (2000). *Detecting lies and deceit: The psychology of lying and implications for professional practice*. Wiley.
- Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research*, 19(1), 52–90.
- Walther, J. B. (1996). Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication Research*, 23(1), 3–43.
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2006.05.002>
- Walther, J. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1992). Relational communication in computer-mediated interaction. *Human Communication Research*, 19(1), 50–88.
- Wang, S. (2020). Chinese gay men pursuing online fame: Erotic reputation and internet celebrity economies. *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(4), 548–564.



- Ward, J. (2017). What are you doing on Tinder? Impression management on a matchmaking mobile app. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(11), 1644–1659. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1252412>
- Watson, D., Beer, A., & McDade-Montez, E. (2014). The role of active assortment in spousal similarity. *Journal of Personality*, 82(2), 116–129.
- Weatherburn, P., Reid, D., Hickson, F., Hammond, G., & Stephens, M. (2005). *Risk and reflexion: Findings from the United Kingdom gay men's sex survey 2004*.
- Weinberg, M. S., & Williams, C. J. (1974). *Male homosexuals: Their problems and adaptations*.
- Williams, C. (2007). Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, 5(3).
- Wong, D. (2011). Hybridization and the emergence of “gay” identities in Hong Kong and in China. *Visual Anthropology*, 24(1–2), 152–170.
- Wu, J. (2003). From “long yang” and “dui shi” to tongzhi: Homosexuality in China. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 7(1–2), 117–143.
- Wu, S., & Ward, J. (2019). Looking for “interesting people”: Chinese gay men’s exploration of relationship development on dating apps. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2050157919888558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157919888558>
- Yeo, T. E. D., & Fung, T. H. (2017). “Mr Right Now”: Temporality of relationship formation on gay mobile dating apps: *Mobile Media & Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157917718601>

Zervoulis, K., Smith, D. S., Reed, R., & Dinos, S. (2020). Use of 'gay dating apps' and its relationship with individual well-being and sense of community in men who have sex with men. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *11*(1–2), 88–102.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2019.1684354>

Zhou, Y.R. 2006. Homosexuality, seropositivity and family obligations: Perspectives of HIVinfected men who have sex with men in China. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 8, no. 6: 487–500.<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691050802572711>

## APPENDIX 1

### CODE SCHEME

V1. Which sexual role does the user have?

- 0 bottom
- 1 top
- 2 versatile
- 4 undisclosed

V2. What is the relationship status of the user?

- 0 single
- 1 partnered
- 2 dating
- 3 married
- 4 undisclosed

V3. What is the relational goal of the user?

- 0 chat
- 1 date
- 3 friend
- 4 boyfriend
- 5 gym buddies
- 6 sex
- 7 ambiguous goal
- 8 undisclosed

V4. What does the main photo show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso
- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V5. What does the first supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso

- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V6. What does the second supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso
- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V7. What does the third supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso
- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V8. What does the fourth supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso
- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V9. What does the fifth supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes
- 3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso
- 4 non-human objects
- 5 celebrity/model
- 6 blank

V10. What does the sixth supplementary show?

- 0 a recognizable face
- 1 a headless torso with clothes
- 2 a headless torso without clothes

3 human body parts without a recognizable face and torso

4 non-human objects

5 celebrity/model

6 blank

V11. Does the profile contain masculinity language?

0 No

1 Yes

V12. Does the profile contain self-directed masculinity language?

0 No

1 Yes

V13. Does the profile contain sport/gym language?

0 No

1 Yes

V14. Does the profile contain body language?

0 No

1 Yes

V15. Does the profile contain self-directed body language?

0 No

1 Yes

V16. Does the profile contain other-directed body language?

0 No

1 Yes

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **RECRUITMENT STATEMENT**

**(Translated from Chinese version)**

Dear Participants,

I am Liang He, a Ph.D candidate at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, I am doing a research about Chinese gay men's use of dating app Blued. I would like to invite you to participate in this interview and share with me your experience of using Blued. The interview will last 1 to 1.5 hours. You can quit any time in the process if you feel uncomfortable. This research has been approved by the doctoral committee of department of Journalism and Communication at UAB. I promise your personal privacy will be strictly protected. A pseudonym will always be used in the writing of my dissertation.

If you feel interested in this research, please kindly contact me via my WeChat: xxxxxx or QQ: xxxxxx.

I look forward to your participation.

Best,

Liang He

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

**(Translated from Chinese version)**

#### **MOBILE DATING IN THE DIGITAL ERA: SELF-PRESENTATION ON GAY**

#### **DATING APP BLUED**

1. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about Chinese gay men's self-presentation on Blued.
2. My participation in this research is voluntary. I understand I will not be paid for my participation.
3. I will be interviewed by the researcher over a telephone or through WeChat/QQ voice call. The interview will last approximately 30-90 minutes.
4. I understand that the interviews will be tape recorded to facilitate the analysis of the data.
5. I understand that I will be assigned a pseudonym when the researcher writes the dissertation. My personal information will be strictly protected.
6. The audio recordings of the interview will be stored by the researcher in a very secure way. Nobody else will have access to the audio recordings. The precaution will prevent any negative impacts that this interview will cause to me.
7. I understand that I can withdraw from this research anytime when I feel uncomfortable.
8. I have the right to review and provide edits to the interview transcripts. I have the

right to request a copy of the dissertation after the project is completed.

9. I understand that the results of the interview will be presented in Liang He's doctoral dissertation and may also be presented in manuscripts submitted to journals for publication.

10. I understand that this research has been approved by doctoral committee of Department of Journalism and Communication of UAB.

11. I have read and understand all the explanation provided to me. I have received answers to the questions I have asked.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 4

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

(Translated from Chinese version)

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. What is your preferred pseudonym? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your nationality? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your current city of residence? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your sexual orientation?
  - a. Homosexual
  - b. Bisexual
  - c. heterosexual
6. What is your relationship status?
  - a. Single
  - b. Dating
  - c. Married to a heterosexual woman
  - d. Divorced with a heterosexual woman
  - e. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the status of your sexual orientation disclosure? (multiple choice)
  - a. in the closet
  - b. come out to close friends

- c. come out to family members
  - d. come out to colleagues
  - e. come out to siblings
8. What is your highest level of education?
- a. Primary school
  - b. Middle school
  - c. High school
  - d. Associate
  - e. Bachelor
  - f. Master
  - g. Doctor
9. What is your profession? \_\_\_\_\_
10. How long have been using Blued? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Have you logged into Blued at least once in the past 30 days?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
12. Are you using other dating apps? What are they? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is you WeChat ID or QQ ID \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**(Translated from Chinese Version)**

1. Could you please tell me a little bit about your experience of using Blued?
2. What is your motive of constructing a profile on Blued?
3. What kind of information did you disclose on your personal Blued profile? Why do you disclose or not disclose that kind of information?
4. How did you choose the photos that has been published on your profile? And why did you choose these photos instead of other photos?
5. Why did (not) you upload your face photos on Blued?
6. What did you write in your textual description? Why did you write in that way?
7. To what extent do you think the impression you present on Blued is authentic to your offline self?
8. How do you evaluate the profiles of others?
9. What do you think of the authenticity of the profiles of other users? Did you have any disappointing experience?