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"I never told my family I was grieving for my mom": The not-disclosing-grief experiences of parentally bereaved adolescents and young adults in Chinese families

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Abstract

In bereavement literature, the significance of open communication within the family is often highlighted. However, in recent years, scholars have noticed the complexity of grief communication in the family, especially challenges and obstacles to sharing grief. Our study seeks to contribute to the research by offering a deeper understanding of the grief-sharing experiences of parentally bereaved adolescents and young adults from China, a family-centered society with strong traditions of treating bereavement and grief as taboo. We used a narrative approach to analyze 82 interviews with 44 participants. We found that almost all the participants, regardless of their gender, parent's gender, cause of death, or time since loss, indicated that they never shared grief with other family members. Specifically, three themes emerged from the analysis. "Holding back tears during the funeral" reflects participants' struggle to protect the family (especially the surviving parent) through hiding their grief during the family crisis. "Pretending no grief at all after loss" shows how participants intentionally avoided any grief conversations within the family to not trigger others' grief. In addition, "Keeping grief secret as a family rule" indicates how Chinese families powerfully guided and influenced participants in avoiding the open expression of their grief. Our findings have drawn attention to the not-disclosing-grief experiences of bereaved adolescents and young adults in the Chinese context and the role

of the family in it, therefore, calling for further support for bereaved young people, either within the family or through professional services.

KEYWORDS
adolescents, China, grief communication, parental loss, young adults

After the death of a loved one, most individuals experience a period of intense grief, with an excess risk of triggering diverse psychological reactions (Schwartz et al., 2018). One common assumption is that the bereaved individual ought to share grief experiences, communicative openness is beneficial for bereavement adjustment, and closedness is linked to maladaptive adjustment (Chow et al., 2007; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009). Traditionally, the dominant grief discourse, particularly the theory of "grief work" (Freud, 1922), postulates that grief is a temporary state that should be worked through, in which the bereaved need to disclose grief to let it go. From a stress-coping perspective, sharing grief is viewed as an emotion-focused strategy necessary for ameliorating emotional distress, whereas not sharing is considered avoidance/denial of grief (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Hooghe et al., 2018). Since bereavement often challenges or even shatters the personal meaning system, scholars also argue that talking about grief could work as a meaning-reconstruction approach for helping the bereaved to search for some reason, explanation, or meaning in their loss (Neimeyer, 2019).

In this context, the significance of open communication within the family is often highlighted (Hooghe et al., 2011; Stroebe et al., 2013). For the bereaved, family members are the most natural and accessible social network to permit open grief communication (Hooghe & Neimeyer, 2013; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009). Sharing grief with family members can be a key resource for creating stronger bonds, reinforcing security, and constructing mutual support (Bartel, 2020). Traylor et al. (2003) followed 61 recently bereaved people for 6 months and demonstrated that increased loss-related expressions predicted fewer grief symptoms over time. Moreover, family literature has greatly contributed to our understanding of this topic. The most influential work is Walsh's Family Resilience Framework (2011), which emphasizes that loss alters family structure, functioning, and interactions and argues open communication and problem-solving processes can foster family resilience in dealing with loss. From a meaning-making viewpoint, Nadeau (1998) argues that the loss also shatters a family's belief system, and through family conversations, personal meaning starts to emerge and eventually becomes woven into shared meaning, which powerfully influences family adaptation to loss. Kissane and Bloch (2003) even developed a typology of bereaved families and distinguish five family types: supportive, conflict resolving, intermediate, hostile, and sullen, the latter two considered dysfunctional largely due to poor family communication. Collectively, as Hooghe et al. (2011) summarized, in most relevant studies, openly sharing grief in the family is implicitly favored.

In recent years, scholars have noticed the complexity of grief communication in the family (Fredman et al., 2019; Hooghe et al., 2012, 2018; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009); mainly, numerous challenges for grief sharing have been recorded for bereaved parents after the loss of a child. It is typically reported that bereaved parents are hesitant to disclose personal grief, to protect partners from additional pain (Stroebe et al., 2013). Openly sharing grief also proves difficult when the bereaved perceive others are not comfortable with grief communication and would criticize their prolonged grief (Hastings, 2000). Researchers have found that the often-incongruent grieving styles, especially gender differences in coping with bereavement, make it particularly difficult for bereaved couples to share their grief with each other (Toller & Braithwaite, 2009). As the bereaved parents would be overwhelmed by their grief, researchers have recently argued that not talking could partly be understood as an emotional process of attunement to regulate their own grief intensity (Hooghe et al., 2018). In summary, research on sharing grief in the family

is limited (Bartel, 2020), and what we know is largely from the experiences of bereaved parents. Empirical studies exploring family communication about grief among other populations are lacking and, therefore, warranted.

One bereaved group calling for our attention is parentally bereaved adolescents and young adults. The bereaved person's developmental stage has long been suggested as a crucial factor leading to complications in the grieving process (Balk & Corr, 2001). Unfortunately, there is a dearth of studies on how losses experienced in the transition from adolescence to adulthood might influence grief expression (Schwartz et al., 2018), not to mention expression of grief in the family. Adolescence (approximate ages 10–18) is a period of substantial change in the self and the formation of a stable identity (Erikson, 1968). Young adulthood (approximate ages 18–30), often regarded as the last phase of adolescence for transitioning to adulthood, is characterized as a period of further separation from parents and individuation while still depending on parents as the central "pillar" of life (Guassi Moreira et al., 2018). The period during adolescence and young adulthood can be understood as a progressive process of transition from childhood to adulthood. During this transition, parents play a critical role in providing attachment bonding, emotional comfort, and instrumental support (Fingerman, 2017). Losing a parent places them at increased risk of complicated grief, low self-esteem, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and substance misuse, and diminished academic performance (Balk & Corr, 2001; Brent et al., 2012; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Jones & Martini, 2021). Research has demonstrated the similarities of grief reactions among adolescents and young adults, which are assumed different from those of children or adults, including turning to varied risk-taking activities to escape strong emotions (Palmer et al., 2016), or lacking peer support and feeling isolated in grief (Herberman Mash et al., 2013). Collectively, it is logical to consider adolescence and young adulthood as a continuous progression of the developmental period and explore how parentally bereaved adolescents and young adults (hereafter "young people") share grief in the family.

Although existing knowledge is largely from studies of Western societies, the picture of non-Western cultures is obscure, and little is known about grief communication in China, a family-centered society with strong traditions of treating bereavement and grief as taboo (Cheng et al., 2019). Although grief reactions are the universal response to the death of a loved one, most scholars agree that grieving as a process is socially and culturally constructed, and each culture has prescribed cultural norms of grieving (Rosenblatt, 2001). The norms experienced by Chinese bereaved can be quite different from those experienced in Western cultures. For instance, Chinese culture sees the action of "talking about death" as an invitation to evil spirits to jinx one's life (Chow et al., 2007); and Chinese people rarely discuss issues of death openly, including breaking the bad news to dying patients for fear of accelerating the death (Cheng et al., 2019), and communicating about body donation after death to family members (Chan et al., 2020). In contrast, within Western cultural traditions, as Hooghe et al. (2018) have stated, the belief that parents should talk about the loss with each other is deeply rooted.

Given these considerations, the significance of sharing grief in the family and its complexity, the understudied status of young people on this topic, and cultural norms regarding talking about death specific to the Chinese context, this study aims to explore the grief-sharing experiences of parentally bereaved young people in Chinese families.

PRESENT STUDY

This study was part of the first author's doctoral research on the experience of parental loss among Chinese young people. As it is necessary to explore the way one's interactional processes and context shape grief-sharing experiences (Hooghe et al., 2011), we used a narrative approach (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Riessman, 2008) to highlight the context and interaction in the

bereaved's experiences. While recognizing the different narratives within the same family, we focus on understanding the meanings and processes related to how young people construct and interpret their experiences of sharing grief with other family members.

METHODS

Participants

Our study used purposive sampling and expected participants to meet the following criteria: having experienced the death of a parent during adolescence and young adulthood and being at least 6 months into bereavement. Upon approval from the University's Survey and Behavioral Ethics Committee, we recruited participants from online postings.

From the 191 individuals who were interested, 44 young people participated, 33 females and 11 males. 29 had lost a father, and 15 lost a mother. The age at the parent's death ranged from 10 to 30 with a mean of 19. The time since loss ranged from 6 months to 17 years with a mean of 5.41 years. The reported causes of death were: 21 from anticipated death, 12 from sudden natural deaths, 8 from violent deaths, and 3 from suicide. For details of participants' background information, refer to Appendix S1.

Following bereavement scholars' tradition (e.g., Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009), we did not set one specific time since loss (e.g., over 10 years) as an exclusion criterion. Additionally, as parental loss has been argued as a lifelong process and cognitive development would lead young people to keep revisiting the parent's death (Biank & Werner-Lin, 2011), we wanted to include the voices of the young people who experience a long-term loss, to more fully capture the experiences from a variety of participants.

Data collection

Between August 2017 and September 2018, the first author interviewed a total of 44 young people using a semi-structured interview guide. All participants met with the first author at least once. Second or more interviews were scheduled on a case-by-case basis, such as when the participant's narratives could provide a rich portrayal that needed one more interview, or the participant was not ready to share his/her experience during the first interview. Eventually, 16 participants were interviewed once, 20 participants twice, six participants had three interviews, and two participants were conducted for four interviews, which yielded 82 interviews. For details of the number of interviews for each participant, refer to Appendix S1.

Interviews ranged from 90 min to 4 h and were conducted on the phone or in person. At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed of the research purpose and ethical principles. With their informed consent, all interviews were audiotaped. Considering Chinese people seldom talk about death and grief, two questions were asked as conversation starters: Would you mind sharing the reason for accepting this interview? Would you mind telling me how your relationship with your deceased mother/father was? This often helped the participants open the sharing. Afterward, participants were asked to describe their communication and interaction with other family members after the loss. We modeled interview questions after the narrative approach, in which participants were invited to recall aspects of their grief-sharing stories (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The narrative approach is the appropriate form of data collection when researchers want to facilitate participants narrating life stories with continuity alongside interactions with other people in relation to the story (Lieblich et al., 1998). For details of the interview guide, refer to Appendix S2.

Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The holistic-content analysis was conducted on the narrative data because it facilitates exploring the meanings of narratives through content analysis while keeping the narrative intact for a holistic understanding (Lieblich et al., 1998). First, we read transcripts several times to be fully immersed in the narratives. Then, we performed thematic coding using Nvivo, identifying categories through the line-by-line coding and locating narratives in which participants referred to their experiences of grief communication in the family. Special attention was paid to context and interactions related to talking or not-talking experiences. Subsequently, we used two narrative structure approaches—the problem–solution approach and the three-dimensional space approach—to weave the categories in a narrative format. Both were developed by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) to achieve the holistic-content analysis' central feature of "restorying" a story from the original data. The problem–solution approach emphasizes the narrative's contextual details (characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution). In addition, the three-dimensional space approach highlights the narrative's interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation.

Several strategies were used to address the credibility and trustworthiness of data analysis. First, we collaborated with participants by checking and negotiating the meaning of their narratives; all transcripts and drafts of participants' "restoried stories" (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) were sent to them for verification and feedback, and stories were revised according to participants' comments. Second, when the first author finished coding and constructed the "restoried" stories, that is, organized the elements of personal narratives into the two narrative structure approaches, the other authors checked those drafts, extensive discussion and revision taking place at all stages of the analysis process. Third, making reference to "bracketing interviews" (Rolls & Relf, 2006), the other authors continued to ask the first author questions and facilitated her to reflect on the impacts of personal assumptions and experiences on data analysis.

FINDINGS

Ms. He[1] (23 years old) said that ever since her mother died suddenly of a heart attack 3 years ago, she dreamt about her mother every night. In those dreams, her mother was healthy initially yet always left her suddenly. The repeated dreams led her to have insomnia. However, even though deeply troubled by the loss, she never disclosed her grief to anyone:

> Interviewer: Does your father know that you are grieving for your mother?
>
> Ms. He: He doesn't know. The people around me don't know, including my relatives. My grief, those dreams… I never told my family members. I have never even told my father! I think those dreams are quite fine, at least I still remember what she looks like.

The experience of "I never told my family I was grieving for my mom" was not unique to Ms. He. Almost all participants, regardless of their gender, parent's gender, cause of death, or time since loss, said that they never shared grief in the family. Specifically, three themes related to their not-talking experiences emerged: holding back tears during the funeral, pretending no grief at all after loss, and keeping grief secret as a family rule.

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[1]Participants' pseudonyms were given according to the interview sequence and the Hundred Family Surnames (*Bai Jia Xing*, 百家姓). Hence, Ms. He was the twenty-first participant in this study.

TABLE 1 Application of Ms. Zhang's Narratives to the Problem–solution Approach.

Setting	Characters	Problem	Actions/intentions	Resolution
Suddenly informed that father was seriously ill (In the ward)	Zhang, her parents, and some relatives	Without any notice, Zhang was brought to see her dying father	Didn't want to worry her parents and show vulnerability in front of other relatives	Pinched herself to hold back tears
Alone with mother (Outside the ward)	Zhang and mother	Mother asked Zhang how she would be if father died	Felt sad deep in her heart; Pretended to be strong and answered: "It's ok" with a smile	Decided to stay in the hospital and to help mom to take care of father
Father died Mother broke down (In the ward)	Zhang, mother, and the doctor	The doctor needed to issue a death certificate and asked Zhang to copy father's ID card	Felt nothing inside; Anxious that the printing room was not open during National Day	Worried about mother; Ran outside the hospital to make copies
Father died Mother broke down (In the ward)	Zhang, mother, and relatives	Relatives arrived one after another	Worried about mother; Worried about becoming "helpless" mother and daughter in front of relatives	Didn't shed a tear; Hugged mother and promised would take care of her;
Arranging father's funeral and cremation (In the crematorium)	Zhang, mother, and relatives	Worried about mother; Father was to be sent to the crematorium	Primarily responsible for funeral arrangement; Didn't allow herself to cry in front of relatives	Refused relatives' support: "No need to help me; I'm fine."

Holding back tears during the funeral

Although funerals have been assumed as beneficial for the bereaved to express grief and receive support, "holding back tears during the funeral" is featured in most participants' narratives in the period immediately after the parent's death. In Chinese society, according to the principle of filial piety, children are expected (or required) to cry out for a parent's death at the funeral; however, "didn't cry" was a recurring theme: *I didn't cry (at the funeral) … I felt like I fucking should cry. I still haven't figured it out* (Mr. Cao, a 23-year-old fatherless son).

Ms. Zhang, who lost her father when she was 19, spoke about such contradicting emotions of feeling deep grief while projecting the appearance of "I am not grieving," emanating from her struggle to protect the family (her inconsolable mother), through hiding her grief during the family crisis.

> Ms. Zhang: My mother broke down in tears immediately (after my father passed away), but I just stood there patting her on the shoulder. I didn't shed a single tear! … I hugged her, told her not to cry, and said, "Mom, I will take good care of you." I was just afraid that everyone would think that now it is just two of us, the kind of mother and daughter who helplessly rely upon each other. … I hope after my father was gone, I can become a new pillar for mom. I don't want others to think we are very miserable, weak… So, I feel I must hold on; that's it.

As presented in Table 1, the action of holding back tears repeatedly emerged in Ms. Zhang's narratives. Though her father died after a long-term illness, Ms. Zhang suffered from unanticipated grief because she was suddenly brought to the hospital and told that her father was dying. After realizing the swollen man lying in the bed was her father, her first response was to pinch herself to hold back tears, since she did not want to increase the burden on both parents and to show vulnerability to other relatives. A day later, after her father ate the breakfast she brought him, he died. Her mother broke down almost immediately, and Ms. Zhang recounted her surprise: "I felt nothing inside, no sadness at all." Moreover, even though she was a college student at that time and her mother was middle-aged, Ms. Zhang noted how occupied she was afterward in handling post-death matters, including arranging her father's funeral and cremation. It seems that because of her worry for her mother and the tasks for the funeral arrangement, she managed to stay composed and pretended to have no grief.

Like Ms. Zhang, many participants described how hard they tried to hold back tears in a time of family chaos: a parent died, others cried out, and there were many funeral tasks to handle. Mr. Shen was 20 when his father died within 3 days; he mentioned that he also was highly involved with the funeral arrangements and did not cry. In fact, it wasn't until he went back to university after his father's funeral that he cried bitterly while sleeping (his roommate told him). When asked what made him hold back tears, Shen replied: "I had a duty…Everyone else was crying. The matter (funeral) had to go on. There must be someone who didn't cry, was sober. So, I forced myself to repress my emotions."

Many participants perceived it was their responsibility to take care of other family members during such disruption of family function. Ms. Yang, whose father died suddenly when she was 21, also emphasized that she did not shed a single tear, even when serving as a pallbearer. During those days, she repeatedly reminded herself that she could not lose control of emotions and had to hold back no matter how much pain she was in, because "Mom was crying…You couldn't cry in front of your younger brothers. If I wasn't strong, how should they live when they'd already lost Father?"

Pretending no grief after loss

When asked about grief communication after the funeral, almost all participants stated that they would continue to pretend they were not grieving, to avoid triggering others' grief. When Ms. Chen's father died from lung cancer, she had not yet graduated from college and only had a part-time income. Like Ms. Zhang, Ms. Chen recalled, "What I felt in my heart was that my mother must rely on me for care. I was the only one (dependable person) in our family." Thus, after the funeral, Ms. Chen quickly returned to work (in another city). Her aunt told her that her mother often cried for no reason and withdrew into herself. Because of her mother's intense grief, Ms. Chen consciously avoided any reminder of her father in family talk (see Table 2). However, one

TABLE 2 Application of Ms. Chen's Narratives to the Problem–solution Approach.

Setting	Characters	Problem	Actions/intentions	Resolution
Immediately after father died	Chen and mother	Mother broke down in tears	Didn't want to trigger mother's grief	No grief-sharing with mother during the funeral
After the funeral	Chen and mother	Lost the breadwinner because of father's death	Tried to take good care of mother	Returned to work immediately
In front of father's tomb	Chen and mother	Mother thought Chen was not grieving	Felt angry and wronged	Disclosed her grief to mother for the first time

consequence of her not-disclosing-grief actions was that during the first Chinese Spring Festival after her father's death, her mother asked Ms. Chen warily in front of her father's tomb, "Aren't you sad about your father's death at all?"

> Ms. Chen: It turned out that in my mom's eyes, I looked quite normal, not like a fatherless daughter. At the time I was a little angry and asked her, 'What do you want me to do? You don't think I'm grieving? It's what I deliberately pretend to be! Do you want me to do nothing and just cry? If I allow myself to grieve, then who is the one our family is relying on? Our family was just like a mud puddle. Would Father want to see that?'

Ms. Zhu told the first author a shocking story. When she was only 16, Ms. Zhu's father went to Beijing to seek medical treatment for liver cirrhosis, which did not work; however, her mother waited 2 months to break the terrible news of her father's death to her and her younger sister. Ms. Zhu described how the family cried on each other's shoulders when the death was finally disclosed; yet afterward, she excluded her family as a sharing network and observed the emotions of her mother and younger sister very carefully because "my mother suffered a lot; my sister was very sensitive; I was very afraid to arouse their unpleasant feelings."

Keeping grief secret as a family rule

As Doka (2002) stated, every society has its "grieving rules" that determine a socially conferred "right to grieve." Likewise, we found that Chinese families set family rules about discouraging young people from openly expressing or sharing their grief, "keeping grief secret as a family rule." This theme emphasizes that families not only serve as the context where grieving takes place but also actively get involved in regulating participants' not-disclosing-grief experiences. For example, Mrs. Zou mentioned that after her father passed away because of advanced liver cancer, *fuqin* (father 父親) became the word-which-must-not-be-spoken in her family:

> Mrs. Zou: Everyone, including my mother, just pretended that nothing had happened and continued to live as they used to… Everyone was deliberately avoiding it, rarely mentioning (father)… I was very young at that time. I didn't mention it either, just followed them. For so many years, no one has ever said anything openly. I just hold it in my heart, even when I felt sad. I didn't dare speak out, for fear of my mother being angry.

As shown in Table 3, both Mrs. Zou's close and extended family created an unspoken rule of grief-avoiding as a guide for family interaction. Even when she suffered facial paralysis immediately after her father's death and the doctor suspected it resulted from emotional distress, her family members never discussed the effects of loss with her. A few years later, when Mrs. Zou went to college and minored in psychology, she tried to break that family rule by disclosing grief to her mother and other relatives; however, such attempts have so far failed. Ultimately, she gave up and decided not to try grief sharing.

Similarly, in Ms. Shui's family, there was a guide not only about grief sharing but about keeping her fatherless identity a secret. When Ms. Shui's father died following a long battle with cancer, she was taking the college entrance examination and her family concealed the bad news until she finished her exam. Upon hearing the news, she cried for 2 days. After that, she acted just like others and never mentioned her father in the family. What struck us is how secret Ms. Shui kept her bereavement-related information: whenever she had to fill out detailed information describing her family members' status, she would claim her father was retired. When asked why she was so secretive about this, Ms. Shui responded: "There was an elderly family

TABLE 3 Application of Mrs. Zou's Narratives to the Three-dimensional Space Approach.

Interaction		Continuity			
Personal	**Social**	**Past**	**Present**	**Future**	**Situation/place**
Secretly cried and experienced facial paralysis	Her family never recognized the effects of her loss	Father died	Family never talked about "father" and pretended that nothing happened		Immediate period after father's death
Tried to share grief with mother	Mother refused to talk	An unspoken rule about grief-avoiding emerged	Tried to break the rule through open the sharing with mother		A few years after father's death
Tried to share grief with other relatives	Relatives refused to respond to Zou's painful experiences	Zou followed the family rule	Tried to break the rule through sharing with relatives		Many years after father's death
Seldom shared her grief with family	One friend recognized her grief	Zou had tried to break that rule, yet failed	Was touched by that friend, and he eventually became Zou's husband	Won't share the grief with original family anymore	Many years after father's death

member, I remembered it very clearly. I was specifically told that I shouldn't say anything in school."

DISCUSSION

The complexity of grief communication in families has received increasing attention recently, yet there remain many gaps to address (Fredman et al., 2019; Hooghe et al., 2012, 2018; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009). Our study sought to contribute to the research by offering a deeper understanding of the grief-sharing experiences of parentally bereaved young people in Chinese families. What we heard in the narratives of 44 young people was that almost all participants, regardless of their gender, parent's gender, cause of death, or time since loss, indicated that they never shared grief with other family members. This finding is significant, as Hooghe et al. (2011) argued that most often, research has focused on communication and openness without considering interactions and context leading the bereaved toward not communicating with others. In this connection, this study extends existing knowledge (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Nadeau, 1998; Walsh, 2007) by demonstrating how young people in the present study challenge the grief-communication notion that openly sharing grief in the family generally exists. Notably, Hooghe et al. (2018) have reported a similar not-talking phenomenon among bereaved couples and suggested it is an emotional process of attunement on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. In our study, we believe that the narrative approach contributed to a more nuanced view for understanding young people's not-disclosing experience by relocating it within the family context and reordering it chronologically. Based on our findings, we argue that rather than saying that young people did not communicate grief in the family, they hid grief from the family and the family has a far-reaching influence on their not-disclosing behaviors. Specifically, their journey of hiding grief began with the instinctive desire to protect the family in crisis and, therefore, hold back tears during the funeral. It continued with the avoidance of triggering family members'

grief post bereavement, coupled with the family's conscious guidance of avoiding grief as taboo, ending in their hidden grief experiences.

We found that participants' strong concerns for the family (especially the surviving parents) hampered their grief-sharing actions, both during the funeral and afterward. Young people would try to protect the family in chaos and take on parental roles toward family members, including repressing grief to support/handle the funeral arrangements or masking grief to prevent burdening other family members. This finding echoes the concept of the parentified child that arises in studies of other adverse family circumstances, such as parents with HIV/AIDS or single-parent households (Stein et al., 2007). Parentification refers to the premature assumption of parental, spousal, or adult roles among children or adolescents before they are developmentally prepared for adult responsibilities (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Similarly, young people in our study felt obligated to care for the surviving parents, therefore, assuming a caretaker parental role at the expense of disclosing their own grief. In a study in Hong Kong, bereaved children aged 5–11 were found to hide their grief for losing a sibling to protect their parents and minimize parents' worries (Chan et al., 2022). In Latino and African American cultures, which are more family- and group-oriented, it is also observed that children are socialized to regard parental role assumption as normative when parents turn to children for help (Stein et al., 2007). Namely, parentification is culturally appropriate within those families. As Markus and Kitayama (1991) stated, in a collectivistic culture, individuals view the self as interdependent within groups. Thus, it situates them in cultural obligations to fulfill collective goals, such as family survival following the death of a parent. In this connection, Chinese culture has long been recognized as collectivistic and has a strong emphasis on conformity, interdependence, and loyalty (Hui & Triandis, 1986). It lends further support to understanding the parentified behaviors of young people, including not disclosing grief openly for the family's sake and pretending to have recovered from the loss.

Furthermore, our study moved beyond portraying families as passive agents and uncovered how families proactively restricted participants from sharing grief. With a strict family rule of keeping grief hidden, even young people who endeavored to disclose grief had little freedom except to compromise and comply with that rule. This finding is surprising but also significant, as in bereavement literature, family is assumed the most natural network to permit open grief communication (Hooghe & Neimeyer, 2013; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009). One possible explanation for Chinese families' strong restriction on grief talk may be related to the Chinese cultural taboo on death (Cheng et al., 2019), as discussed in the Introduction. Also, much of the scholarly literature has reported that in Chinese society, the death-taboo challenges the information disclosure to dying patients and greatly decreases effective communication on end-of-life care (e.g., Dong et al., 2016). Death-taboo culture also permeated the interview process. For instance, participants showed reluctance in talking about death, bereavement, and grief directly, instead preferring to use euphemisms. For example, Ms. Zhu did not use the word "death" once, but 77 times said "event" to refer to the death of her father. Therefore, as Walter (2000) has argued, one function of cultural narrative is "the policing of grief," which refers to the mechanism by which families (or other agents) are pressured to make their narrative congruent with the larger cultural narrative. Our finding echoes Walter's concept insofar as the Chinese family constructed norms for silencing young people's grief, aligns with the Chinese cultural taboo of death.

Our findings offer several practice implications. First, rather than advocating open communication within the family, which might put extra challenges on young people, our study suggests that professionals can recognize the complexities of grief communication with other family members and make room to "talk about talking" (Fredman et al., 2019; Kissane & Hooghe, 2011), including asking about their grief-sharing experiences and discussing the possible effects on their bereavement experiences. Secondly, this study has enriched the understanding of resonant meanings that young people tie to their non-disclosing-grief experiences. Though our findings may not provide evidence about the effects of not talking about their adjustment, it may help if professionals use a meaning-reconstruction model (Neimeyer, 2019) to help young people to find

meaning in their not-disclosing behaviors through reauthoring their grief narratives. Also, it is vital to help them to be aware of the significance and need for self-care despite their choice of "family comes first." Thirdly, our findings provide a deeper understanding of how families get involved in individual grief. Professionals may stress the importance of seeking family support while neglecting the family's discouragement of grief sharing, but a family-centered approach that includes the surviving parent within service delivery is warranted. The provision of grief education for the surviving parent is an area in which professionals can play a crucial role, helping to normalize young people's grief-sharing attempts and supporting them in communicating grief within the family.

Although our study is the first attempt to provide a glimpse of sharing grief in Chinese families, several limitations are worth discussing. Despite our attempts to invite young people's family members to participate, only one sibling joined. This limits our understanding of the relational dimensions of grief sharing within the family unit. It is recommended that future research be designed with a systemic lens, recruit the family, and conduct both individual and joint interviews to unfold this dynamic family process. In this study, we did not focus on the possible differences in gender or death modes in grief sharing; hence, future studies may explicitly examine these issues. Also, despite the comparatively large sample size, our findings cannot be generalized to all young people, in the absence of a randomized representative sample. Moreover, we explained the strong restriction on grief talk of Chinese families as a cultural issue. Although this study did not compare cultures, future research might consider studying young people from other cultures and further compare their findings with ours.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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