Using Grounded Theory to Understand a Cutting-Edge Issue: Effects of Integrative Tactics on Chinese Gay Men’s and Lesbians’ Social Well-Being

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Abstract
This study aims to demonstrate how grounded theory can be used to explore and analyze negotiation processes between self-identified gay men and lesbians and their parents. For a majority of Chinese gay men and lesbians, marriage proves to be the primary concern that drives negotiations with parents. Extant research documents the precarious consequences of gay men’s and lesbians’ social well-being yielded by these negotiations, which primarily employ distributive negotiating tactics. As integrative tactics prove to be conducive to favorable outcomes, their application in same-sex children’s negotiation with parents informs the present study. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 Chinese participants (15 gay men and 10 lesbian women). Grounded theory analysis of interviewee data identified a grounded theory of soft-power-based negotiation, which illustrated detailed negotiation processes between gay men and lesbians and their parents and critical conditions mediating this process. The grounded theory elaborated concrete soft-power bases and integrative tactics used by participants and their parents. Conditions for integrative tactics to sustain gay men and lesbians’ social well-being emerged. Results implied viable solutions for resolving conflicts between social minorities and social majorities in general.

Keywords
China, grounded theory, homosexuality, negotiation, social well-being

Introduction
Living in a heteronormative society, Chinese gay men and lesbians face many issues, among which, marriage is listed as a primary concern by most gay men and lesbian women (M. H. Liu et al., 2015). The marriage institution in China is cultivated as a mandatory obligation, a result of the interplay of certain compulsory institutional constraints and symbolic significances. This heterosexism espouses the general public’s sexual prejudice against same-sex individuals, and gay men and lesbian women must negotiate against this ideology in order to sustain their social well-being (Herek, 2004). With regard to this issue in China, parents play the roles of actors with whom gay men and lesbians primarily negotiate. Dire consequences such as suicide and estrangement are known to arise from conflicts between gay men and lesbians and their parents in this regard, which deteriorates the well-being of both sides (Ren et al., 2019). Under these circumstances, understanding how same-sex individuals negotiate with their parents and how their negotiation affects their social well-being is imperative. Integrative negotiation based on soft power bases for conflict resolution is the centerpiece of negotiation in terms of both scholarship and teaching (Korobkin, 2007). Therefore, to determine whether integrative bargaining is conducive to gay men’s and lesbian women’s conflict resolution, this study investigates the integrative tactics deployed by gay men and lesbians when they negotiate the issue of marriage with their parents and how deployment of these integrative tactics affects their social well-being.

Considering that the goal of this study is to uncover the process of gay men’s and lesbians’ negotiation, a grounded
theory approach proves to be a potent tool given the exploratory nature of this original study (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005a, 2005b). Moreover, this approach is also ideal for studying the current topic, as existing theories fail to explain and capture participants’ living experiences.

**Literature Review**

**Power Bases and Negotiating Tactics**

Negotiation is a process involving interactive communication, where at least two parties combine their conflicting perspectives into a single decision. Within this kind of social interaction, power plays a nuclear role in organizing, facilitating, and affecting actors’ behaviors and relationship dynamics (Simpson et al., 2015). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to focus on how power affects negotiations.

French and Raven (1959) defined six especially common and vital bases of social power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, expert power, and informational power, which can be classified into a cohesive dichotomy as either soft or hard (Erchul et al., 2001; Getty & Erchul, 2009). Soft power refers to the kinds of social power that are considerate, noncoercive, and subtler, including “positive expert, positive referent, direct informational, legitimate dependence, and personal reward power”; whereas hard power refers to power bases that are coercive, intimidating, and direct, including “impersonal coercion, personal coercion, impersonal reward, legitimate position, legitimate reciprocity, and legitimate power” (Getty & Erchul, 2009, p. 448). Concrete tactics to execute these power bases are divisible into integrative and distributive negotiating tactics based on which power bases they try to realize. Integrative tactics are in line with soft power bases and are prosocial and conducive to relationship growth and maintenance (De Dreu, 2004). In contrast to integrative tactics, distributive tactics are in line with hard power bases and are antisocial and detrimental to interpersonal relations (Sillars, 1980).

**Negotiating Homosexuality Against the Institution of Marriage**

Influenced by different motivations, gay men and lesbians employ different negotiation tactics that lead to distinctive negotiation processes, which then result in different outcomes affecting their social well-being. In terms of motivation, same-sex individuals frequently mention factors such as saving the family’s reputation, carrying on family kinship, fulfilling filial piety, and alleviating social stigma (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018; Neilands et al., 2008; Ren et al., 2019). Contingent to their motives, gay men and lesbians employ different tactics to negotiate their same-sex identity against the Chinese institution of marriage. One way is to conceal their same-sex identity and marry heterosexual individuals to manifest their filial piety and commitment to reproduction (M. Liu, 2013). Another relatively new and underaddressed tactic is the nominal or formality marriage. This type of marriage is a fake matrimony in which a gay man and a lesbian woman pretend to be a married couple mainly for social, familial, and reproductive purposes. Studies document that this type of marriage could shield gay men and lesbian women from social stigma, maintain their same-sex relationship, and reserve traditional family values (Choi & Luo, 2016; Qiu, 2017; Ren et al., 2019; Tedschi Gallo, 2017). In addition to these tactics, some gay men and lesbians go to extreme lengths by threatening their parents with suicide, and some do in fact commit suicide. Moreover, estrangement from families and fleeing to other cities are also common choices (Chou, 2001).

**Method**

The grounded theory, introduced five decades ago by Glaser and Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), consist of an inductive, comparative, and systematic method of conducting an inquiry with the aim of constructing a theory. This approach enables and encourages researchers to persistently interact with data while constantly engaging with the emergence of data analysis. Data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously as they inform and streamline each other (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

The fieldwork was executed in Shandong, China, between March and June 2017. A Chinese coauthor who self-identified as heterosexual, fluent in Mandarin and English, and had established a rapport with several Mainland Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (LGBT) community activists conducted the semistructured interviews in Mandarin—the participants’ first language. Inclusion standards of participants who used integrative tactics for negotiation included communicating the marriage issue to parents in a noncoercive and considerate way, conveying their needs in a nonaggressive and gentle manner, and achieving their objectives through subtle and strategic ways. The LGBT activists invited the interviewer to post-recruitment information on the WeChat platform (a communication mobile app widely used among the Chinese population) where groups of gay men and lesbians socialized. In all, 25 self-identified gay men and lesbians (15 gay men and 10 lesbian women) ages 23–39 participated in the study. The primary strategy of theoretical sampling was used throughout the study. According to grounded theory, theoretical sampling selects important concepts to be researched more effectively than humans (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We attempted to approach the most relevant interviewees who could provide ideas that were pertinent to this study. Data analysis began immediately after we interviewed two participants as we aimed to discover more plausible concepts. Emerging concepts led to more unanswered questions and, in turn, additional interviews were conducted. This process repeated until data saturation was reached, when all the central categories were fully developed, demonstrated variations, and could be integrated (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). All interviews were audiotaped, and the same author transcribed and translated transcripts into English. The author’s knowledge on marital stress faced by Chinese gay men and lesbian women and her presence at the interviews facilitated accuracy and maintained cultural sensitivity of the translation.
Upon translation of transcripts, six participants who were fluent in English were revisited to validate meanings. The study secured ethical approval by the Human Subjects of Ethics Subcommittee at City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. All participants were informed of the aims and processes of this study and written consent was obtained. Participants’ confidentiality, anonymously coding their names for reporting purposes, and the choice of immediate withdrawal were guaranteed.

Each interviewee was assigned a number in order to preserve the privacy of data: for lesbian women, L1, L2,...., and for gay men, G1, G2, etc. The initial interview guide for this study was prepared and designed based on the literature of negotiation, marriage, intergenerational relations, and social well-being. Questions and subquestions were asked to understand the negotiation process. A set of questions regarding the negotiation process asked about participants’ actions, including “How did you communicate with your parents about your intentions and needs? When you communicated with your parents about the marriage issue, did you engage using certain emotions? How did your parents respond?” and “Did you find an effective way to communicate with your parents? If so, what was it?” The influences of negotiation on participants’ social well-being were also probed by asking the following: “How did you think this negotiation influenced you?” “Did you feel lonely or did you feel close to your family and society?” and “Did you feel accepted by society and did you think that you could benefit from society?” After initially interviewing two participants, we immediately analyzed the data, which generated new concepts and questions that needed to be answered. The initial interview guide was thus revised, and more questions were added; the revised interview guide was used to interview more participants. A revision of the interview guide was conducted whenever new questions emerging from previous rounds of interviews needed to be addressed.

We remained flexible as well as responsive to data and goals. The analytical process of the grounded theory approach started with reading and familiarizing ourselves with the data, followed by initial coding. Grounded theory coding shapes the analytical frame for analysis. We remained open to all data that were collected. Data were first deconstructed, closely investigated, and compared for differences and similarities. Causes, events, actions, and interactions that were found to be conceptually similar or relevant were grouped together under abstract terms or concepts, namely “categories.” Axial coding, which identified core concepts of the study, was performed. Based on the results of open coding, axial coding regrouped the data in order to discover more analytic concepts. The final step of coding was selective coding, which aimed to investigate the central category of the study. Saturation of categories was examined at this point, and it was concluded that further analysis will not produce any new information. All data were captured and depicted via key categories, and a central category that could reflect the core story of all respondents as a group emerged. This central category was utilized to develop a conceptual model and an emerging theory, which is considered to be grounded in data and can reflect experiences of all participants (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Notes were taken during interviews to record participants’ facial expressions and emotions that could not be captured by a tape recorder. Successive memos were maintained throughout the process, which facilitated immersion in the analysis and enhanced the level of abstraction of ideas. Theoretical memo writing and concepts were finally integrated and diagrammed to form the theory of this study (Babbie, 2015; Charmaz, 2006). An important function of memo keeping is for the interviewer to constantly reflect on how personal experiences relate to this research through the entire process (Maxwell, 2009). For instance, the interviewer was a self-identified heterosexual female who had made her identity known when she conducted interviews so that she would not neglect any taken-for-granted aspects that were critical for gay men and lesbian women. One such aspect was the meaning of marriage. The author reflected that marriage was a long taken-for-granted idea for her, and getting married at an appropriate age never conflicted with her own value system. However, after interviewing the first two participants, the author found that for gay men and lesbians, marriage posed different layers of meanings. It associated with their sexual identity, daily interactions with surroundings, and functions in a heteronormative society. Considering this, the interviewer was more inclined to pay attention to daily practices that were previously invisible to the author but important for participants during negotiations with parents.

This research design enables in-depth data collection from both gay men and lesbians. Thanks to a referral by activists whom participants trusted and respected, we were able to build a rapport with them, which facilitated their sharing. However, this study had its fair share of challenges. The first challenge came in the form of locating female participants. Compared to gay men, lesbian women were more invisible and less agreeable to interviews. During data collection, three lesbians failed to be present for the interview due to privacy concerns after they had accepted our invitation. The second challenge arose from the theoretical sampling method. Data saturation was originally considered to be achieved after the first 20 interviews, however, a new concept that parents’ use of integrative tactics contributed to participants’ social well-being was emerging from the data, and thus the conceptual model developed was challenged and required further substantiation. Therefore, a new round of data collection ensued.

Using a grounded theory approach has its pros and cons. In terms of benefits, the grounded theory approach can be applied to discover participants’ actions, important negotiating process, mechanisms, mediators, and outcomes, and thus the purpose of constructing a theory grounded with these data was achievable. By using this approach, we were able to shift the research from generalization and verification of statistical materials to understanding a complex social process and discovering unexpected knowledge. In terms of disadvantages, this approach focused excessively on everyday practices of participants, and as data emerged, we were limited to attaching to higher levels of theories.
**Results**

Findings led to the culmination of a grounded theory explaining how dyadic negotiation was based on the flow of soft power. The grounded theory analysis eventually consolidated findings with a grounded theory which was termed the dyadic soft-power-based negotiation model (see Figure 1).

The central phenomenon of soft-power-based dyadic interaction indicated how the use of soft power in negotiation sustained social well-being in gay men and lesbian women and how parents reacted to their tactics. Using integrative tactics for negotiation served as a central theme across other elements of participants’ negotiation, such as motivations, strategies, and consequences of social well-being. According to the model, causal conditions, which were referred to as participants’ characteristics, including occupation, consideration for parents, and same-sex identity development motivated their use of integrative tactics for negotiation. Strategic conditions, namely, integrative tactics used by participants included nominal marriages to disclose sexual identities and tactics used by parents such as persuasion and acceptance to negotiate. Mediating conditions were translated as factors that mediated the negotiation’s impact on participants’ social well-being, encompassing a sense of guilt, same-sex relationship satisfaction, and nominal marital relationship satisfaction. Consequential conditions referred to the outcome of participants’ social well-being, that is, how their social well-being was affected by the negotiation process. The following sections illustrate the mechanisms of the negotiation process.

**Characteristics Predisposing Homosexuals’ Use of Soft Power Bases**

**Conservative work climate encouraging the use of soft power.** The level of conservativeness in participants’ occupations plays a vital role in positively affecting their utilization of soft power bases. Those who work in state-owned enterprises, civil service sectors, the government, and in relatively conservative surroundings were prone to adopt soft power bases for negotiation. Leaking information about their same-sex identity to other colleagues might incur discrimination, demotion, and even job loss. These concerns are expressed in the following quotes:

As I work as a civil servant who is affiliated with the local government, the disclosure of my same-sex identity could directly lead to my dismissal, since homosexuality is against what the state’s policies approve and associate with promiscuity, which will tarnish the government’s reputation. (G4, age 39, gay)

Similar to G4’s case, L1, a 32-year-old lesbian woman, was also a civil servant. She mentioned that disclosing her same-sex identity would cost her job:

If my colleagues find out that I am a lesbian, I will probably get fired, because the government would never accept a lesbian working for them. As a result, I must think of a low-profile way to solve my marriage problem. (L1)

Like L1 and G4, other participants who utilized soft power bases expressed similar concerns, and some even ranked pressure from work as the top reason for concealing their same-sex identities from colleagues by using soft power bases.

**Consideration for parents leading to use of soft power bases.** Participants’ consideration for parents was positively associated with their use of soft power bases, and the more they cared for their parents’ health, needs, and expectations, the more inclined they were to deploy soft power bases for negotiation. As parents gradually aged and faced declining health, participants believed that releasing such shocking news would likely
devastate parents both mentally and physically. This belief was evinced in the following:

The major reason I conceal my same-sex identity is that I am afraid my parents will not take the news well and it might harm their health. (L7, age 27, lesbian)

Similarly, G11, a 29-year-old gay man, mentioned that his mother’s health was the chief concern when it came to negotiating with her:

My mother already faces poor health, and this is the primary reason I still hide in the closet. (G11)

Concern for parents’ health was ranked as the top priority by a majority of participants who utilized soft power bases. In addition to parents’ physical health, which worried many participating gay men and lesbians, parents’ mental pressure was a concern. Therefore, power bases that could alleviate their concerns were desirable approaches.

Same-sex identity development discouraging the use of soft power bases. Participants’ level of same-sex orientation identity development was negatively associated with deployment of soft power bases. In earlier stages of same-sex identity development, participants harbored more internalized homophobia toward their identity, and as they attached negative connotations to their same-sex identity, they denied themselves the right to be gay and wanted to distance themselves from the Tongzhi community (a contemporary Chinese term encompassing groups of LGBT individuals) by approaching heterosexuals for marriage as a denial and cover-up for their same-sex identity. Details of such concerns were desirable approaches.

Some participants did not realize their same-sex identities nor understand their same-sex urges very well, so they complied with their parents’ expectations by getting married before they fully understood their same-sex identities even though this choice was not entirely against their will at the time. As the following participant stated:

I am so used to being bound by mainstream social values that I do not want to admit that I am gay, as it is against what society approves of and it will make me a bad person. (G7, age 24, gay)

For participants who chose to adopt this power basis, they commonly considered that directly conveying information that was pro-homosexuality to parents was the best method of negotiation in the sense that it would obviate the necessity of lying in the future, which might cause greater harm to both parents and themselves. Moreover, this seemed to be the best way to be responsible for their own lives.

Positive referent. Another soft power basis adopted by participants when they negotiated with parents was positive referent. In this power basis, the target individual complies with the influencing agent as the target wants to be associated with the agent (Getty & Erchul, 2009). Some participants deployed this power basis to negotiate with parents by trying to rely on the intergenerational relationship to appeal to their parents’ compassion and intended to let their parents comply with their needs and decisions. By always mentioning that they were their parents’ children during the negotiations and usually expressing experiences of hardship, agony, distress, and repression through the years, participants who used this power basis attempted to arouse their parents’ compassion and sense of guilt in order to deter their parents from pushing them toward unsuitable marriage choices. L6, a 27-year-old lesbian, reported that:

Some participants adopted this power basis to negotiate with parents, particularly when they wanted to convey information regarding homosexuality.

G5, a 27-year-old gay man, casually came out to his mother without any hesitation when he was 17:

After having a few boyfriends, I had already become increasingly mature in terms of my same-sex identity, and as I gradually approached adulthood, I became increasingly persistent to come out to the whole world. Coming out affected not only my life but also my partner’s life. (G5)

The resulting information asymmetry offered participants more leeway to prepare arguments and persuasions targeting parents’ doubts, worries, and rejections. When G10 confessed his homosexuality to his mother, she associated it with disease, so G10 concealed all the information regarding homosexuality being viewed as a psychological and physical disease from her; instead, he only introduced homosexuality as an inborn characteristic.

I remember telling my mother that I have had feelings for boys since I was three, and I kept telling her that I was born this way, but there was nothing wrong with my body. Of course, she was shocked and suspected I was diseased, so I shared information with her that stated that homosexuality was not a disease—something I had prepared for long in advance. I must say, official information and news did speak louder than my persuasion, and I felt so lucky that she had only received a little education and knew nothing about surfing online, or else it would not have been so easy for me to persuade her. (G10)

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Soft Power Bases Used by Participants

Direct informational. A direct informational base refers to providing information that has logical value to others in order to make them comply with one’s self (Getty & Erchul 2009).
How many parents have the heart to push their children into the abyss if they love them deeply and sincerely? They will finally all give up as long as you stick to your position and do not sway. (L6)

Similarly, this point was mentioned by other participants, both gay and lesbian individuals:

I am the only son in my family. Although my parents did not accept the reality that I would never get married and have my own son in the future, they could still not ground me at home and control my thoughts. (G2, aged 29, gay)

Participants who had a closer and more intimate relationship with parents were more inclined to use positive references as they were more confident that their parents would agree because previous positive intergenerational relationships had laid a foundation for their future conflict resolution. Relying on the positive referent power basis, participants adopted techniques that were less direct, harsh, or disruptive in an attempt to create a relatively peaceful atmosphere that considered both parties’ feelings and benefits.

**Integrative Tactics Based on Soft Power Bases**

**Nominal marriage.** Some participants chose to marry same-sex individuals of the opposite gender to form a seemingly normal but actually nominal kind of marriage for the purposes of satisfying their parents, handling reproduction, alleviating social pressure, and setting the stage to come out later on. This negotiation technique was identified as based on soft social power since participants considered the benefits and feelings of their parents or others involved by trying to deploy an indirect approach that created the least possible harm and was most convenient. This technique was believed by many homosexuals to be capable of reconciling conflicts existing among different negotiating participants.

Satisfying parents ranked as the top reason for a majority of participants who chose the tactic of nominal marriage. G3, a 34-year-old gay, married a lesbian woman and formed this kind of nominal marriage almost 3 years ago:

As the only grandson in my family, I believe that I have the responsibility to maintain my family’s reputation and satisfy their expectations. (G3)

The second reason that some participants chose nominal marriage as a tactic was for the purpose of reproduction, either through the method of test tubes or through artificial insemination:

The ulterior motive behind my parents pushing me to get married is that they want me to give birth to my own child. In that case, the solution is simple, all I have to do is find a gay man who also wants to have a child. (L10, age 27, lesbian)

The last reason participants used the nominal marriage tactic was to make it a reciprocal gesture that would enable them to live their lives based on their own preferences later on. L3, a 28-year-old lesbian, considered a nominal marriage to be a good prelude to come out to her parents:

I think that getting nominally married first and then coming out is better than coming out directly. It will be much easier for my parents to accept my same-sex identity later on if they learn the truth, as they will probably sympathize with my sacrifice for them and thus give me a break. (L3)

**Identity disclosure.** It was found that identity disclosure was another soft-power-based integrative tactic used by participants. Even though this tactic was direct, participants hoped to avoid direct confrontation or threats to parents; rather, they appealed to their parents’ compassion and communicated gently and patiently while conveying pro-homosexuality information to them. Preparing enough professional information or help was also critical to this tactic, as explained by one participant:

I told her that I was gay and I was not into girls. My mother totally froze and could not say a word. So I immediately asked another gay person’s mother to speak to her, as they had the same experience of their child’s homosexuality, and my mother could learn how to perceive this issue from that aunt. (G2)

Coming out progressively and gradually to parents was also important when participants wanted to reveal their same-sex identity to parents based on soft power.

I told my mother step-by-step on my birthday. First, I asked her opinion on the issue. She said that it was no big deal to her and that many people did not get married or have children these days. I went further by telling her that I had been keeping a secret for a long time, and it had been torturing me. She immediately realized what I was talking about, but she did not overreact; rather, she was pretty calm. (G13, age 25, gay)

The direct informational integrative tactic, although more direct compared to other subtle tactics, was exercised in a gradual and soothing way, with participants preparing professional knowledge and help for their parents and appealing to their parents’ compassion. Direct confrontation was avoided by participants by stating the issue in a way that was more possible for their parents to accept.

**Dyadic Power Flow Interactions**

Negotiations between participants and parents based on soft power bases were dyadic interactions, with both sides trying to influence each other through concrete, integrative tactics. This section will illustrate how participants and their parents interact in order to exert an influence on each other.

Some negotiations were initiated voluntarily by participants, whether or not they were faced with parental pressure to get married. A majority of participants who took the initiative in
negotiating with their parents opted for the integrative tactic of identity disclosure by disclosing their same-sex identity voluntarily to their parents. Parents who were informed by their children of their same-sex identities were inclined to either accept or persuade them in terms of soft power bases. When G5 and L5 came out voluntarily to their parents, G5’s parents and L5’s father immediately accepted them.

I did not come out directly. Rather, I took an indirect approach. I told him, “you often asked me whether I felt attracted to someone previously, and I kept telling you that I was not interested in this aspect. However, that was not one hundred percent true, it was just that the people I was interested in were different from others.” (L5, age 27, lesbian)

Having discerned their children’s differences in terms of gender performance or being aware for a long time that their child was different from others allowed these parents to prepare for any possible unconventional route their children might opt for in the future. Therefore, these parents’ worlds were not toppled by this fact, as they had already largely pieced together the puzzle themselves.

In conclusion, the direct informational tactic could successfully invite parents’ acceptance tactic in cases where parents observed their child’s certain unique or special traits or had already discerned their offspring’s unconventional sexuality.

In most cases, parents generally kicked off the negotiation process by persuading their children to get married and reproduce. These parents expressed their emotions and concerns in a logical manner while taking their children’s opinions and feelings into consideration. Sometimes, they adopted indirect and subtle approaches by not bringing up the marriage issue in front of their children or involving a third party to persuade their children, which made it easier for children to accept their views while avoiding confrontations. More importantly, it was likely that the more care and understanding participants received from their parents would lead to participants to behave reciprocally to put themselves in their parents’ position and consider their thoughts and feelings.

My parents currently babysit my sister’s child, and they are surrounded by a of elders all day long and are asked by these people “why is your younger daughter still not married.” They cannot answer, and I cannot always put them under this kind of social pressure, which makes me less of a person and really selfish. (L3)

Faced with their parents’ attempts to persuade them to get married, participants based their negotiation on soft power negotiated with two integrative tactics, namely, nominal marriage and identity disclosure. For nominal marriage, participants had to negotiate not only with parents but also with nominal spouses and same-sex partners, which was complicated and difficult. As this tactic rested on a lie, more lies would be subsequently required to conceal previous lies. Parents would begin to attempt to persuade their child to do other things, including participate in family reunions, get engaged, have a wedding, and reproduce. Therefore, bringing home a nominal spouse was not the end of the negotiation process; further rounds of negotiation regarding their relationship development continued to emerge.

Most participants who deployed the direct informational tactic were also under the pressure of their parents’ persuasion. Pushed by their parents in terms of the marriage issue, participants who were well prepared or whose same-sex identities had developed into the integration stage came out to their parents and conveyed arguments to persuade them.

I made a PowerPoint presentation to introduce them to the Tongzhi community that contained substantial data informing them about the proportion of gay men and lesbians in China and what their lives would be like. (G10)

Touched and impressed by their son’s demonstration and explanation, G10’s parents immediately accepted his same-sex identity. Negotiations built on soft power bases were dyadic interactions with mutual influence between both sides. When participants tried to exercise soft power with parents via integrative tactics, parents were also inclined to use soft-power-based integrative tactics to negotiate.

**Contribution of Integrative Tactics to Participants’ Social Well-Being**

*Contribution by parents.* Participants who disclosed their homosexual identities and were accepted positively by their parents reported an increase in terms of overall social well-being. On one hand, they unburdened themselves of a heavy secret that had been torturing them for years. On the other, they were now honest with their parents and no longer needed to worry about marital pressure. The two most difficult aspects of being homosexual in China, identity disclosure and marriage, were resolved, and these participants could freely pursue their lives. G13’s mother accepted the truth about his same-sex identity, but she neither supported him nor objected to him:

I felt less depressed and more relaxed, and after I came out to my mother and learned her reaction, I was encouraged and began to interact with others more often and more openly with the Tongzhi community and heterosexuals in my life, as I was more confident about my identity and the public’s attitude towards homosexuality. (G13)

Participants who were accepted by their parents in a relatively more supportive and embracing way not only felt more socially integrated but also more socially cohesive; in other words, these participants not only intended to socialize and integrate with others more but also cared about other gay men and lesbians in society, feeling a desire to dedicate themselves to helping others like them.
Perhaps because I am a successful example, I am willing to share my stories with other gays and lesbians through various channels. I hope people who know of my story can see a reflection of their own behaviors and attitudes. (G5)

L5 felt that her social well-being had greatly increased after her parents accepted and supported her same-sex identity:

Before, I was always depressed and frustrated and did not want to admit it. After being accepted by my parents, I finally feel relaxed and at ease. My parents also feel that I am more confident and positive than before, and more importantly, they notice that I have become more outgoing, and I do not oppose the idea of socializing with people anymore. (L5)

Thus, parents’ integrative tactics contributed to increasing participants’ social well-being, especially in light of their social integration. Some participants even increased their social contribution by feeling more responsible to help others and dedicated themselves to the same-sex cause in China.

**Contribution of participants’ own integrative tactics.** Participants’ own use of integrative tactics also affected their social well-being. However, the use of integrative tactics based on soft power only partially increased participants’ social well-being, that is, not all participants who adopted integrative tactics saw an increase in social well-being. Three factors mediated how tactics affected participants’ social well-being: participants’ sense of guilt regarding their parents, participants’ level of satisfaction with their same-sex relationship, and participants’ level of satisfaction with their nominal marital relationship.

First, participants who arranged a nominal marriage to satisfy their parents’ needs and alleviate their own social pressure usually reported an increase in their social well-being. As evinced in the following:

I felt ever happier and more relaxed after I got nominally married to this lesbian, and I am so happy about our marriage. Since I have everything under control, and our relationship is overall harmonious and friendly, my life has become increasingly carefree. (G3)

However, if these participants’ nominal marital relationships were not good, their social well-being would be affected negatively. In addition, the aspect of participants’ sense of guilt regarding their parents mediated the impact, such that the more guilt they felt regarding their parents, the lower their social well-being. As explained by L10:

When I saw my parents spending their hard-earned money on my dowry and their delighted facial expressions, I knew I was going to regret this someday. Relying on their support to live my life comfortably while lying to their faces made me feel like I was the worst person in the world, and I did not deserve the nice life they had prepared for me. (L10)

Participants’ satisfaction level toward their same-sex partner also influenced their social well-being, and the better their relationship was with each other during their negotiation with parents, the higher their social well-being would be, and vice versa.

**Discussion**

This study documents and demonstrates how grounded theory helps to construct causal relations of integrative negotiation between gay men and lesbian women and their parents and explains its effects on homosexual individuals’ social well-being. The negotiation was found to be a dyadic interaction in that one party’s choice of certain negotiation tactics would affect the other’s choice and this mutual influence motivates participants and parents to reply and initiate new actions toward each other in order to move the negotiation forward. The majority of the qualitative data are only descriptive by nature, which makes it difficult to generate theories. However, the grounded theory approach contributes to integrating descriptive data and explaining these data (Parry, 1998). A soft-power-based negotiation model elaborating soft power bases and integrative tactics used by both parties was identified via grounded theory. More importantly, this article discovers conditions for integrative tactics to sustain homosexuals’ social well-being. The results of this study fill in the research gaps and contribute to related literature by adding details and explanations. First, prior research assumes a passive role for gay men and lesbians during their negotiation against the marriage institution (Buxton, 2000; Yip, 2008). However, the current study finds that gay men’s and lesbian women’s roles in this negotiation are more thorough. Some complied with pressure from parents or society, whereas others initiated the negotiation proactively by confessing their homosexuality or entering a nominal marriage. Second, previous studies have primarily discovered how gay men and lesbians negotiate this issue in distributive approaches such as estrangement and threat, and studies on nominal marriage are limited to depictions of this phenomenon (M. Liu, 2013; Wang, 2011). This study goes beyond the focus on distributive approaches by concentrating on integrative tactics. It is important to use integrative tactics in a Chinese cultural background. Integrative tactics are in line with traditional Chinese cultural characteristics of being people oriented, patriarchal, rule abiding, morality valued, and Confucianism centered (Yan, 1992). These characteristics explain why filial piety is important to Chinese gay men and lesbians when they contemplate marital issues, in that they have been greatly affected by traditional Chinese culture. Besides, these characteristics of traditional Chinese culture have extensively shaped the Chinese personality. Temperament is the core personality trait, and it can dominate one’s personality (Yan, 1992). The most representative traits of Chinese’ temperament that explain why integrative tactics are essential are described in the following paragraph.

First, traditional culture, especially Confucianism, extols that individuals should always maintain a happy medium as a way to socialize. The Chinese tend not to take risks or be extreme under the impact of this culture. Consequently, the
Chinese have gradually cultivated a temperament that pursues compromise in order to avoid risks or losses. Second, the Chinese temperament has the element of conservativeness. The Chinese have gradually internalized traditional thought that teaches people how to stay out of trouble to maintain themselves. Third, the Chinese are likely to follow the majority instead of standing with the minority. This is because they think that they have the intention to prioritize collective benefits (Yan, 1992).

The results of this study explain the negotiation process in a novel way by proposing conditions that complement prior studies. The characteristics of gay men and lesbians who were more likely to adopt soft power bases were identified, and their occupations, concern for parents, and same-sex identity development conditioned the use of this power basis. Characteristics that predisposed participants’ use of soft power are consistent with those identified in previous studies (e.g., Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). Compared to conditions that encourage gay men’s and lesbian women’s nominal marriage in Western countries, their consideration for parents proves to be a new condition that is in line with the filial piety upheld by traditional Chinese culture (Y. H. Li, 2009). Two soft power bases that engendered integrative tactics were identified: positive referent and direct informational. Relying on these power bases, participants endeavored to appeal to their parents’ compassion by accentuating the pain and distress of their experiences, which lowered the possibility of their parents’ rejection. For participants who used these latter power bases, they usually prepared themselves with pro-gay discourses, which made homosexuality more acceptable to their parents. These two power bases operated via concrete integrative tactics of nominal marriage and identity disclosure. Both tactics worked in a soft and confrontation-avoidant manner that considered parents’ reactions and feelings. It should also be noted that younger informants were more inclined to come out to their parents, usually at relatively earlier ages, which also supports prior findings (Grov et al., 2006). Better preparation in terms of knowledge of their sexuality and independence rendered homosexuals a better stake in negotiations. Moreover, it discerns the influence of this process on participants’ social well-being. Prior studies have only documented the negative impacts of this kind of negotiation on gay men and lesbians, while other influences and concrete details of how social well-being was affected have remained undocumented (Hernandez et al., 2011; H. Li et al., 2010). In contrast to previous findings, the present study shows that the social well-being of gay men and lesbians could be enhanced through their soft-power negotiation with parents under certain conditions.

The current research applied grounded theory to investigate the negotiation process between Chinese gay men and lesbians and their parents through integrative tactics. In summation, the study made several contributions and offered several implications. First, grounded theory is useful for discerning theoretical constructs and develops a theoretical model that explains the negotiation process in detail. Second, it contributes to both literatures of negotiation and family studies. It manifests the integrative tactics used and how they worked in the case of gay men and lesbians’ negotiations with their parents. Third, a grounded theory of soft-power-based negotiation paves the way for further quantitative studies to test these conditions. Fourth, people’s social well-being is improvable under certain circumstances, and integrative tactics could contribute to people’s enhancement of social well-being. Therefore, efforts are worthwhile to discover ways to improve people’s social well-being in light of the grounded theory. Further, this study exemplifies the significant impact of good preparation on coming-out outcomes, which supports Grov et al.’s (2006) implication that providing support to lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (LGB) during their coming-out process is vital. It is suggested that researchers, educators, and service providers must make more of an effort to help LGB prepare in case they want to disclose their identities to their parents. Meanwhile, results also imply that integrative tactics can be conducive for social minorities to negotiate with social majorities under certain conditions, which can be generalized to negotiations between socially disadvantaged groups and socially advantaged groups. This study highlighted viable ways to approach consensus agreement between these two groups. Therefore, conflict resolutions can be attained by the use of soft power. However, this study has several limitations. First, more female informants must be recruited to discern whether gender is a condition that mediates the negotiation process. Additionally, parents of same-sex individuals should be recruited in order to complement the dynamic process elaboration. Moreover, parents’ social well-being is also worth studying in order to verify whether integrative tactics do exert a positive impact on all participants.

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