Article

Negotiations Between Chinese Gay Men and Lesbians and Their Parents About Marriage

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Abstract
This article aims to demonstrate how critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be used for studying and analyzing self-identified gay men’s and lesbians’ (simplified as gays and lesbians in the following) marriage challenges. Chinese gay men and lesbians face many challenges, among which marriage is conceivably their top concern. The majority of these individuals must negotiate this issue with their parents. Discourses woven by gays and lesbians to influence their parents are crucial for understanding how they negotiate this issue. Such an understanding is the focus of the present study of 20 participants including 10 lesbians and 10 gay men in China. This study applies CDA to unveil the functions, linguistic techniques, and ideological bases of gay men’s and lesbians’ discourses in negotiation. The application demonstrates the strength of CDA in analyzing how people use language to produce and construct identities and activities. The current research advances the use of CDA not only by taking the initiative of using it to study this emerging issue but also by incorporating the analysis of inherent discursive ideologies.

Keywords
critical discourse analysis, marital stress, negotiation, self-identified gay men and lesbians

Introduction
Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has gradually emerged as an important approach to probe relationships among discourse, social power, abuse of power, social inequality, and positions taken by discourse analysts. As exemplified in the Foucauldian approach toward language, power, and society, CDA is useful to reveal power relations, social injustice, and hidden ideologies in various discourses (Herzog, 2016; Van Dijk, 1993). CDA focuses on discourse to reveal its enactment and reenactment of identity, inequality, and ideology. The analysis rests on the premise that language is essential in reproducing ideologies, which in turn is crucial to building and maintaining social inequalities and identities (Hart, 2010; Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001). Discourse for the analysis is involved in producing, reproducing, and challenging dominance that relates to the deployment of social power by institutions, groups, or elites, which leads to social inequality, including racial, gender, ethnic, class, political, and cultural inequities. CDA seeks to determine what strategies, structures, and other properties of verbal interactions, texts, or communications take effect in this process (Farmer, 2015; Van Dijk, 1993).

Relevant studies using CDA have demonstrated the usefulness of the analysis in interrogating and revealing hidden manipulation and ideologies. The major lines of studies in this area include employing CDA to investigate gay men’s and lesbians’ discourses on same-sex marriage, particularly their opinions on gender role models for parenting. Literature on this line of research documents that gay men and lesbians construct competing claims against traditional discourse that presents gay men or lesbian families as insufficient and incapable of raising normal children (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Hicks, 2005). For example, Clarke (2006) critically examined a lesbian couple’s discourse regarding men as role models for lesbian families. The results of this examination showed their efforts to normalize lesbian families and abate the importance of male roles in the family. Since CDA is useful in providing a more insightful and detailed understanding of complicated subject matters, it is also applicable to examining discursive
strategies adopted by gay men and lesbians to reconcile their conflictive sexual and religious identities (Shamsudin & Ghazali, 2011; Zulkfli & Rashid, 2016, 2019). Zulkfli and Rashid (2019) explored how Malaysian Muslim gay men negotiated their gay identity with their religion. They found that despite their disrupted identity, the gay men tried to approach identity reconciliation by accentuating the indomitable nature of their same-sex desire and downplaying the sinfulness of same-sex relationships in Islam. Another line of research is utilizing CDA to analyze public discourses regarding same-sex marriage to uncover discursive strategies adopted by same-sex marriage opponents (Jowett, 2017; Turner et al., 2018). Drawing on both corpus linguistics and CDA, Turner et al. (2018) researched British newspaper articles that discussed introducing same-sex marriage into the United Kingdom. Via CDA, this analysis showed that the opponents of same-sex marriage represented themselves as victims whose traditions, civil liberties, and moral values were endangered by the state. These opponents’ discourses implicitly enabled and permitted homophobia (Turner et al., 2018). CDA also reveals the underlying racial issue within gay men’s and lesbians’ equality discourse. Hutchinson (2000) studied gay rights for White gay men and argued that persons of color and of low economic status, as well as lesbians, are excluded from equality discourse. This finding implies a limitation in the homosexual community that distorts reality. Moreover, anti-racist theory further marginalizes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of color, thus constructing the harmful stereotype that gay people are White and privileged (Hutchinson, 2000).

Discourse Framework

This study applies discourse analysis exemplified by Foucault. According to Foucault (1978), discourses determine, restrict, and allow what can be done and what cannot. Discursive practices accepted by actors become normative structures that maintain actors’ positions and power relations. In this sense, discursive practices can sustain varied forms of repression and oppression, but participants regard them as normal in this discourse (Mangion, 2011). The study of discourse is thus a powerful approach to explore and expose the ideologies, unbalanced power relations, and various ways of persuasion inherent in these discursive practices.

This study focuses on the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity in China. This discourse proposes a cultural golden standard to prescribe what counts as appropriate, acceptable, harmonious, and socially valuable (Califia, 2000). Heteronormativity is a discourse that advocates and promotes heterosexuality, gender conventionality, and family traditionalism as the appropriate and right conduct for social members (Ingramah, 1994). A “vast matrix of cultural beliefs, rules, rewards, privileges and sanctions” comprises this heteronormative discourse, working together to espouse and maintain that heterosexuality is natural, normal, and superior (Lynch & Maree, 2013; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005, p. 144). Among the many approaches of articulation that maintain the powerful societal status of heteronormative discourse, the institution of heterosexual marriage counts as normal and socially valuable in playing the central role. Moreover, intertwined with this heterosexual institution is the idea of building a conventional nuclear family. Heterosexual marriage, in the current sense, is describable as heteronormative, as it functions to spread a particular arrangement of gendered and sexual practice with an implicit sense of normalcy and rightness (Berlant & Warner, 1998). Thus, the impact of heteronormative discourse goes beyond prescribing a certain marital and familial combination for the normalization of specific genders and sexualities (Ingramah, 1994).

The critical analysis of gay men’s and lesbians’ discourses follows the approach to CDA proposed by Fairclough (1995) in the tradition of the discourse-historical approach (DHA), which is in line with Foucault’s work (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). According to Fairclough (1995), three stages are involved in the CDA process. The first stage, the description stage, involves the study of texts. The second stage, the interpretation stage, engages cognitive and psychological considerations and focuses on how people have adopted certain interpretations. The last stage is the explanation stage, which analyzes sociocultural contexts. Therefore, following this three-stage approach, the analysis of informants’ discourses focused first on the text by uncovering functions of and rhetorical skills used by gay men and lesbians for their discursive construction. During the second stage of interpretation, analysis sought to interrogate how respondents endeavored to convince the public to interpret homosexuality using nonnegative meanings. The investigation revealed that these attempts and efforts made by respondents constructed their identity and community, which were premised in the formation of their attitude and practices toward negotiations. Meanwhile, challenges to the claims of the validity of these discourses emerged to inquire into their reasonability. Finally, the CDA exposed the social context behind respondents’ discourses, that is, it elucidated ideological props to trace the influence of social context. The reason this study chose this approach among other CDA approaches was that it not only focuses mostly on linguistic analysis but also tries to link fields of texts, genres, discourses, and actions together. This approach avoids investing too much in weaving theoretical labyrinths. Instead, this approach endeavors to develop conceptual tools related to specific problems.

Compared with this approach, other approaches, such as the Foucauldian approach, attach more importance to the structural features of discourses than to single-exchange structures (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Thus, in order to concentrate on the discursive use at the individual level, the DHA is the most suitable approach for the current study.

Method

The fieldwork occurred in Guangdong, China, from March to June 2017. The fieldwork collected data through semistructured interviews, with audiotaping and transcription. Recruitment of interviewees worked through snowball sampling.
Eventually, the study included 20 gay men and lesbians, whose ages ranged from 27 to 39 years. They were 10 persons who self-identified as gay men and 10 people who self-identified as lesbian. These persons offered their verbal consent to the study. Putonghua was the language adopted in this fieldwork, as it is the interviewees’ first language. Although the interviewer was not a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender queer/questioning community, she tried to invite and facilitate their complicated and rich culture by building a rapport via friends’ referrals and using in-group terminologies during the interviews, which she drew on using a co-constructed interview approach (Rojas-Lizana, 2017). Because this study aims to obtain diverse opinions, it recruited gay men and lesbians with different marital statuses and different relationship experiences to portray a relatively full picture.

Among the gay respondents, three had experienced nominal marriage, two had same-sex partners, and five were single. For lesbian respondents, one had marital experience, five had same-sex partners, and four were single. The participants’ occupations varied from college students and white-collar workers to chief executive offers and civil servants.

Each interviewee was identifiable with a number: for lesbian interviewees, L1, L2, and so on, and for gay interviewees, G1, G2, and so on. Questions seeking their opinions, attitudes, and arguments—such as “How do you view homosexuality?” “How do you perceive marriage?” “How do you perceive or argue with your parents in terms of your marriage issue?” and “Why do you think and behave in such a way?”—were asked in order to invite interviewees to share answers regarding discourses.

The approach to analysis of the interview data was CDA. Discourse in this sense referred to actual communicative action via the medium of language (Johnstone, 2018). Although communicative action is not limited to either spoken or written form, this study focused on interviewees’ spoken discourse. CDA is the comprehensive and close interrogation of language in use (Dunn & Neumann, 2016). People utilize language for purposes, such as communication, constructing or destroying things, such as institutions, advantaging themselves, and so on. Therefore, we combined an analysis of linguistic functions with that of what and how ideas and themes evolve (Gee, 2014).

To analyze the data, this study followed the DHA, which is the most linguistically oriented form of analytic approach aligned with Foucault’s work. DHA generally comprises the following steps: identifying a discourse and its functions, discovering linguistic functions, and exploring the context or background against which linguistic realizations take place (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Results

Interviewees introduced the discourse of homosexuality normalcy to justify the existence of homosexuality, problematize the conventional heterosexual marriage institution, and legitimate alternative ways of living. Analysis of the discourse elucidated its functions, discursive rhetoric, and ideological propping to trace the influence of social context. Direct quotes will be used to support the authors’ assertions.

The CDA revealed that gay men and lesbians constructed a discourse to espouse and argue for the normalcy of homosexuality and to destroy the conventional marriage institution. This discourse had three discursive functions. First, the discourse legitimized homosexuality normalcy. Second, the discourse problematized heterosexual marriage. Third, the discourse promoted alternative ways of living other than entering heterosexual marriage. The discourse gave more credit to the pursuit of personal desires and flexibility than to a rigid lifestyle. Three forms of rhetorical techniques were polarizing, exaggerating, and metaphorizing. Ideologies that gave rise to this discourse and that made it possibly received by parents were individualization and postmodernization, which advocated the pursuit of individuality and independence from social obligations.

Discourse-Upholding Alternatives to Traditional Marriage

The discourse of homosexuality normalcy served to establish social practices that justified the existence of homosexuality by legitimizing its normalcy, problematizing the heteronormative marriage institution, and promoting alternative ways of living.

Legitimizing Homosexuality Normalcy

In their discourse, gay men and lesbians regarded themselves as a group being normal, harmless, and more sincere toward love than were heterosexuals but suffering from misunderstanding and stigmatization in society. By upholding these characteristics, informants tried to persuade their parents that they were no different from heterosexuals and probably better than some homosexuals so that parents need not feel humiliated by their children’s sexual orientation. This kind of argument resonated with Oscar Wilde’s statement that homosexual love is superior to other kinds of love (Duffy, 2001; Rojas-Lizana, Tolton, & Hannah, 2018). Such persuasion consisted in the following:

We are not different from heterosexuals except our sexual orientation. I think that gay and lesbian people are even better than heterosexuals are. When they look for prospective spouses, all they consider is a person’s material conditions, and their romantic feelings only come second after that. However, when we look for same-sex partners, all we think about is our romantic feelings, and hence our same-sex relationship is more pure and love-oriented. Moreover, when it comes to work, I think that we work harder and perform better than heterosexuals do, since we do not want to be looked down upon by the public, and we want to prove that we are actually as normal and good as heterosexuals are. (G9, aged 29)

According to the interviewees, same-sex identity often worked as a kind of social eustress that motivated them to work harder and achieve more than their heterosexual counterparts,
especially in their careers. These individuals regarded work as an opportunity to both accumulate wealth for their future and demonstrate that their ability was no worse than that of heterosexuals, as expressed in the following:

Being a lesbian makes me more self-independent than most of the same-aged heterosexuals. I began to plan my life carefully when I realized I was a lesbian, and this homosexual identity has been propelling me to achieve and progress more. I do not want my father to feel humiliated by my same-sex identity, so I have to work very hard to excel at my career. (L2, aged 23)

Not only did this discourse try to erase social differences between gay men and lesbians and heterosexuals, this discourse even aimed to attack heterosexuals, as in the following statement:

Straight people are no better than us, and they are even worse, because they have extramarital affairs even though their spouse loves them deeply. Therefore, I do not understand why we count as immoral, while the straight can escape from the criticism. (G1, aged 26)

Additionally, interviewees argued that homosexuality is inborn, and therefore they should not be blamed for being homosexual, as they were incapable of choosing their sexual orientation. This was evident in the following:

I was born like this, and this is not something that I can decide or choose, just as they were born heterosexual. (G4, aged 39)

Moreover, this discourse tried to elicit parents’ sympathy by stressing the intergenerational relationship. Hence, parents who did not accept their child’s homosexual identity counted as selfish and outdated. Thus, it was a hijacking of parents’ compassion. This argument stemmed from China’s changing discourse on intergenerational relationships, which increasingly stresses parents’ endless devotion and dedication to their children (Choi & Luo, 2016). L6, a 27-year-old lesbian, reported the following:

How many parents have the heart to push their children into the abyss if they love their children deeply and sincerely? If they keep rejecting who you are and pushing you to live according to their will, then you do not have to care about their feelings, as they care more about their needs than yours.

Similar to L6’s opinion, this argument arose in other interviewees, both gays and lesbians. G2, a 29-year-old gay, thought that morally hijacking their parents was a trump card for the majority of homosexuals, especially under the legal regulation of the one-child policy. Interviewees in their 20s and 30s were the only children of their parents, in most cases. If their parents did not concede but kept pushing their children, these parents would practically lose the relation with their children. G2 added the following:

I am the only son in my family, and 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. It is a quasi-Chinese tradition that parents must defer to their only children’s needs.

In sum, the function of the homosexuality normalcy discourse justified the existence of homosexuality by attributing the identity formation to uncontrollable biological causes, accentuating commonness with and superiority to heterosexuals, and eliciting parents’ compassion.

Problematizing Heterosexual Marriage

The second function of this discourse was to resist the heterosexual marriage mainly by problematizing it. The discourse endeavored to overturn the importance of heterosexual marriage by attaching negative connotations to it. According to these interviewees, heterosexual marriage had little to do with true love and focused on people’s social obligations. G1 had come out to his mother 4 years before, but as he approached 30, his mother began to push him to get married and have children, given the fact that he was gay, as described below:

As I look around, 99 percent of my heterosexual friends got married either because their girlfriends were pregnant or because their parents needed them to produce offspring, and very few married for love. However, for us, love is the only thing that binds us together, so homosexual intimacy is a way more pure than heterosexual marriage.

Moreover, some interviewees argued with their parents that heterosexual marriage would downgrade their quality of life:

For my high school classmates who are married and have children, they have turned into this bunch of ungroomed and fat middle-aged men who are crushed by mortgages and family chores every day. Therefore, I do not see any benefit from getting married, and I think that being homosexual somehow has saved my quality of life, because I have so much time to work out and pursue my own interests, and I do not have the burden of a mortgage or children. (G3, aged 34)

In addition, this discourse stressed that heterosexual marriage was against gay men’s and lesbians’ most basic urge and need: their sexual orientation. Therefore, getting heterosexually married was inhumane to them, according to the following:

I think the most and direct reason for marrying someone is that we are happy when we are with each other. Therefore, if I do not feel happy to be with someone, then I should never marry that person, and I believe that people should be entitled to pursue their own happiness by living in this world, whatever their sexual orientation. (G8, aged 26)

Furthermore, entering into heterosexual marriage, according to this discourse, was immoral and irresponsible for
interviewees’ parents and their heterosexual spouse. As the interviewees would conceal their identity and deliberately deceive a heterosexual spouse in marriage, this would cause them harm. Even if they disclosed their identity, a low-quality relationship would still negatively affect the social well-being of the people involved, as happened in the following cases:

I used to have this childish thought of deceiving a girl into marriage, and we could get a divorce after she gave birth to a child. But I gradually gave up this idea because it is immoral and detrimental to the girl who marries me. (G2, aged 29)

Similar to G2’s opinion, L8 believed that gay men’s heterosexual marriage was bad for women. Anchoring on a woman’s perspective, L8 worried very little about the morality of this kind of marriage. Rather, it was the threat to women’s interests, particularly regarding domestic violence, which bothered her:

Many gays deceive their wives into heterosexual marriage in China, and they do not only cheat their wives by conducting extramarital affairs with other gay men, but they also beat their wives. The wives of gays are a group of people suffering domestic violence frequently, which is an issue that is becoming more and more serious. (L8, aged 27)

In conclusion, the current discourse emphasized the negative connotations of heterosexual marriage for resisting the marriage. This discourse argued that heterosexual marriage was more obligation-driven than affection-driven, that it would negatively affect gay men’s and lesbians’ quality of life and was against humanity, and that it was irresponsible and harmful for all people involved. Previous studies support this point, as some showed that Chinese gay men and lesbians frequently reported higher psychological stress and estranged family relationships (Chou, 2001; Liu, 2013). Compared with how Chinese gay men and lesbians perceive heterosexual marriage, gay men and lesbians in Western cultures have different opinions about heterosexual marriage. Although a portion of this population regards heterosexual marriage as negative, as it exacerbates their psychological pressure, some gay men and lesbians form supportive and friendly relationships with their heterosexual spouses, and they regard their marriage as significant and beneficial (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006).

**Legitimizing Alternative Ways of Living**

The last function of the homosexuality normalcy discourse was to legitimize alternative ways of living rather than get heterosexually married. As opposed to the heteronormative discourse advocating heterosexuality and marriage, the discourse upheld by the interviewees advocated various ways of living—except for marrying heterosexuals. The discourse emphasized flexibility and creativity, as gay men and lesbians were free to pursue their needs and desires as long as they managed to balance their own life with their parents’ needs and expectations. This discourse prioritized personal needs while putting the fulfillment of obligations into the second place, as in the following:

I always try to persuade my father that marriage is not a necessary thing to do in today’s society, that I can earn a decent living by myself, and that I enjoy my status right now. So why do I have to break this peace by getting married? (L8)

Interviewees frequently mentioned the social changes that favored them, as in the following case:

Times have changed, and unlike our parents who had to get married or else they were stigmatized by society, today’s China does become more tolerant toward singles. (L3, aged 28)

To strengthen this idea, this discourse also called for a rewriting of filial piety discourse. The current discourse emphasized that one’s personal desire is crucial and must be valued. Unconditionally conforming to parents’ expectations and requirements by overlooking what one truly wants does not count as filial piety; it is merely blind allegiance. True filial piety is respecting and loving each other while maintaining a boundary between parents and children, so that both sides do not interfere with each other too much. Because one’s life is one’s own business, even parents should not intervene too much. G6 (aged 29) frequently persuaded his mother by explaining filial piety in this way:

Time has changed, and I do think that there should be a boundary between parents and their children however intimate they are, and no part should cross this line. Parents and their children just love and support each other in our daily life, but we should never try to control and make each other do what we really want in the name of love.

The discourse promoted that marriage and reproduction are not the only goals of life, particularly in modern society. That is, marriage increasingly refers to a personal choice rather than a cultural imperative, the cost of living, such as buying a house and raising children, increases rapidly, and the social welfare system for eldercare becomes more established and hence people do not necessarily need to depend on their offspring for care in old age. In addition, this discourse expected parents to attend more to their own life rather than focus on their children’s life, as stated in the following:

Before I came out to my parents, I had begun to prepare them for my homosexual identity by decreasing their focus on me. I had told them that they should sign up for some cooking and exercise classes, and cultivate their own hobbies instead of thinking of my business for me every day. (G8, aged 26)

Interviewees who became nominally married regarded this change in focus as a reciprocal gesture that their parents needed to return. These interviewees accentuated that the changing filial piety today bolstered mutual contributions and reciprocal gains between parents and children instead of emphasizing
children’s sole obedience to their parents (Chen, Liu, & Mair, 2011). G4 came out to his parents after he was nominally married to a lesbian woman for 3 months, and his parents accepted him without struggling too much.

I think my marriage was a step for my parents to get off their high horse. If I did not get married, they would be so worried about me, and other villagers would talk about them negatively behind their back. They thought that I had taken their needs and reputation into consideration, so they did not have the heart to push me anymore, as they felt that I had already sacrificed enough. (G4)

By accentuating flexibility and rewriting the filial piety discourse, the homosexuality normalcy discourse functioned to advocate ways of living other than getting heterosexually married.

**Discursive Rhetoric**

To persuade parents to accept the current discourse, interviewees deployed various linguistic techniques in the negotiation process. These techniques sought to link relevant contents within a given context conveying that homosexuality was normal, to persuade, manipulate, and challenge their parents. Three types of discursive rhetoric emerged from interviewees during their negotiation with their parents: use of grammatically cohesive elements, particularly first-person plural pronoun “we,” use of exaggerations, and use of metaphors.

**Polarizing**

Grammatically cohesive elements, particularly first-person plural pronouns and generalization, were evident in the negotiation of gay men and lesbians in negotiating about the marriage issue with their parents. The elements had the following linguistic functions, and they categorized and grouped people into “in-group” and “out-group,” denying personal responsibility and assigning it to the whole group, implying the claim that what many people commonly believed could not be wrong.

Chinese gay men and lesbians called themselves “people in the circle” to differentiate themselves from heterosexuals. This rhetoric functioned to accentuate difficulties and misunderstandings that interviewees experienced, especially from heterosexuals, as used by them to dispel their parents’ doubts and arouse their sympathy in the following manner:

People outside the circle always think that it is gross for two men to conduct intercourse, and they cannot picture that scene. Alternatively, they think that two men cannot have children if they choose to live together, or even if they do, then their children must be gay too. If the outsiders bothered to know us more, they would understand that people in the circle can live as well as they can. (G10, aged 31)

Another cohesive element frequently used by interviewees was first-person plural pronouns such “we” and “our.” By using these pronouns, interviewees assigned the stigmatizing behaviors and responsibility to the gay community as a whole in order to eschew their own responsibility and make their discourse more convincing. This is evident in the following:

> Although we are gay men, we are not antisocial nor anti-human. Our capability to work can surpass that of some straight men and women, which is not unusual. Except for our different sexual orientation, we are no worse than any one. (G9, aged 29)

In addition, interviewees used nouns to imply generalization when they expected their parents to be aware of information, and this implied the spread and acceptance of that information. L6 had come out to her parents, but they still believed she should get married, and they even pushed her to nominal marriage with a gay man. She persuaded her parents in the following way to convince them that nominal marriage was unfavorable for women:

> Many gay men nowadays require their lesbian partners to register for a marriage certificate. However, under these circumstances, our rights are difficult to protect. Moreover, gay men will usually require women to reproduce. However, they do not take care of us or pay for different kinds of reproduction expenses, and this impairs both a woman’s psychological and physical health.

Using grammatically cohesive elements, interviewees managed to construct a “we discourse” that was more convincing and can shoulder more responsibility. Under the influence of this rhetoric, parents had the opinion not to blame their children for being gay, and as there were many people like their children, that children were not singular.

**Exaggerating**

Exaggeration was another linguistic device adopted by interviewees to persuade their parents, express their negative emotions toward conventional marriage, and criticize the conventional marriage institution. These functions unfolded in the following ways.

Interviewees tended to exaggerate their feelings and reactions to persuade their parents to alleviate their pressure on them to get married.

> Right now, he (her father) just keeps drilling all those clichés into me and arranging blind dates for me against my will. I always argue with him that if he continues in this way, he had better just cut off the father-daughter relation and we pretend not to know each other until we die. (L8)

In addition, interviewees deployed exaggeration to express their negative feelings toward conventional marriage to convey the idea that their parents were tormenting them by pushing them into marriage, as in the following:

> I have told my parents that pushing me into marriage equals pushing me to die. So I ask them, “Do you really want me to die? If so, I can just jump out the window immediately and save them the
trouble of arranging blind dates for me, arranging a wedding, and spending a great deal of money on my dowry.” (L10, aged 27)

The second example of exaggeration was that interviewees often addressed others in their discourse. L9 frequently quarreled with her father to exaggerate her mother’s negative situation in order to make him feel guilty.

My mother is more like a servant to my father instead of a wife. She lives a life even much worse than a mistress does. At least a mistress can gain some material goods from her companion. However, all my mother gets are endless domestic chores and my father’s snubbing. One has better things to do than to put oneself into this hell of coldness and cruelty. (L9, aged 27)

Via exaggeration, then, interviewees intended to magnify or even crucify their experiences to startle, threaten, and persuade their parents into complying with their desires.

**Metaphorizing**

Metaphors are words or phrases that are incongruent or anomalous in discourse but that are understandable via transferring their meaning in context. Nonliteral language, such as irony, simile, and metaphor, counts as more persuasive than literal language. Metaphors entered interviewees’ negotiations when they either wanted to persuade their parents or wanted to express their feelings toward their parents during their negotiations. L6 frequently communicated with her parents using fierce emotions, and she always compared herself to spilt water. Details flowed in the following:

He (her father) made me feel that marriage was the only meaningful thing to do as a woman. In addition, I felt that I was just spilt water, and he just wanted to spill me out as soon as possible in order to get rid of me.

Metaphors were also deployable when interviewees conveyed their feelings toward their parents. Using metaphors made the expression more vivid and assisted interviewees in depicting themselves as victims, which worked to arouse public compassion for them, as people tend to sympathize with the powerless and despise the powerful. Such deployment is evident in the following:

For heterosexuals, marriage may be a tomb that buries their love alive. However, at least their souls can remain intact. For us, marriage was more like an ax, since it chops our souls into pieces that is not restorable together. Nothing could be more painful than marriage. (G9)

In addition to the soft feelings that the interviewees held for their parents, some of them blamed their parents for not respecting their own will:

We are like emotionless robots who only perform what their masters tell them to do. Even though our masters do not know that we have our own minds and they cannot read our minds, we cannot blame them, for they are the people who created us in the first place. We should just be as robotic as we can to erase all our emotions and feelings out of our minds and be docile to our masters. (G4)

Gay men and lesbians also used metaphors to describe their perceived stigma and convey that homosexuality was natural and normal. Such a stigma appeared in the following:

People tend to demonize us. I am not a monster but a human being like anyone else. (G5, aged 27)

By using metaphors, interviewees managed to link social objects with social cognitions. This technique facilitated the vivid expression of their opinions, which made their feelings and attitude clearer for their parents.

**Ideological Propping**

The ideologies that furnished the construction of this discourse are traceable to detraditionalization or individualization and postmodernization, which call for liberalization of the mind from the manacles of conventions and for the pursuit of individual desires (Giddens, 1992). These ideologies wove this web of discourse that criticized the traditions and extolled individualization. The detraditionalization thesis, as part of individualization, focuses on the decline of traditional family customs, such as lifelong marriage, a division of domestic labor based on gender. This detraditionalization thesis prepares the way for a corresponding rise of personal choice and individual agency (Chambers, 2012). Giddens (1992) argues that detraditionalization of intimacy involves both the erosion of outdated norms and traditional values as well as the thriving of individual agency. Postmodernization counts as a shift in strategy for survival, as modernization is not an optimal strategy for maximizing an individual’s life. Postmodernization strives to maximize people’s well-being via lifestyle changes (Inglehart, 1997). Several changes brought about by postmodernization in China justify this discourse. First, there is a tendency in contemporary China for increasing the number of people to marry in approximately their 30, and the busy work world as well as rising housing prices lead parents to consider reducing their pressure on their children regarding the marriage issue (Yu & Xie, 2015). In addition, an increasing number of young couples, especially those introduced by their parents, get divorced, and therefore parents tend to intervene in their children’s marriage less often than before. Moreover, filial piety currently emphasizes reciprocal gains rather than children’s sole deference to their parents (Apostolou, 2013).

The first ideological basis behind this discourse is individualization. Interviewees perceived that due to globalization, China could not escape this trend and was enduring it right now. Therefore, perceiving themselves as the forerunners of social change, interviewees believed in their responsibility to take action to propel this change.
First, I believe that our life belongs to ourselves and that you should not live for others’ expectations. Second, any approach that can solve the problem counts as a good solution, not only the conventional ones. Moreover, being in a rut is not how people of our generation react. Different people have different approaches to solving their problems, which is the principle of diversity. (G3)

Actions were called for to mobilize gay men and lesbians to think critically and go beyond society’s limitations, which was crucial to arousing their awakening to the new trend.

It is quite normal that society does not understand us, as the majority of the public has not reached the same level of thinking as we have. Therefore, being cynical and blaming society for its backwardness is useless. Instead, we should stick together and use our actions to change people’s minds little by little. (G4)

In addition to individualization, another ideological basis is postmodernization, in which changes and objective conditions worked favorably for gay men and lesbians to implement and advance this discourse.

I am positive that our generation can witness the legalization of same-sex marriage in China, since what is happening in the world will surely influence what happens and will happen in China. If you look back, changes have happened in China in these decades; for instance, the once strictly implemented one-child policy has been replaced by a policy that encourages each family to have a second child. Similarly, after 1 or 2 decades, Chinese society probably will realize that it should be more lenient toward the gay community. (G2, aged 29)

Changes, such as removing same-sex behavior from the criminal code, were vital factors that gave rise to this discourse, as they provided concrete and official evidence for the public that the official position of the state was not openly against homosexuality.

We live in a really good time to bring about changes to our society, as objective conditions are favoring our side. People, especially the younger generation, do not regard us as abnormal or immoral, since there is no longer a law condemning our behavior. (L2, aged 23)

By analyzing the ideologies behind this discourse, we implemented the DHA. The social background against which this discourse emerged had meanings and was thus clear.

Discussion
This study is one of the vanguard studies comprehensively examining Chinese gay men’s and lesbians’ negotiation process by identifying its strategies and ideological bases. To fill previous knowledge gaps about gay men’s and lesbians’ negotiation with their parents, this study investigates how discourse serves as a strategy for them to negotiate with their parents about the issue of marriage. Using CDA, this study identifies the homosexuality normalcy discourse introduced by interviewees, demonstrated how this discourse was articulated by gay and lesbian people during their negotiations with their parents, and explained the functions of this discourse.

Previous empirical studies have devoted more attention to marital stress as a social stigma against Chinese gay men and lesbians leading to their marital decisions (Feng, Wu, & Detels, 2010; Neiands, Steward, & Choi, 2008). With the help of CDA, this study goes beyond investigating these causes by focusing on microlevel interpersonal interactions between gay men and lesbians and their parents. The results of this study enhance our understanding of how Chinese gay men and lesbians tackle marital stress, specifically how they resolve conflicts with their parents. The results generated by this study could fill the three research gaps mentioned above. First, gay men and lesbians established a discourse to negotiate with their parents when they faced marital stress. The homosexuality normalcy discourse served to establish social practices that legitimized the existence of homosexuality by arguing for its naturalness, problematized the heteronormative marriage institution, and legitimized alternative ways of living. Second, analyzing from a discursive perspective, gay and lesbian persons used the rhetorical strategies of polarizing, exaggerating, and metaphorizing in constructing the normalcy discourse. A linguistic analysis of this discourse found that these three kinds of rhetorical devices appeared when gay and lesbian persons wanted to express their opinions and persuade their parents. These linguistic techniques enabled the discourse to be more persuasive and believable while removing responsibility from individuals. Third, the ideological basis behind the discourse comprised the social changes of individualization and postmodernization, accompanied by other social changes that favored gay men and lesbians. Intimacy gradually breaks free from the manacles of social norms and obligations, and a more flexible attitude to sexuality emerged (Giddens, 1992). This decentered sexuality sets spouses free from reproductive needs (Chambers, 2012). The pursuit of the unconventional way of life advocated by the individualization thesis made the open relationship between spouses increasingly popular by decreasing its stigmatizing connotation. Pursuing pure happiness rather than abiding by obligations and traditions has empowered gay men’s and lesbians’ individualization (Gabb, 2008). Further, changes, such as economic growth, a rising divorce rate, and the decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality in China, brought about by postmodernization also justify this discourse (Apostolou, 2013; Guo, 2007; Yu & Xie, 2015).

Although CDA is a useful tool for researchers to remove the veil and dig deeper into truth, it is not without its critics. Most CDA research has been limited to the first stage of Halliday’s systemic functional grammar. In addition, explaining how certain discursive tips are adapted and why these strategies are effective remains a research gap (Hart, 2010). This study goes beyond merely analyzing linguistic tactics and applies this method by discovering a discourse woven by Chinese gay men and lesbians and its underlying inherent ideologies. This is a new development in this method in practice.
This study utilized gay men’s and lesbians’ negotiation with their parents as an example to demonstrate how discourse works as a strategy for negotiation. To conclude, the study makes the following contributions and implications. First, this study concentrates on a special group of people in China whose voice is frequently unnoticed and whose social well-being is precarious. Second, this study contributes to the practice of CDA, as it delves into a relatively understudied topic and demonstrates how discourse organizes communication, expression, and persuasion and fulfills self-interest. Detailed discursive techniques become evident to enhance an understanding of gay and lesbian discourse in general. Third, the current research advances the use of CDA by moving the analysis beyond pure linguistic analysis. This study also delves into ways to use and receive tactics and ways that ideologies gave rise to certain discourses. Implications from CDA indicate that individuals should be aware of the manipulations and distortions inherent in discourses to protect their own rights and interests. The freedom and liberty carried by discourses should have a limit so as not to interfere with others’ interests. Therefore, following the doctrine of the mean is a desirable path to an individual’s socialization (Hursthouse, 2006). Good and effective communication can enhance social interactions. Therefore, being cautious about misconceptions, falsification, and misleading statements in communications contributes to better social interactions (Allen, 2009). In addition, our analysis of gay men’s and lesbians’ discourse revealed that postmodernization and detraditionalization were ideologies underlying their discourse. These two ideologies downplay the role of human beings and accentuate the importance of material conditions. The results of CDA imply that restoration of human power and rights is important and that focusing too much on material development instead of ideological development will overlook the social well-being of some groups of people. Hence, the government should also consider people’s social well-being when pursuing economic development (Haigh, 2005).

Given its contributions made, this work still has some limitations. Despite its attempt to select participants from diverse places in the country, the study could not reach some remote areas because of time and budgetary constraints. Hence, the current sample may be selective and cannot represent the Chinese gay men and lesbians fully. This is nevertheless a limitation in previous studies in this field (Li, Holroyd, & Lau, 2010; Steward, Miège, & Choi, 2013). Our study could only rely on some individuals to recruit informants, as it is impossible to identify and reach all subgroups of the gay and lesbian community. Fourth, this study endeavors to collect enriched and contextual data from only a small sample of people to conduct its qualitative, discourse analysis. Although this study enables us to perceive and understand the range of their experience to some degree, it precludes us from drawing inferences about population trends, a limitation shared by research in this field (Steward et al., 2013; Tao et al., 2013).

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