



Articulating Sexuality, Desire, and Identity: A Keyword Analysis of Heteronormativity in Taiwanese Gay and Lesbian Dating Websites

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the so-called social construct, i.e., the frame of heteronormativity, can be maintained, reproduced and enacted by language within same-sex dating communities in the twenty-first century. That is, we examine heteronormativity in discourse collected from two popular same-sex dating websites in Taiwan in order to analyze how heteronormative ideologies influence the linguistic construction of homosexual desires, dating preferences, and queer relationships. By scrutinizing the keywords in the corpora through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics, we argue that there are still power relationships among Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women seeking romantic love online that are informed by heteronormative ideologies around gender within the scope of homosexuality. On the one hand, the keywords contain many binary roles providing conventional interactional modes for Taiwanese homosexual couples that show great similarity to those in heterosexual relationships. On the other hand, the analysis indicates that heteronormative constructions of masculinity and femininity are related to anxieties over mainstream preferences for dating on the two target websites.

Keywords Heteronormativity · Gender and sexuality · Language and identity · Critical Discourse Analysis · Corpus Linguistics · Dating websites · Gay and lesbian · Cultural frame · Taiwan

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Introduction

Sexuality is an interdisciplinary study. It is widely discussed in the fields of literature, language, geography, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, cinema, media studies, human development, law, public health, medicine and so on. This study takes a linguistic perspective to re-examine how the so-called social construct—“the frame of heteronormativity” (Butler 1990) is performed nowadays in Taiwanese same-sex communities. Although it is widely believed that the sexual orientation of a person may be partially or totally determined by factors such as genes, early uterine environment (such as prenatal hormones), and brain structure, researchers such as Wittig (1980) and Butler (1990) have pointed out that the ways people perform sexuality are also rooted in sociocultural frames relevant to their lived experience. This paper aims to examine these sociocultural frames, focusing on that of heteronormative ideology and its influence on the linguistic construction of homosexual desires, dating preferences, and queer relationships in the discourse of same-sex dating websites in modern Taiwan.

Sexuality denotes the ways in which people behave as sexual beings, including “sexual behavior, sexual desire, and sexual identity” (Baker 2008: 6). Gender is defined as a socially constituted identity through stylized and repeated performances, sexuality similarly derives from various types of behavioral interactions among individuals, giving “sociopolitical meaning to the body as an eroticized and/or reproductive site” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 470). What’s more, language specifically provides a significant avenue for articulating sexuality and its detailed realization of gender performances. Sexuality is not merely displayed through an array of actions; it is “talked into being” (Mykietiak 2015: 445). This perspective accords with the tenet of Critical Discourse Analysis which focuses on “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (van Dijk 2008: 283).

Increased debates around the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (henceforth LGBT) people, sexuality and related gender acts have garnered more attention from sociolinguistic studies working within the framework of Queer Theory (cf. Wittig 1983; Butler 1990; Turkle 1995; Baker 2003; Cameron and Kulick 2006; Wang 2009; Chiu 2012; Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013; Milani 2013; Mykietiak 2015). Since the classic works done by Wittig, Butler, and many others, recent studies on queerness identify *dating texts* and *heteronormativity* as two important foci. Dating texts in magazine adverts and dating websites, where people, especially LGBT people who cannot come out easily, establish their values on community comradery, dating preference, and romantic relationships (Thorne and Coupland 1998; Baker 2003; Wang 2009; Chiu 2012; Milani 2013). Another notion that has drawn academic focus is that of heteronormativity, which signifies the idea that heterosexuality, with its implied senses of gender and sex, is considered to be normal, universal, and desirable (Wittig 1983; Butler 1990; Chambers 2003; Cameron and Kulick 2006). The differentiation according to ‘what is heteronormative’ forms a hierarchy of gender and sexuality, which privileges those heterosexuals who conform to putative norms and

disadvantages all others; hence, it is of vital importance that heteronormativity be laid bare and discussed openly so as to advocate for the equality of people in sex, gender, and sexuality (Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013).

However, queer linguistics, including research on heteronormativity and dating texts, have long been culturally biased towards Western societies. As for queer studies based on online forum, Nip (2004a, b) has investigated the identity-building capacity of the Internet in social movements by examining a women's group *Queer Sisters* in Hong Kong. In addition to her main findings on the effect of the online forum, she has also indicated that in Hong Kong "the culture of opposition to the dominant mode of heterosexual relationships remained at the level of mutual recognition and reinforcement on the bulletin board" (Nip 2004a: 38). However, she mainly focused on issues of solidarity and collective consciousness in social movements in the group, not on heteronormativity. When same-sex marriage in Taiwan became legal on 24 May, 2019, Taiwan became the first nation in Asia to perform same-sex marriages. Given Taiwan's relatively progressive social politics, it is worth documenting how Taiwanese gays and lesbians construct their sexuality in an Asian society. In other words, the present paper aims to examine how heteronormativity dominates in the discourse collected from two popular homosexual dating websites in Taiwan, and to analyze how heteronormative ideologies influence the linguistic construction of homosexual desires, dating preferences, and queer relationships, with the synergetic perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL). Although aspects of discourse such as metaphor and euphemism are also important and require more focused attention, in order to make a first attempt at this analysis in a Taiwanese context, we limit our current discussion based on the keyword analysis conducted for the purposes of the present paper, leaving the analysis of metaphor to later studies.

Queer Linguistics on Desire, Identity, and Online Dating

With the rise of the Internet, online communities have come to play a crucial role in social networking (cf. Nip 2004). Within these online communities, LGBT people can anonymously construct, perform, discuss, and argue about their individual as well as collective identities (Wang 2009). Compared to other online spaces, dating websites abound with discourse hinting at gender performance among LGBT people (Milani 2013). Gender, according to Butler (1988), is reproduced and bolstered by the repeated stylization of corporeal signs and discourse; that is, gender can be regarded as a feature formed by human performance, which has the possibility of strategic deconstruction and reconstruction. This is called *gender performativity*. Unlike face-to-face dating, online interaction enables one to be anonymous and thus to strategically present him/herself in compliance with favored styles of gender and sexuality. Yet, it is the manipulability of online discourse that signifies the gender preference among LGBT communities in Taiwan (Chiu 2012).

Several queer linguistic studies discuss how LGBT identities and desires are formed on dating websites as well as anonymous personal advertisements in magazines, which were once popular for finding sexual partners before the rise of the

Internet. Thorne and Coupland (1998) conduct a qualitative investigation of Self and Other categorization in 200 personal adverts written by gay men and lesbian women, with an eye towards revealing how gay men and lesbian women in the UK commodify and market sexual/gender identities. Baker (2003) carries out a corpus-based analysis of British gay male personal adverts with diachronic data to explore how British gays have constructed *masculinities* through language in the personal advert genre during the period from 1973 to 2000. Milani (2013), as a pioneer investigating LGBT identity and desire on dating websites, presents a quantitative textual analysis of personal profiles on *Meetmarket*, a South African online community for gay men, to “tease out the ideas of straight-acting-ness and racial distinction by which the members of this community valorize, and thereby make more *desirable*, certain identities at the expense of others” (ibid.: 616). There are also several discourse and fieldwork analyses of homosexual identity and desire as developed on dating websites in Taiwan. Wang (2009) explores the issue of performative identity on the Taiwanese Internet forum *MOTSS* by reinterpreting Butler’s theory of gender performance and Goffman’s idea of self-presentation. She argues that gender performance on the online forum contributes to the materialization and heterogeneity of Taiwanese *tóngzhì* (‘LGBT people’) in terms of issues surrounding body and sexual morality (ibid.: 48). Chiu (2012) employs fieldwork and textual analyses on the language collected from *Grindr* and *Scruff*, two popular mobile applications for gay dating and sex, revealing that a sexual hierarchy has emerged from the *no-picture-no-chat* rule while seeking ideal partners.

Despite these fruitful discussions, several issues still need further elaboration. Firstly, queer linguistics has a strong tradition in Western-based linguistic anthropology; accordingly, non-Western or globalized communication contexts should be further explored so as to unveil the whole picture of how sexual preferences are constructed by gender (Motschenbacher and Stegu 2013). Secondly, most previous studies only focus on a single type of sexuality, viz., either on gay men or on lesbian women. However, it is important to comprehensively compare and contrast these two groups so that gay men and lesbian women, who face more or less similar challenges in Taiwanese society, be collectively analyzed utilizing the same methodology. Thirdly, research on dating texts is usually conducted using qualitative and top-down approaches, which show strength in revealing ideologies but lack statistical data to support the distribution or salience of the analyzed data. Despite some quantitative analyses such as Baker (2003, 2004) and Milani (2013), these corpora still require a reference corpus to which they can be compared in order to calculate the keyness of high-frequency lexical items. Fourthly, Butler (1990) further questioned the validity of viewing heterosexuality as the original sexuality. “Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (Butler 1990: 43), i.e., “a parody of the idea of the natural and the original.” This leads us to wonder how the situation in Taiwan has changed over the past thirty years. Motivated by the previous studies, we propose a synergy between CDA and CL, exploring the embedded heteronormative mechanisms in the language of personal profiles collected from two same-sex dating websites in Taiwan to understand how culture-based heteronormativity influences dating preferences of Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women in the twenty-first century.

Data and Methodology

The target websites in this study are *Top1069* (<http://friend.Top1069.com/>),¹ a Taiwanese online community that serves as a dating platform for men seeking male partners, and *2Girl* (<http://www.2girl.net/portal.php>), a dating website for Taiwanese lesbians. There are several reasons for choosing dating websites for our study. Firstly, dating websites are good environments for linguists to plot a map of identity and desire, showing “how particular desires seek to attach to a variety of bodies, objects, statuses and relationships” (Cameron and Kulick 2003: 114). Secondly, the websites target an almost exclusively Taiwanese audience, meaning that the data can be narrowed to the cultural context in Taiwan. Thirdly, the websites do not charge a fee for listing, thus attracting many users. For these reasons, *Top1069* and *2Girl* have been chosen for analysis.

Data Collection

The research design of this paper mostly replicates Milani (2013) which investigated how same-sex desire is construed on a gay website by examining their personal profiles. Methodologically, the present study involved two phases. First, over the course of one year, the first author downloaded randomly the textual sections of profiles created between July 3, 2013 and May 15, 2015 and saved them as electronic text files (.txt); all screen names were deleted and substituted with a numerical code. This generated a corpus of 506,960 words (lexical tokens) to be analyzed with the help of the computer corpus analysis package WordSmith Tools 6.0 during phase two. The second phase comprised the actual discourse analysis of the corpus. This involved processing all the text files with the help of *WordSmith Tools 6.0*, providing us: (1) frequency information, that is, how many times a word was used; (2) concordances, a list of the contexts in which a particular word occurs; and (3) keyness, specific wordlists obtained by cross-comparisons between these three corpora. As emphasized in *Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research* (BPS 2017), special care has been taken to anonymize those profiles and delete any identifiable IP or links. Any verbatim quotes have been translated into English, so as to reduce the risk of these being traced to their source and potentially identifying participants. In total, we collected 2250 personal profiles (750×3, self-descriptions) in the corpus, with an equal number (750) from each *Top1069*, *2Girl*, as well as a reference website, *Match.com*.

The data were later divided between two corpora: *Desiring Self* and *Desired Other*. As a corpus-driven study, the primary way to observe salient ideas in the corpora is via keywords,² which are calculated by comparing the frequency of each word in the wordlist of a text with the frequency of the same word in a reference

¹ This website was valid while we collected our data for this research; however, it was found closed on Aug 30, 2018.

² Our data are parsed and segmented into smaller lexical units, or so-called ‘words’, by System for Chinese Segmentation, which is currently managed by National Digital Archives Program in Taiwan.

Table 1 The corpora of the study

	Profiles	Articles	Chinese characters	Words
Target corpora	<i>Desiring Self (Top1069)</i>	750	262,476	165,453
	<i>Desired Other (Top1069)</i>	750	80,218	51,068
	<i>Desiring Self (2Girl)</i>	750	152,295	99,259
	<i>Desired Other (2Girl)</i>	750	96,924	62,724
Reference	<i>Heterosexual (Match.com)</i>	750	203,510	128,456
Total		3750	795,423	506,960

wordlist. Thus, personal profiles (self-descriptions) of Taiwanese members from *Match.com* (<http://www.tw.match.com/>), a well-known dating website for heterosexuals, were chosen as the reference corpus to which we compare the homosexual corpora. For consistency with the target corpora, the size of the reference corpus is limited to 750 profiles (including 375 men and 375 women) as well (see Table 1 for detailed information).

In order to explore the embedded heteronormative mechanisms, the personal profile texts depicting *Desiring Self* and *Desired Other* will be analyzed through keywords, wordlists, collocates and concordances. Additionally, with the aid of *WordSmith Tools 6.0*, quantitative data will be complemented by discursive and social analysis of relevant excerpts. Note that since we intend to analyze the linguistic features of gay couples, lesbian couples, and heterosexual couples when they are trying to engage in or establish romantic relationships, we did not compare the keyword difference between profiles of gay men and straight men, nor between profiles of lesbian women and straight women.

The following sections present a general analysis of keywords in the corpora, identity binarism, masculinity, and femininity. Note that we do not interpret the self-descriptions as precise and self-contained indicators of gay and lesbian preferences and identities, as the language can be adjusted or even manipulated according to the posters' motives. Rather, this study aims not merely to indicate how the 'commodifying medium of personal profiles for dating' shapes Self and Other identification, but also to discuss the implicit heterosexually-oriented norms embedded in the language of these dating websites.

Keyword Categorization and Distribution

As a corpus-driven analysis, the study searches the keywords of the three corpora to reveal the most salient and representative concepts within these online communities. After being parsed and run by *WordSmith Tools*, the keywords were divided into the following nine categories by the authors (see Table 2).

Through the classification described above, the keywords in the corpora were further analyzed according to the relative collective frequency of the categorized tokens and types in manifesting the salient concepts in these two online communities (Tables 3, 4).

Table 2 Categorized keywords in the corpora

	Categories	Examples of keywords
A.	IDENTITY-BASED ATTRIBUTE	<i>nánrén</i> ‘man’, <i>TB</i> ‘tomboy’, <i>gē</i> ‘elder brother’
B.	RELATIONSHIP	<i>qīngrén</i> ‘lover’, <i>BF</i> ‘boyfriend’
C.	PERSONALITY	<i>zhēnchéng</i> ‘sincere’, <i>yóushàn</i> ‘friendly’
D.	GENERAL ABSTRACT ENTITY	<i>sīwéi</i> ‘thought’, <i>wèilái</i> ‘future’
E.	APPEARANCE	<i>jīròu</i> ‘muscles’, <i>húzhā</i> ‘stubble’
F.	INTEREST/ACTIVITY	<i>yùndòng</i> ‘exercise or sport’, <i>lǚxíng</i> ‘travelling’
G.	GENERAL EVENT	<i>liánluò</i> ‘to contact’, <i>yǒu</i> ‘to have’
H.	ENVIRONMENT	<i>táiběi</i> ‘Taipei’
I.	CLOSED-CLASS ELEMENTS AND PROPER NOUNS	<i>ma</i> ‘interrogative particle’

Table 3 Frequency distribution of keyword categories (token)

	Iden. (%)	Relat. (%)	Perso. (%)	Abstra. (%)	Appea. (%)	Inter. (%)	Event (%)	Envir. (%)	Total (%)
G. Self	16	1	0	8	20	15	38	3	100
G. Other	21	10	3	5	8	8	45	1	100
L. Self	9	11	0	11	4	5	58	2	100
L. Other	10	19	0	5	2	6	56	2	100
Hetero.	2	4	22	20	0	6	44	1	100

Table 4 Frequency distribution of keyword categories (type)

	Iden. (%)	Relat. (%)	Perso. (%)	Abstra. (%)	Appea. (%)	Inter. (%)	Event (%)	Envir. (%)	Total (%)
G. Self	21	1	0	12	24	16	17	9	100
G. Other	30	10	5	6	23	10	11	4	100
L. Self	20	12	0	12	10	6	33	7	100
L. Other	24	26	1	4	7	7	24	7	100
Hetero.	5	7	26	19	1	8	32	3	100

Iden. identity-based attribute, *Relat.* relationship, *Perso.* personality, *Abstra.* abstract entity, *Appea.* appearance, *Inter.* interest/activity, *Event* general event, *Envir.* environment, *G. Self* Gay Desiring Self, *G. Other* Gay Desired Other, *L. Self* Lesbian Desiring Self, *L. Other* Lesbian Desired Other, *Hetero.* the corpus of *Match.com* (heterosexual)

Statistically organized with the personal profiles of *Match.com* as a reference corpus, the data from gay men’s *Desiring Self* and *Desired Other* and the lesbian counterparts generate 110, 102, 165, and 137 keywords, respectively. And with the keywords of heterosexual profiles (compared with the corpus of all the homosexual profiles), there are 241 words in total. These collected keywords are

limited to words with the keyness³ ($p > 0$; $p < 0.000001$). In Table 2, Group I, which contains almost all function words, is excluded from the calculation to prevent a statistical distortion.

According to the frequency distribution of keywords in either tokens or types (Tables 3, 4), gay men and lesbian women in Taiwan refer more frequently to the concepts of IDENTITY-BASED ATTRIBUTES than do those on *Match.com*. The saliency of this group of keywords may reasonably reflect a fact in online communities: gendered roles played in a relationship require words to be clarified for homosexual website users while for heterosexual users their biological sexes are taken for granted and thus unmarked. Further, each group of members has at least one distinctive concept: APPEARANCE and INTEREST/ACTIVITY on *Top1069*, RELATIONSHIP on *2Girl*, and PERSONALITY on *Match.com*, indicated as boldfaced numbers in Tables 3 and 4. These four groups of concepts will be further observed by concordance and discourse analysis in the following sections.

The Identity Binarism and Heteronormativity

Heterosexuality is not simply constructed by the desire for the opposite sex, but is regulated and practiced through one-man-one-woman relationships, intercourse, marriage, the roles of husband and wife, father and mother, etc. (Coates 2013: 537). In Taiwan, the norms of heterosexuality have further been advocated as an unmarked moral standard, which generates a well-developed lexicon in Mandarin Chinese, such as *fūqī* ‘husband and wife’. Yet, how do same-sex couples define their identities and relationships? Are they copies of heterosexual couples (cf. Butler 1990)? The following section investigates the linguistic mechanisms for denoting gendered roles in homosexual relationships on *Top1069* and *2Girl*.

Binary Key Terms for Gay Men on *Top1069*

Homosexual people in relationships seem to have more homogeneity, either from the perspective of biological sex or from the perspective of social norms. However, plenty of keywords and high-frequency words are used on *Top1069*, to define the binary roles of Taiwanese gay men in a relationship as shown in Table 5.

We pair the identity-based terms in Table 5 for two reasons. Firstly, there is always a term with its counterpart, which implies co-hyponymic or antonymic concepts, such as *lǎogōng* ‘husband’ and *lǎopó* ‘wife’, *gēge* ‘elder brother’ and *dìdì* ‘younger brother’, as well as the semantic relationships between *āo* ‘indentation’ and *tú* ‘protrusion’ (Table 5). Secondly, the binary terms usually appear in the same

³ According to the manual of *WordSmith Tools 6.0*, the keyness of an item is computed through Ted Dunning’s Log Likelihood test, which measures keyness in terms of statistical significance and is considered more appropriate than using Chi square, especially when contrasting long texts or a whole genre against your reference corpus. See UCREL’s log likelihood site (<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html>) for more on this.

Table 5 Role-play terms with binary relations (From the wordlists of 3000 frequently used terms in the corpus of *Top1069*)

Desiring Self (Top1069)

gē (*gēge*, *gěgě*) ‘elder brother’ versus *dì* (*dìdì*, *dídì*) ‘younger brother’

Desired Other (Top1069)

gē (*gēge*, *gěgě*) ‘elder brother’ versus *dì* (*dìdì*, *dídì*) ‘younger brother’

lǎogōng ‘husband’ versus *lǎopó* ‘wife’

gōng ‘*seme*; aggressive’ versus *shòu* ‘*uke*; passive’

yīhào ‘No.1 (top)’ versus *líng hào* ‘No. 0 (bottom)’

tú ‘protrusion (top)’ versus *āo* ‘indentation (bottom)’

Top versus Btm (bottom)

paragraphs of personal profile texts, showing their collocational similarities. The following examples show several typical identity-based terms in the personal profiles of *Top1069*:

- (1) *Being a yīhào surely makes me gain pleasure when having sex, but it’s such a pity that I almost feel nothing when being a líng hào, who hopes to feel great in the receptive sex position without reluctance.* (From profile No. 563, translated into English, *Desiring Self, Top1069*)⁴

Despite no clear biological distinction between both sides, gay couples still distinguish themselves in terms of sexual position during sexual activity, such as the term *yīhào* ‘number 1’ and *líng hào* ‘number 0’, which are generally imbued with sexual meaning. *Yīhào* and *líng hào* can be looked upon as metaphoric uses of Arabic numerals. *Yīhào* (sometimes *yī*), a synonym of *top*, refers to a man who engages in the penetrative or assertive role during sexual activities (either anal or oral sex). The conceptualization of *yīhào* is established when the shape of 1 in the source domain is mapped onto the reproductive organ of males in the target domain. By contrast, *líng hào* (sometimes *líng*), a synonym of *bottom* (or *btm*), denotes a man who acts as a receptive or passive partner during sexual penetration. Likewise, its conceptualization derives from mapping the shape of 0 onto the part of body into which an *yīhào* penetrates.

Example (2) contains two terms that denote a homosexual male relationship in terms of more abstract aspects:

- (2) *(I am) A cute dì with a baby face. A student from X University. I am crazy for gē with heavy eyebrows, always thinking about the future days when you take me to travel and enjoy countless cuisines. Hope you can be beside me, protecting*

⁴ All the examples provided in this paper are originally in Mandarin Chinese, but are presented only in English due to length limitations (except for the key terms discussed) and privacy considerations.

and loving me. I am also willing to be your virtuous boyfriend~ (From profile No. 621, translated into English, *Desiring Self, Top1069*)

The pair *gē* and *dì* (lit. ‘elder brother’ and ‘younger brother’) signify styles of companionship in daily living. The writer in (2) looks for a *gē* to form a *gē-dì* relationship with him. *Gē* is the man who is proactive, responsible, and inclined to take care of *dì*. Conversely, *dì* refers to the man who prefers being passive, dependent, and under the protection of *gē*. The ideas of *gē* and *dì* in the Taiwanese gay community metaphorically derive from the traditional concept of Chinese families: elder brothers should take care of their younger brothers. The two roles are also associated with the typical images of Taiwanese men and women: *gē* should be strong and reliable like a real man, while *dì* should be protected and virtuous.

Binary Key Terms for Lesbian Women on 2Girl

Similar to the data from *Top1069*, the lesbian members on *2Girl* also used many terms to illustrate relationship roles between two women in Taiwan, as is shown in the role-play terms (see Table 6):

Overall, the role-play terms on *2Girl* form pairs comprised of a boyish girl and a girl with recognizable femininity in compliance with the norms for heterosexual women in Taiwan. Aside from the common pair for both gay and lesbian couples, *lǎogōng* ‘husband’ and *lǎopó* ‘wife’, *tī* and *pó* are also a pair frequently used in the *2Girl* lesbian corpus, as exemplified in (3) and (4):

- (3) *About you: I hope you are a tī. I hope you have a stable job and are not in the habit of smoking and drinking (I’m OK with a few drinks, though). Gentle and not chauvinistic.* (From profile No. 321, translated into English, *Desired Other, 2Girl*)
- (4) *I hope I can meet you, a low-key but attractive pó with long hair. We may be of similar age and of similar sizes of figure. We may even have similar ways of thinking and similar life experiences. We can share all the things that have happened in these years.* (From profile No. 737, translated into English, *Desired Other, 2Girl*)

Table 6 Role-play terms with binary relations (from the wordlists of 3000 frequently used terms in the corpus of *2Girl*)

Desiring Self (2Girl)

T ‘tomboy; butch’ versus P ‘tomboy’s wife’

tī ‘tomboy; butch’ versus *pó* ‘tomboy’s wife’

TB ‘tomboy; butch’ versus TG ‘tomboy girl; femme’

Desired Other (2Girl)

T ‘tomboy; butch’ versus P ‘tomboy’s wife’

tī ‘tomboy; butch’ versus *pó* ‘tomboy’s wife’

Butch versus Femme

lǎogōng ‘husband’ versus *lǎopó* ‘wife’

Compared to Taiwanese gay men's keywords on *Top1069*, lesbian women on *2Girl* also use similar pairs of terms to describe lesbian couples. *Tī* and *pó* in (3) and (4) are the most typical and frequently used terms within the community. *Tī* (also *T* and *TB*) derives from the first letter of the English term *tomboy*, which means a girl who exhibits characteristics or appearance deemed typical of a boy or a man, as is depicted together with its near synonym *butch*. On the other hand, *pó* (also *P* and *TG*) means wife in Mandarin Chinese, which denotes the idea of 'tī's wife' and can be associated with the English term *femme* (Su 2009). According to the examples provided above, the *tī-pó* (or *T-P*) distinction is related to appearance, the concept of protection and dependence, and division of household responsibilities. *Pó* is expected to be feminine and long-haired, low-key and thus unrecognizable in the society. In addition to the division of responsibilities similar to that of heterosexual couples, the *T-P* distinction shares great similarity with the stereotypical gender distinction between heterosexual men and women: while *pó* is girlish and dependent, *tī* is manly, reliable, and should be careful not to be chauvinistic. Apart from the definition of *tī* and *pó*, lesbian women on *2Girl* also show great concern for the *T-P* distinction in their language as shown in (5):

- (5) *After joining the community, I feel confused by the labels like TB, TG and versatile, which are used to describe identities in everyone's personal profile. How should I be classified?* (From profile No. 590, translated into English, *Desiring Self, 2Girl*)

The relationship between *tī* and *pó* seems extremely important and necessary in the mainstream lesbian community in Taiwan (Zheng 1997: 123). The paragraph in (5) nicely reflects this notion: this user feels confused with the seemingly obligatory *T-P* identification through which everyone in the lesbian community defines themselves. Furthermore, the text also shows her anxiety about not being able to fit into the classification scheme, which may lead to potential problems for in-group friendship and relationship with an ideal partner.

Summary

Despite no biological distinction between homosexual lovers in a relationship, there are still many terms illustrating binary roles in terms of their sexual positions, personalities, and ways of companionship, which can be related back to the tendency for humans to categorize everything. Binarism is a typical way in which human beings perceive, conceive of, and even normalize the world, including classic dichotomies, such as nature versus nurture, male versus female, and masculinity versus femininity. According to the mechanism of binarism, men and women are defined and disciplined not just by their stereotypical gender differences, but also by the heteronormative pairing with the opposite sex (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Since most gay men and lesbian women in Taiwan grow up in a family affiliated with the marriage of heterosexuals. Through unremitting identification, comparison,

imitation and coercion, Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women create modes of romantic relationship which show great similarity to those of heterosexual couples. This includes the overt imitation of husband and wife (e.g., *lǎogōng* and *lǎopó*), as well as several types of gender classification affected more or less by heteronormativity: dominance and submission in terms of sexual positions (e.g., *yīhào* and *língào*), appearance (e.g., *tī* and *pó*) and the concept of protection and dependence (e.g., *gē* and *dì*, *tī* and *pó*). Humans begin internalizing heterosexual relationship norms in childhood, so it is reasonable that homosexual people replicate this mindset in performing their own romantic relationships. Like Johnson wrote, “Via our embodied understanding, we learn how to go on with our thinking, how to carry a situation forward in a fulfilling way.” (Johnson 2007: Ch. 4). Butler (1990) presented a possibility of “a parody of the idea of the natural and the original,” so although it may be naïve to conclude that homosexual couples directly copy the patterns of heterosexual couples, heteronormative assumptions seem to have remained pervasive in Taiwan’s LGBT community over the last thirty years.

Masculinity and Femininity on *Top1069*

Masculinity and MAN

Gay men are stereotypically associated with non-masculine characteristics, such as being effeminate, outspoken, sociable, talkative, and concerned about appearance (Madon 1997; Eguchi 2009). How, then, do Taiwanese gay men describe themselves on *Top1069*? The keywords from the collected personal profile texts on the target website suggest that masculinity is constantly mentioned and emphasized for self-introduction and description of ideal partners. First of all, the most frequently used modifier for describing gay identity in the *Top1069* corpus is *MAN* (‘manly’), which is mentioned 54 times (frequency: 0.02%; keyness: 43.52) to describe *Desiring Self* and 19 times (frequency: 0.04%) for *Desired Other*. Compared with the cases used in negative constructions together with collocates (with a -5 to $+5$ span) such as *bù* ‘not’ (9 times) and *zhuāng* ‘to pretend’ (2 times) in the corpus of *Desiring Self*, the term *MAN* has a strong tendency to co-occur with positive terms for conveying one’s own masculinity, such as *hěn* ‘very’ (25 times), *yánggāng* ‘manly’ (4 times), *jí* ‘extremely’ (3 times), etc. Likewise, the concordance lines with *MAN* are often positively presented in constructions like *xúnzhǎo MAN de rén* (‘Looking for manly guys’) for portraying their ideal partners, as in (6):

- (6) *If you ask me my ideal type in terms of appearance, I would say MAN and mature guys would be my favorite... mature and gentle guys are also good for me.* (From profile No. 748, translated into English, *Desired Other, Top1069*)

Overall, the high frequency of the three keywords, *MAN*, *yì-nán* ‘heterosexual man’, and *zhí-nán* ‘straight man’, indicates that Taiwanese gay men view masculinity as an important principle in defining themselves or finding partners. Moreover, it

Table 7 Terms related to appearance in the corpus of *Top1069* (keywords)

Key word	Freq.	RC. Freq.	Keyness
<i>Desiring Self (Top1069)</i>			
<i>shuàigē</i> 'handsome guy'	53	2	47.04
<i>diǎo</i> 'penis'	40	0	45.97
<i>tiāncài</i> 'ideal type for everyone'	27	0	31.03
<i>shuài</i> 'handsome'	48	5	30.32
<i>liǎn</i> 'face'	51	7	27.48
<i>xiōngfùjī</i> 'chest and abs'	21	0	24.13
<i>jǐròu</i> 'muscle'	27	1	24.05
<i>Desired Others (Top1069)</i>			
<i>jǐròu</i> 'muscle'	25	1	55.18
<i>shuàiqì</i> 'handsome'	24	2	47.59
<i>shuài</i> 'handsome'	28	5	45.69
<i>duǎnfǎ</i> 'short hair'	20	1	42.92
<i>wàixíng</i> 'appearance'	25	6	36.42
<i>yǎnjìng</i> 'glasses'	14	0	35.2
<i>jiēshí</i> 'muscle'	14	0	35.2
<i>diǎo</i> 'penis'	12	0	30.17
<i>húzhǎ</i> 'stubble'	20	5	28.61
<i>xiōngfùjī</i> 'chest and abs'	10	0	25.14
<i>shuàigē</i> 'handsome guy'	14	2	24.48
<i>liǎn</i> 'face'	20	7	24.07

RC Freq. reference corpus frequency

may also imply that masculine gays tend to display their heteronormative manliness in order to attract others, whereas non-masculine gay men, who are seen as typical gay men according to the previous literature (Kimmel and Mahalik 2005), choose to hide their femininity.

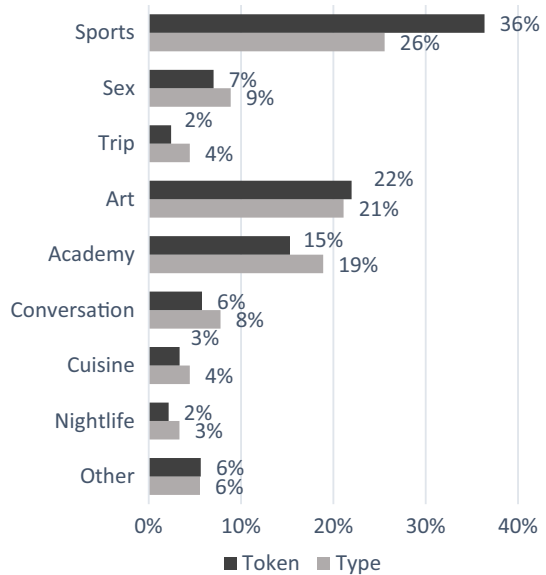
Masculinity in APPEARANCE

The keywords used to depict appearance in the corpus of texts from Taiwanese gay men’s personal profiles also substantiate the saliency of masculinity, as shown in Table 7.

Example (7) shows the way they describe these physical features for desired others.

- (7) *I like mature guys at the age of 25–35, especially those who have a habit of weight training (not a requirement/Xiōngjī ('chest and abs') and fùjī ('the abdominal muscle') are my favorites (Sorry for being picky. I want to find someone pleasing to the eyes. I major in PE, so I have some fùjī. I hope my Mr. Right*

Fig. 1 Frequency distribution of the 3000 frequently used terms about interest/activity in *Self*



is coming soon. (From profile No. 258, translated in English, *Desiring Self, Top1069*)

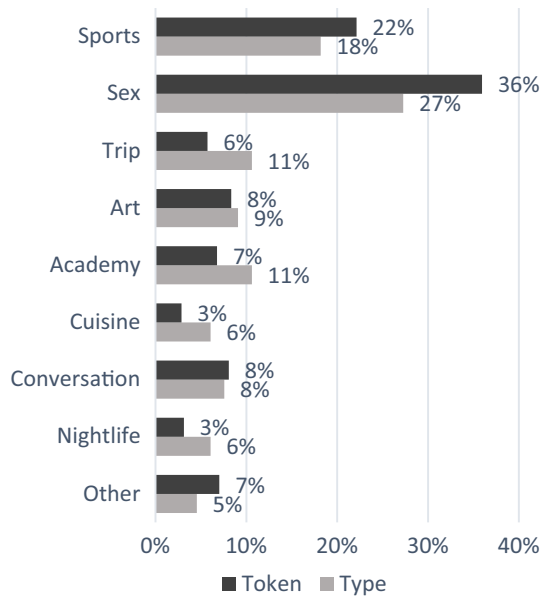
Regardless of social status, race or cultural backgrounds, the body is the core site for the definition of prototypical masculinity, or true masculinity in the context of heterosexuality (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 45–66). According to Baker's (2003) research on gay adverts, muscularity and appearance are highly correlated to masculinity. In the keywords categorized into the group APPEARANCE, similarly, there is a high proportion of terms manifesting the secondary sex characteristics of males and masculine physical traits, such as *diǎo* 'penis', *jīròu* 'muscle', *xiōngfùjī* 'chest and abs', *jīeshí* 'muscled' and *húzhā* 'stubble'. These terms signifying masculinity (or hyper-masculinity) not only outnumber the other keywords (e.g., *liǎn* 'face'), but are mostly used in positive contexts, which indicates the importance and desirability to be masculine, as shown in (7) above.

Masculinity in ACTIVITY/INTEREST

As previously mentioned, the keywords about appearance signify the positivity of masculinity in Taiwanese gay communities; additionally, masculinity is also manifested in keywords denoting interests and activities. This paper demonstrates the proportion of keywords as well as the frequently used terms about interests, hobbies or activities, as those provided in Figs. 1 and 2.

As shown in Fig. 1, the terms describing sports or exercises comprise the highest proportion among all the categories in terms of token (36%) or type (26%). As for

Fig. 2 Frequency distribution of the 3000 frequently used terms about interest/activity in *Other*



the data in Fig. 2, both sex (token: 36%; type: 27%) and sports (token: 22%; type: 18%) are the most salient concepts for keywords denoting interests and activities.

The saliency of the concepts sex and sport can be associated with gays' desire for masculinity. The reference of sexual acts, according to Phua's (2002) study on gender stereotypes, is usually equated with a high degree of masculinity because it is more tolerated for men to speak of sex than for women in most social contexts. On the other hand, sport and exercise are also stereotypically looked upon as a masculine activity owing to the image of men "being physically active or aggressive" (Chen 1994). In addition, sport and exercise are even thought of as ways for men to ensure their masculinity because the activities "provide a continuous display of men's bodies in motion in stylized contests" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 54–55). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Taiwanese gays show their interest in sports and the guys who love sports for the purpose of emphasizing the importance of being masculine.

Gaining insights from the observation of keywords related to positive masculinity (e.g., identity-based attributes, appearance, and interest or activity), this paper demonstrates that Taiwanese gay men, who are typically considered feminine by the public, characterize themselves as being manly, straight-acting, sporty and muscled, which is reminiscent of the normative traits for heterosexual men in Taiwan. Masculinity has highlighted how acting straight has become somewhat of an obsession among homosexual men across various socio-cultural contexts (Eguchi 2011; Phua 2002). While some LGBT activists advocate the respect to all types of gender performances, many gay men still strive to attain heteronormative masculine features not only to compensate for the social

perception of gay men as effeminate, but also to become an “undetectable” gay man (Kimmel and Mahalik 2005; Phua 2002; Cai 2009; Wu 1998).

Abjection of Femininity

Aside from investigating how gay men positively describe masculinity or the ability to act straight, the valorization of heteronormative masculinity can also be signified by observing the high frequency of words used in negative constructions for condemning femininity. For instance, feminine terms such as *niáng* ‘sissy’, *CC* ‘effeminate’, or *jiěmèi* ‘sisters’ are mostly applied in negative contexts, which indicates that behaving like a girl or woman is not welcomed in the Taiwanese gay online community, as shown in (8):

- (8) *I prefer energetic and Japanese-styled guys! (Attention: it doesn't mean I like niáng guys.) But I can hardly attract this type of guy. It is quite common for me! Ha!* (From profile No. 718, translated into English, *Desired Other*, *Top1069*)

Niáng ‘sissy’ in Mandarin Chinese is usually used to describe a man who has characteristics regarded as being typical of a woman. The man in (8) cannot accept as his lover a guy possessing features denoted by *niáng*, which corresponds to the dominant negativity in *niáng*’s collocation: the negative word *bù* (‘not’) outnumbers all other collocates both in the corpus of *Desiring Self* (17 times) and *Desired Other* (11 times). In contrast to the worship of masculinity among Taiwanese gay men, feminine men are often excluded from gays’ lists of ideal partners.

As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stress, it is essential to recognize hegemony, subordination, complicity, and most importantly, *marginalization* as four of the practices that regulate primary patterns of Western masculinity. Masculinity is a type of gender performance many gay men crave and thus apply to their own definitions of Self. To construct and maintain the masculine Self, it is necessary that the existence of the feminine Other be overtly rejected (Bergling 2001; Hall 2001). Likewise, the phenomena of marginalization can also be reflected in the negative collocations of feminine terms used in the Taiwanese gays’ personal profile texts, such as *niáng*, *CC*, *jiěmèi*, etc. According to the data, we argue that the valorization of masculine traits along with the stigmatization of effeminacy on *Top1069* more or less strengthens heteronormative constructions of gender.

Masculinity and Femininity on 2Girl

Femininity in Identity-Based Attributes and Appearance

Similar to the cases describe above for gay men, lesbian women are stereotypically considered less feminine or even masculine both in Taiwan and all around the world (Walker et al. 2012; Zheng 1997). Yet, the keyword analysis provides a different

Table 8 Terms related to femininity and masculinity on 2Girl (keywords)

Key word	Freq.	RC. Freq.	Keyness
<i>Desiring Self (2Girl)</i>			
<i>zhōngxìng</i> 'gender-neutral'	34	0	56.47
<i>chángfǎ</i> 'long hair'	42	2	55.78
<i>shuài</i> 'handsome'	40	5	40.77
<i>nǚháyàng</i> 'like a girl'	51	14	33.27
<i>nǚrénwèi</i> 'femininity'	51	16	29.62
<i>niáng</i> 'sissy; effeminate'	22	1	29.6
<i>duǎnfǎ</i> 'short hair'	21	1	27.89
MAN 'manly'	25	3	26.04
<i>Desired Other (2Girl)</i>			
<i>zhōngxìng</i> 'gender-neutral'	20	0	44.58
<i>chángfǎ</i> 'long hair'	23	2	38.92
<i>shuài</i> 'handsome'	28	5	38.32
<i>niáng</i> 'sissy; effeminate'	16	1	28.83
<i>nǚháyàng</i> 'like a girl'	33	14	27.4
<i>duǎnfǎ</i> 'short hair'	15	1	26.75
<i>měipó</i> 'a beautiful girl'	11	0	24.52
MAN 'manly'	15	3	23.99

RC Freq. reference corpus frequency

picture of lesbian presentation in Taiwan. In the language of personal profile texts on 2Girl, plenty of keywords are used to depict the gender performance of lesbian online users and their ideal partners, as shown in Table 8.

In spite of being female, the Taiwanese lesbians on 2Girl describe themselves and ideal partners through words conveying a variety of gender performances, some of which are even closer to the typical features of heteronormative male images, including *zhōngxìng* 'gender-neutral', *shuài* 'handsome', *duǎnfǎ* 'short hair' and MAN 'manly'.

Among the keywords, those denoting femininity receive nearly complete positive semantic prosody in the personal profiles on 2Girl, such as in the cases of (9) and (10) below:

- (9) *I love beautiful P with strong scent of nǚrénwèi ('femininity') regardless of the gender of her ex-lovers.* (From profile No. 590, translated into English, *Desired Other, 2Girl*)
- (10) *I prefer a pó ('wife') with chángfǎ ('long haired') and nǚrénwèi ('femininity'). I hope I can find you, or good friends with the same interest, sharing the pleasure of seeing beautiful girls.* (From profile No. 177, translated into English, *Desired Other, 2Girl*)

The keyword *nǚrénwèi* 'the scent of women', which denotes a mature femininity through the reference of *nǚrén* 'woman', is frequently used in the personal profile texts on 2Girl. The profile owner of passage (9) not only says that she is

more interested in women with mature femininity, but also that bisexual women and those who used to date males in the past are still in her consideration as a partner in a romantic relationship. This example indicates that some Taiwanese lesbian women have an ambivalent attitude towards being attracted to feminine lesbians who are likely to “fall in love with guys again” (Shieh 2009: 128–129). Based on this phenomenon, the frequent co-occurrence of this keyword and the expressions about the possibility of loving a man also imply that *nǚrénwèi* is inclined to be associated with the characteristics of heterosexual women.

Also, the body-part keyword *chángfǎ* ‘long hair’ signifies Taiwanese lesbian women’s preference for femininity on *2Girl*. Short-haired men and long-haired girls are the most appropriate and ideal gender presentations in modern Taiwanese culture, which might be a reason why *chángfǎ* is constantly mentioned together with other terms for femininity. In (10), the user claims that she likes a *pó* who has long hair and *nǚrénwèi*. In fact, the keyword *chángfǎ* in the corpus of *2Girl* is always used positively, which indicates that the femininity instantiated by long hair is highly preferred in the Taiwanese lesbian online community.

In sum, the discussion of (9) and (10) above elicits the ideology that lesbian women on *2Girl* have a common preference for femininity, which shares great similarities with the case of gay men in which masculinity is admired and lauded.

Female Masculinity in Identity-Based Attributes and Appearance

While most of the gay men on *Top1069* show their abhorrence of effeminateness across the board, the concept of female masculinity is generally rejected by many lesbian women while also being embraced in certain contexts. First of all, the following passages are examples of cases in which lesbian women do not accept their partner as being gender-neutral or masculine:

- (11) *I want to find a person who can share her whole life with me, cherishing our happiness together. But if you define yourself with the words like zhōngxìng* (‘gender-neutral’), *MAN* or *shuàiqì* (‘handsome’), then I have to say sorry because we are not right for each other. (From profile No. 733, translated into English, *Desired Other*, *2Girl*)

The writer of (11) regards herself as a lesbian woman but cannot accept her future partner as having any attributes illustrated by such terms as *zhōngxìng* ‘gender-neutral’, *MAN* ‘manly’, *shuàiqì* ‘handsome’ and *duǎnfǎ* ‘short hair’. This situation, wherein some Taiwanese lesbians disfavor female masculinity, is similar to those gays who cannot tolerate femininity found in other gay men. To construct a feminine Self successfully, the characteristics considered divergent from normative femininity tend to be strongly rejected by lesbians themselves. In so doing, Taiwanese lesbian women can avoid being outed by their appearance and therefore gain a sense of security within a society dominated by heterosexuality.

On the contrary, some lesbian women on *2Girl* appreciate female masculinity, which also appears frequently associated with *T* (or *tī*) in a Taiwanese lesbian relationship. The following passage is an example of preference for female masculinity:

- (12) *I'm living in Taichung, craving a lover's company in a stable relationship. I can cook, and I can take you out. It will also be my honor to accompany you and do what you want to do together on weekends. I'm not a MAN T, but can I get to know you, though?* (From profile No. 307, translated into English, *Desiring Self, 2Girl*)

While some Taiwanese lesbian women on *2Girl* refuse to align with non-feminine homosexual women, still many heteronormatively queer characteristics are considered positive and even normative in some specific contexts, especially when collocated with the term *T* 'tomboy; butch'. The writer of (12) identifies herself as a *T*, feeling worried about not being able to find girlfriends due to lack of masculinity. The sentence 'I'm not a *MAN T*, but can I get to know you, though' reveals her anxiety and a possible belief that *T* should behave as a man, or at least as a gender-neutral woman.

Lesbian women's preferences in gender performance bears some similarity to those of gay men but the profile data on *2Girl* contain more complexity and nuance. While many Taiwanese lesbian women on the dating website embrace femininity, the analysis of the keywords denoting non-feminine characteristics shows that female masculinity is not rejected as completely as male femininity in the Taiwanese gay community on *Top1069*; in fact, there are some who openly elicit masculine lesbian women, widely known as *T* in Taiwan or *butch* in Western countries, to be their partners. Yet, female masculinity has been tightly connected with *T* women in the online lesbian community, making some lesbians feel anxious about whether or not their behaviors and appearance fit the norms of lesbian manliness. That is, some *T* lesbians may struggle with the pressure of becoming masculine in order to find partners successfully. The phenomenon of compulsory masculinity in the data of *2Girl* is similar to the situation that Taiwanese gays are forced to abide by standards of masculinity, which is lauded by both hetero- and homosexual people.

Summary

In heteronormative societies, the core concept of heterosexuality is the love between a man and a woman, maintained by the repeated practice of performing normative gender (Cameron and Kulick 2006: 165). For heterosexual men, the most essential and privileged gender form is masculinity, which has been viewed as a sign of men's power and an instrument for maintaining patriarchal societies (Gardiner 2002; Nguyen 2008). In Sinophone culture, masculinity is not only defined by a muscular body but also explicated by a well-educated mind, as denoted by the highly valued qualities of *wén* 'culture' and *wǔ* 'martial skill'. They, respectively, correspond to *yīn* 'darkness, femininity' and *yáng* 'brightness, masculinity', two basic complementary

entities of the world in Chinese philosophy (Louie and Edwards 1994). Based on this idea, an ideal man should be equipped with competence in the skills associated with *wén* (e.g., academics and arts) and *wǔ* (e.g., sport and martial art) so that *yīn* ‘darkness, femininity’ and *yáng* ‘brightness, masculinity’ can be ‘balanced in one corporeal form’ (ibid.: 139). By contrast, heterosexual women are traditionally constrained by constructions of femininity (Nguyen 2008). Femininity is usually conceived of as opposite and subordinate to masculinity. For instance, femininity in traditional Chinese societies is illustrated by a set of principles called *sāncóng sìdé* ‘three obediences and four virtues’, which exhorts submission as a virtue of women.

According to the keywords in the personal profile texts on *Top1069* and *2Girl*, masculinity and femininity play an important role in illustrating the *Desiring Self* and the *Desired Other* on dating websites. Most Taiwanese gay men on *Top1069* admire those who have masculine traits, excluding non-masculine or feminine gay men from the lists of ideal partners. On the other hand, most Taiwanese lesbian women on *2Girl* embrace femininity and reject manliness; yet, female masculinity is still supported and normalized by some lesbian women.

Although the gay men and lesbian women on *Top1069* and *2Girl* describe masculinity and femininity in different ways, the modes of gender performance within the two groups are both rooted in heteronormativity: the popularity of masculinity in the online gay community may well derive from the notion that a masculine man is widely deemed the ideal type of man and thus is unlikely to be recognized as gay in heterosexually-oriented societies. As for *2Girl*, there is a certain amount of tolerance for female masculinity but many lesbians (especially *T*) still form their relationships in a heteronormative mode, thinking that they should behave in a manly way so as to provide a sense of security and reliability for their feminine partners. To sum up, the diverse gender performance of Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women on the dating websites is still constrained by how the genders of men and women are assumed to be normal in heterosexual societies.

Conclusion

The present paper examines heteronormativity in the discourse collected from two popular homosexual dating websites in Taiwan in order to analyze how heteronormative ideologies influence the linguistic construction of homosexual desires, dating preferences, and queer relationships. Although the dominating influence of heteronormativity on homosexual couples has been discussed in the literature, the keywords in the corpora show that strong power relationships formed by heteronormative notions of gender within the scope of homosexuality still exist among Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women. On the one hand, the keywords contain many binary roles providing conventional interactional modes for Taiwanese homosexual couples, which show great similarity to those in heterosexual relationships. On the other hand, the analysis indicates that heteronormative constructions of masculinity and femininity are related to anxieties about mainstream preferences for dating in the two target websites.

In discussions of discourse and society, Van Dijk (2009: 7) has pointed out that “contexts are not some (part of a) social situation, but a subjective mental model of such a situation.” In this paper, the language in personal profile texts reflect how Taiwanese gay men and lesbian women present themselves and what they expect from their ideal partners differs; however, there are still many heteronormative conventions which may strengthen the influence of the gender hierarchy and undermine the value of gender equality. While gay men and lesbian women in Taiwan have been striving to advocate for public respect of their sexual and gender identities, i.e., to fit the extant sociocultural frame, the problems which derive from heteronormative power relationships within the queer community still await further explication. This paper bolsters such conclusions, based on solid linguistic analyses, in the hope of awakening LGBT members, and society more broadly, to the existing inequality implicit in queer dating discourses, and if possible, to the possible solutions for combating this inequality both now and in the future.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors. All data were processed under the Ethics Guidelines for Linguistic Studies (Linguistic Society of Taiwan 2011) and the Ethics Guidelines for Internet-mediated Research (BPS 2017).

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