Communicating Homosexuality Online in China: Exploring the Blog of a Lesbian Organization Through the Lens of Co-cultural Theory

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Abstract: This article explores the official blog of a lesbian organization in China. Using the lens of co-cultural theory through a content analysis, this article tries to answer the general question: how does an oppressed co-cultural group openly communicate to the public online. Specifically, this article asks three questions: (RQ1) what are the communication practices it employs online; (RQ2) are there any special communication practices emerged under Chinese online context and (RQ3) what is the preference of the communication strategy of this blog. The results indicate that blogosphere provides a venue for this oppressed group to make its voice heard, at the same time social, and cultural backgrounds influence this group's communication and choices of communication strategies online.

Keywords: Co-Cultural theory, Blog, LGBTQ organizations, homosexuality, China,

1. Introduction

Following the civil rights movement and feminist movement, LGBTQ group has gradually earned their positions in more societies in western world (Hawley, 2001). However, compared to their western counterparts, Chinese LGBTQ community is still suffering from social oppressions and remains silence and invisible in the real world. With the technology development, cyber world has become another place for human beings to express themselves and communicate with others. As Pool (1983) argued, "technologies for self-expression, human intercourse, and recording of knowledge are in unprecedented flux" (p.226). There are pervasive Chinese homosexual discourses online in different forms. However, most of them are spontaneous and unorganized, and few scholars have paid serious attention to this kind of discourses.

The blog of Les+ is an organized online discourse, which is managed by a Chinese lesbian organization called Les+. The purpose of this blog, as mentioned on the first page of the blog, is to facilitate intercultural communication between LGBTQ communities and dominant cultural groups. Using Co-culture theory (Orbe & Spellers, 2005), current study examined communicative practices used in this blog to provide a theoretical understanding of how LGBTQ communities communicate with dominant group members online in China. LGBTQ communities have been studies extensively in western societies. However, scholars have limited understanding of this type communities in China. Current study provides insightful knowledge for this topic. Moreover, current study attempts to examine if this western-orientated theory could be used to explain eastern online communication practices in the context of China. The result of this study could possibly enlarge the theoretical scope of co-cultural theory. Specifically, this study asks questions of what communicative practices are used in this blog, are there any unique Chinese-

oriented communicative practices that the co-culture theory fails to recognize, and are there any preferences among the online practices that Orbe and Spellers (2005) have suggested.

2. Theoretical and Contextual Foundations

2.1. Co-Cultural Theory

Co-cultural theory is a helpful theoretical frame to analyze online discourses about homosexual experiences in China. Developed from muted group (Kramarae, 1981) and standpoint theories (Smith, 1987), co-cultural theory provides an analytical lens to examine the interaction between underrepresented cultural groups and dominate/major culture groups (Orbe, 1996, 1998, Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Specifically, this theory focuses on exploring the communicative experiences of those unrepresented groups. Based on muted group (Kramarae,1981), which implies that the society is constituted with multiple cultural groups, Orbe (1998) has argued that although the society is pluralistic, only one cultural group dominates the society as well as the communication system. Therefore, other groups have to "strategically adopt certain communication behaviors to negotiate oppressive dominant structure" (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p.174). Different from other theories that also provide approaches to study underrepresented groups, this theory argues that those underrepresented groups interact with dominant cultural groups strategically and eventually in hope of achieving the dominant group status (Orbe, 1998b). As a result, the non-dominant groups are considered as co-cultural groups instead of non-dominant groups under this theoretical framework.

According to co-cultural theory, which is developed from four phenomenological research projects (Ford-Ahmed & Orbe, 1992; Orbe, 1994, 1996; Roberts & Orbe, 1996), there are 26 communicative practices (i.e., emphasizing commonalities, developing positive face, censoring self, averting controversy, extensive preparation, overcompensating, manipulating stereotypes, bargaining, dissociating, mirroring, strategic distancing, ridiculing self, increasing visibility, dispelling stereotypes, communication self, intragroup networking, utilizing liaisons, educating others, confronting, gaining advantage, avoiding, maintaining barriers, exemplifying strength, embracing stereotypes, attacking and sabotaging other) that western-based co-cultural groups could use to negotiate with the dominant groups. Orbe and Spellers (2005) proposed that six factors together influence the co-cultural groups' choice(s) of which communicative practice(s) to use. He concluded the relationship among these factors as follow,

> "Situated within a particular *field of experience* that governs their perceptions of the *cost and rewards* associated with, as well as their *capability* to engage in, various communicative practices, co-cultural group members will adopt certain communication orientations-based on their *preferred outcomes* and *communication approaches*-to fit the circumstances of a specific *situation*." (Orbe, 1998c, p. 19)

Co-cultural theory has been used to examine how different co-cultural groups communicate regarding their positions in different settings, including people of color (Gates, 2003; Paker, 2003) and people with disabilities (Cohen, 2008) in the organization, international students

(Urban & Orbe, 2007) and first generation college students (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004) in educational setting, Hmong people, immigrants (Kirby, 2007) and Hawaiians (Miura, 2001) in the major western society, and women (Lev-Aladgem & First, 2004) and gay men (Kama, 2002) in nonwestern society. These studies suggest that co-cultural theory could be applied to different context to examine different co-culture groups (e.g., women, disabled, people of color, gay et al.) Since LGBTQ communities are oppressed by dominant society in China, they could be considered as a co-culture group. As a result, it is possible to apply this theory to examine their communications. The following part discussed status of LGBTQ communities in China.

2.2. Homosexuality in China

Following the civil rights movement and feminist movements, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) groups have gradually earned their place in the Western societies (Hawley, 2001). For example, in San Francisco, LGBTQ people have their own communities; in several European countries, same-sex marriage is protected by laws; and every year, in different western countries, there are gay pride parades. However, compared to their western counterparts, Chinese homosexuals are still suffering from different kinds of oppression of the society and remain a silent and invisible group in society.

In general, homosexuality in China is in a peripheral status in society and homosexuals tend to live a dual life (Young, 2005) due to the pressure from political intolerance, and dominant social norms. First of all, Chinese government has suggested bureaucratic intolerance towards homosexuality (Beach, 2006). Government puts pressures on this community. "Homosexuality has long been regarded in Chinese culture as a sign of 'transgression' that demands a different order of social normality" (Zhang, 2001, p. 63). Until 2001, homosexuality was eventually removed from the list of mental disorders in China (Yong, 2005). However, even after this action, they were still sent to have mental tests after they committed crimes (Xing, 2005; Zhou, 2004), which suggests that the government still sees homosexuals as an abnormal group in the society. Moreover, in China, although there is no law against homosexuality, neither are there laws that protect them and their rights, nor are there any official organizations (Fung & Chen, 2008). Therefore, politically, homosexuality is a constructed as a deviated group in major society in China.

Secondly, homosexuality is against Confucianism and Taoism, which are two dominant philosophies in Chinese society (Fu, 2007). Confucianism is one major philosophy that influences Chinese society for thousands of years. Confucianism claims that having a child (especially a son) is one of the most important duties for people, because the son can (and must) carry on the family name (Yang, 2006). Thus, homosexuality is undutiful, because these people will not have offspring. Taoism, which is another major philosophy in China, emphasizes the importance of uniting males and females. Taoism emphasizes the balance between Yin (female) and Yang (male), and it claims that only when Yin (female) and Yang (male) are balanced, can people have a happy and healthy life (Li, 1996). Hence, the combination of two males or two females is Yang-Yang relation or Yin-Yin relationship, which is unbalanced. According to these two major philosophies, homosexuality is also deviated from major cultural norms.

Positioned in such a deviated status, homosexuality is usually muted and misunderstood by the major society in the real world. Voices and representations of homosexuality are scare in major public media in China (Li, 1998; Zhou, 1996). As Zhang (2001) stated, "in China, homosexuality is never a pure sexual problem, but an issue that raises questions about the violent discourse in which the peremptory heterosexuality has been a predominant force as the rulers of normality" (p.64). This scarcity of the representation in the major public culture also reinforces the deviated status of homosexuals in China. Current study examined online discourses of LGBTQ communities to provide an insightful understanding of how do they communicate with dominant group members in the online world.

2.3. LGBTQ organizations in China

Under such pressure, gays and lesbians feel oppressed and they need help from one another. Entering new millennium, with the development of Internet and communication technology, a large amount of homosexual websites have emerged and LGBTQ people have started connected to each others online (Long, 2008). As a result, several unofficial organizations aiming at helping homosexuals have emerged. Among these organizations, Les+ is one of the most reputable, which owns the only national paper-based lesbian magazine Les+. However, this magazine is not circulated widely and is not official, because of the strict censorship. Les+ magazine was firstly issue in 2005 with the efforts of two lesbians. This magazine commits to facilitating the communication among homosexuals and to enlighten Chinese homosexuals' life by presenting the positive aspects of lesbians' life.

Although it is an organization founded by two lesbians, it is not exclusive to lesbians. In fact, Les+ is a co-cultural organization actually aims to serve the community of all LGBTQ people. As the motto of this organization states, "we are a charity organization co-founded by lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and aliens, our purpose is to let everyone (including LGBTQ people) to see the colorful and confident life LGBTQ people have through cultural communication" (Les+, 2012).

The official blog of Les+ is external voice of this group, because it reaches all populations, not just LGBTQ people. This blog is an effort of intercultural communication that aims at promoting the communication between in-group (LGBTQ people) and out-group members (dominant group members). The evidence is that this blog is an open account blog, which means everyone can read its content without any restrictions. In addition, this blog has a high popularity score of 93 out of 100 (SINA, 2012), which indicates that this blog is widely reviewed by large audiences. Another piece of evidence is that the specific purpose of promoting intercultural communication between LGBTQ people and out-group people is clearly stated on the left side of the home page of this blog (Les+, 2012). Hence, this blog could be considered as an intercultural communication effort.

Homosexual is one of the co-cultural groups that seek to interact with major group and leverage their position in the major society in China. In order to understand the communicative strategies this group has used online, co-cultural theory provides a useful lens to analyze this specific case (Les+). Based on the typology of communicative practices that Orbe and Speller (2005) have provided, current study is interested in understanding:

RQ1: What types of communicative practices does Les+ employ on its blog?

As previously stated, although co-cultural theory has been used in non-western context, it is only has been used in Israel and Japan. Considering this theory is developed in the United States, which is a typical western culture country, and the current study examines lesbians in China, which is a typical eastern cultural country, it is reasonable to ask if the typology of communicative practices provided by this theory can be adopted into eastern culture. Moreover, when developing this theory, Orbe and Spellers (2005) indicated that the 26 practices by no meanings are comprehensive, and he also encouraged scholars to explore more possible practice when examining different co-cultural groups in different settings. Hence, the next research question is:

RQ2: Based on communicative practices embedded in this blog, are there any other communicative practices Les+ used in Chinese online context that in addition to the existing 26 practices?

At last, China has a highly collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980) that gives more consideration to the relationships between people and emphasizes harmony in the society. People with this cultural orientation tend to avoid conflicts with each other (Ting-Toomey, 1991). When there is a conflict, collectivist culture usually avoids confrontations (Ting-Toomey, 1999, Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, & Oetzel, 2000). Co-cultural theory suggests three communication approaches of nonassertive, assertive and aggressive. Nonassertive is linked to inhibited and nonconfrontational behaviors, aggressive is related to self-promotive and hurtful behaviors, and assertive is in between of these two approached (Orbe & Spellers, 2005). Accordingly, in Chinese culture, nonassertive and assertive communication should be preferred for LBGTQ community. However, online context is different, some people argue that individuals express themselves different online, while others argue that online environment is just the extension of the real social world. Thus, the question arises here, when communicate online, whether LGBTQ community inherits the communication preference based on Chinese culture? Hence, the third research question is

RQ3: Which communication is preferred by Les+'s blog, nonassertive communication, assertive communication or aggressive communication?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Site of Les+

The blog of Les+ was launched at the year of 2007, and keeps updating regularly till present. Everyone can read and comment on this blog without any restrictions. Readers are not required to become members of this organization or SINA Blog. The major part of this blog is the blog posts, and all the posts are written in Chinese. On the left hand of the blog, it has different sections for readers to explore, which include photos of activities that Les+ organized,

introduction of this organization, other LGBTQ communities' websites, fans and visitors of this blog and newest comments from visitors.

3.2. Data Coding and Analysis

Although there are abundant online discourses from this blog, the blog post was the focus of this study, because it was originally created by the organization to facilitate the intercultural communication between LGBTQ community and other. Les+ blog has 309 blog posts all together and these 309 posts were the data pool for analysis. Content analysis was used as the method to analyze this data. Based on the 26 communicative practices and 9 outcomes of intercultural communication, a codebook was created for researchers to identify the communicative practices that involved in this online discourse. Two researchers who are familiar with the co-cultural theory and are native Mandarin Chinese speakers served as the coders of this study.

Data for analysis were obtained from *http://blog.sina.com.cn/lesplus*. 309 blog posts starting from Dec. 7th, 2008 to May 10th 2014 were downloaded as the data for analysis. Each piece of blog post is the unit of analysis. Orbe and Spellers' (2005) typology of 26 communicative practices is the major part of the coding book. Coders were asked to identify which practice(s) emerged in each piece of blog post. The code book also asked coders to identify the year of the post, the number of the practice(s) that was used in each blog post and at last identify any other practice that is absence in Orbe and Spellers' (2005) typology.

Prior to coding, coders discussed their understanding of each communicative practice and clarified some confusions of the codebook. For example, coders decided that any blog that mentioned the activities held by this organization to the public (e.g. showing LGBTQ movie, LGBTQ photography exhibition, drama and etc.) would be coded as communicating self. Any blogs that mentioned the history of homosexuals, the terminologies like tomboys that are used by LGBTQ communities would be coded as the practice of educating other. Then, the initial coding was conducted to test and establish inter-coder reliability, which is used to determine whether independent coders are measuring variables in a consistent manner (Riffe et al., 2005). A total of 31 randomly selected blogs were coded, which represented 10% of the total sample (N=309). Both Cohen's kappa coefficient agreement and percentage agreement were used to calculate the level of agreement between two coders. The Cohen's kappa ranges from .61 to 1.0 with an average of .83 for all variables, and average percent agreement for the variables was 94.4%. No changes have been made to the initial codebook and it was continually used for the whole data analysis.

4. Results

Altogether 309 blog posts were analyzed, which dated from 2008 to 2014. Averagely, each post employed 1.47 practices from Orbe and Spellers' (2005) typology.

Research question 1 asked what types of communicative practice this organization (Les+) employed on its blog. Among 26 practices of Orbe's (2005) typology, 15 of them have emerged: Emphasize Commonalities, Developing Positive Face, Manipulating Stereotypes, Barging, Dissociating, Mirroring, Increasing Visibility, Dispelling Stereotypes, Communicating Self,

Intragroup Networking, Utilizing Liaison, Educating Others, Confronting, Gaining advantage, and exemplifying strengths. The most often used practice was communicating self (*n*=218), followed by increasing visibility (*n*=168) as second, and educating other (*n*=62) as third. The least often used practices are barging (*n*=2), dissociating (*n*=2), mirroring (*n*=2) and confronting (*n*=2).

Almost every single blog post had used the practice of *communication self*. This means "interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open and genuine manner" (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 177). In the context of the Les+ blog, this practice involved introducing two levels of identities: a meso-level identity of *Les+* and an organizational and micro-level identity of individual members of the LGBT community. These two levels of identities are exemplified as following:

> "We are organized by LGBT community members and friends. We support the community building, devote [ourselves?] to communicating our culture, [and?] promoting gay rights. We hope to see a society of equality, diversity and freedom" (meso-level); and "I am a lesbian and I am proud of myself" (micro-level).

More than two-thirds of the blog posts employed the practice of *increasing visibility* to maintain a presence with the dominant structure. This practice called for public awareness of the LGBTQ community in China and invited the public to interact with this community. Special occasions were often used as an opportunity to increase the visibility of this group, such as Chinese New Year, Valentine's Day or major national disasters (i.e. the Sichuan earthquake). An excerpt from one such message goes, "Valentine's Day is special for lovers, but for LGBT members in China, most can't openly celebrate it with the one they love. We hope this society can see us and listen to us. We want to show our love openly in the sunshine."

Educating others was used in about one fourth of the posts. These posts mainly aimed at "enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values etc." (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 177). Various topics were touched by using this practice, including how to interact with LGBT members without offending them; the vocabularies of different parties in a same-sex relationship such as "T" for a masculine role and "P" for a feminine role; the requirements for a same-sex couple to adopt a child; and the health issues that the LGBT community is concerned about. One significant finding of this practice is that there was a fair amount of posting devoted to parents whose children are LGBTs, and these posts served as sources of education for these parents on how to interact with and approach to their own children. One blog post says:

Please don't panic and don't be disappointed; it is extremely hard and risky for them to disclose themselves in front of you. Please embrace them as they are your children. They are not monsters just because of their sexual orientations, and they are eager for your approval more than anything.

The results of other practices are shown in the following table with frequencies, percentages and sample text, respectively.

Table 1.

Practice	Frequency	Percentage	Sample Text
Nonassertive Assimilation Emphasize Commonalities	25	8%	We are just like everyone else in the world, we just want true love for ourselves.
Developing Positive Face	80	26%	Hundreds of friends joined us and we had such a wonderful night. We drank, danced, sang, and talked, we brought love and hope to this community and the world.
Assertive Assimilation Manipulating Stereotypes	12	4%	Let's party! May,26th , we will bring the sexist and sluttiest night to you! Pink is the theme color! Revenue of admissions will be donated to support our organization and volunteers!
Barging	6	2%	If not been told that they are gay penguins who love each other, Roy and Silo are two very common names of penguins in Central Park. They and their adopted girl living together. The love in this penguin family touches people in America and a children's book about this family has published in America.
Aggressive Assimilation Dissociating	3	1%	Bi-sexual is just a sexual orientation, it is not a life style, it does not have any relationship with one-on-one or one-to-many relationship. Just like others, bi-sexual can develop and commit to a very steady one on one relationship. They have different kinds of life styles.
Nonassertive Accommodation Increase Visibility	226	74%	Valentine's day is special for lovers, but for LGBT members in China, most of them can't openly

			date the one they love on that day. We hope the society can see us and listen to us, we want to show our l ove openly under sunshine.
Dispelling Stereotypes	56	18%	Being decadence seems like a symbol of gay and youth, but don't let parents believe that being gay is the cause of being decadence. Study hard and work hard, let parents trust you with your true self and let them understand you are responsible.
Assertive Accommodation Communication Self	290	94%	We are organized by LGBT community members and friends. We support the community building, devote to communicating our culture, promoting gay rights. We hope to see a society of equality, diversity and freedom.
Intragroup Networking	42	14%	We work with Izhixing Research Institution, Beijing Gay Activity Group, Aibai Culture Education Center, and other LGBT organizations to establish the "2009 World Outgames Preparation Committee" to help Chinese LGBT members to participate the Second World Outgames.
Utilizing Liaisons	19	6%	In the pride month, we should work with the public to promote our community and the concept of equality. We can work with students, if possible, we should set up booth on different campuses and ask students to help us spread the words. We can work with parents of LGBT members: talk to the parents, let them understand their children and if possible stand up for their children and other LGBT members.

Educating Others	83	27%	If you want to help us and show your support, please simply do not keep staring at us on the street; please show your disagreement when others discriminate us; and if you are brave enough, please argue for us.
Aggressive Accommodation Confronting	3	1%	Advertisements of homophobia come to China now, let's stand up and fight against it! As we know, till now, not a single Chinese local company claims to support the rights of LGBT members, to those companies who have a very narrow understanding of human rights, we should take some actions.
Gaining Advantages	37	12%	I still remember the look on my parents' face, when I came out with them. They were disappointed at me and my father even refused to recognize me as his son. After then, I started to run away from home as if I never had a family.
Assertive Separation Exemplifying Strength	3	1%	This is a fact. Homosexuals have important roles in various civil activities. In recent decades, homosexuals have played important roles in fighting for women's rights, colored women's social status, and native women's rights. They also have had profound influence in activities aiming at de-colonization, and independence of different countries.

Table 1 also shows the co-cultural orientation of each practice used. Co-cultural orientation contains a specific preferred outcome (assimilation, accommodation or separation) and a communication approach (non-assertive, assertive, or aggressive) (Orbe,1998). This blog preferred *assertive* and *non-assertive* approaches to communication significantly more than an *aggressive* approach. As the larger communication context is situated in Chinese culture, which

prefers non-aggressive communicative practice in daily life, this result was not surprising. In terms of the preferred result, *accommodation* is the most preferred result, followed by *assimilation* and *separation* which indicated Les+'s intention of promoting "cultural pluralism without hierarchy" (Asante, 1998, p.271), rather than totally conforming to the dominant culture or deviating from the dominant culture.

Research question 2 asked, according to this blog, if there were any communicative practices in the Chinese context in addition to the existing 26 practices. Codebook asked coders to identify if there is any other communicative strategy that could not be explained by Orbe and Spellers' typology (1=yes, 0=no). If the answer is yes, coders needed to briefly describe the strategy in their words. The result suggested that there were 48 pieces of blog post have used other strategies that cannot be explained by co-cultural theory. After finished the coding process, coders discussed these 48 blog posts and the brief descriptions they wrote down. Based on this discussion, three themes emerged as the other strategies: embracing identity (any communicative practice express the pride/positive feelings of being a LGBTQ member directly), using western power (any communicative practices that mentioned the LGBTQ communities' situation, living condition or society's tolerance in western) and using invitational rhetoric (any communicative practice that uses welcome gesture to communicate to others but not aims at persuasion). The following section discussed these three strategies respectively.

Embracing identity is a communicative strategy that focuses on recognizing the identity of co-culture group member and showing the pride of being such a member. The uniqueness of this strategy lies at expressing the pride of being such a member directly and audiences would recognize that members happily embrace the identity. The typical example of this strategy is "I am a lesbian and I am proud of myself."

Using western power is a communicative strategy that focuses on comparing co-culture groups' situation in eastern and western, emphasizing co-culture groups' situation is better in western and thus encouraging people learn from the west. The uniqueness of this strategy is based on the notion that western thoughts have a superior power in eastern society. Most of Orbe and Spellers' strategies concerned with the influence of dominant group on co-cultural group. However, to the Chinese society, western thoughts or westerners are not paty of the dominant group and they are even superior to dominant group in Chinese society. Therefore, this strategy is unique in Chinese context. In China as long as something is labeled western, it would automatically be considered as a better one. Therefore, this strategy is unique in the context of China. One example of such strategy is "Since the LGBTQ social movement, homosexuals are more and more accepted by western societies, however, Chinese homosexuals are still struggling for their status in the society."

At last, based on Foss and Griffins's (1995) idea of invitational rhetoric, which suggests a conversational approach to communicate, the third strategy is labeled as using invitational rhetoric, which is about using a welcoming gesture to invite others to understand co-culture group, and the purpose is to showing others the groups' situation instead of persuasion. All the communicative practices that Orbe and Spellers (2005) suggested have specific purpose like "make themselves invisible" or "to provoke dominant group reactions" (p.177). Different from these practices, invitational rhetoric has no persuasive purpose. It only wants to invite others to see the world of LGBTQ communities. Some examples of this strategy are "dear friends",

"welcome to see us", and "everyone is welcomed".

　　　Research question 3 asked which communication is preferred by the organization of Les+ when communicate online. According to Orbe's typology, among 26 practices, 8 of them are considered as nonassertive communication, 10 of them are considered as assertive communication, and 8 of them are considered as aggressive communication. During the coding process, the presence of each practice was coded as 1, and the absence was coded as 0. Three new variables of nonassertive communication, assertive communication, and aggressive communication were created by adding score of corresponding practices together. The result suggested that nonassertive (n=196) and assertive communication practice (n=232) were much more preferred than aggressive communication practice (n=28).

5. Discussion

5.1. Communicative Practices and Strategic Choice

The results of this study indicated that this blog has strategically chosen the communicative practices according to the cultural and social contexts in which it is embedded. The result of research question 1 indicated that this blog has employed several strategies that Orbe and Spellers (2005) suggested in their theory. Actually, over half of the practices have presented in this blog. The frequencies of the presence of each practice suggest that the most often used practices are communicating self, increasing visibility and educating others. The use of these three practices provided some insightful understanding of this organization as well as LGBTQ community's communication behaviors online in China. According to Orbe and Spellers (2005), communicating self refers to the communicative practice of "interacting with dominant group members in an authentic, open, and genuine manner; used by those with strong self-concepts" (p. 177). Using this practice indicate that the members of this organization have strong self-concept and would like to initiate and engage into the communication with dominant culture group members in a civilized way. This result also explained why such blog has established: because this organization has the desire to communicate with dominant group.

　　Increasing visibility refers to the practice of "covertly, yet strategically, maintaining a co-cultural presence within dominant structure" (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 176). Using of this practice is especially appropriate in Chinese context because in dominant Chinese society, LGBTQ is a muted group that does not have many chances to announce even its existence. Therefore, in order to facilitate the intercultural communication between this group and the dominant group members, the first important task is to make dominant society realize the existence of such group and online sphere has provided such opportunity for this group.

　　Educating others means that co-culture group members "taking the role of teacher in co-cultural interactions; enlightening dominant group members of co-cultural norms, values, etc." (Orbe & Spellers, 2005, p. 177). This seems as a reasonable choice of practice after co-culture members increased their visibility. As aforementioned, comparing to western society, Chinese society has relatively little knowledge of LGBTQ community, therefore, after let dominant group members realize the existence of this community, the next step is to educate them.

　　The answer to question 3 suggested that among all the practices that used in this blog, non-

confrontational practices (assertive and nonassertive) are much more preferred. This choice is a wise one in Chinese context. Chinese culture emphasizes harmony and balanced relationship between social members and would like to avoid confrontations, consequently, aggressive communication may cause panic and hostility among dominant group members, which could result a negative impression of LGBTQ community. Although online sphere is considered as a freer environment, the answer indicated that Les+'s communication strategy is still influenced by the social and culture context. Hence, social and cultural background is manifested in the communication in online context as well. Choosing the relatively gentle communication strategy of nonassertive and assertive communications may gradually cause dominant group members' attention and facilitate the major society's acceptance of the community. At last, when examining the practices that were not used, most of them fall into the category of the confrontational approach (aggressive). This phenomenon again could be explained by the Chinese communication principle of collectivism (Chen, 1994; Hofstede, 2001). Collectivism requires individuals give priorities to the bigger collectives and the essence of Jen requires one's daily interaction to be appropriate and respectful of existing social norms. Thus, under such influence, an aggressive approach such as direct and/or hurtful expression or self-promotion, or exercising control over others, would be considered selfish and impertinent conduct, which could not be accepted by the wider society, even though these behaviors support a good cause.

5.2. Unique Practices in Chinese Context

Research question two asked if there are any communicative strategies particular in Chinese online context and the result suggested three: embracing identity, using western power, and using invitational rhetoric. These three practices are the results of the interaction of LGBTQ community's living condition in China and Chinese culture.

Embracing identity means that co-culture members announce their pride of being such a member. Identity of LGBTQ is rather vague and negative in China. There is no legitimate voice of these people in the society. As a result, many misunderstanding of the identity of homosexual exist. Homosexual identity is usually linked to negative connotation such as HIV/AIDS, slut, irresponsible, and wired (Neilands, Steward, & Choi, 2008). In order to fight against this negative connotation, the blog employed several positive statements of the identity like, "I am a lesbian, I am pride", "I am happy with who I am (a gay)", and "let's be proud of being a member of this (LGBTQ) community". These statements have expressed the group members' pride of community and communicated this information to dominant group member.

Using western power means the communicative practice that uses examples, stories or facts of LGBTQ communities in western societies. This practice is unique in Chinese context that it comes from the pervasive thoughts of "learning from west" in modern China. Since Deng Xiaoping suggested "open market" policy in 1978, the thought of "learning from the west" gradually has become popular in modern China (Wu, 2008). English is one of the three core courses for students from elementary school to college, western products and brands are more popular than local products and brands, and western celebrities are widely admired among Chinese youths. Hence, in the society, there is a notion that something from western is something good. Some sample articles of this unique communication practice include: *International Day*

against Homophobia and Transphobia, Let's work together; World Outgames; Watch The L world, learn fashion; Let's draw rainbow together: world gay pride day. Compare to Chinese society, LGBTQ community has a better living situation in western society, therefore, by presenting stories, facts from western, this blog could effectively facilitate the intercultural communication.

At last, the idea of practice of using invitational rhetoric is based on Foss and Griffin's (1995) concept of invitational rhetoric, which uses the idea of invitation and aims at inviting understanding instead of persuasion. Les+ does not use radical discourse to persuade audiences to accept homosexuals nor to promote change. As an alternative, it uses invitational rhetoric to invite audiences to understand homosexuals. Some most often used phrases in this blogs are: my dear friends, welcome to see us, let's discuss, please, and everyone is welcomed. Instead of using argumentative style and languages, using narrative/descriptive style and gentle languages showed that Les+ blog invites all different kinds of audiences no matter what are their attitudes towards homosexuality, to understand homosexuals together rather than forcing readers to change their opinions and thoughts. The rationale of this practice is in line with the traditional Chinese philosophy, which emphasizes the harmony of the whole society.

5.3. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study has both theoretical and practical implications. First of all, current study expanded the use of co-culture theory into one eastern context. Although this theory emerged from four phenomenological studies that based on western culture and co-culture groups in western context, results of current study indicated that this theory is also useful to understand co-culture groups' communication behaviors in the east. The presence of more than half of the communicative practices in the blog posts supports this conclusion. By applying this theory into the context of China, it added new understanding of this theory with a different context.

Moreover, current study expanded the typology of 26 communicative practices that Orbe and Spellers suggested in 2005. By applying this typology in eastern context, three unique Chinese-orientated practices emerged from the analysis. Orbe and Spellers (2005) stated that their typology has no means to be comprehensive, and more practices should be added to the list. Current study answered this call by considering the influence of Chinese culture on co-culture group members' communicative practice and thus, suggested three new communicative strategies.

From practical perspective of view, current study presented the online communication of an oppressed social group. Under the strict censorship policy in China, LGBTQ groups do not have chance to make themselves heard, however online world has provided such opportunity for them, and thus, indicating the power of online communication. This blog is the evidence that both communicators and audiences are actively engaged in this civil conversation, which is not allowed in the real world. This phenomenon indicates the Internet's power of enhance democracy. Although online world is different from the real world in terms of the freer atmosphere and less strict censorship, this world is still influenced by the traditional social and cultural backgrounds from the real society. This implies that when communicate online, norms and rules from the real world are still needed to be taken into consideration.

Current study analyzed the organization of Les+'s use of communicative practices to facilitate the intercultural communication, and provided a systematic understanding about how a co-culture group actually uses different practices that co-culture theory suggests. From the analysis of Les+'s use of different practice also suggested that context should be taken into consideration when decide which practice(s) should be preferred. For instance, in Chinese culture, which prefers harmony, non-aggressive practice should be the first of consideration. Thus, current study provides an example for other co-culture groups to understand how to facilitate intercultural communication from co-culture theory's perspective of view in the real life.

5.4. Limitations and Future Directions

There were several limitations of current study, and the findings should be interpreted with caution. First of all, this study did not include audience's comments to the blog due to the possible time lag between the time blog was posted and the time comments were posted by audience. Communication is a mutual process and both parties that engage in the communication should be examined. In the context of blog, where audience's feedback is allowed, current study neglected to examine such interaction. Moreover, this study only examined one single co-culture group organization though the largest LGBTQ-serving organization in China and made the conclusion. As aforementioned, there are many other LGBTQ organizations in China, although Les+ is the typical one, if more organizations could be combined in a study, such study could provide more comprehensive understanding of their communication effort in China.

Hence, future studies could include audience's comments and reactions to examine the interaction between co-culture groups and dominant groups to gain a better understanding of the effect of each communicative practice co-culture groups used. Moreover, more organizations of LGBTQ community could be included into the study to gain a more conclusive understanding of the research questions this study suggested. It is possible that more Chinese-orientation communicative practices could be detected.

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