HEGEMONY, DISCOURSE AND GENDER IN REALITY TELEVISION SHOWS: A CRITICAL READING OF GENDER DISCOURSE IN *IF YOU ARE THE ONE* AND *ONLY YOU*

By

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To my family, friends, and boyfriend, who have given me their care, understanding, and support throughout this process
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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication

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The media reflect and construct the social world. Past research indicate that representation of women in media tend to reinforce the patriarchal hegemony, as women are always presented as subordinate to men. While research on this topic abound, very few researchers focused on the representation of women in reality television shows, a relatively new media genre that has accumulated great popularity. This study seeks to build upon and expand this literature by conducting a multi-tiered critical discourse analysis on the representation of women in popular reality television shows in China, where the growth of this media genre in recent years is phenomenal.

This study focuses on two popular Chinese reality television shows, one dating show—If You Are the One, and one job search show—Only You. The multi-tiered critical discourse analysis involves in-depth examinations of televisual texts of the shows, general discursive practices of the show participants, and specific verbal and nonverbal texts during the participants’ interpersonal communication. As revealed from the analysis, the discursive construction of women and womanhood in the sample reality television shows exhibits some progressive traits, in terms of
presenting women that challenge the male’s dominance, while the overall shows still conform to the patriarchal ideology.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Opening Statement

The media have been identified by social scientists as the most influential social institution that supports the patriarchal social structure (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1983, van Zoonen, 1994, Kim, 2008, Chen, 2009). Consistent with the patriarchal situation in various fields of the society, substantial literature has shown that women are underrepresented and misrepresented in mass media. While women’s social-economic status differ across cultures, studies have found that the majority of media portrayals of women fall within stereotypes such as family-centric housewives, who are subordinate and compliant with their husband (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2000), or passive objects to satisfy men’s sexual desire (Mulvey, 1976). Portraying women primarily as traditional domestic housewives and sex objects in media potentially reinforces the patriarchal dominance in the gender relations, and consequently limits women’s capabilities and possibilities in their lives. As recent years witness the elevation of women’s status in political, economic, and social aspects thanks to the feminist movements and the broader socio-economic changes (Rhode, 1995), how have the media responded to this social change becomes a significant question to ask. What is the current situation of media’s representation of women? Do women in media still conform to stereotypically feminine roles? Do the media exhibit any progressive traits in response to the changing ideology concerning women’s social role and status? How are gender relations negotiated through media texts? This study aims at contributing to the address of these questions by focusing on one particular television genre—the reality television show.

The reality television show, as a relatively new media genre, has achieved huge popularity cross the world since its occurrence. Disproportionate to its booming
popularity, a review of the literature on media representation of women indicates that this program genre does not fully receive deserved academic attention in this field. Studies on women in media generally focus on print and television commercials, news stories, films, and scripted television dramas (e.g. Cheng, 1997, Cheng & Wan, 2008, Luo & Hao, 2007), leaving reality television shows much as an unreclaimed land with its valuable resources not well exploited. For the rare studies done on portrayals of women in reality television shows, the exclusive academic focus on U.S. based shows also limits people’s understanding of the situation, considering that the burgeoning of this television program genre has become a global media phenomenon (Nabi, Biely, Morgan, & Stitt, 2003). It is thus especially valuable to bring in a non-U.S. perspective on this issue.

This study aims at bridging this gap by investigating the representation of women in popular reality television shows in China, where a proliferation of reality television shows is seen in recent years. A feminist critical discourse analysis approach is adopted to examine the construction of the female gender in two particular reality television shows, If You Are the One and Only You. Each of the two shows targets an important aspect of social life respectively: love and career.

Why China?

Thanks to the interweaving contribution of feminism, the party and state policies, and the market economy (Chen, 2009), large improvements have been made in gender equality in China, as evident in women’s relatively high employment rate today. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2010, 74 percent of Chinese women are employed, a higher rate than in the United States (68 percent). Despite the seemingly promising figure, however, it is generally acknowledged that women in China still face bias in the job market. For instance, it is reported that women face
more difficulties in finding a job and hold much fewer senior positions (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2010). Moreover, the belief that for women a good marriage is of more importance than a good career is still prevalent in the society. An online search of the idiomatic Chinese phrasing of this belief, “gan de hao bu ru jia de hao,” yields numerous articles and comments supporting it (e.g. Gong, 2007). For lots of Chinese people, women are always expected to take the dutiful and natural role of wife and mother, while their professional achievements are given less significance comparatively. Women who are not married or do not have a boyfriend in their late twenties or thirties are ironically tagged as “sheng nu” in Chinese, which literally means “leftover women,” and they are under a lot pressure to leave that state.

Under these broad social circumstances, popular reality television shows that deal with love and employment concerns of young people make unique cases for the examination of media representation of women in China. As highly sought-after reality television shows, If You Are the One and Only You reflect and contribute to the public’s perception on gender relations in the contemporary Chinese society. How are “real” women portrayed in the shows? What do people talk about women and feminist ideas in the shows? Do women and men present different discursive styles during the shows that reflect any social reality on the issue of women’s status? By answering these questions through a close investigation of discourses in the reality television shows from a feminist perspective, this study adds to the literature on the representation of women in mass media.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is a critical discourse analysis on the representation of women in Chinese reality television shows. To lay a solid theoretical foundation for the study, this chapter offers a review of the literature on the theory of social construction of gender; a review of representation of women in mass media, the reality shows in particular; an examination of the development of feminism and women’s social status in China; and a brief overview of the current situation of reality television shows in China. The literature on critical discourse analysis of television is also included.

The Social Construction of Gender

From the social constructionist point of view, our conceived reality of a certain object or phenomenon is dependent on the ongoing, dynamic process of social construction that is based on our interpretations and knowledge of it. To say that something is socially constructed is to say that individuals and groups create it, not vice versa. In van Zoonen’s (1994) words, “reality is not merely something that exists ‘out there,’ but it is also (re)constructed by the social and sense-making activities of human beings” (p. 38).

Berger and Luckmann (1996) described the reciprocal relationship between identity and social structure: “The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it” (p. 173). According to Berger and Luckmann (1996), identity types are social products created by the dialectic between individual and society, and thus any theorizing about identity and specific identity types must “occur within the
framework of the theoretical interpretations within which it and they are located” (p. 174).

Gender, and the relations between males and females, therefore has to be understood within its social context. With this paradigm, social scientists viewed gender as essentially a social construction, and relations between women and men as social relations fundamentally (Lorber & Farrell, 1991, West & Zimmerman, 1987, Berger & Luckmann, 1996, Rothenberg, 1998). As a social construct, the concept of gender, as well as race and class, “reflects and perpetuates the prevailing distribution of power and privilege in a society” (Rotherberg, 1998, p. 8). The categories within gender are defined by the dominant male group as a means to create social rankings (West & Zimmerman, 1987, Lorber & Farrell, 1991). By associating the concept of gender to biology, the dominant patriarchal perspective makes such rankings seem permanently unalterable, justified by the design of nature (Weber, 2004). In short, as Lorber and Farrell (1991) put it, “gender categories are institutionalized cultural and social statuses” (p. 8). Gender, therefore, has to be looked at as a social institution, a process, part of a stratification system, and a structure (Lorber, 2011).

Marxist feminism explains the phenomenon of gender inequality from the perspective of economy. By stating that women have inferior working abilities to men, men keep women from learning valuable technological skills and occupying higher-ranking positions. Women are preserved as a cheap and exploitable labor force, whereas men take up all the better-paid, more interesting, and more autonomous jobs. As Cockburn said: “Two factors emerge as helping men maintain their separation from women and their control of technological occupations. One is the active gendering of jobs and people. The second is the continual creation of sub-
divisions in the work processes, and levels in work hierarchies, into which men can move in order to keep their distance from women” (cited in Lorber, 2011, p. 116).

Since the second wave of feminist movement in the 1960s, social scientists have worked on the theorization of gender relationship based on the social constructionist paradigm. According to Berger and Luckmann (1996), institutions such as gender and race are embodied in individual experience by means of roles, which “are an essential ingredient of the objectively available world of any society. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him” (p. 74). Gender role theory argues that women and men are put into different roles, which are "a cluster of socially or culturally defined expectations that individuals in a given situation are expected to fulfill" as female or male (Basow, 1992). Thus the differences in women and men’s behaviors are explained by the reason that they respond to different social expectations. In general, male identity tends to underline independence, aggressiveness, competence, and a narrow range of emotional expression, while in contrary female identity plays emphasis on sympathy, nurturance, cooperation, friendliness, vicarious achievement, dependency, timidity, and emotionality (Malone, 1997). A substantial volume of literature has been built upon this theory. Researchers have applied this theory to looking at different social institutions, especially those that are responsible for the learning, the so-called “agencies of socialization” (Connell, 1987, p. 49). The same conclusion has been constantly reached that women has been placed in an inferior, subordinate role to that of men.

Connell (1987, 1993) argued that images of “hegemonic masculinity” and “emphasized femininity” have been the dominant images of gender. Evolved from previous kinds of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity denotes aggression, authority,
advanced capability of dealing with technology, and the subordination of women. Correspondingly, emphasized femininity is subsidiary to and defined by hegemonic masculinity, characterized by “the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men’s desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labor-market discrimination against women” (p. 187).

Goffman (1979) coined the concept of “gender display,” which is defined as ritual-like, conventionalized, perfunctory portrayals of the culturally established correlates of sex (p. 1). He stated that such displays of gender are concentrated at beginnings and endings of purposeful undertakings, or continued as a single note across a series of activities—that is to say, they are carefully scheduled to accommodate the activity so as not to interfere with its execution (p. 3). Nonetheless, an imbalanced, even distorted view of the gender relationship is transmitted through the displays (p. 3).

Building on the theory of gender role and gender display, West and Zimmerman (1987) proposed the groundbreaking theory of “doing gender.” This theory emphasizes that gender is “done” in the ongoing social interactions between individuals. Male and female learn about gender differences since their early age, and even when they enter the adult life when gender status is supposed to be stabilized, they construct gender in every situation. As West and Zimmerman put it, “the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competences as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p. 126).
Language and the production of gender. Language, as a system of vocal signs, is the most important sign system of human society that constructs enormous edifices of symbolic representations that seem to overshadow everyday reality like gigantic presences from another world (Berger & Luckmann, 1996, p. 36, 40). It is an interactive activity that mediates linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge and constitutes a site for the construction of identities and subjectivities (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995, p. 3). In other words, the social construction of any object or phenomenon is impossible without language.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1996), on the one hand, language has the ability of being objective, in the sense that it accumulates meanings and experiences, which then can be preserved and transmitted to the following generations. On the other hand, the individuals’ subjectivity is crystallized and stabilized by the use of language (p. 38). Berger and Luckmann (1996) explicated the significance of language as follows:

Language is capable not only of constructing symbols that are highly abstracted from everyday experience, but also of ‘bringing back’ these symbols and re-presenting them as objectively real elements in everyday life. In this manner, symbolism and symbolic language become essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the commonsense apprehension of this reality” (p. 40).

To fully examine any social construct, such as gender, therefore, incorporates the analysis of the ways in which language functions in the processes of its objectification and internalization by the individuals.

The ways in which speeches are given and received reflect the social distribution of power. Research have shown that talks tend to be more limited when the relationship between those who are involved in the talk have asymmetrical status of power. As Philipsen (1975) stated, “speech is the currency of social interaction when participants have similar social identities. … Speech purchases an expression
of solidarity or assertion of status symmetry. When a speech surrogate is used, such as violence, it is an assertion of distance, difference or status asymmetry” (cited in Malone, 1997, p. 18). Considering the imbalanced social status of women and men, it is expected that talks between women and men tend to exemplify such a social phenomenon.

Researchers on the relations between language and gender have suggested that ways of speaking can be gendered (van Dijk, 2008, Holmes, 2005, Johnson, 2005). In general, masculine speech styles are characterized by competitive, challenging, and confrontational ways of speaking, realized by the prolonged speaking time, taking dominant roles during conversation, taking up more speech turns, the practice of speaking in a one-at-a-time fashion, and the frequent use of interruption. Feminine speech styles, on contrary, are typically marked by cooperative, supportive, and smooth interaction, more efforts on the establishment of connections and social bonds, taking up less speech turns, and the negotiation of relationship in terms of equality and solidarity, realized by the use of politeness strategies, the use of hedges, the avoidance of confrontations, and minimal responses (West & Zimmerman, 1987, Holmes, 2005, Holmes, 2007, Fairclough, 1992). These gender differences in speech styles are regarded as reflections and outcomes of women’s subordinate position in society under the power abuse from men, and the different ways in which women and men have been educated as well (van Dijk, 2008).

Meanwhile, it should be remembered that in the situation of face-to-face interaction, such as conversations, language is given and received by individuals in return. The identity presented by any individual thus needs to be appropriate to the situation. It needs to be consistent with a history of other presentations of identity
before the same audiences as well as some internal self-concept of oneself (Malone, 1997, p. 78). Therefore, according to Malone (1997), face-to-face interaction involves on one hand a “style”—behavioral choices that create a consistency, and on the other hand an “ideology”—a set of beliefs about how one wants to be understood by others (p. 78). Taking gender into consideration, it is argued that the gendered self-presentation as it is presented in talk is “subject to both the constitutive demands of the interactional order and the framing constraints of the institutional order” (p. 78). From this perspective, conversations between women and men may well not reflect the asymmetric gender social status.

**Feminism and the Mass Media**

It is hard to give a clear-cut definition for feminism, as it indeed incorporates a broad span of perspectives—for instance, biologistic, individualistic, social psychological, socio-cultural and economic (Steeves, 1987). The meaning of feminism is constantly fashioned by varies movements that aim at empowering women. Nonetheless, the underlying core assumptions of feminism remain consistent across different perspectives that what the feminists strive for is the equality between women and men. Feminists argue for equal treatments of women in various aspects of social life, challenging the patriarchal hegemony with their efforts in defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women (Hollows, 2000). With the aim to liberate women eventually, feminists center on the social construction of gender and endeavor to grasp the origins and continuing nature of women’s devaluation and marginalization in the society (Steeves, 1987).
Representation of Women in the Media

In view of mass media's immense influence on people's perceptions on gender and sexuality, the devaluation of women in the media is of concern to feminism across different perspectives. How women are represented in the media is one major realm for research concerning media and gender. Kitch (1997) made a generalization of previous academic works done in this area and stated that there are four major categories of scholarship: (1) the “stereotypes approach” in which researchers look at how images of women are stereotyped in the media and contend that such images reflect real options for women; (2) the search for alternative mass-media representations of women and womanhood—images of unusual women—inside and outside mainstream media; (3) examinations of the function of media imagery within cultural and political ideology; and (4) semiotic analysis of media representations of women as polysemic texts. While Kitch’s (1997) generalization about the academic attentions placed on representations of women in media focuses only on those analyzing American mass media, literature on women’s images in media from other countries also exists and contributes to our understanding of women’s status in the society. Considering the extensive collection of scholarly work on women’s media representation, only those that are most relevant and informative for the present study were included in the literature review.

In general, feminist research on mass media have shown that women tend to be represented as compliant, passive, and adopting a domestic role (Katzman, 1972, Tuchman et al., 1978, Courtney & Whipple, 1983, Dow, 1996, Walsh et al., 2008, Cheng & Wan, 2008). Moreover, women are often shown in a seductive manner and as objects that exist to satisfy men’s sexual desire. The renowned feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, argued in her signature treatise The Second Sex (1974) that images of
women in media are created and defined by the male gaze, construct, and desire, and that in this patriarchal society, men regard women as sex objects, and women themselves internalize the male gaze as well. Mulvey (1975) applied this concept to her influential analysis of Hollywood films and further expanded it. She maintained that as “the pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female,” the male gaze has been in a determining position that projects its fantasy on to the female form, which is styled accordingly (p.11). The appearances of women are coded for strong visual and erotic impact, objectified as “(passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man,” waiting to be demystified (p.18). Thus, gazing becomes a male activity that even women who look at the visuals of other female adopt a male position, and in the same breath, women who are being displayed and looked at in the media also internalize the male gaze, turning herself into an object of vision (Berger, 1972).

Not only women are stereotypically misrepresented, past research have also shown that they are underrepresented in the media, or in Tuchman’s (1978) words, they are “symbolically annihilated.” In news, shows for kids, commercials, prime-time dramas, situation comedies, and even the new media form like computer clip art images, the percentage of men greatly outnumbers that of women (Tuchman, 1978, Rhode, 1995, Milburn et al., 2001).

Scholars have identified the nature of media as hegemonic. Hall (1979) defined hegemony as a situation in which certain social groups with temporary power can exert “total social authority” over other subordinate groups by “winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant class appears both legitimate and natural” (p. 331, 332). The hegemony approach to look at the media, as Kellner (1990) argued, “analyzes television as part of a process of economic, political, social, and
cultural struggle. The media is thus a battle ground for different classes and social groups to “compete for social dominance and attempt to impose their visions, interests, and agendas on society as a whole” (cited in Gamson, Croteau, Hoyne, & Sasson, 1992, p. 381). Relating to the issue of gender, while the media is a hegemonic social institution that imposes dominant patriarchal ideology, it also leaves room for the expression of counter-hegemonic, hereby feminist, messages and reflects changes in women’s social status and ideology.

Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman’s (1986) research is an exemplary documentation of the hegemonic media’s nature of being a “shifting, complex, and open phenomenon, always subject to contestation and upheaval” (Kellner, 1990). Lichter et al. did a content analysis on prime time network television in the United States from 1955 through 1986, and found that consistent to findings from previous feminist studies on women in media, “female characters are less in evidence than males and, in many ways, are portrayed as the weaker sex. They are less likely to be mature adults, are less well educated, and hold lower status jobs. Their activities tend to represent the private realm of home, personal relations, and sexuality, while men represent the public realm of work, social relations, and sexuality” (p. 17). However, Lichter et al. (1986) noted that some “progressive flourishes” were found in the television programs they examined since the 1960s that themes including gender equality and women’s rights were clearly presented. They argued such progressive elements to be an outcome of the feminist movement’s effort to diminish the gap between women and men’s social status.

Ferrante, Haynes, and Kingsley (1988) replicated a 1972 study on portrayals of both women and men in commercials. Their findings show that women are portrayed less in the home settings. Also, while women are still mainly presented in the role of
wife or mother, they are also portrayed in a wider range of occupation than 15 years ago. Similarly, this research shows how the media exhibit some progressive traits in response to the misrepresentation of women in media.

Luo and Hao (2007) investigated whether mass media function as agents of social change or simply reinforce the existing social structures. They examined cover pictures of a political, propagandistic women’s magazine in China from 1956 to 2003, and found that the images of women presented in the magazines’ cover pictures are to a large extent influenced by the socio-economic and political-ideological changes in the society. For instance, during the period from 1956 to 1966, when the women’s liberation movement in China was still at its early stage, women portrayed by the magazine’s cover pictures were highly presented as equals to men by participating in social production and as administrators and leaders, thus reflecting and further promoting the improvement of women’s social and political status in China. The authors acknowledged that these portrayals of women are by no means an exact copy of reality, as reality is constantly constructed and reconstructed in the media. Rather, these images are “a symbolic representation of the Chinese women created through the interaction of party ideology, editorial policy, readers’ taste, and the changing reality of women’s life and work in China” (p. 295).

Although examples exist that show some media products taking an egalitarian position in the gender issue, feminist researchers have argued that the media’s nature of reinforcing patriarchal culture remains unchanged in essence. Gerber (1978) made this statement that “the image of women in the mass media is changing within the existing structure, and is changing for the worse, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding” (p. 46).
Baehr’s (1980) analysis on a television drama series is an example that supports this idea. The author found that while moving away from the stereotypical, family-oriented images of women, the television drama series actually construct and place a new stereotype of “the liberated woman,” who are “pretentious, overly intense propagandists, pre-occupied with ‘women’s rights’ to the exclusion of the ‘real’ problems of the world” (p. 38). Such a stereotypical image of liberated women is simply “manufactured to serve the commodity market of capitalist economy” (p. 32) and emptied of “progressive meaning” (p. 38). As Baehr (1980) concludes, “the themes and issues of feminism are drawn on and presented in a way that leads to the ultimate re-affirmation of the patriarchal family—a critique of which lies at the core of feminist ideology” (p. 38).

In the same vein, Yang (2003) identified the new women’s image as “beautiful-and-bad women” in Taiwan’s popular media. This new portrayal of women, which claims to promote feminism, indeed serves to construct a superficial perception of feminism, which emphasizes sexuality, physical attraction, and consumption. Therefore, as the author argued, such untraditional media portrayals of women limit the political aspects of feminism to the personal, reduce the heterogeneity of women’s movement, and ironically fall into old stereotypes that reinforce the patriarchal ideology in media again. Rhode (1995) articulated the idea well that the mass media “have done much both to frustrate and to advance feminist objectives”, as the images of feminism and feminists—most of whom are female—are demonized, personalized, trivialized, polarized, and blurred the focus by the media.

Overall, researchers with a feminist point of view have advocated for a more non-stereotypical, comprehensive, and truthful representation of women in media, one that portrays women as independent, confident, mature, well-educated, and
adopting active social roles far more than domestic wives and mothers and objects of sexuality, thereby being compatible with the social reality. While it is argued that the media are not and can never be a mimetic reflection of reality, and that women are not and can never be accurately reflected in media content (Rakow, 2001), due to the media’s nature of being hegemonic, it does not hurt to have the expectation that the media show some progressive changes in the portrayals of women and thereby gender relations along the improved feminist awareness in the society.

**Reality Television Shows and the Representation of Women**

Reality television show is a relatively new genre of television programming that claims to represent reality (Cavender et al., 1999). This genre became very popular during the late 1990s in the United States with the success of the shows like *Survivor, Big Brother, Blind Date*, etc, and it soon burgeoned in many other countries across the world as well (Nabi et al., 1993). According to Nabi et al. (1993), reality television shows, although lacking a clear and cohesive industry definition, generally have the same elements that distinguish them from other television genres: (1) “real” people portraying themselves rather than performing fictional roles, (2) filmed at least in part in their living or working environment, (3) without a script, (4) with events placed in a narrative context, (5) for the primary purpose of viewer entertainment. A wide range of subgenres of reality television shows have developed along the years, including dating/romance, makeover/lifestyle, hidden camera, talent, competition/game, docusoap, situation comedy, law enforcement, and court (Krakowiak, Kleck & Tsay, 2006).

Reality television shows’ booming popularity has attracted researchers to examine how women are represented in this particular media form during recent years. This literature is still limited by now, and a comprehensive examination of this
television program genre is not available as studies on this topic have each focus on a particular reality television show. Nevertheless, research findings have suggested that reality television shows represent women in the similar way as other media in general, i.e. portraying them as delicate, vulnerable, and committing to stereotypical feminine role, and emphasizing on their physical characteristics (e.g. Cavender, Bond-Maupin, & Jurik, 1999, Hetsroni, 2000, Cado, 2008, Fairclough, 2004).

Cavender et al. (1999) focused on the portrayal of women in a reality television crime program, AMW. Their findings show that this reality television crime show conforms to the typical portrayal of women in television by depicting them as victims who are in a perilous state and in need of the men—the program hosts, the police, and the rest of criminal justice system—to help. As Cavender et al. (1999) stated, women are found always silent during the show, and when they speak up, they tell stories that are “embedded in hegemonic narratives that appear to let women constitute and interpret their lives but that also maintain, in a taken-for-granted fashion, structures of oppression that constrain women’s lives” (p. 659). The reality claims of the show further emphasize the portrait of peril.

Dubrofsky (2009) focused on the representation of women’s emotions in a famous reality dating show in the United States, The Bachelor. She found that most women in the show tend to be shown as “excessively emotional,” unable to control their emotions, and therefore being dangerous, threatening, and unfit for love (p. 355). Those emotional women get eliminated through the dating process, leaving the “unremarkable” woman chosen by the bachelor as his bride.

With a discourse analysis approach, Cheung and Sung (2011) examined the media representations of gender differences in leadership styles in the show, The Apprentice. Their analysis reveals that the show presents the masculine discourse
style as the preferred, default way of doing leadership. The authors also found that the mixed leadership style, which combines stereotypically masculine and feminine discourse strategies in “doing leadership,” is presented most favorably in the show overall, but it seems less acceptable for female managers than for male ones. The transgression of stereotypical gendered expectations is considered inappropriate for women. Female managers who employ masculine discourse strategies are likely to receive negative evaluations by their apprentices while male managers who include some feminine discourse strategies are recognized positively.

Taking an indirect approach to look at how gender is represented in The Apprentice show, Holmes (2007) examined print media coverage of the show. The findings show that even in describing those who both are successful business people, gendered stereotypes emerge as well. The female business leader is frequently fit into feminine gendered role, framed as a lacking in seriousness, as fallen, as a child “playacting in the role of the adult male authority figure either in his absence or with his help.” Conversely, the male business leader is portrayed in a more favorable tone that he is a real mogul, who is superior, heroic, and with more authoritative quality.

Hetsroni (2000) compared male and female’s criteria of mate selection in dating game shows as well as in normal real-life settings by analyzing the shows and surveying college students. Results show that female and male dating game show participants use physical criteria—appearance, sexual anatomy and bedroom behavior and age—as a primary means to screen their dating mate, while the surveyed students rely more on intelligence and education. He therefore argued that the dating shows are an untruthful presentation of people’s preference during mate selection by focusing disproportionately more on sex and physical attraction. Female
and male show participants alike become objects of the sexual scrutiny by the opposite sex. The gender difference is small that men tend to employ physical categories more often than women, and it is almost negligible in dating game shows. Moreover, the researcher also noted that female participants in the shows exhibit loyalty to their traditional gender roles when choosing their dating partners.

Other written works done by researchers on the topic of gender representation in reality television shows are mostly limited in opinion-driven brief commentaries and critics. The Feminist Media Studies journal published a series of editorials focusing on gender issues in reality television shows in its November, 2004 issue. In Graham-Bertolini’s (2004) commentary, the Joe Millionaire show was found to glamorize traditional notions of appropriate behaviors of women and normalize ideas about what role should women adopt by ensuring that the female participants demonstrate “sexual purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (p. 341). Yep and Camacho (2004) noted the nature of The Bachelor show as normalizing the notion of hetero-gender relations, which refers to “the asymmetrical stratification of the sexes, privileging men and exploiting women, in the institution of patriarchal heterosexuality” (p. 339). Female participants in the show are mostly presented as objects of male gaze as the focuses are always on their physical appearances, such as breasts, buttocks, legs, as well as make-up and hairstyle. Many of the reality dating shows, as Harris (2004) asserted, deliberately set out to ridicule women. Fairclough (2004) looked at the Wife Swap show, and argued that while the show seems to challenge gendered role for women, in essence it only further emphasizes the idea that women are by natural expected to be a good housewife and that those who do not conform to this gender role are to be despised.
To sum up this section, research and critic essays done on the topic of representation of women in reality television shows present a not very auspicious picture for feminists and for women in general. It seems especially true for the dating shows, which are recognized as embedded with patriarchal heterosexuality and gender stereotypes. The paucity of research in this direction makes it valuable to further expand this literature, especially when it is so far exclusively concerned with reality television shows produced in the U. S. A close examination of the situation of portrayals of women in reality television shows in a culture diverse in many ways from the U.S. makes a valuable contribution to the literature. Furthermore, as previous studies have usually focused on a certain aspect or just a small section of the shows under examination, they fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of how women and gender relations are represented in the shows. To close this gap in the literature, this study based its findings on a multi-faceted analysis of two reality television shows of different subgenres.

Feminism and Women’s Social Status in China

To better understand the media representation of women in China, a review of how they have been situated in the society along the history is necessary. The belief that women are of an inferior social status to men is deeply rooted in the Chinese culture, largely due to the influence from the Confucianism. During the feudalist era in China, patriarchy was the norm in all aspects of the society: family, economy, education, culture, and the political system (Pearson, 1995). Women used to suffer from dreadful oppression and discrimination. One most well-known incidence of the oppression against Chinese women in the feudalist time is the foot binding, which was a painful procedure that break women’s feet bones. Women’s feet had to be tightly bound since an early age to prevent them from growing larger, since the male-
dominated aesthetic view at that time considered women’s delicate tiny feet to be beautiful and sexually arousing, giving women more femininity and elegancy in their movements. Those ill-functioning bond feet physically constrained women’s freedom and thus limiting their capability of challenging the men’s dominance, forbidding their access to a world of more possibilities than just being a domestic wife.

The subordinate status of traditional Chinese women was manifested in the feudal ethics that women should possess the “three obediences and four virtues.” The “three obediences” means the obedience to her father and brother before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her sons after her husband’s death. The “four virtues” refers to faithfulness, propriety in speech, proper manners, and household management ability. Thus, in the feudal China, women’s highest life value and standard of excellence was constrained to be “devoted wives, dutiful spouses, and exemplary mothers” (Lin, 2000).

Women’s social status in China began to improve after the overturn of China’s last feudal dynasty. During the era of May Fourth Movement in 1919, also known as the New Cultural Movement, scholars and intellectuals who were heavily influenced by the Western ideologies first introduced the concept of feminism to the public. While by then only those urban women with relatively high education level got enlightened by the May Fourth feminist movement, it generated significant influence for the state’s policy toward women since the founding of the New China in 1949 (Li, 2001). Policies were made to ensure equal rights for women’s education, payments, and etc. Activities that aimed to emancipate women from feudalist thoughts were promoted across the nation. One of the most notable achievements since then is that women began to enjoy equal pay for equal work. Statistics show that in China the
share of women’s earnings in total family income rose from 20 percent in the 1950s to 40 percent in the mid-1990s (Luo & Hao, 2007).

It should be noted here that the women’s movement in China is regarded as part of the democratic revolution in China instead of being a relatively independent movement itself. This means the opposing side of the emancipation of Chinese women is not the hegemonic patriarchal policy, economy, and culture, but rather what the entire Chinese people had suffered from—imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism (Cheung, 2010). The leading force of the so-called women’s movement in China, therefore, is not women themselves, but men instead (Cheung, 2010). As Chen (2009) argued, the improvement in Chinese women’s social status is less an outcome of feminism but rather one of the party-state political efforts and market forces; the state, the Chinese Communist Party, and the market, are innately male-dominated. To cite Chen’s (2009) words, in China, “the feminist challenge is practicing, and at the same time the state-market domination is operating. … Chinese feminism and the women’s movement have not developed into a mass-participation political movement” (p. 111). Such a top-down promulgation and solidification of feminist notions (Hsu, 2007) by men proves to be insufficient and even hypocritical for women to truly achieve an equal social status. For instance, women were encouraged to take part in the labor force during times of economic reconstructions, but when the labor force got saturated, the government then started to emphasize the importance of women’s domestic roles as wives and mothers, calling them to “return to the kitchen” (Hsu, 2007). Such mistreatment of women in workplaces and the enactment of the one-child policy in the 1980s made Chinese women realize that their inferior social status was still deeply rooted. Awakened by such awareness while constricted by the political environment, a new wave of
women’s movement in China was initiated in an “invisible” manner, as opposed to “visible” on-street demonstrations usually adopted by the Western women’s movement (Li and Zhang, 1994). A group of female researchers and scholars in China started to conduct studies on women’s issues and problems free from the government’s supervision as a means to promote gender consciousness and strive for women’s rights (Wang, 1996).

Despite the arguable top-down, male-led, and later invisible nature of Chinese women’s movement, today’s Chinese women are more conscious of gender equality issues than ever before, and they feel more confident in their ability to compare and compete with men. A nationwide survey conducted by All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) showed that more than 80 percent of Chinese women today feel positive about their capability that they disagree with the traditional belief that women are weaker than men (cited in Wu & Chung, 2011). According to this survey, most Chinese women have a strong sense of independence, and they prefer to have their own career even if their husband’s earning would be sufficient for the whole family. They feel that the traditional saying that “women should try to avoid surpassing their husbands in social status” is unreasonable, and they support the view that men should share half of the housework with their wife.

At the same time, highly negative influence of the male-superior concept still remains. Since a great number of family preferred sons to daughters and thus opted to abort their female fetus, the sex ratio in China has become seriously imbalanced. According to statistics from *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook 2010*, in 2009, there were almost twenty-four million more male than female in the population below nineteen years old, which amounted to a sex ratio of 118:100. Moreover, although the employment rates of women and men do not differ
considerably, women account for only 17 percent of the higher level of jobs such as legislators, senior official, and managers (Hausmann et al., 2010), which clearly marks the hegemonic patriarchy in the society.

**Reality Television Shows in Contemporary China**

Reality television shows were introduced to the Chinese media as an innovative genre of entertainment programs since 2000 (Xie & Chen, 2006). A variety of reality television shows have been produced since then, most of them being copycats of Western shows. The first wave of immense popularity of reality television shows in China was led by a group of talent shows since 2005. *Super Girl*, a Chinese version of *American Idol* featuring all female contests, became a big hit in television and gave rise to other shows of the same format since 2005. The most exemplary show of this kind, *Super Girl*, set a record rating of 4.15 in 2009 (Zeng, 2010). This record was broken in 2010 by a dating show, *If You Are the One*, which marked a new wave of popularity of reality television shows. Led by *If You Are the One*, dating shows have become the most sought-after subgenre of reality television show among Chinese television stations. Many variations of dating shows have been produced since then.

While enjoying mounting popularity, many dating shows were criticized for presenting untraditional, negative values. One most infamous case was Miss Ma’s response to a man pursuing her love, “I’d rather cry in a BMW car than laugh on a backseat of a back.” in one episode of *If You Are the One*. Such a blatantly money-worshipping attitude was considered too unethical and damaging to China’s cultural construction to be shown on television. Ma’s statement, as well as other materialistic or racy statements by other show participants in *If You Are the One* and other dating shows, aroused public protests, and finally lead the government to crack down on
the dating shows. In early June 2010, not long since dating shows has became the new trend for entertainment programs, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) issued a harsh set of regulations on all the entertainment programs, including reality television shows, prohibiting more “incorrect social and love values such as money worship” to be presented (cited in Bergman, 2010).

Adjustments were made in the reality dating shows in compliances with the state’s regulations to never “hype up marginal issues, show the ugly side of things, or overly depressing, dark or decadent topics,” but to “maintain core Socialist values” (cited in Yang, 2010). Such moral regulations on reality television shows urged program producers to come up with new shows that can both satisfy the requirements of the state and achieve high ratings. As a result, job search shows were introduced to the audience since the latter half of 2010 from several television stations. For instance, on the official website of Only You, a popular job search show, it openly positions itself as a show with “strong social responsibility,” aiming to “guide correct values” and help its audience “building a healthy and positive attitude for job hunting,” and as a “challenge against the dating shows.”

On January 1st, 2012, a new crackdown from SARFT on entertainment shows came effective, canceling more than two-thirds of prime time entertainment shows, as a means to curb “excessive entertainment and a trend toward low taste” in the media (cited in Tejada, 2012). Many of those programs being canceled were reality television shows, including several talent shows and dating shows. If You Are the One, although used to be the most controversial dating show in China, survived the latest elimination. The reality television shows that are maintained today are under more content restrictions to ensure that they disseminate decent values and promote China’s cultural construction.
In viewing of the moral requirements to reality television shows from the government and the increasing recognition of gender equality in the society, it is reasonably expected that contemporary reality television shows in China represent women in a non-biased, non-stereotypical light, and support feminist ideas.

**Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

Definitions of the term “discourse” vary. According to Fiske (1987), it is “a language system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates…” (p. 14). A discourse may be viewed “both as a sequence of speech acts and in terms of classes of speech acts among which choice has been made at given points” (Hymes, 2003, p. 39). Foucault's (1969) succinct description of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49) moves beyond the focus merely on language, but also encompassing patterns of meanings that may be nonverbal—visual, spatial, etc, that may be interpersonal or institutional. Gee (1999) differentiated between discourse as “language-in-use” and what he terms as “Discourse” with a capital “D”, which is defined as different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language ‘stuff’, such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others (p. 13).

This study embraces what Fairclough (2003) stated about discourses: they “not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are projective imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions” (p. 124). For the
purpose of this study, the term “discourse,” as well as “discursive,” is used by both its broad and narrow definition in corresponding contexts.

As “discourse” is a contested concept, so is “discourse analysis.” Discourse analysis is the name given to a wide range of different approaches to the study of texts, which have developed from diverse theoretical traditions and been applied to studies from various disciplines. Strictly speaking, there is no single “discourse analysis,” but many styles of analysis of texts that all position themselves under this name.

Discourse analysis has gained sweeping importance in the field of social psychology and has been regarded as “almost synonymous with ‘critical’ and in some cases ‘feminist’ research,” as language is “a key site for feminist resistance” (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995, p. 3). It is one of the most widely used approaches that are based on social constructionism (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Dell Hymes (2003) justified discourse analysis as a valid research method in his crucial article for sociolinguistics, “Models of the interaction of language and social life,” that “underlying the diversity of speech within communities and in the conduct of individuals are systematic relations,” which can be the object of qualitative investigation (p. 30).

Hymes’s (2003) work is instructive for the analysis of discursive practices. He used the term “speech” to incorporate any form of verbal language usage, including conversations, self-presentations, etc. According to Hymes (2003), a speech is composed of a total of sixteen elements: 1) message form—how something is said, 2) message content—what is said, 3) setting—the time and place of a speech act, 4) scene—the cultural or psychological circumstance of a speech act, 5) speaker, 6) addressee, 7) purposes as outcomes, 10) purposes as
goals, 11) key—the tone, manner, or spirit in which a speech act is done, which includes various non-verbal interactions as signals, 12) channels,—through what medium a speech act is done, 13) forms of speech, 14) norms of interaction, 15) norms of interpretation, and 16) genres.

Despite different styles within the broad concept of discourse analysis, four main themes are shared across those varied approaches (Gill, 2000). First, there is the concern with texts, written, spoken, or visual. Rather than seeing various texts as a means of discovering some reality that lies behind the discourse, rudimentary discourse analysis focuses on texts in their own right. The content and organization of texts are what discourse analysts are interested in. Second, discourse analysis view languages, or texts, as constituting, and at the same time being constituted by the social world. Fairclough (1992) argued that there are three dimensions of discourse’s contribution in terms of construction: social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning. Besides, societal forces that do not necessarily have a solely discursive character—for instance, the social structure of patriarchal hegemony—influence the practices of discourse as well. The third theme is consistent with the second one that a discourse, even in its narrowest definition, is seen as a form of action that generates social significance. Fourth, all types of discourse analysis treat talk and texts as organized rhetorically, seeing discourses as involved in persuading and impressing the audience with a particular version of the world.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

According to Gill (2000), there are probably at least 57 varieties of discourse analysis, which can be grouped according to their broad theoretical tradition. Critical discourse analysis originates from critical linguistics, social semiotics and critical
language studies. Types of discourse analysis within this tradition have a close association with the discipline of linguistics, with an emphasis on semiotics and structuralist analysis (Gill, 2000, p. 172). The central semiological idea of this group of discourse analysis is that the meaning of a text derives “not from any inherent feature of the relationship between signifier and signified, but from the system of oppositions in which it is embedded” (p. 172). This is to say that the meaning of a text does not stop at the overt level of the sign produced by the word and its related concept, it is more relevant to the power distribution in different groups in the society.

Critical discourse analysis is “critical” in the sense that it intends to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power, such as gender relations (Jorgense & Phillips, 2002). It is concerned with the relationships between meaning, power, and knowledge (Foucault, 1980). The major emphasis of critical discourse analysis is political—it aims to transform hierarchical relations within the social order, thereby eradicating injustice and inequality in society (van Dijk, 2001).

From the critical discourse analysis perspective, a prevailing social order and social processes are less constituted and sustained by the will of individuals but rather by the pervasiveness of discourses. Similarly, power relations in the society are considered as not so imposed on individual subjects but as “an inevitable effect of a way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privilege the status and positions of some people over others.” (Locke, 2004, p. 1-2). Fairclough (1995) described the aim of critical discourse analysis as

to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power (p. 132).
Fairclough (1992) put forward a three-dimensional mode for critical discourse. Any speech act should be seen as being a text; a discursive practice that involves the production, distribution and consumption of texts; and a social practice to which the communicative event belongs (p. 73). From this perspective, a central concept of critical discourse analysis is “intertextuality” (Fairclough 1992, 1992b, 1995, 2003) that texts are not to be understood or analyzed in isolation from other related texts and the broader context.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

While critical discourse analysis shares much in common with feminism in terms of, for instance, the focus on social injustice between different groups, researchers (e.g., Cameron, 1992, 1998; Lazzar, 2005) have advocated for viewing feminist critical discourse analysis as a distinct research perspective. Feminist discourse analysts put their energies on the theorization and analysis of the “particularly insidious and oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in most social practices” (Lazzar, 2005, p. 3).

The central concern of feminist discourse analysis is with critiquing discourses that maintain the power relations in which men are systematically privileged as a social group and women are disadvantaged, excluded and disempowered as a countering social group (Lazzar, 2005, p. 5). As Lazzar (2005) stated, the examination of “how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk” (p. 10) is the major task of feminist discourse analysis.

As a political perspective on gender, feminist critical discourse analysis is equally applicable to the study of texts as well as talk. From this standpoint, the need
for a multimodal dimension in the analysis of visual texts is acknowledged by feminist critical discourse analysts, out of the feminist belief that attention to semiotic modalities beyond language, such as visual images, body languages and sounds, can also contribute to the demystification of the interrelationships of gender, power, and ideology.

**Television as Texts for Discourse Analysis**

Texts are “vehicles for discourse” (Pearce, 1999, p. 88). In its broadest sense, a text is defined as “any phenomenon that pulls together elements that have meaning for reader or viewers or spectators that encounter it” (Butler, 2009, p. 9), or “any tissue of meaning which is symbolically significant for a reader” (Parker, 1999). Any text, written or spoken, visual images or sounds and so on, is always simultaneously “representing, setting up social identities and social relations and influencing the way we think about the world” (Russell, 1999, p. 94). Taking this broad definition of text, television programs, their sequence of sounds and images, should be viewed as texts (p. 9).

As reviewed previously, television is hegemonic, so not all meanings in the televisual texts are presented equally. The ideologies of some social groups are privileged over those of subordinate groups. Butler (2009) contended that it is of critical importance to reveal the hierarchy of meanings in television, in line of the essential aim of discourse analysis. According to Butler (2009), narrative and non-narrative structures, lighting and set design, camera style, editing, and sound, etc. are all important textual elements of the television that contribute to the emphasis of some meanings and the de-emphasis of others.

The act of viewing television is one in which the discourses of the viewer encounter those of the televisual texts (Butler, 2009, p. 9). This process then
involves the viewers’ conscious and unconscious interpretation of various types of texts. Rose (2000) termed this process as the translation of televisual texts, which, she argued, involves decisions and choices, which usually take the form of simplification when dealing with medium with complex texts, such as the television. Considering the polysemic nature of television messages, there can never be an analysis that captures a single truth of the text (Rose, 2000).

Applying discourse analysis to the study of television is to enable other ways of interpreting images, sounds, signs and symbols, and at the same time reveal particular ideologies, forms of knowledge and power within television (Russell, 1999). For discourse analysis, television can be considered a form of “cultural discourse” through which dominant values, ideas and beliefs are expressed, received and understood by those “outside” the screen (p. 93).

**Research Questions**

Inspired by the theory of social construction, the feminist study of media and critical discourse analysis, with a focus on the representation of women in popular reality television shows in China, the study asks the following two research questions:

**Research Question 1.** How are images of women, discursively constructed by verbal and non-verbal texts, represented in popular reality television shows in China? Do the shows exhibit progressive traits that challenge conventional roles of women?

**Research Question 2.** What does the representation of women and feminist/patriarchal ideas in reality television shows demonstrate about the role and status of women in the contemporary Chinese society?
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Sample Size and Selection

The two shows selected as data source for this study, *If You Are the One* and *Only You*, were chosen because of their popularity in China as representatives of the most popular reality television show genres nowadays, dating shows and job search shows. Besides, gender relations are of great concern in both relationship and career matters. Examining how images of women are discursively constructed in these shows is valuable for understanding the media representation of women and womanhood in China.

While the major conflicts in dating shows take place between the single women and single men, the major conflicts in job search shows are between the job applicants and the employers, with gender not playing a same significant role. Including both *If You Are the One* and *Only You* enables the study to compare and contrast gender discourses in reality television shows with different focuses, thereby providing a comparative and more complete perspective on the representation of the female gender in China’s popular reality television shows.

Episodes from the two shows were randomly selected for in-depth analysis. Analysis was performed on one show that aired during June, July and August 2011. For the show *If You are the One*, analysis was conducted on the shows from June 19, July 23 and August 28. For the program, *Only You*, the shows chosen were from June 19, July 31 and August 14, respectively. As each episode from the two shows lasts more than one hour and both shows incorporate abundant conversations as their major content, six episodes render plentiful data for analysis.

Each selected episode of the two shows was carefully watched by the researcher back and forth. Full transcription was made for each selected episode by
the researcher alone, so as to be able to read over the verbal texts, immerse into the data, and then describe and interpret them. The transcriptions were firstly done in Chinese and then translated into English in manners through which the original text forms and meanings in Chinese were kept to the largest extent. Since the study aims to reveal the discursive construction of women, special attentions were paid to women’s speech styles and contents, interactions between the female and male, and discourses pertaining to themes about women’s rights, social status, and roles. For the multimodal analysis, the researcher endeavored to describe the televisual texts as truthful as possible, and based the analysis on them.

**Method of Analysis**

As Gill (2000) pointed out, the essence of discourse analysis is “ever elusive,” “never quite captured by descriptions of coding schemes, hypotheses and analytical schemata” (p. 180). Fairclough (1992) reminded researchers with intention to use critical discourse analysis that one will lose sight of the complexities of discourse if complying with a too rigid analytical framework. Parker (1999) resonated this statement that there is no “right” way to conduct a critical discourse analysis. As he put it, “any retreat to set ‘methods’ will end up restricting our understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of meaning” (p. 2). Rather than to construct a “discourse analytic machine” that can “shred all varieties of text,” it is more meaningful to recognize “ways of reading” that can be adapted and modified for different discourses in different circumstances (p. 2). Researchers using critical discourse analysis vary in their disciplines and specific procedures applied to their research objects, but they complement each other, working together to build critical discourse analysis into a salient theoretical framework and methodology.
The majority of this study focuses on the verbal aspect of discourses, and it is assisted by multimodal analysis that looks at significant non-verbal aspects of the reality television shows. The analytic method adopted for the analysis of verbal texts is based primarily on Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional analytic framework, discussed previously. It is necessary to make some further explication of the three analytic levels here. The three levels—the analysis of discursive practices, analysis of texts, and analysis of social practice of which the discourse is a part—are inevitably overlapping and complementary to each other. Following this analytic framework, a critical discourse analysis study involves a progression “from the interpretation of the discourse practice… to description of the text, to interpretation of both of these in the light of the social practice in which the discourse is embedded” (p. 231). To be specific, the analysis of reality television shows for this study is carried out as listed below.

**Discursive practice analysis.** This level of analysis focuses on the context of the production and consumption of conversational texts during the reality television shows. The emphasis is on how some aspects of the conversation participants—gender, roles on stage, and positions in real life—affect interpretations of the texts. Analysis at this level is of a relatively holistic grasp of the discourses.

**Text Analysis.** Fairclough (1992) proposed a range of aspects to look at for the analysis of specific texts, which include: interactional control—the relationship between speakers, such as the question of who sets the conversational agenda; ethos—how identities are constructed through words; politeness strategies; metaphors; word meaning; wording; and grammar. By reading between the lines and attending to details during conversations, analysis at this level is made with a particular attention to those textual elements to discover underlying meanings.
As Fairclough’s (1992) tools for text analysis are primarily concerned with written texts, but this study looks at face-to-face interpersonal interactions on television, it is necessary to further refer to Hymes’s (2003) instructions on analysis of spoken texts. The tone, manner, or spirit in which a speech act is done, including various non-verbal, probably unconscious interactions as symbols, play significant roles in sending messages and constructing social identities and relations.

**Social practice analysis.** According to Fairclough (1992), analysis at this level is difficult to be outlined into a checklist. As a matter of fact, he did not provide an analysis at this level clearly in his own discourse analysis. The general objective of this analytic level is to specify “the nature of the social practice of which the discourse practice is a part, which is the basis for explaining why the discourse practice is as it is; and the effects of the discourse practice upon the social practice” (p. 237). Given Fairclough’s (1992) description, to analyze discourses at this level is to answer the second research question of the current study, What does the representation of women and feminist/patriarchal ideas in reality television shows indicate about women’s role and status in the contemporary Chinese society?

Analysis at the social level, therefore, is included in the discussion section of the thesis as part of a concluding remark on all the sampled discourses. How the reality television shows reflect the broader social ideology concerning the role and status of women in China, and what ideological and political influences they might have on people’s perceptions about the female gender are discussed.

While the focus of this research is primarily on the verbal part of texts that take place during reality television shows, the fact that television as text involves much more than just conversations requires the present research to adopt a multimodal analysis approach. As Lazzar (2005) stated, a multimodal view of discourse has a
great value for a holistic feminist critique of discursive constructions of gender (p. 5).

Data in the forms of animation, program format, lighting, stage setting, camera usage, editing, sound and music are taken into account for analysis of the sampled reality television shows.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the *If You Are the One* and *Only You* shows were examined respectively through 1) a multimodal analysis of the show’s title sequence and logo, stage setting and program format, and camera styles, as consistent elements in every episode, 2) a discursive practice analysis that looked at the overall verbal discourses in each selected episode of the show, and 3) a text analysis that focused on specific discourse excerpts in each episode in detail.

*If You Are the One*

**Multimodal Analysis**

A multimodal analysis of the show’s non-verbal elements, including images, stage settings and program structure, is an integral part of the critical discourse analysis study as these elements are consistent throughout every episode and are always the most intuitionally perceived by audiences. How these elements of the show work together to present female and male participants is significant to reveal in what light they are placed during the show right from the start. In this analytical section, I conducted a close reading of the show’s: 1) title sequence and logo, 2) stage setting and program format, and 3) camera styles.

**Title sequence and logo**

*If You Are the One* begins with a ten-second animated title sequence. It presents two major characteristics of the dating show: the one man vs. many women match-making style. Women turned their lights on or off to indicate their interest in dating the man. A silhouette-style is adopted for the animation. Images of male and female are stereotypically masculine and feminine respectively, which will be illustrated later on.
Accompanied by fast-paced, nightclub-style pop music, the animated title sequence starts with a camera shot of many blurred female images, which are exact copies of the same image. Standing with her one hand on her upper waist and one knee bent so only the tip of the foot touches the ground slightly, the female silhouette looks curvy and sexy. Then the camera zooms into the second shot, in which a man is standing on one end of a seesaw, stretching his arms out as if getting ready to fly. Several people jump on the other end of the seesaw and spring the man straight up. The man soars up, passing by several women, who are slim but curvy and in short skirts and high heels—an outfit that accentuates the feminine characteristic. The practice of flying endows the male figure with speed and thereby a strong sense of power. Female figures are shown tossing hair, standing casually, and pointing at the man as they all look up in his direction. Then the man stops soaring and stands facing a line of women with light boxes in front of them, similar to those on the show’s stage. The man is portrayed as standing casually—both legs straight and arms crossed in front of his chest, a gesture that can usually indicates observing, considering, or judging. He nods his head as the women line up one by one in front of him, as if he is satisfied with their appearances. The camera then focuses on one female figure, who puts a hand up and points into the air. And finally, a typographic logo of *If You Are the One* shows up, which marks the end of the animated title sequence.

As the examination revealed, female images in *If You Are the One*’s title sequence are depicted in a stereotypically feminine way, and the physical beauty of women is emphasized. The females are clearly positioned as the passive object of “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975). In comparison, the male figure is depicted with more sophistication and integrity. As the title sequence culminates with the presence of the
show’s logo, the emphasis on women’s feminine body image, which implicates the objectification of women, is made even more explicit.

The main body of the logo is an artistic composition of the show’s four-character Chinese name, taking up about 80 percent of the logo. The remaining portion of the logo is a female silhouette. Similar to those in the title sequence animation, this female’s image conforms to the mainstream standard of beauty for a woman’s body – slim and curvy. The effect of the silhouette makes the female figure look as if she is nude. She leans back against the characters, standing on only one foot with another leg bent and foot lifted, which adds to the delicate feeling of her body. The female silhouette’s white or black color (as appeared in different places), gentle curves and smaller size present a sharp contrast to the large, bright red, angular characters of the show’s title. All these features contribute to bringing out the visual, that is, sexual attractiveness of this female figure.

Considering that taking this female figure out of the logo would not hurt the meaning of those characters, its presence has more symbolic significance. As this female figure is not an indispensable part of this logo, an underlying ideology is transmitted from this arrangement that the physical attractiveness of women is promoted as the uppermost attraction of the show. The absence of a male figure in the logo further strengthens the objectification of women as something to be gazed at.

Stage setting and program format

As the show’s title sequence and logo place a particular emphasis on the female guests, especially their feminine physical characteristics, they are stressed for the value to bring about visual pleasure. The studio setting and certain part of the show’s format also contribute to this purpose.
The stage is designed as a catwalk. At one end of the runway are 24 spots with speech-table-like light boxes for each single female guest, divided in half on each side of the runway in a wide arc. At the beginning of the show, single female guests walk on stage in two lines from the entrance by the end of the runway, and step down from a staircase to the stage, which adds to the effect of positioning them like celebrities.

Instead of walking straight to their marks, these single women need to walk around the standing target on each side, which extends the time span of this section and allows for more camera shots on them. Accompanied by a fast pop song and dazzling light effects, the coming-on-stage section resembles a beauty contest, in which the physical appearance of the women become the main attraction for the spectators and are subject to critiques.

Compared to the single female guests, the coming-on-stage section for the single men lacks visual impact. Each single man comes on stage from the other end of the runway, enters the stage from a small elevator, and then takes a few more steps before introducing himself.

The audiences are randomly seated at both sides of the runway, on a lower level of the stage, which also resembles a typical modeling show setting that gives prominence to those who walk on the runway. Two psychologists, one male and one female, are seated near the middle point of the runway on a small platform the same height as the main stage.

As the single man stands near the other end of the runway, the distance between him and the single women is quite long. During most of his presentation, the single man will be standing there with the host. By positioning the male participant and the host together at the end of the runway opposite the women, and
having the male host sit close to the male participant, the spatial arrangement positions male and female gender in clear opposition.

A key part of the show occurs before the male participant starts his formal presentation. He must pick one single woman on stage as the one he wants to date the most, usually based on first impression about each of them. At this time, the performing of gaze by the single man on stage is magnified by the medium close-up shots on him, depicting how he looks intently from Single Woman No. 1 to No. 24. Again, this step of selecting the favorite woman resembles a beauty contest, or even the feudal emperor’s selection of his concubines, during which the power imbalance between males and females is always significant as women being passive objects of gaze that can satisfy the man’s voyeurism. The choice is seen by the show’s television audience but kept secret to those in the studio, including the single women. It will be made known only when the man makes it to the “Men’s Right” section, when more than one woman still keep their lights for him after seeing all three of his introductory video clips. In that case, the male participant gets to choose as a date for after the show from those who keep their lights on for him.

Based on the rules of the show, single women enjoy some initiative compared to their male counterparts, since the fact that they turn their lights on or off will indicate the success or failure of the man’s ability to pursue a date with them. A male candidate has to leave the stage right away if all the women’s lights are off, even if all three of his videos have not been shown. Therefore, the male participants are in a relatively passive position, as they are the subjects of the judgment by the single women. The men have only one chance to be on stage and need to make the most of it. They must try to impress the women so they can stay longer onstage and present more, and ultimately have someone willing to go out with them.
This being said, the initial step of letting the single man pick his favorite woman actually has no influence on his own presentation process and how the single women will respond to him, although it adds some suspense to the show. From a feminist perspective, the design of this step nonetheless has its significance in that it empowers the single men, so that they are not in a completely passive position under the judgment of the single women. The fact that only a few male participants can make it to the “Men’s Right” section to choose from women who are willing to leave the stage with him – the step that empowers men with their final decision-making practice – makes the step of choosing the love at first sight at the beginning meaningful. Every single man at least has this chance to be in the role of a selector. Using this selection process at the beginning of the show causes a reduction of any dominance in the show by the single women.

Moreover, as only the single men have introductory video clips to present themselves, understanding of a male guest is more systematic than that of a female guest. Information about a certain female participant is always fragmented and highly simplified, briefly listed on their nametag, or mentioned on a few occasions during their conversations. That being the case, from one perspective, the show endows women with more superiority, as it is the men who need to make more efforts in self-presentations to impress the women. However, it is paradoxical that by doing this, images of single women in the show appear to lack sophistication compared to the men. Unlike the male guests who get to introduce their career, experiences, and hobbies, etc., in detail, female guests rely heavily on their appearances and interactional practices on stage to be impressive.
Camera styles

Analysis of the discursive construction of the female gender in the television shows necessarily involves a comparison to that of the male. The following analysis of camera styles examines shots on both genders.

Since If You Are the One offers no supplementary introductory video clips for the female participants, their visual presentations during the show are limited to the studio setting. The interior camera usage for such entertainment television programs is likely to be restricted by the spatial conditions, largely abides by general industry standards, and lacks variation and sophistication. Most of the time, camera shots of men and women alike during the show are at a flat angle, medium shots (the subject is visible from the waist up) or long shots (the entire body of the subject is visible), and lacking camera movements, such as zooming and panning. Such a camera style is always perceived as being straightforward, thus objective and less emotionally involved.

It is those “unusual” camera shots that offer more possibilities for interpretation concerning the gender of the subjects. A low-angle long shot is used primarily to film the single women when they come to the stage. The camera zooms in as the women make their appearances. Besides, the coming-on-stage process is facilitated by crane shots of a panorama view of the stage, with fast and dramatic pulling back and rising up movements. The montage of the two camera shots considerably intensifies the visual impact of the arrival of the single women, emphasizing their physical beauty as a major attraction to the audience. Moreover, when a male participant has the initiative to choose from those women who keep the light on for him, the camera is in a dramatic style again, combining both low-angle and high-angle shots to follow the women as they walk down the runway to the other end. In contrast, camera shots
on the single men are always of a flat angle and limited in movements. Consistent with the show’s stage setting, the impressive camera usage on women in those situations again suggests that women are objects of visual pleasure.

To conclude this section, the multimodal analysis of If You Are the One’s title sequence, logo, stage setting, program format, and camera styles reveals conflicting facts concerning the portrayal of women on this reality television show. On the one hand, women are empowered in that they can determine whether a single man can succeed in pursuing them onstage. On the other hand, they are stereotypically portrayed with an emphasis on their physical attractiveness while lacking a comprehensive presentation of their personalities.

**Analysis of If You Are the One 06/19/2011**

**Discursive practice analysis**

The 06/19/2011 episode of the If You Are the One show featured twenty-six women and seven men in total discourse, including twenty-five single women, five single men, one male host, one male and one female psychologist. As female participants in the show significantly outnumbered the male ones, the expectation would have been that they would take up a considerable portion of the show’s entire conversational contents. However, they accounted for less than 14 percent, with the female psychologist alone contributing over a quarter. Such a disproportionate amount of verbal interplay by the female participants can be explained by the following facts.

First of all, the single men received more speaking time than the single women. As discussed in the multimodal analysis, a large portion of the show’s discourse is set aside for introductory video clips by the male guests. In this episode, a total of thirteen video clips were shown to present five single men, while the twenty-four
single women only got a relatively short time in between those video clips to interact with the single men on their points of interest. The questions the women asked and comments made about the male guests tended to be brief, and more attention was directed towards how the male guests answered their questions, so the single women were more observers than speakers and actors on stage. In addition, since all the conversations which took place during the recording couldn’t be shown due to the program’s time limit, many female guests did not get a chance to be shown speaking during the broadcast. Nine of the female guests did not speak at all during the entire episode, which made their presence in the episode of minor importance.

Secondly, the male host had significant discursive power during the show, as he played a key role in holding the stage. He would always chat with the male guests or the psychologists in length to liven up the atmosphere. Usually, single women raised their hands and waited to be called by the host to get their chance to speak. The host had the right to determine which participant to call on and whether to continue with the conversation on a particular topic. Beside, as the one who most represented the voice of the show, the host had the necessity and responsibility of offering insights and guidance to his audience, so he always had priority to lead a discussion and give concluding remarks. As a result of the host’s power and the lack of on-camera time for the women, the discursive advantage of the men was inevitably obvious.

Furthermore, the male psychologist presented more discursive dominance than the female one. As guest hosts, the two psychologists both contributed considerably to the interactions on stage. Their identity as experts in gender relationship issues allowed – and actually required – them to have more freedom to speak up actively and for extended time periods. Comparing the styles of the two psychologists,
however, makes it obvious that they had two different speech styles and levels of involvement in the discourse.

In this episode, the male psychologist tended to create more conflicts on stage, as his questions were oftentimes aggressive and his comments critical and unpleasant. Also, he seemed intent on attracting attention to himself, as he would often raise his voice, joke about himself, and use exaggerated facial expressions and body language, etc. In comparison, the female psychologist’s speaking style was much less dramatic and confrontational. She tended to impose harmony on the atmosphere, exhibited by giving more caring and supportive feedback, paying careful attention to her comments so as not to hurt anyone’s feelings, etc. In total, she spoke up fewer times and always at a shorter length than her male counterpart.

In conclusion, the overview of all the participants’ discursive practices during this episode of *If You Are the One* reveals that the male was in a dominant position in the show’s discourse. Women were shown speaking for much less time and obeying the male’s order to speak up. Besides these facts, the female participants as well as the psychologist exhibited a similar speech style that was typically feminine and abided by conventional expectations for women’s public speaking manner. To be specific, the females all used very limited gestures when speaking, restraining from being too emotional. When the female guests were asked to give comments to the male guests, their comments were mostly positive and encouraging. Even when they expressed negative attitudes, they tended to word them in a euphemistic way, avoiding creating direct conflicts. Such a collaborative and egalitarian speech style disadvantaged women in terms of the strength of their speeches during the show, although their sole presence on stage was promoted as a major selling point of the show.
Text analysis

Six excerpts were selected from this episode for detailed analysis as they have reflections on the contemporary situation of people’s acceptance of the feminist ideology, how they see the role of women, value, and status in a romantic relationship.

Excerpt 1.1
(M—single male guest, 1,2,3… —the show guest’s assigned number on stage)
1 M1: Talking about what kinds of girl I like, she should be intellectual.
2 She should have a well-rounded figure, which is more attractive and feminine.

Excerpt 1.2
1 M3: Several years ago, my ideal girlfriend was like everyone would want, kind of clichéd, like having a slender body, long hair, and light skin.
2 Now that so many years have passed, I think now I value the psychic connection more.
3 There are many girls nowadays who dress themselves pretty when going out,
4 but are unkempt in their private life.
5 I can’t accept this.

Excerpt 1.3
1 M5: I think girls must have an independent personality.
2 They must have brains.
3 Do not go with the flow.
4 Do not be a philistine.
5 I feel strongly against philistine women.

The three excerpts above were from the introductory video clips of three single men as they talked about expectations for their girlfriend. It seems that a beautiful mind was a more important criteria than a beautiful appearance for these men to choose their girlfriend, which objected the conventional patriarchal ideology that women are good primary for their physical attractiveness.

Only Single Man No. 1 briefly specified his desire for his girlfriend’s body shape, emphasizing physical femininity as a favorable feature, which was also only of secondary importance compared to women’s intelligence. Single Man No. 2’s
words further indicated that judging women solely by their physical appearances was immature, since this is what he did “several years ago.” As he cared more about the “psychic connection” between lovers and expressed his aversion to women who cared about a pretty look only, he implicitly supported the feminist idea that women are to be valued for their mind rather than their body. Single Man No. 5 further advocated feminist ideas. Without stating any standard for physical features, he stressed that what’s beyond the body – an independent spirit, intellectual ability, and a good taste – were more desirable qualities for women.

Excerpt 1.4

1 Host: Whether to have kids should follow the common wish of the husband and wife in the first place.
2 Then it’s not a conflict to talk about filial piety based on that.
3 Just as Le Jia (the male psychologist) said, there are many ways to perform filial piety,
4 and we think one probably should not turn it upside down.
5 It’s not like that we have kids just in order to show filial piety to our parents,
6 but that our parents’ wish can be fulfilled while we have kids.

The host made the comment as a concluding remark for the presentation of one male guest on stage. The male guest supported a conventional Chinese belief that having a kid is one’s indispensable duty and the most important way to show filial piety to the parents. This statement led people to think that he wanted to marry a woman just for the purpose of having a child so as to please his parents, which he denied. The male psychologist, however, stuck to that misinterpretation and emotionally argued against it. The host’s concluding remark on their conversation was a restatement of the male psychologist’s opinion, in a less argumentative and more instructive way.

Although these suggestions were given based on the misinterpretation of the male guest’s statement – a common practice in reality television shows which deliberately creates conflicts on stage to attract audiences – their objection to the
idea that having a child is every couple’s duty to their parents indirectly advocated for women’s rights. Along with the belief that having children is the obligation a couple has to their parents, comes the discrimination and suppression of women, marking them as subsidiary to their husbands and downsizing their value to a tool for carrying on the family line for their husbands. Arguing that a child should not be born for the mere sake of filial piety is therefore feminist, as it transmits the idea that wives are equal to their husbands and that it’s their right and freedom to choose whether to have a kid, not a duty. In this way, the traditional patriarchal expectation that every woman must fit into a domestic maternal role is argued against.

Excerpt 1.5
(F—single female guest)
1  F5: Suppose that you have a girlfriend, who does not wear any makeup when going out with you.
2  You two actually communicate very well, but your friends say she is just ordinary.
3  Then what will you do?
4  M3: Well, I do not dress up every day like right now.
5  When I was in my suit, they would always say, ‘You’re going to either a wedding or a funeral.’
6  So if you do not like to wear makeup, I’m totally fine with it.
7  I don’t really care about that. That’s it.

In this conversation, the female guest asked the male guest’s opinion on women not wearing makeup, and his response reflected that he valued good communication more than a pretty face. According to some radical feminists, cosmetics, which are primarily produced and sold to women, exemplify the patriarchal society’s emphasis on women’s outward beauty and negligence of their true ability, as women feel obligated to wear them in public to feel and appear socially capable (Craig, 1998). The choice of not wearing makeup, then, symbolizes the objection to the patriarchal ideology for a lot of women. The male guest’s acceptance of women who didn’t wear makeup supported the feminist idea that women should not be judged by their appearances. The camera shot following the
male guest's answer showed the female guest nodding her head in agreement, confirming the correctness of such a pro-feminist idea.

Excerpt 1.6
(LJ—male psychologist)

1 F13: I think he is handsome. Everybody likes him.
2 Men like this are hard to discipline. That's annoying.
3 Host: No. 13 is from Korea.
4 LJ: She wants to find a Chinese husband, who she can discipline.
5 F13: Many people want that, but actually it's not allowed in the Korean society.
6
7 Host: No. 13 is from Korea.
8 LJ: She wants to find a Chinese husband, who she can discipline.
9 F13: Many people want that, but actually it's not allowed in the Korean society.

The excerpt above is interesting in that a female guest from Korea expressed explicitly her desire to “discipline” her husband in the future. What's underlying the desire was the unwillingness to be submissive to men, the request for equality, at least in the family. The choice of the wording “to discipline” showed a strong and assertive attitude to request dominant power in the relationship. She also suggested that such a desire was the common wish of many women and she did believe that women who married Chinese husbands were able to achieve such a dominant status in their families. While it is hard to determine whether the female guest's belief that Chinese women could “discipline” their husbands is true or not, such expression of a woman’s request for non-submissive status was a straightforward challenge against patriarchal values.

Excerpt 1.7

F5: I'm studying in a law school now, and my life is kind of busy but I'm willing to spend some time to date someone, to communicate. So I'd like to know what's your current situation?

M4: I think I'll keep focusing on with my career, but I'll spare some time… since my career is just starting up.

F5: Because I did not have any dating experience before, and I do have quite a strong desire to career achievement –

LJ: Do you think you can attract him?

F5: I think, as for myself, I'm here on this stage with a sincere heart,
so I hope you can consider it seriously, if you’re interested in me or not.

This excerpt featured a female guest expressing her interest to the male guest. Based on her statement, the female guest discursively constructed herself as a woman with characteristics traditionally more associated with men – being independent, aspirant, and career-oriented. While she was interested in the male guest and certainly hoped that he could take her away, she did not attempt to attract him by catering to his preference. Instead, she presented her individuality by objectively explicating herself, emphasizing her sincerity while admitting her lack of interest and experience in relationship matters. Such a way of speaking posed a strong sense of equality between the female and male guest.

**Analysis of *If You Are the One* 07/23/2011**

**Discursive practice analysis**

The 07/23/2011 episode of the *If You Are the One* show featured twenty-five women and seven men in its discourse, including twenty-four single women, five single men, one male host, one male and one female psychologist. The female participants contributed approximately 20 percent of the show’s conversational contents, a little bit more than the 06/19/2011 episode. Five of the single women on stage were shown not speaking at all during the entire episode.

As usual, the majority of the speaking time was allocated to the monologues of the single men in their introductory videos. Fourteen video clips were shown in this episode. The host was in control of the conversation flows on stage. He was always the person instructing female guests when to speak, and usually initiated discussions and gave concluding remarks.

Comparing the two psychologists in this episode, the female one spoke up fewer times than the male, and spoke with a more collected manner. The female
psychologist spoke up just to ask questions or give advice on certain aspects of the male participants, behaving quite professionally as a psychology advisor with a serious attitude. By contrast, the male psychologist was more relaxed and actively expressed his thoughts, including making fun of people and talking about things irrelevant to the understanding of the single men or women. As in the 06/19/2011 episode, the male psychologist’s desire to take a dominant role during a conversation was also strongly reflected by his quick follow-ups and frequent interruptions of the comments of other participants and the use of exaggerated wording and non-verbal expressions.

In short, viewing the show as a whole, the discursive dominance was still in the men’s hands in this episode of If You Are the One, since the male guests, the host, and the psychologists all had more freedom and privileges to talk on stage, and the single women were in a relatively passive role watching the discourse.

**Text analysis**

Ten excerpts that have implications for the state of mind of the men and women in terms of gender roles and status in a relationship were analyzed in detail in this section. Both patriarchal and feminist ideologies were presented in the discourses of men and women alike.

**Excerpt 2.1**

2. I’m from Beijing. I’m 23.
3. I hope to find someone who is tall and strong.
4. Since I’m tall, 172 cm, I hope to find someone taller than me.
5. Also, I hope he could be a little bit fat, so that I would feel safe.

This excerpt was one female guest’s self-introduction when she first came on stage. The way she described the characteristics of her prospective boyfriend reflected her unconscious mind-set about gender roles. As she wanted her boyfriend to be “tall,” “strong,” and “fat,” she emphasized the men’s physical masculinity and
related it to the sense of security, which was key to her for emotional appeal. This is reflective of the deeply rooted value that women are less strong than men and thus are subordinated and in need of their protection.

Excerpt 2.2

1 W14: I think you are a little bit childish.
2 As Le Jia said that before, I am a child myself. (How Le Jia said that was not present in this episode. He might have said it in some other episode, or in off-stage conversations with the female guest.)
3 I think I need someone who can tolerate me, not a big baby.

In this excerpt, the female guest criticized one male guest as “childish,” and implied that maturity was an essential factor for a man to be her partner. What is interesting here is how the female guest, as a grown-up woman, was marked as “a child” by the male psychologist, and accepted and internalized such an image. As she allowed herself to be regarded as immature while at the same time requiring her man to be mature, she voluntarily placed herself in an inferior and dependant position compared to her man, who should be a powerful figure to take care of and protect her. The patriarchal value is thus dominant in this statement.

Excerpt 2.3

1 M1: When the storm comes, I’ll be her shelter.
2 When the storm goes, I’ll stay by her side,
3 because I have the determination to be with her until we are old.
4 If you are a mild-tempered, unselfish, tall girl born in the 1980s,
5 then you are the one in my dreams.

As revealed from the excerpt above, the male guest stressed his ability to provide company and protection to his girlfriend—an emphasis on his powerful masculinity. The requirement for his girlfriend to be “mild-tempered” and “unselfish” was also consistent with the conventional expectations for women. As obedience and self-sacrifice are to be celebrated as essential virtues of women, the underlying patriarchal value ensures the dominant power status of the men is not challenged.

Excerpt 2.4
M3: I like girls with long hair, slender, and gorgeous. She should be smart, independent, fun, and with good communication skills… Things that I find hard to bear include not caring about hygiene, and acting as if she’s spoiled.

This male guest’s statement showed contradictory ideas that appeared to be both in favor of and against feminist beliefs simultaneously. On one hand, he required a specific standard of beauty for his prospective girlfriend’s desired physical appearances – a practice that is typical of the patriarchal ideology that values the attractiveness of women’s outward features. On the other hand, the male guest showed his agreement to at least some of the feminist ideals, as independence and sociability of women were put forward as decent features to possess.

Excerpt 2.5
M2: Here are the standards for my ideal girlfriend.
First, ‘two tigers cannot live in the same mountain.’ Since I have kind of an authoritative personality, already a tiger in the family, I don’t want a tigress in the family. So I wish my ideal partner to be tender, virtuous, and forgiving.

Excerpt 2.6
M2: I wish my other half to be industrious and thrifty in managing the household. She should be good at money management. Regulate the cost of living on the premise of a guarantee of life quality. I hope she could be less than 25 at best. I’d like to have two to three kids in the future. Having kids is a woman’s core obligation, so this age is the most suitable. If I could not meet the right one for now, I would keep waiting. The standard about age will never change.

Excerpt 2.7
F16: I feel like you want a genius woman to be your girlfriend… Host: Nonsense. He is very material. He just wants a 25-year-old woman to give birth to his kids. He said that having kids is a woman’s core responsibility.
Excerpt 2.8
1 F22: After watching the three video clips, I feel that you are extremely confident.
2 I’m very curious. What makes you so confident?

Excerpt 2.9
1 F1: Hello, there. Like No. 15 said, you are almost saintly right now. So I think none of us 24 female guests are good enough for you.

Excerpt 2.10
(HH—female psychologist)
1 HH: You said that having kids is the women’s core responsibility.
2 Many excellent women are willing to have kids, and they believe it’s a very happy and irreplaceable part of their life.
3 However, they absolutely do not wish to be confined to it by men, being told that they have such an obligation.

The expression of the patriarchal ideology upgraded even more when the male guest talked about how he considered having kids was the “core obligation” for
women (line 11 in Excerpt 2.6), which lead him to set a strict age standard for his prospective wife (line 4-8 in Excerpt 2.6). From a feminist point of view, such a proposition was demeaning to women, as it belittled women's ability to make significant contributions to the social world, subjecting them to a status as a tool to continue the family line for their men.

It is interesting that while the single women turned off their lights for the man after hearing those statements in his introductory video, no one made explicit objections to his patriarchal statements during their on-stage communications. They commented that he was too good and confident and his standards were too high to be right for them, although in a mocking tone (Excerpt 2.7, 2.8, 2.9). In other words, they opposed his propositions at heart but chose to express it in a rather euphemistic way to avoid direct conflicts. Such discursive practices otherwise reflected how those female guests had largely internalized a submissive role ascribed to them by the long-existing patriarchal ideology. Of note, the host repeated the statements in words similar to those of the male guest with a hint of sarcasm to indicate his disagreement, which, however, might be overlooked (line 2-4 in Excerpt 2.7). The show would seem to be obviously against feminism if it did not offer any clearly stated disagreement to the male guest’s statements. Under this circumstance, the female psychologist’s argument against the statement that the core obligation of women is to have kids was of remarkable significance (line 22-26). As a renowned psychologist invited to the show as guest host, the female psychologist had always represented a righteous and authoritative model of morality for those on stage and in front of the television. Her straightforward opposition to the male guest’s statements as a concluding remark on his self-presentation marked the impropriety of devaluing women—thus the patriarchal value—with an official tone.
Analysis of If You Are the One 08/28/2011

Discursive practice analysis

In the 08/28/2011 episode of the If You Are the One show, twenty-five women and seven men were involved as major participants in the show’s discourse. Among them were twenty-four single female guests, six single male guests, one male host, one male and one female psychologist. Similar to the other two episodes selected for analysis, the women’s discourses still took up only a small portion of the total discourse, approximately 16 percent. Eight of the single female guests did not speak throughout this episode, while four of the six single male guests got to show all three of their introductory video clips. The men were able to introduce more information about themselves and were therefore in a dominant position in the show’s discourse.

The female psychologist was as usual the one who spoke up most among the female participants on stage, which was not unusual considering her priority as the guest host and a renowned psychologist. However, her speaking time was still significantly less than that of the male psychologist, the host, and the single men on the program. The female psychologists’ interactional style on stage was quite different from those of the men as well. As described in the analysis of the other two episodes of the show, she had a more disciplined manner and lacked the kind of tongue-in-cheek, entertaining tone during her communications with others, which occurred quite frequently in the discourses of the men.

For the single female guests on stage, no incidences occurred where they spoke up without the host’s permission. On some occasions, the single women were bold enough to ask sharp questions or give unflattering comments. While this might be interpreted as an example of the women exhibiting more confidence than the single men, it should be noted that their discursive power was limited when they
were situated in the overall context. The single women were given much less time to speak on stage due to the show’s time limit. But in addition to time constraints, the commanding bearing of the host and the male psychologist largely contributed to the restraint of the single women’s discursive power. Detailed analyses of some excerpts on this point were presented in the text analysis section.

**Text analysis**

Six excerpts from this episode were analyzed in this section. The findings revealed how men and women perceive and discursively construct the image of women in association with that of men.

Excerpt 3.1

1. M2: First of all, my ideal girl must be kind.
2. Second, she should have a positive attitude.
3. She would see me in a positive and optimistic light, and see life in the future in that way, too.
4. I don’t like girls to take the initiative to pursue a man.
5. I feel that only girls pursued by myself can give me the sense of achievement.
6. That kind of girl deserves to be cherished by me more.
7. I think girls should have some requirements for guys, material or not.
8. It means that at least she has expectations for her man.

Excerpt 3.2

1. M4: Girls that I like can’t be commanding.
2. If something happens, we can just have a discussion together.

Excerpt 3.3

1. M5: About my ideal girl, looking ok and not being too short is enough.
2. I hope that my other half can give me suggestions when I can’t make up my mind, and make the decision with me.

Among the six single men in this episode, three frankly stated their standards for an ideal girlfriend in their video clips as shown above. It is interesting to see how the patriarchal ideology that positions women in a subordinate status to that of men
was expressed from different aspects in the statements from the men, both explicitly and implicitly.

All three of the quoted participants neglected to specify a desirable physical appearance as an important criterion to choose their girlfriend – a notable point that reflected how the show featured men who valued the female's inner nature more than outward attractiveness, which reflected the influence of the feminist ideology.

However, what is more obviously seen from their statements is the continued dominance of the patriarchal ideology that men should always get the upper hand over women. As in the words of Single Man No.2, he disliked women to be the initiator in a relationship (line 5-7 in Excerpt 3.1). He maintained the idea that passiveness is an important virtue for women. They need to be conquered by men as their achievement. A man who was the object of a woman’s pursuit was perceived to degenerate into a passive and inferior position, as if they were following orders from the women. Such a diminishing of men’s power by women was threatening to the patriarchal ideology. Single man No. 2’s words made clear his opposition to women’s higher status to men. He used a firm modal of negativity in line 5, “I don’t like,” without any modification to mitigate the force of his statement, which is stereotypically masculine and mandatory. This use of the negative modification demonstrates his insistence that he maintain his own position of dominance in relation to the women.

Similarly, Single Man No. 4 stated frankly that women should not have a commanding bearing (Excerpt 3.2). His use of strong negation, “can’t be,” indicated his intention to take the dominant position in a relationship, and a fear of the disempowerment of men by the “commanding” women who refused to be submissive. Single Man No. 5 constructed his image in his discourse as someone
likely to be hesitant about decision-making, thus in need of help from others in this area. While his proposition indicated he relied on the ability of women to a certain extent, the value of women was limited to being the men’s assistant and supporter.

Excerpt 3.4

W18: Hello. Do you think you have a very competitive personality?
M6: I will definitely do things that I believe are right.
W18: But I feel like… (you are) a little bit weak.
       If I were with you, I would become protective toward you, like a tigress. Right?

In this excerpt, the female participant questioned whether the male participant was “competitive,” which was regarded as an important characteristic for her when evaluating a man. Although the single man gave a positive response to her question, the single woman was not persuaded by his words. She spoke out about her impressions of this man, marking him as “weak,” and further pictured a possibility that she would become a “tigress” when she was with him. In the Chinese culture, the word “tigress” is usually a derogatory term used conventionally to describe women with an aggressive and commanding personality, who were to be criticized for their overpowering practices. In this same section, the woman used a slightly sarcastic tone, frowning, and scratching her head in confusion, thereby expressing her doubt, refusal, even fear that a woman would transgress the social norm to impose superior power on men.

Excerpt 3.5

W7: Hi there. You said that you like cheerful (girls), so do you like (girls who are) somewhat mischievous like me, or (girls who are) somewhat mature and graceful, like No. 8?
M5: My ex-girlfriends were indeed all of the cheerful and mischievous kind.
LJ: So, in the past, he –
W7: But I’m asking about now.
M5: Now, I think from the bottom of my heart I will comparatively prefer –
W7: Mischievous (girls), just like me.
M5: Comparatively preferable. Yes. Yes.
Host: So you think you can be generalized in one word, mischievous?
M5: Actually Beijing girls are all [like this]
W7: [I want to explain that.]
Beijing girls just speak very directly.

The female participant in this excerpt exhibited a masculine style of speaking. She was seen being straightforward, with a strong desire to speak up, and pushed the man hard for an answer. Although she asked the man what kind of girls he liked, she referred directly to herself and another single woman as his options (line 1-3), which made obvious her affection for the man and the desire that he liked her in return. As the single man’s answer did not satisfy her, she interrupted the male psychologist, who was trying to comment on the man’s answer, to push for a more direct answer (line 6). Her use of a declarative sentence in an accusatory tone without mitigating the force in her words evoked a higher power status for her compared to the single man. She even got so eager for the man’s answer that she interrupted him and directly put forward herself as his choice (line 8), a strong indicator of her aggressiveness. She then followed this up by overlapping the speech of the single man to explain herself to the host, a move that suggested her attempt to obtain more discursive power on stage.

It is ironic, however, that the woman with such a forceful speaking style kept referring to herself as “mischievous,” a word that is usually associated with kids and pets, a word that connotes a sense of naivety. With a slightly mocking tone, the host questioned the appropriateness of the single woman’s description of herself like that, and it led to laughs from the audience. Such an immature and disadvantaged characteristic self-acknowledgement by the single woman and further aggravated by the host’s ridiculing comment substantially weakened the strength of her image.
Excerpt 3.6

1. W21: Hi, there. Actually, it doesn’t matter what a sad past you have, because your ex-girlfriend lost someone who loved her, but you only lost someone who did not love you. However, what you have done... Your lovesickness for her could only affect yourself, not anyone else. You are too obstinate, aren’t you?

2. Host: No. 22. Listen, do you have any questions? Listen carefully, I say, questions.

3. W22: I...

4. Host: In the last round you don’t give comments. Ask questions.

5. W22: I...I don’t have questions.

6. Host: Let me remind you 24 ladies. During the last round of communication... This is a dating show, and you can communicate with the male guests in various ways. What we hope to see is that you ask him whatever questions you have, communicate with him, not that you give your personal comments on something he said, and when you’re done, you turn off the light.

Excerpt 3.6 is another example of how the strong discursive power of the single women during their interactions with the single men was suppressed by the host in a larger context.

In line 1-6, Excerpt 3.6, Single Woman No. 21 talked about what she thought about the single man’s lovesickness for his ex-girlfriend. She comforted him at first, saying that his loss was not that serious (line 1-3), and then suddenly introduced a jarring note, criticizing him for being too obsessed about his ex-girlfriend (line 4-6). The single woman’s comments were perceived as very sharp, and she denied the value of the man’s deeds and frankly labeled him as “too obstinate.” Ending her comments with a tag question magnified her critical tone, and by turning off the light right after making those comments, she further added to the force of her speech as a strong negation of the man. The single man did not say a word after her comments, but his facial expressions showed that he was obviously upset. Single Woman No.
21, therefore, exhibited absolute discursive dominance and a higher power status during this interaction with the man.

The host then called Single Woman No. 22 to speak, who probably raised her hand previously off-screen. She was shown speaking only one sentence, however, since the host stressed in a stern voice that what he wanted was questions (line 7-8, 10-11). Commanding sentences were used to manifest his hard attitude and a dominant power status. The single woman looked as if she was so intimidated by the host’s cautionary words that she stammered, and then in a very weak voice, stated that she had no questions to ask (line 9, 12). The host then followed up very quickly to allow her no more opportunity to speak, and continued to set rules for communication by the single women (line 13-19), which was a straightforward restriction of their power of discourse on stage. From his tone, it was obvious that he was somewhat annoyed by what Single Woman No. 21 just said. Rejection from the woman by turning off her light represented a loss of face for the male guests. Her sharp, unfavorable comments further weakened the power of the men, subjecting them to a position of public criticism. The host’s ruling thus helped maintain the men’s power status on stage. A message was thus sent that challenges from women to the patriarchal gender hierarchy, such as criticizing men directly in public, was undesirable.

**Only You**

**Multimodal Analysis**

Consistent with the multimodal analysis of *If You Are the One*, the section below also includes a close reading of the *Only You* show’s 1) title sequence and logo, 2) stage setting and program format, and 3) camera styles.
Title sequence and logo

The most prominent feature of the title sequence and logo for the *Only You* show is its complete omission of the female gender, which suggests the patriarchal ideology that men are and should be more responsible and dominant in the labor market. Similar to *If You Are the One*, the title sequence for *Only You* is also a short animation, in which the images are abstract silhouettes. A man is shown running quickly across city streets at night, exhibiting considerable strength and determination. By the end of the animation, he runs up some stairs where the city is seen lit up and extending to the horizon, a scene that generates feelings of accomplishment and leadership. Also, a bright moon that hangs right above the man like a giant spotlight contributes to the metaphor that he becomes a successful man for achieving his goal after conquering difficulties.

The man puts his arms up in a gesture of excitement for success. The image of the man stretching his arms then evolves into part of the show’s logo, which is an artistic composition of both the Chinese and English title of the show. Unlike the logo for *If You Are the One*, in which the female figure appears irrelevant and in contrast to the characters, the male figure is well integrated in this logo, as it takes the place of the radical of the Chinese character “you.” It is apparent that the image of the male figure standing upright and stretching his arms makes him appear very masculine, full of strength. Instead of featuring this image of a successful person as a female, or at least having one equally powerful female figure together with the male one, the show’s logo and title sequence put sole emphasis on the male figure, which reflects and therefore admits and supports the conventional belief that working outside in society is more of the business of men, while the role of women in the job market and their need for career success are of minor importance.
Stage setting and program format

As a derivation from the reality dating shows led by If You Are the One, the job search show, Only You, resembles it in many aspects. The stage setting is similar in that twelve employers are seated in a semicircular line at one side of the studio, connected with the position of the host and the job applicant by a runway. Female employers are not seated in a group, which de-emphasizes the gender difference of the employers. Instead of standing behind a simple light box, each employer is seated in a large, red, throne-like armchair. They have lights behind the chair in the form of a wall of bulbs, by which they indicate whether they want to offer the applicant a job. The color combination for the chair and the light backdrop is crimson and yellow, which are traditional Chinese symbolic colors for power and royalty. Besides, the employers are already in their seats when the show starts. All these arrangements work to reinforce the employers’ higher power status and authority in contrast to the job applicants, who will be standing throughout their interview on stage. That being said, the stage setting of the show puts no emphasis on gender difference, but only aims to highlight the power imbalance between the employers and the job applicants.

Four to five job applicants are interviewed in each episode of the show. Each of them has a short video clip prior to coming onstage, in which they briefly introduce their working experiences and attitudes, etc. Every applicant comes to the stage from the entrance by one end of the runway, and leaves from the same entrance if he/she does not take an offer, or from the exit at the other end of the runway if he/she takes one. The general interview procedure does not differ from one applicant to another because of their gender. There are differences between each job applicant in terms of particular interview details, to be sure, but they are based on
their individual characteristics, such as particular career interests, working capability, etc. In short, based on the show’s setting and format, gender is not a notable conflict for the show.

**Camera styles**

An examination of the camera usages during the show reveals that women and men are not treated differently in their respective camera shots. Similar to that of the *If You Are the One* show, the general camera style in *Only You* is also rather plain, lacking sophisticated maneuvers. Steady flat-angle shots, long or medium, are the most used for both job applicants and employers, women and men alike, while low-angle and high-angle shots with some zooming and panning movements are applied on the job applicants when each of them comes to and leaves the stage.

To sum up the multimodal analysis, as a job search show, *Only You* does not take gender as its major concern, as the major conflicts exist between the job applicants and bosses. The examination of the show’s stage setting, format, as well as its camera style suggests that women are neither particularly empowered nor emphasized for their femininity. Therefore no differentiations in power status between the female and male gender are seen from these aspects. However, the traditional belief that the field of work is the men’s realm where women are of minor significance is shown in the show’s title sequence and logo, as only a male figure is portrayed.

**Analysis of Only You 06/19/2011**

**Discursive practice analysis**

Analysis at this level looks at the overall context of the show’s discourse. Attentions were paid in particular to how the conversation participants’ gender and their roles on stage and in real life interacted during the show and thus had
implications on the representation of women and the gender relations during the show.

A total of twenty people (six women and fourteen men) contributed to the conversations taken place in this episode of the *Only You* show. Among the female participants, two were job applicants, three were employers, and one was an advisor assisting the interviewees. Among the male participants, two were the show’s hosts, nine were employers, two were job applicants, and one was an advisor. With both show hosts being male and male employers outnumbering their female counterpart 2:1, it’s reasonable to expect that this show endowed men with more priority in its discourse.

The counting of each person’s amount of speaking turns and length supports this presumption. Regardless of each person’s role in the program, men took up more than 75 percent of time talking. Comparing the amount of talking between genders with consideration of their roles then reveals that each job applicant got approximately equal speaking time regardless of their gender, the two advisors talked almost the same amount of time, while the female employers contributed much less to the conversation than the male employers did, with a ratio of approximately 1:4.

The ratio of women and men’s speaking time says a lot about gender relations in the program. On the one hand, the program appeared to be fair for women and men at least at the level of the number of job applicants. Female and male job applicants received equal opportunities and freedom to present themselves. No incidences showed that the male job applicants were allowed more discourse power than their female counterpart. As job applicants, who were young and lacking in professional experience and proper interviewing skills, they all received and
responded to the host and employers’ inquiries, challenges, ridicule, and some unpleasant remarks. Of note, two male applicants were employed in this episode, while two female applicants did not take any offer at the end although they were positively received by the employers in general.

On the other hand, with no female as host and a lot more male employers present, women were largely disadvantaged in the show’s overall discourse, as the host was in charge of the overall directing and facilitating of the job applicants’ self-presentation and employers contributed to a considerable part of the conversations. Of note, one might have the impression that the male employers’ dominance in the discourse was created because they were more frequently able to offer an applicant the right job. For instance, in this episode one job applicant came to the show for a position in the e-commerce industry, and none of the female employers had the right position for him, so they kept silent during almost the entire period of this applicant’s interview and left the questioning for others. However, an analysis of each employer’s interactions with the applicants indicates that this is an overly simplistic justification for the relatively minor contribution of women to the show’s discourse. In fact, analysis of the discourse shows that the female employers spoke up mostly under two circumstances: (1) When it was obviously their turn to speak, such as when they needed to tell the job applicant what position they could offer; (2) When the conversation topic was particularly focused on women. For example, two female employers were actively involved in a discussion about the importance of marriage and career for women (which will be analyzed more in detail in the next section). In comparison, the male employers were more active and spontaneous in the interactions with the job applicants across all topics. Whether or not the job applicant
was suitable for any position in their company, male employers were always more likely to participate in the conversation.

**Text analysis**

This section focuses on how the female gender and its relation with the male gender was discursively constructed and enacted through conversation contents during this episode. The following four excerpts are listed for analysis due to their direct as well as indirect relevance to the construction of women’s images.

Excerpt 4.1
(Bsn—female applicant)

1 Bsn: I’m a girl who likes to experience novelty.
2 During college, I took part in many activities as host or model.
3 I wish that I could have a more rapid growth through this show.
4 Transcending oneself is a victory.

Excerpt 4.1 is from a female job applicant’s pre-on-stage video, in which the present job applicant gives a very brief statement of his/her own specialties. As a grown-up woman in search of a future career, this job applicant depicted herself as a “girl” who wanted a “more rapid growth,” words that have the connotation of being very young, thus immature, lack of power, and in need of help and protection. As she comfortably related herself to such an image, she unconsciously internalized the belief that the female is inferior to the male. Nonetheless, the motto-like statement she made as the closing remark of her self-introduction, “Transcending oneself is a victory,” was quite empowering, revealing her desire to be stronger.

Excerpt 4.2
(Lgg, My—male employeres; Bsn—female applicant; Smx—female employer)

1 Lgg: I feel that you are not seriously looking for a job.
2 If you wanted to be a travelling critic, you should have done more research for tours.
3 I think you are using this stage only to show off.
4 What are you looking for?
5 What do you want?
6 Bsn: No, I just want to be a travelling [critic].
7 Lgg: [Secondly] I think you were not telling the truth.
Bsn: [OK, you please go on. Mmm.]

Lgq: [Considering your physical appearances], you as a senior college student you should have had offers at hand, at least three. Maybe your parents helped you with it (the job application), maybe yourself, or your boyfriend [helped].

Host: [Excuse me-]

Lgq: You said you didn’t have any (job offer), [I doubt that.]

Host: [Hold on. Hold on.]

My: [Guoqing], how come you said that “considering your [physical appearances”?]?

Host: [Eh, yes. Yes. Yes.]

My: It might not be so right.

Host: Guoqing, it’s like this… Wait a second.

You said that she should have had three offers considering her physical appearance.

Lgq: Right.

Host: But then right away you explained the three offers by saying “your parents helped you with it,” “your boyfriend helped you…” That has nothing to do with physical appearances then.

Lgq: No. It could help her- That (that she can have others finding a job for her) is about physical appearances.

Host: Even if she were not pretty, her parents would still help her with job applications.

Smx: Boss Li, Boss Li, I’d like to say that-

Lgq: The parents… For parents who help arranging jobs, [it’s hard, too].

Smx: [Boss Li, Boss Li.] I’d like to say that, I think for female, especially young girls, to be pretty looking is their advantage, but to live a pretty life is their true ability.

I believe she has the ability.

Bsn: Thank you.

In Excerpt 4.2, the employers placed emphasis on the job applicant’s physical appearances. As suggested in Lgq’s questioning and reasoning (line 1-5, 7, 9-12), he showed frankly his suspicion about the job applicant’s real intention in being on the program. His underlying belief was that women, especially pretty women, lack actual job competency, and their achievements result from their physical attractiveness, with which they easily got men’s help in applying for jobs. Women’s ability was considered less important than physical attractiveness. His unspoken judgment that appearance is the most important aspect for a woman was questioned.
by the host and other employers, male and female (line 15-20, 22, 23, 25, 28-30). It is noteworthy that while the host argued against Lgq’s reasoning for his disbelief in the job applicant’s genuineness by focusing on his logical error without pointing out the inappropriateness of his opinion, one female employer took the speech turn and expressed her belief about the relation between women’s appearance and ability (line 28, 29), which revealed Lgq’s unspoken bias that pretty women are incompetent and dependent. Besides, her practice of explicitly offering her personal support to the female job applicant (line 30) formed a women’s alliance in defense of attack from the male.

Excerpt 4.3
1 Lgq: What I want to ask is your plan for your life.
2 Perhaps you are clear about it, maybe clearer than we are.
3 We are helping you to find a good job, but actually you only want to find a good husband.
4 Bsn: No, I think a woman [must] rely on herself.
5 Lgq: Maybe…
6 A good marriage is the primary need for a woman.
7 That’s what my wife always says.
8 It’s more important to have a good marriage than a good job.
(Everyone laughs on hearing his words. Playful music accompanied.)
9 Bsn: A good marriage is very important, too-
10 Lgq: OK.
11 Bsn: Right-
12 Lgq: If you agree that a good marriage is more important than a good job,
13 then your job must comply with your goal to find a good marriage.
14 Host: Did you notice that, Meixia?
15 Smx: Boss Li, I think-
16 Host: Mr. Li Guoqing has a bias against pretty women.
17 Smx: Absolutely.
18 Host: Yes, whenever he talks about pretty women-
19 Can’t pretty women be self-reliant?
20 Can’t they be independent?
21 Why do pretty women have to get married?
22 And why do they have to get married with a good husband?
23 That-
24 Smx: Yes, yes, yes.
Excerpt 4.3 features a debate on the importance of marriage for women. Again, Lgq questioned the job applicant’s true intention to come to the show. This time he made it clear about his underlying belief that “a good marriage is the primary need for a woman” (line 6-8, 12, 13), which represents the stereotypically patriarchal ideology that women are more suitable for the domestic role and that being successful in career is the men’s task. To support his belief, Lgq even referred to a female—his own wife—to add to the credibility of such opinion. It is noteworthy that a whimsical tune and people’s laughter that followed suggested that such a statement was something deviant to contemporary progressive values, and thus inappropriate and funny to be said on this occasion. As was mentioned previously in the literature review, while such sayings are believed by many in contemporary China, gender equality and female independence have been officially encouraged, and established as the advanced, justified value to embrace. This is why the host, whose statements represent the show’s stand, argued against the male employer with strong and emotional expressions (line 18-22), as shown in his use of four rhetorical questions in a row.

Excerpt 4.4
1 Yf: There can be intuitions between women.
2 At least Meixia and I both will think that Bai is not here to look for a husband.
3 We can [feel it.]
4 Smx: [Quite agree.]
5 Yf: Right. And not every girl has to have a good marriage to be successful.
6 Smx: Right.
7 Yf: Meixia and I may not have a good marriage.
8 Smx: We are not married, [but we do fairly well].
9 Yf: [And we are not concerned.]
10 Host: [No, no. We wish you a good marriage.]
11 Don’t wish yourselves evil like this, OK? Don’t -
12 Yf: No. I want to say that the independence of personality [and spirit] for a female is unrelated to whether she married well.
13 Bsn: [Yes, yes.]
14 Smx: We will prove this to Boss Li.
We can have a good life, and have an even better marriage.

Men and women are actually equal in terms of spirit. [Even if a man were desperately poor],

Yf: If he had a rich spirit, [we would] believe it's great to marry him.

Host: [Absolutely].

Yf: [Materials do not] mean everything.

Host: [That’s true.] Li Guoqing brought so many reactionary values. Really-

Yf: So, we cannot use such indecent values [to judge all females].

Lgq: [I’m a feminist, I’m] a feminist indeed.

In Excerpt 4.4, the argument against Lgq’s patriarchal belief continued and developed to a new level, as another female employer, Yf, joined the defense for the job applicant on the surface and women in general in essence. She firmly objected to the idea that women must rely on their marriage—in other words, their husbands—to be successful and fulfilled. She argued very directly for women’s ability to gain material and spiritual achievements without men’s help, contrasting this with the Chinese notion that in a good marriage the husband is rich and the wife relies on the husband’s wealth without working too hard herself. Yf’s statements expressed straightforwardly the feminist idea that supports women’s independence and equality to men. The job applicant and another female employer expressed their support for Yf’s arguments, which made it more of a women’s challenge together against men’s prejudice. The host’s backing for her arguments (e.g. describing Lgq’s patriarchal value as “indecent”) further established the correctness of the feminist value. By the end of this debate, the male employer surrendered and declared that he actually support feminism. Although what he had said could hardly convince people that he was a real feminist, this statement nonetheless suggested that the feminist value is “decent” and worthy for women to pursue.
Discursive practice analysis

A total of twenty people (eight women and twelve men) contributed to the conversations that took place in this particular episode of *Only You*. Besides the two male hosts, one male and one female job application advisor who are present on a regular basis, this episode featured four job applicants—three females and one male, and twelve employers—four females and eight males. In this episode, the female accounted for one-third of the total conversations.

It is necessary to note that in this episode the three female job applicants were obviously more competent than the only male job applicant. The male job applicant did not have a college degree. His speech and body language suggested that he was insincere, unsure of himself, and not well prepared for the interview. For instance, he stammered a few times and gave confusing answers to several questions. He received negative responses from the employers and hosts, and he quickly left the stage since all the employers turned off their lights in the first round of decision-making. This man, therefore, did not receive much speaking time and was marked as a “loser” on stage.

In clear contrast, all three female job applicants were competitive, and each received several offers and obtained ideal jobs at the end. The first female applicant had a master’s degree in a top university in China, and was by then on the teaching faculty at another top university. Although she was criticized for her lack of clear career planning, which she admitted in the first place, her performances on stage showed that she had confidence and the required ability. For instance, when she was asked to present a mock oral presentation about a tourism attraction, she did it with coherent and impressive expressions. The second female applicant received
her bachelor’s degree from a well-known university in Canada where she had work experience. While she was characterized as being unenthusiastic and distant throughout her interaction, her work ethic and skills were impressive. The third female applicant was a recent college graduate with only a little work experience in the retail industry, but she won the host and employers’ admiration with her cheerful, quick, and witty responses, as well as her earnestness to work for one particular employer. With the three female job applicants doing well in their interviews, women’s great potential in the workplace was well recognized in this episode of the program.

Women received only four spots in the panel of twelve employers. It is difficult and misleading to generalize the characteristics of their discursive practices as a whole since they presented different levels of involvement in the show’s overall discourse. At one end of the spectrum, one female employer spoke only once during the show, talking briefly about what position she could offer the applicant. Since she spoke only once, she received few camera shots and was shown sitting deep in the chair, a gesture that showed her detachment from the conversation.

At the other end of the spectrum, another female employer was highly active during the show. She was frank in questioning or commenting on every job applicant, even offering harsh remarks. Also, she appeared quite at ease talking and even making fun of male employers. In between were two other female employers—one spoke twice at length to give an explanation to her job offer; the other spoke up more often but not for long, and she had a less aggressive speaking style compared to the female employer who spoke the most.

In brief, women as successful corporate leaders, while disadvantaged during the overall discourse, were shown to have different discursive practice styles, with
one female employer’s active discursive involvement broke the stereotypical feminine style of submissive, passive speaking. Featuring three successful female applicants vs. one male applicant refused by all the employers upheld women’s strong capability in the job market.

**Text analysis**

Unlike the 06/19/2011 episode, this episode of *Only You* featured no conversations focused on gender relations, so no explicit feminist or anti-feminist ideas were expressed during the show. Nonetheless, the ways in which women situated their gender identity was revealed from the ways in which they interacted with others.

Excerpt 5.1
(Gxf – female employer, Cjg – male job applicant, Jy – male employer)

1. Gxf: What are you talking about?
2. Have you done any preparation before you came?
3. Cjg: I…I…
4. Gxf: Generally speaking, before an interview [one should]-
5. Host: [Xiaofei,] Xiaofei, have some control of your emotion and facial expressions, OK?
6. Gxf: I’m really… I’m really very worried about you.
7. To be honest I even felt sleepy just now.
8. Why are you here?
9. Have you done any preparation before you came?
10. I bet you must have watched this show before.
11. I… Of course they’ll ask me, why do you want to quit the job?
12. Why do you want a new job?
13. You cannot give a clear answer to either of the two questions.
14. Leaving aside the first why –
15. Jy: He thought about it after [he was on stage].
16. Gxf: [Right. Leaving aside the] first why, the second why, why I want to do this job, you ought to consider it before.

This conversation took place right after the job applicant gave a quite impractical answer to the question about what he wanted to do as his career. The female employer almost burst out speaking with a rather worried and critical tone, expressing her dissatisfaction with the applicant by posing a series of questions. The
fact that she was of a higher social status compared to the applicant allowed her to gain the upper hand in this conversation. The respective gender of the interviewers did not seem to affect the interactional style of the female employer and other men. She did not expect serious answers to her questions, as she ignored the applicant’s attempt to explain and focused on her own questioning practice, which was rather confrontational and non-cooperative, and usually characteristic of masculine discourse style. She was interrupted twice during her discourse, but kept going with her thoughts right afterwards without allowing the male speakers to speak in turn. This unwillingness to be interrupted implied her resistance to the attempts by the men to take control over the discourse. It should be noted that the host’s interruption of the female employer’s speaking (line 5) was a cautionary advice about the way she spoke. The host suggested that her emotional expressions were not appropriate and should be adjusted. This is reflective of traditional Chinese culture, in which a decent woman is not expected to express strong emotion in public. Women are always supposed to express themselves in a restrained manner, which plays an intrinsic part in the practice of suppressing the power of their discourse.

Excerpt 5.2
(Myq—female applicant)

1 Host: Is that OK, Xiaofei?
2 Gxf: It is good.
3 What I saw is that out of interest you became a teacher of Chinese as a second language,
4 and then out of interest again you want to be a travel critic.
5 You don’t consider whether that company is reliable,
6 and you just want to do it since you think you are interested.
7 When this interest fades again, think about your resume.
8 After you have these two experiences, what is your third job going to be?
9 I figure that you should be twenty-seven or twenty-eight, right?
10 Myq: Umm, not yet twenty-seven.
11 Gxf: OK. Then when you will choose your job again, when you are thirty, what do you want to do?
12 Myq: Umm…
13 Gxf: Your career planning.
To be honest I did not plan it well when I chose to be a teacher. It was quite unexpected.

Host: What an enviable job applicant! She graduated from Peking University and teaches in Tsinghua University. Now she says that 'those were just pure coincidences. I don’t know why I chose them.'

Gxf: This is irresponsible to her own development. You were young back then, but now you still want to be irresponsible to yourself?

This excerpt took place after the female applicant gave a brief description of a tourist attraction to present her ability to be a travel critic. Although the female employer, Gxf, was not the one who could actually offer such a job, the host directly offered her the opportunity to speak (line 1), which suggested his belief in her authority to evaluate the job applicant. Instead of just commenting on her professional ability per se, Gxf quickly switched the focus to the concern about the job applicant’s career planning, which broke the gender stereotype that a woman is always supposed to take a supportive role during a conversation. With a rather impersonal tone, she critically analyzed the job applicant’s not-so-positive career life situation in the future and blatantly criticized her attitude toward career (line 3-9, 11, 13, 20-21). By doing so, the female employer pushed the applicant to face her problem, with little consideration of her feelings—a rather result-oriented way of speaking and thinking stereotypically characteristic of the male.

Excerpt 5.3 (Smx—female employer)
1 Smx: Shaogang, in fact, I think she wanted to cry five minutes ago.
2 Host: Yes. [Yes.]
3 Smx: [But she] has been holding back that impulse for a while.
4 Yinqiu, I think you can speak out your true feelings.
5 Why do your tears drop?
6 Is it something we said that hurt you?
7 Now you are on stage, you need to present to everyone the best side of you, so that the employers can see your best part, and then they’ll employ you.
8 Don’t show us your weak side.
This excerpt demonstrates how another female employer in the panel exhibited a quite feminine discourse style when communicating with the job applicant. When she could no longer bear the psychological pressure from being publicly criticized by the employers, the job applicant burst into tears. At this point, the female employer showed that she cared about the applicant’s thoughts and emotions. Unlike Gxf’s rather businesslike way of investigating, Smx’s tone was caring and encouraging, focusing more on the applicant’s feelings. By calling the applicant by her given name, the employer reflected her intention to demonstrate a bond so that the applicant could feel comforted. Also, she offered positive advice on what was an appropriate response under the circumstances rather than merely giving negative comments on what she did. Overall, although her identity on stage was presented as that of a successful businesswoman, Smx adopted a way of speaking that was typically feminine and that related more to her female identity rather than to her social status as a corporate leader.

Excerpt 5.4
(Cxh, Psy—male employers)

1 Cxh: Actually I didn’t look at her when we were turning off the lights.
2 I was looking at someone in particular.
3 I was looking at Mr. Pan (Psy).
4 Gxf: You are right. Why did Mr. Pan turn off his light? (Cxh then talked in length about his opinion that this job applicant had great potential to be an excellent sales person and therefore should be suitable for Psy’s company.)
5 Host: So why did you…
6 Psy: I have no idea, either. Why did I go out of my mind and turn off the light?
7 Gxf: I’ve been looking at you.
8 I was thinking that her experience is the most relevant to your business,
9 but you turned off your light.
10 There’s no way back now.
11 Psy: Turn my light back on.
12 Turn it on. Turn it on and let me say something.
13 Gxf: No, no, no. It’s [not fair then.] (Psy talked about how he agreed that this applicant had a good sales person quality, which contradicted his behavior in turning off the light)
Gxf: Why did you turn off your light?
Smx: He's here for the first time.
Psy: There are too many people gabbling here on the stage.
He's still puzzled.
Host: Mr. Pan, our program is very serious.
How come you say we are ‘gabbling’ the first time you join us?
Gxf: You are a big boss in charge of billions of wealth.
How come your mind went blank due to our gabbling?

This conversation centered on one male employer’s mistakenly turning off the light for a quite qualified job applicant. The female employer, Gxf, appeared to take great pleasure in Psy’s mistake. While another male employer also commented on Psy’s mistake, Gxf talked about it in a much less euphemized manner. While Cxh only indicated that he thought Psy should not have turned off his light, Gxf directly asked Psy how he came to make that mistake (line 4). In doing so, she appeared bolder and therefore appeared as powerful as Psy. Even though Cxh then took over the speech turn again and talked for an extended period (which is not shown in the excerpt for space considerations), he limited himself to complimenting the job applicant’s professional quality. In comparison, Gxf cared little about saving face for Psy, as she directly pointed out how he made an error (line 9) and the unfortunate result he had to accept (line 10). She also had a hint of satire in her tone. Then when Psy asked for a second chance to make his choice, even though the host should have been the one to consider this request, Gxf refused him decisively by hastily saying four “no” in a row, as if she was the one in charge of the show’s rules. After Psy gave an illogical explanation for his behavior, Gxf almost burst out laughing, and she posed that question again (line 14) to mock him. She further teased Psy about his inability to keep a clear mind on stage (line 21-22).

It is also noteworthy that another female employer responded to Gxf’s question about why Psy made the mistake with a response in a mocking tone that he
appeared for the first time and was “puzzled” (line 15-16). The practice by the female employers, especially that of Gxf who mocked the male employer, suggested that the power distribution within this particular discourse was actually toward the female. The way in which they spoke suggested that they did not perceive themselves as of a lower power status than their male counterparts.

Excerpt 5.5
(Lif—female applicant)
1 Host: What stuff, when you were out there selling…
2 That wording doesn’t sound right…
3 (What stuff) during your sales process, were sold very well?
4 Lif: Ah, don’t be nervous, Bro Gang.
5 Let me help you organizing your words.
6 Host: Ummm, OK. You organize it.
7 Lif: What you wanted to say is-
   (She was interrupted by the audience clapping and laughing.)
8 Host: I’m not nervous. You go on. Go on.
9 Lif: Right, right. I know you are tired now. Let me talk.
   (She then continued talking about her career experiences as a sales person.)

In Excerpt 5.5, the female job applicant interestingly took the upper hand with the host. The host at first embarrassed himself by unintentionally using an inappropriate expression (“out there selling,” – the phrase in Chinese being “Chu Lai Mai”) that was usually related to women selling their bodies. He soon rephrased his words and asked the job applicant a question. Instead of simply ignoring the host’s mistake and answering his question, the applicant took advantage of that mistake and joked with the host. She took the initiative in the conversation and acted as if attempting to comfort the host to alleviate the embarrassing atmosphere (line 4-5). She even called the host “Bro Gang,” a way of addressing someone in quite a close relationship. The host was caught unprepared by her impertinent response. Her words framed the host as “nervous,” “tired,” and not able to express his thought well – an image that is related to lack of power and capability. In contrast, she was the
one who could offer “help” and should do the talking, thus establishing more
discursive power than the host.

Excerpt 5.6
(Ljf read a letter she wrote to Smx before coming to the show emotionally.)
1 Ljf: I saw you (Smx) in the Only You show from Tianjin TV.
2 You looked wonderful and I was deeply attracted by you.
3 I think very few women can keep such a sense of affinity like you do after achieving career success.

As shown in Excerpt 2.6, the job applicant read part of a letter she wrote to a
particular employer, Smx, in which she explained why she came to the show to apply
for a position in her company. What is noteworthy in her letter here is that the reason
the applicant admired this particular female employer was because she “looked
wonderful” and had a “sense of affinity” even “after achieving career success.” As
shown in these descriptions, the female employer was complimented for her
presentation of femininity, which was placed in opposition to her remarkable career
success of being a CEO. In other words, at least for this applicant, a female
employer was still more recognized by her ability to live up to the traditional
expectation for a good woman rather than her professional capability.

Excerpt 5.7
(The female applicant said she wanted to be a sales assistant in Smx’s company.)
1 Host: But there are no sales positions in Meixia’s company.
2 Ljf: Isn’t there an administration assistant position?
3 I didn’t say I would not consider anything else.
4 Host: So sales assistant and administration assistant are both
acceptable.
5 Ljf: Yes.
6 Host: Would you please not hurt me any more in our following
conversation?
7 Ljf: Sure. The fact is that... Here’s what I thought...
8 I was like... I thought you would be very tough.
9 But after I came on stage...
10 Maybe because you feel tired by this time of the show or
something,
11 it’s out of my expectation that you did not hurt me –
Host: And you found that I’m actually fragile.
(Everyone laughed out loud)

Host: I tell you, lady. Don’t make me deal measure to you.

Ljf: I would hurt you if I did.

Ljf: Then do it!

Similar to Excerpt 2.5, this excerpt shows how the female applicant joked with the male host and by doing so challenged the host’s power in the discourse. Her use of a rhetorical question and a double negative indicated her strongly defensive psychology (line 2-3), which, as she later explained, was because she wanted to protect herself from the host’s aggressive comments. With such use of rhetoric, together with her loud and crisp voice, and her tendency to speak for extended time, this female applicant indeed gained more momentum on stage. In response, the host self-mockingly described himself as “hurt” and “fragile,” which, while livening up the atmosphere, positioned him in an inferior power status to the female applicant (line 14). What the host said next (line 15-16), while being a jokingly bluff, was a strong defensive reaction to the female applicant’s discursive challenge to his authority on stage. His wording of “deal measure to you” (“Chu Shou” as in Chinese, which literally means striking out one’s hands) and “hurt you” connotes a physical violent act, an extreme manifestation of power abuse from the superior group to the subordinate one, although disguised by the joking tone. The host’s attempt to suppress the female applicant’s discourse power was not successful, as she responded to his bluff in a fearless, even provocative manner with her eyes staring at the host and her chin up. Such a response of hers again challenged the power of the male host and further enhanced her power status in the discourse.
Analysis of Only You 08/14/2011

Discursive practice analysis

As always, the 08/14/2011 episode of the television show, Only You, featured a total of twenty people (six women and fourteen men) engaged in overall discourse. Those on stage included two male hosts, one male and one female job application advisor, two male and two female job applicants, and three female and nine male employers. In this episode, regardless of each person’s role, females contributed to approximately only 25 percent of the show’s total conversational contents.

Taking each person’s role on the show into account, results of the amount of talking engaged in by women and men differed considerably. Of the four job applicants, the two female applicants got slightly more speaking time than the two male applicants, since they were quite well-received by the employers and made it to the final step of getting an offer. In contrast, the two male applicants lacked the desired professional capability and ultimately did not get any offer. However, this is not to say that the male applicants were allowed less discursive power on stage. For instance, when one male applicant said he wanted to get a job as a singer, he was encouraged to sing a song on stage, and he also had an argument with the host and employers in defense of his design work. Similarly, the female applicants were asked to present their skills when needed. It is safe to say that every job applicant received an unbiased opportunity to present him/herself regardless of gender, and it is only their respective performances that determined the final outcome, which nonetheless upheld the greater professional capability of the female applicants.

Obviously, since the male employers outnumbered the female ones by six people, the female employers spoke for much less time compared to their male counterparts. In examining each of the three female employers individually, it was
revealed that they had different conversational involvement patterns during the show. Smx and Wy both spoke several times during the first applicant’s interview as they asked about her career experiences and expectations, because Smx was the one she most wanted to work for, and Wy wanted to offer her a job. They did not speak up during the applicant interview of any other candidate, thus adopting a very passive role during the rest of the show.

The third female employer, Gxf, spoke up much more frequently to facilitate the mutual decision-making between the employers and applicants, even when she could not offer a position. Such discursive practices as those of Gxf revealed her higher level of involvement in the discussions and her desire and effort to establish her status on stage among the other male and female conversational participants.

In short, similar to the other two episodes, while dominance of discourse remained in the hand of male employers, this episode of Only You featured successful businesswomen with varied discursive practice styles. Besides, given unbiased opportunity to present oneself to the employers, the female applicants were seen more competent that the male ones.

Text analysis

Similar to the 07/31/2011 episode, gender relations were not put forward explicitly as a discussion topic during this episode. Despite this, gender still inevitably played a role during the interactions between those who were involved in the conversation, from which subtle but significant implications on how women were presented in the show could be drawn. Two excerpts from this episode were especially worth examining in detail.

Excerpt 6.1
(Dk—male employer, Xr—offstage assistant host, Zqy—female applicant)

1 Dk: You need to tell us why should we give you this opportunity.
2 What value can you bring us?
Host: What can you bring to your employer during this year?
Dk: Or else it should be you that need to pay any boss here who marries— recruits you. (The Chinese words for “marry” and “recruit” in this context are very similar.)

Sorry, it was a slip of the tongue.
Host: Mr. Du, you forgot yourself just now.
Xr: Even Mr. Du forgot himself!
He must be thinking ‘a pretty girl like this, what kind of man can marry her?’
Then he just spilt the beans! (Laughing)

As shown above, a male employer had a slip of the tongue when interviewing an applicant and this was remarked upon by the other participants. In this case, the applicant was a good-looking female undergraduate student, and before that she got compliments from the host and the career advisor on her decent gestures. Although it was an inadvertent mistake, which was not uncommon for Chinese, it was not simply dismissed after the employer’s apology. It became quite a joking matter as the host emphasized it by commenting that the employer forgot himself (line 6), indicating that he paid too much attention to the applicant’s beauty and thus relationship matters and thus became unprofessional and inappropriate. Of note, the host made that comment succinctly and implicitly, but the show further included the offstage assistant host’s response to that mistake, who was so amused by it and started describing why it happened based on his own imagination to make the situation more funny and add to the voyeuristic effect of the mistake (line 8-10). As indicated from the two hosts’ responses, it is not the slip of tongue per se that was funny, but the underlying connotation of the phrase. The employer involuntarily made himself a man so obsessed about the beauty of the woman that he wasn’t able to keep a clear mind. The slip of tongue might be less funny if it was of a word other than “marry,” but one irrelevant to an intimate relationship between men and women, or if the female applicant was not as good-looking. As in the 06/19/2011 episode, the males seemed to put undue emphasis on the female applicant’s prettiness and
consideration about her marriage, a typical indication of the patriarchal value that confines women to such subordinate domestic roles.

Excerpt 6.2
(Co—male employer, Gxf—female employer)
1  Co:   I hope you can help us find some stars, who are not very popular abroad but very popular in China.
2  Co:   I believe during the past five years when you were in the U.S. –
3  Gxf:  Those who are popular in China must be even more popular abroad –
4  Co:   Wrong.
5  Gxf:  You want to find someone very famous in China but has little fame abroad.
6  Co:   You are looking for a real bargain.
7  Co:   Let’s take an example, like ‘The Big Bang Theory,’ an American TV show.
8  Co:   This show might not be so popular in the U.S. as in China.
9  Co:   He (the leading actor in the show) might be just an ordinary actor –
10 Gxf: Those who are popular in China must be even more popular abroad.
11 Gxf: Those who are popular in China must be even more popular abroad.
12 Co:   Then how many Chinese people have seen this show? Have you done a marketing audit?
13 Co:   I haven’t. That’s why I want someone to do it, right.
14 Co:   How do you know the group that watches American TV shows?
15 Co:   That’s exactly what I want her for.

Excerpt 6.2 features an argument in which one female employer questioned the reasonability of a job provided by one male employer. She took a dominant role here in this conversation as she criticized and interrogated the male employer. She interrupted him to argue against his idea (line 3), a characteristically aggressive practice of seizing dominance in the discourse. A quite critical and assertive tone was adopted in her statement, as shown in her use of the modal word “must” (line 3). The uses of the pronoun “you” was also a clear indication of her confrontational attitude (line 5, 6, 11, 13). All these characteristics were in a typically masculine style.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The previous chapters involved descriptions of analyses designed to answer the following research questions: How are images of women, discursively constructed by verbal and non-verbal texts, represented in popular reality television shows in China? Do the shows exhibit progressive traits that challenge conventional roles of women? The following is a summary of the previous analysis of the six episodes from *If You Are the One* and *Only You*.

Comparing the multimodal analysis of the two shows, the research revealed that some stereotypical gender messages are sent through several important televisual texts. In the dating show, *If You Are the One*, the physical femininity of women is emphasized as a major attraction of the show. The female characters are designed to appear very sexy in the animated title sequence and logo of the show; the stage setting and camera work all combine to maximize the attractiveness of the female contestants. By featuring such an excessive number of attractive women on the show, the visual impact is enhanced. In addition, many of the single women were not given the opportunity to speak while on the show. These facts all indicate the objectification of female participants, as they are presented to satisfy visual pleasure in looking, and are thus situated in a passive position for the active “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975).

Such a patriarchal emphasis on the physical appearances of women is to a large extent diminished in the job search show, *Only You*, where female employers and job applicants are presented in the same manner as their male counterparts. The emphasis on the voyeuristic value of women is non-existent in the title sequence and logo of the job search show, as there are no female characters in them. Such an absence of women, however, paradoxically suggests another stereotypical belief...
based on the patriarchal ideology that women are less suitable to perform non-domestic tasks and thus less valuable in the job market.

The lack of attention paid to the physical appearances of the women probably results from the job-interview nature of the show, since what the employers value about the applicants is their competence rather than mere appearance. However, as demonstrated in the text analysis of the 06/19/2011 and 08/14/2011 episode, some male employers paid undue attention to the physical attractiveness of the female applicants, and even expressed some male hegemonic beliefs that women were dependent, inferior, and should be confined to domestic arenas. In this case, though, those expressions were strongly argued against and marked as inappropriate.

In the three episodes of Only You under analysis, the abilities of women to develop career achievements equal to men were revealed. Female employers, as successful entrepreneurs and senior managers, were positioned as equals to the male ones. Furthermore, female job applicants were shown to possess solid educational backgrounds and/or strong work abilities, and usually performed better on stage than the males. Thus, contrary to the messages conveyed by the title sequence and logo, this show challenged the stereotypical representation of women in media as domestic roles or objects of sexual desire. Such a discrepancy might be reasoned by the consideration that the design of the title sequence and logo is based on a stereotypical projection of gender roles, while the reality does not necessarily conform to that.

Of note, there were also a number of outstanding female participants in the If You Are the One show, who have a good education and/or a successful career. However, since the focus of the dating show is on relationship and marriage matters – a domestic concern stereotypically of greater importance to the female, the
presentation of the female guests centering on aspects of career achievements is quite limited. Challenges of the dating show to the stereotypical images of women in media are restricted.

In both shows, the power distribution in discourse gravitates considerably towards the male, no matter how many women are present. The confinement of women’s discourse power is mostly manifested in the control of overall discourse by the male hosts during both shows. The lower power status of women in discourse is further enhanced in the *If You Are the One* show by the more comprehensive presentation of each single male guest and the male psychologist’s more active and performative participation in discourse. Similarly, in the show *Only You*, the power of the women’s discourse was further limited by the existence of a not so necessary male assistant host, and the number of male employers was double that of the female ones. The male employers were also generally more active in asking questions and giving comments to the job applicants.

In many instances, the speeches of the women on the shows revealed their internalization of a submissive role. This was especially prominent in the dating show, where some women considered themselves inferior, in need of protection by men. They also objected to the idea of overpowering men. The ways in which women presented themselves on the shows mostly conformed to a typical feminine style, characterized by their scant and generally passive involvement in discussions, the tendency to allow interruptions by the men while they were speaking, and the avoidance of verbal confrontations. According to researchers on the social construction of gender through languages (e.g. West & Zimmerman, 1987, Holmes, 2005, Fairclough, 1992), these characteristics of the speech of women are symbols of their lower social status in this patriarchal culture.
There are also several cases in the analysis where women adopted a more masculine style of speaking, as they were shown arguing, interrogating, criticizing, or making fun of their male conversation partners. By doing so, they achieved a relevant higher power status in those small discourses. Such challenges to the dominant discourse of male power were not always well received, as manifested by the hosts’ oppressive discursive practices in response to them.

In both shows, when explicit patriarchal thoughts were expressed during the conversation, women always spoke up to support feminist ideas on gender equity and women’s rights. They were shown arguing against some typical patriarchal ideas and practices, such as judging women by their appearances, regarding child-rearing as the core obligation of women, and suggesting that women better fit in the domestic realm. The shows’ hosts also stated their support for feminism on some occasions. By supporting the feminist challenge to the patriarchal ideology, they brought progressive values to the shows, advocating that women be seen in an equal light as men and be recognized as having equivalent value and ability, just as men do in society.

In general, most of the time, the discursive construction of the female gender by men, women, or the shows as institutions abides by the patriarchal ideology and positions the female in an inferior power status to that of the male. Nevertheless, as the media, although hegemonic, leaves room for the subordinate groups to express their ideologies and values, progressive traits in the reality television shows also exist. Representations of women in the shows are not merely confined to stereotypical ones that posit them as domestic wives and sex objects. Women are shown to challenge the dominant power of men through their discursive practices, and feminist ideas are supported when relevant conversations are brought up.
Another research question posed by the analysis of the two shows is, “What does the representation of women and feminist/patriarchal ideas in reality television shows demonstrate about the role and status of women in contemporary Chinese society? To answer this question, it is necessary to identify the level of truthfulness and whether the two shows reflect societal reality in the first place.

As both shows, *If You Are the One* and *Only You*, claim to be service-oriented programs for the public – helping singles find love, or helping people find a job – they have one thing in common: they feature mostly ordinary people with these two common needs on stage. In addition, both shows enjoy great popularity with thousands of people applying to be on them. The selected participants bring to the shows a great diversity in terms of their personality, education, worldview, etc. Although media critics have reminded us that reality television shows are not to be confused with reality, and that they have writers behind the scene to design certain lines for the show participants (e.g. Booth, 2004), for contemporary Chinese reality shows under strict regulation by the government, at least they present people on stage with their real identities and real thoughts. Unlike shows that feature lives of celebrities or marginalized groups, the two shows under study are quite close to the real situation of lives of the ordinary people. In this respect, the ways in which women and womanhood are represented on stage, therefore, reflect social realities.

That the female is discursively constructed as the inferior gender during the shows indicates the same reality as in society at large. The state is male-dominated, and so is the market. What the *Only You* show presents about the status of women and men in the job market exactly mirrors the real situation in society: while many women are indeed competent and have great potential to achieve success, they are much less in number and have lower status than men in similar positions of power.
The glass ceiling effect for women in workplaces is prominent, hindering competitive women from getting faster and better promotions.

There is a serious gender imbalance in China, so particularly in the young generation, women are said to be more selective now in choosing their partners. This means men need to make more efforts to compete for their love. This situation is reflected in the dating show’s general design where single men strive to give a positive and impressive presentation on stage and are subject to elimination by single women.

This, however, does not seem to alter the fact that men still have advantages when considering the issue of marriage. Women in general are still under pressure to get married before thirty years of age, while their fertility and physical attractiveness are at their peak. On the contrary, as reflected from what several single women said on stage, that they wanted their men to be mature and protective, men do not have the urge to marry early. According to a multi-city report conducted by Jiayuan.com (2011) on the attitudes of young Chinese men and women toward marriage in contemporary society, women are judged largely by their age, appearance, and the ability to be a supportive assistant behind the husband, which primarily means taking care of the family chores. Meanwhile, men are primarily measured by their ability to make money, by their maturity, and physical masculinity. Such criteria for spouse selection largely conforms to the traditional gender concepts constructed through the patriarchal culture in China. The Confucian belief that men play the key role in the society while women are responsible for family management still seems prevalent today. This social reality is reflected in the single men’s discursive construction of their ideal girlfriend, as someone who is good-looking, submissive, and/or good at housekeeping.
Correspondingly, the expressions of feminist ideas in both shows by both the females and males indicate the growth of feminist consciousness in the society. Support by the hosts for feminist ideas on several occasions is particularly noteworthy, as their statements largely represent the official voice of the shows. Their arguments against some patriarchal values, which are demeaning to women, suggest the social recognition of feminist efforts to raise the social status of women.

In brief, the reality television shows represent a microcosm of contemporary Chinese society, in which the male remains the dominant gender no matter whether in the workplace or in heterosexual relationships. In the meantime, women as the subordinate group posed challenges to the male-dominated gender hierarchy by adopting and promoting feminist ideas and ways of communicating with men.

The media does not merely reflect the social world, but contributes to the establishment of dominant cultural norms by influencing audiences. The social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) posits that audiences of television do not receive the televised contents passively. Rather they cognize, reflect, regulate, and vicariously learn from them about what is appropriate to do under particular circumstances. Similarly, Gerbner’s (1969) cultivation theory proposes that consumers of media productions like television programs are subtly cultivated by those media contents. Their perceptions of reality are likely to be shaped by the reality presented on television, and their attitudes are also likely to be fashioned by those presented on the screen. Strasburger’s (1995) study of the perceptions of viewers of dating shows reveals that as participants are viewed as “real people,” they are seen as a peer group by the viewers, who then identify more with them than with characters in fictional dramas.
Considering the perceived authenticity and great popularity of reality television shows in China, they perform a significant role in the construction of people’s perception of society. In addition, since the major target audience of reality television shows like *If You Are the One* and *Only You* is the young generation, whose values and ideologies matter to the future trends of social culture, the shows are expected to shoulder some social responsibility as they guide their viewers with more advanced, ethical values that accord with social development.

How these shows portray the roles and status of women inevitably have an influence on how women are perceived and positioned in the real world. Due to the hegemonic nature of the media, women are presented with less discourse power in the overall discourses of the reality television shows, which is consistent with the general social reality of gender hierarchy, and thus risks reinforcing such patriarchal gender norms. At the same time, the existence of progressive traits in these shows via their ability to convey the message that women have equal rights and ability, and should not be confined to stereotypical gender roles, contributes to feminist efforts to challenge the male-dominated gender hierarchy.

From the viewpoint of social construction theory, that which is socially constructed, such as gender and gender relations, can be reconstructed and rearranged as other aspects of social, political, and economic life evolve (Lorber, 1991, Rothenberg, 1998). It is expected that one day, the representation of women in media discourse as a group equal to men with no confinement of gender roles, will not merely demonstrate some “progressive traits,” but a truthful reflection of a non-patriarchal social reality.
CHAPTER 6
LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study faces several limitations. This study on representation of women in popular Chinese reality television shows is based on the paradigm of heteronormativity. Men and women are positioned as two opposite genders for the research purpose. Such a bipolar categorization of gender has been called into question by social scientists and feminists, who note that there are many more gender identities than just two, and that the differences between genders are rather more gradual than distinct (van Dijk, 2008). Basing the research on these essentialist categorizations is therefore restrictive, and risks overlooking other important facts in the media discourse, while revealing only a partial picture of the issue of gender representation and construction in media.

Analysis of different aspects of discourse in the current study relies solely on the researcher’s personal description and subjective interpretation of the texts. A challenge, therefore, exists in the complete identification and interpretation of messages conveyed in those texts. Although such subjectivity is intrinsic to qualitative research, especially research from a feminist perspective, it risks the perceived validity of the study, especially considering the possibility of polysemy in texts. As a qualitative research, this study provides an in-depth look at how images of women are discursively constructed by and in the media, but lacks the generalisability to generate a comprehensive picture of the issue in the Chinese media industry. Future research may approach this topic with a quantitative research method.

The current study focuses on two reality television shows in China, which, although very popular and representative of their respective categories, may not represent other sub-genres of reality television shows in China. In addition, as the
sampled episodes are within a relatively short time span, the research lacks comparison between shows developed for different social backgrounds to see how the representation of women in those shows has changed through time and what social changes are reflected. Future research can focus on such horizontal or longitudinal comparisons of reality television shows to reveal worthwhile findings.

This current study contributes to the literature of representation of women in reality television shows by bringing a non-U.S. perspective. Future research should apply a similar approach to examine reality television shows in other cultures or nations to further expand this literature. In particular, studies that make cross-cultural comparisons on this topic will expand the depth and dimension of this literature.

Finally, as this study focuses solely on the production of the media discourse about women and womanhood, it leaves room for the examination of the consumption of those discourses. Studies on how viewers of reality television shows receive and interpret the discursive construction of gender and gender relations in the shows will bring more valuable insights to this topic.
Yes underscore indicates emphatic stress.

[xxx] brackets mark the onset and completion of overlapping talk.

(xxx) parentheses mark editorial comments.

– en dash indicates incomplete or cut-off utterance

… suspension points indicate intermittence of dialogue.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Harris, M. (2004). Gender trouble in Paradise (Hotel), or a good woman is hard to find. Feminist Media Studies, 4(3), 356-358.


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Since her graduation from Shenyang No. 2 High School, China in 2005, Xiaoxi Zhang has pursued an education with an interest in cross-cultural communication. Xiaoxi majored in Film, Drama and Television Literature with a focus on script translation and dubbing in the Communication University of China during 2005-2009, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Xiaoxi attended the University of Florida in 2009 to pursue a master’s degree in Mass Communication. Her areas of research interest now include international/intercultural communications, public relations, media ethics, and women’s studies.