A Research Report
of a
Baseline Survey of Students' Attitudes
towards
Gender Stereotypes and Family Roles

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background of the Study

A Baseline Survey of Students' Attitudes towards Gender Stereotypes, Family Roles AND Non-traditional Family Roles was commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission in April, 2000. A major objective of the study was to establish the present level of acceptance gender stereotypes, family roles and non-traditional family types by students for future comparison. It was also a broader and ultimate goal of the study to assess the effectiveness of the various efforts to promote equal opportunity concepts among students. It is intended that the survey will provide information and useful data for professionals in the field of education, social welfare and other disciplines for the formulation of effective strategies in pursuing integration and equal opportunities for people regardless of their gender or social background.

Research Objectives:

1. To survey children's attitudes towards gender stereotypes, gender roles in the family and non-traditional family types with regard to the following:
   a) The extent to which they recognize and accept gender stereotypic views of personal traits and occupations, and aspects of school life:
   b) The extent to which they accept arrangements of family roles according to gender, which include child care responsibilities, household chores, work-family role commitment, and wife/husband as the major breadwinner;
   c) The extent to which they accept non-traditional families such as divorced families and reconstituted families.

2. To establish a set of indices of children's attitudes toward gender stereotypes, gender roles in family, and non-traditional family types.

3. To examine the relationship between children's gender stereotypes, gender roles in family, and non-traditional family types and the following factors:
   a) demographic and economic characteristics;
   b) personal background and experiences concerning gender roles in family, and non-traditional family types;
   c) aspirations about future spouse and family roles;
   d) exposure to specific programmes to promote equal opportunity concepts for

both genders, and persons with non-traditional family types [Special Educational Television (ETV) Programme on Equal Opportunities, and other special programmes by school/student groups or other non-governmental organizations].

Methodology

Sample

The survey of students attitudes towards gender stereotypes, family roles and non-traditional family types involved 3310 questionnaires collected from students in P.4 (729) F1 (90) F.4 (935) and F.6 (706). Two versions of the questionnaire were used. The junior version was for students in P4 and F1, while the senior version was for F.4 and F.6 students. The basic structure and dimensions of the measuring instruments used in the two versions were the same. However, in view of the less sophisticated vocabulary and the concentration span of lower form students, the junior version was shortened accordingly with vocabulary that was more age appropriate.

Measuring instrument

Adjective checklists covering personality and occupational stereotypes, a family role scale and vignettes were the main instruments used to examine four main areas: gender stereotypes in general, gender stereotypes in the school context, gender role expectations in the family and attitudes towards non-traditional family types. Both adjective checklists and the family roles attitude scale were found to have good overall reliability scores and were able to distinguish adequately between high and low scorers. Five vignettes scenarios were designed to represent five kinds of non-traditional family types. These were a classmate coming from a single parent (divorced) family, a classmate coming from a re-constituted family, a classmate with a mother in Mainland China, a classmate whose mother had died and a classmate with age discrepant parents (an elderly father). Responses options were designed to reflect the degree of acceptance of children of the key characters in the vignettes.

Focus groups

Focus groups were held with young people of ages similar to those included in the study. We wanted to elicit their impressions about gender stereotypes, family roles and

non-traditional family types as well as to ascertain the vocabulary that was familiar to them so that we could incorporate it wherever possible in the measuring instrument. Initial versions of the scales were shown to focus group members and changes made based on their recommendations.

Pilot tests

A pilot study was carried out in two primary schools and three secondary schools to test-run the questionnaires and the administration procedures. A total of 355 questionnaires were distributed. This led to a further modification of some of the vocabulary to make it more comprehensible for junior forms, and changes to preamble on how to fill out the questionnaire.

Results and discussion

It is very important to remember that our young people live in a world that is profoundly gendered in nature. The three major social institutions that influence them, the family, the school and the media, all offer versions of the world where males and females are subject to different expectations and standards of behaviour. The profound influence of gender on the way that youngsters think about their world is evident in this research. This is not surprising but there are also signs that the issue is not as clear cut as it used to be and that some boundaries, at least, are dissolving – for instance, in the general acceptance amongst both male and female students that women will have a career.

How stereotypical is students' thinking in relation to potential jobs and careers?

Although gender stereotyping was observable in relation to which subjects are suitable for males and which for females, they are much less stereotypical than notions about career choices. Junior students tended to be more stereotyped in their thinking about subjects than the senior students. Both male and female students were markedly gender stereotyped in their thinking about job suitability and there was a good deal of agreement between them about occupations that were suitable for males and those that were suitable for females. When they were asked to imagine being the opposite sex and then choosing a suitable career, there were marked changes in their personal choices of career. Although they paid lip service to the idea that most occupations were suitable for either gender, stereotypical thinking still dominated career preferences. Very few of them targeted themselves beyond stereotypical boundaries in career options. The

patterns of choice were very clear for both males and females and this must, presumably, reflect the dominant differentiations between men and women in our society. Such thinking disbars individuals from even thinking about doing something different. In addition there are macro implications; if a society is marked by stark job/occupational segregation, the economy cannot develop to its full potential

How stereotypical is their approach to personal traits?

Students were given a checklist of personality traits and asked to state whether they were masculine, feminine or neutral. Among both junior and senior forms, male students were more inclined than female students to perceive masculine traits as masculine, whereas the female students saw them as being neutral. Examples include traits like having a strong personality, being independent and having leadership abilities. This seems to suggest that students considered it reasonable for females to aspire to be more like a male. Indeed, if young women are going to be successful in our competitive society, then they will need the more `masculine' traits. At the same time, they need to hold back, so that family and nurturing roles can be accommodated.

Was it also acceptable for males to want to emulate qualities usually associated with females? Apparently, yes, at least in some areas, although it was true that students in all forms were more stereotypical in their perceptions of feminine than masculine traits. Amongst both the junior and senior forms, female students perceived feminine traits as more feminine than the male students, who saw them as being more neutral. Examples include traits like shyness, being sympathetic, and being sensitive to the environment and others needs. On the whole, both male and female students were in general agreement over traits considered neutral although there were some minor differences. For instance the junior students were divided on the traits of active and persistent while the senior students were not in agreement about active and silent.

If stereotypical perceptions of gender traits persist, it jeopardizes the development of human potential and capabilities, given that people will be confined to develop within the straight-jackets of socially defined roles and gender-appropriate behavioural patterns. This also reinforces the segregation and rigidity of gender roles and thus social statuses.

To what extent are students normative in their thinking about the gender division of labour?

The most normative in their attitudes towards gender roles were the junior forms especially the boys, while the most non-normative were, predictably, the senior girls. Overall, the female students were less normative in their thinking across all ages than their male counterparts. We would surmise that exposure to the non-normative ideas of the senior girls encouraged the senior boys to adjust their ideas somewhat. Generally, the responses showed that participants were quite supportive to the idea of a woman having a career. However both males and females expected that the husband would be the major breadwinner in the family. It was also clear that women were still identified by both genders as being more suitable for the care of young children. Senior girls had high aspirations but still within certain parameters – they do not want to be the main breadwinner, they do want themselves and their children to be provided for but they also want to work.

Certain findings stand out. For instance, there were major disagreements between senior males and females on four statements. The boys were adamant that it was `unacceptable for the girls to take the initiative in courtship and dating' (the girls were neutral). Male students were horrified at the prospect that boys `should be trained in domestic science, household work and childcare' (the girls agreed with the statement) and appalled at the thought that `daughters and sons should share the housework equally' (the girls strongly agreed). They were further dismayed at the idea of having a woman boss (the girls were accepting of that). As we go on to argue in a later section, this rigidity in gender roles that young males demonstrate is not in their long-term best interests, even if in the short term it means they can avoid tasks which they find distasteful!

What are the students' views about parenthood?

Our study was not primarily concerned with ideas about parenthood but some interesting views were found, particularly regarding fatherhood, which are worth reporting here. There seemed to be greater concurrence among views in the junior forms, while male and female respondents from the senior forms had more divergent opinions. Many of the views were what one would expect. Amongst the junior forms both girls and boys thought that fathers should be the main breadwinner and that children should not live with fathers after divorce. Boys strongly disagreed with the idea of fathers being `househusbands' while girls found it acceptable. Among the senior students both male and female respondents disagreed with the statement that fathers should be the final decision makers in the family, thought that the father should be the main breadwinner, and agreed that children should not live with the father after divorce.

Their ideas about `househusbands' mirrored those of the junior students. In addition, females disagreed with the statement that husbands/fathers should be spared household duties after work, while male respondents were neutral. The same difference of opinion was seen on the statement that husbands/fathers should be head of "external affairs", while wives/mothers should be head of "internal affairs".

However, the most interesting finding was that students of all ages and both genders agreed with the statement that `if the father works long hours and has little time for the children, it would not be good for their healthy development'. This is interesting because the statement probably represents the normative position. Traditionally, fathers in Chinese societies have had an emotionally distant position in the family and take a role as a disciplinarian rather than a loving presence. Although this position has changed somewhat in modern Hong Kong, fathers are still distant because of job demands and working long hours. Yet our participants were very clear. They want a father to be involved in their lives and believe that his absence is potentially harmful for them. Our children, at least, are not satisfied with `hands-off' fatherhood.

Ideas about motherhood were much as one would expect. Amongst both junior and senior forms women were seen as being better at and more suited to looking after children. They were more likely to want to stay at home to take care of them particularly if they had a partner who could financially support them. But there were differences between the junior and senior forms. Both male and female juniors agreed that women should have less ambitious career goals because of family responsibilities and that a family is more important to a woman than a career. By the senior forms, the female respondents no longer agreed with the first statement and views about the second one had become more divergent, so that there was no clear gender pattern in response.

These ideas about parenthood confirm our view that if a society seeks greater gender equality, then both males and females should be freed from stereotypical constraints. If attention is given only to freeing one gender, without the concomitant and complementary development of the other, the efforts of one party will eventually be frustrated by the non-cooperation of the other.

Do young women have more choices; the office and the kitchen?

The answer to this question based on our research is definitely yes. There is less stereotypical thinking about young women by young women and about young women

by young men amongst our respondents. Because our respondents think it is reasonable for a woman to aspire to be more like a man, young women have a wider range of choices available to them in attitude and behaviour. Young men are more constrained by stereotypical thinking in their attitudes about masculinity and are therefore, presumably, more concerned that what they do matches what males are expected to do. Young women think that physical education, mathematics and computers are suitable for both sexes, for instance, whereas young men tend to think that they are male activities.

These differences are seen most vividly in the answers to the Perception of Gender Roles in the Family Scale. Women are expected to contribute to their parents' daily living expenses after they are married, expected to have a career but also thought to be better at looking after children than men and are expected by our young male respondents to stay at home to do so (our female students were neutral on this issue). Men are expected to be the major breadwinner by both sexes but neither sex agrees that the husband/father should be the person to make the final decisions on important matters.

These are just a few examples but it is obvious that some of the traditional boundaries are breaking down. The definitions of what it means to be masculine and feminine are changing. Males are losing their unquestioned authority in the family and elsewhere yet a truly egalitarian family life is still not valued, as seen in the emphatic negative responses of our young male respondents to the idea of being taught household and child care skills and of sharing household and childcare duties. Our young female respondents were much more enthusiastic about the possibility of men sharing these tasks. Presumably there is still a sense among young males that these quintessentially female activities are low in the hierarchy and would affect their status if they were seen to participate in them. If they already sense that their `masculinity' is under attack refusal to participate in domestic chores may be one way of shoring up their sense of themselves as men. In our view, there is a need for re-negotiation of what `being a man' means. This would entail less reliance on success, assertiveness and strength and support for permission-giving to young men to be more aware of the reflective and nurturing side of their natures. To reverse the more usual phrase; why can't a man be more like a woman? Our findings in this area are supported by those of Yeung and Kwong (1996) who found that female secondary school students had more progressive attitudes towards egalitarian family practices and equal family roles.

With greater variety of choice comes other burdens, however. Women are thought

to be capable of managing both a career and a family and thus satisfying both sides of their natures. But with little input from the husband/father on the domestic front they may find themselves over-stressed and over-burdened, trying to juggle two `jobs' at the same time. Because they are expected to be capable in both areas, young women have to plan ahead. Careers like nursing, teaching and social work (as well as matching stereotypical ideas about female qualities) allow them the flexibility they need. Other careers, like business and law, do not. The norm is `24 hour a day' work and these norms are not adjustable. A woman is only likely to be successful if she is prepared to be treated like a man. Thus if there is to be gender equality it has to involve changes in both occupational and family structures and the preparedness of men to participate on equal terms in family life. But in order for this to happen the negative attitude of males towards these traditionally female activities needs to be changed. `I am too important to participate equally in the family' could be said to typify the male response. `It's OK to be successful, but not too successful. And it's not OK to be the main breadwinner' sums up the females' view.

The research of Shek (1995a; 1995b) on the subject of marriage in Hong Kong is apposite to consider at this point. He has shown that marriage has a statistically significantly negative effect on women's sense of well-being and mental health, whereas the opposite is true for men. He also found that the longer men were married the greater satisfaction they expressed. The reverse was true for women. His conclusion is that married men are winners, and married women losers in Hong Kong. Yip (1998) has found that statistically marriage is a risk factor for suicide among women in Hong Kong but a protective factor for men. All of this suggests that there is a need for re-norming and re-socialization concerning the meaning of `masculinity' and `femininity' and their relationship to gender roles within the family. The greater possibilities and latitude available for women to develop must be coupled with concomitant freedoms and acceptance on the part of men to take up complementary social and familial roles i.e. those tasks originally performed by women. We seem to be a very long way from such a re-negotiation of roles.

Is school life a gendered experience?

Preferences for male or female class teachers was more noticeable among the junior students but much less so among senior ones. Class teacher preference among junior students was obviously closely related to their perception of female teachers as more lenient, friendly and caring. Students were asked to rate their male and female teachers on six dimensions (lenient/strict, lively/boring, favouritism/fair,

friendly/unfriendly and confident/unconfident). Clear differences in opinion emerged about male and female teachers and the way they were perceived differently by male and female students. For instance, about 50% of students across all forms perceived their male teachers as confident but the percentage of students that thought female teachers were confident dropped precipitously from around 55% in F4 to 30% in F4 and F6. Female students in the senior forms consider female teachers to be much more strict than is the case for the male students. However, the findings need to be taken cautiously since student-teacher interactions are the result of mutual, reciprocal influence and affected by many contextual and personal factors. Further research is necessary to explore these findings in greater depth.

School subjects were obviously seen to be more or less suitable for male and female students. Participants were asked to assign a list of subjects as appropriate for male or female students, or both. Among junior students languages, Putonghua, mathematics and general knowledge were considered suitable for both. Boys thought that studying computer was more suitable for boys while girls disagreed. Likewise, boys thought that physical education was more suitable for boys, while girls disagreed. Art and music were seen as feminine subjects. Senior form participants thought that languages, biology, geography, Putonghua, computer, art, music, history and chemistry (in descending order) were suitable for both genders. Male and female students did not agree on mathematics, wood and metal work, and physical education, with males having the more stereotypic views. Both males and females agreed that domestic science was a female subject. Recent research published by Wong, Lam and Ho (in press) provides further evidence that school is, indeed, a gendered experience. They found that, in line with international experience, girls were outstripping boys in academic performance based on grades in HKCEE by a very significant margin. This was not an aspect that the present research covered but it is obviously of great relevance to our concerns.

Extra-curricular activities followed a similar pattern with a clear division into those thought suitable for both, while other activities were highly gendered. A girl wanting to join the football club and a boy wanting to learn dance would almost certainly feel themselves to be out of place. Generally, stereotypical perceptions were more marked for male than for female students. Almost certainly such perceptions will affect students' choice of activities.

Leadership preferences among students were represented by asking them about their choices for class monitor and Chairperson of extra-curricular activities. Most

students expressed egalitarian views in response to the question about class monitors. Either they had no preference or they thought that one of each (male and female) should be class monitor. The only exception to this general pattern was among P4 students where 20.7% of the males and 10.2% of the females preferred a class monitor of their own gender. In general, the pattern of gender preference in chairmanship of extra-curricular activities matches the direction of activities thought to be suitable for males and females. Students made similar choices for both preference for the gender of chairperson and the gender suitability of the extra-curricular activity. No preference was observed in preferring to have a male student as the chairperson in extra-curricular activities suitable for both genders.

Students' appearance tends to be a very sensitive topic in schools and one about which strong feelings are held and expressed by both staff, students and teachers. However, it tends to be a discipline issue rather than a gender issue. Most schools have rules to enforce conformity in appearance for students and, in some instances, teachers. How welcome are these rules? The majority of our students agreed that school authorities should have rules about hair dyeing and hairstyle for both male and female students, although F4 students of both genders were considerably more liberal on this topic than the other participants. About 10% of students across all age groups thought that hairstyles for males should be restricted but not those for females. But this was the only sign of gender stereotyping on this issue.

Students were also asked what they thought about female students and teachers being banned from wearing trousers. Not surprisingly, the majority of students were against any restrictions, although the females were more enthusiastic than the males. Among F4 and F6 students 86.3% and 91.2% respectively of female students supported both female teachers and students having the choice of wearing trousers. However, there was a small minority group among the male students (20% across all age groups) that supported a `skirts only' policy and who may, therefore, be considered stereotypical in their thinking.

Should a gendered division of academic subjects and extra-curricular activities prevail, it constrains both boys and girls in how they develop their academic and other interests, which eventually also confines their occupational choices and overall personal development. The discrepancy in views between the boys and girls found in our study points to the urgent need to cultivate greater acceptance amongst boys in adopting less stereotypical conceptions of gender in general, and in academic and non-academic choices in particular.

How accepting are students of classmates coming from non-traditional families?

Our participants did discriminate between the different sorts of family structure portrayed in the vignettes and held varying attitudes towards them. The family types by degree of acceptance in descending order of acceptance were age-discrepant parents, a family with the mother in the Mainland, a female-headed single parent family, a male headed single-parent family and the re-constituted family. Students were most accepting of classmates coming from a family where the marriage was intact, suggesting that students may be much affected in their opinions by traditional ideas of family and marriage and the notion that marriage should be preserved at all costs. There was also a very discernible (and statistically significant) trend of the senior students being less accepting than the junior ones. This mirrors the results found in the disability survey. The explanation presumably lies in the greater social maturity of the older students who are more likely to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of helping or be-friending a student who their classmates may view with suspicion or disdain. Younger students appear to be more tender hearted and innocent in their acceptance.

The issue of acceptance of children from non-traditional family types really concerns a respect for difference and a belief in the equal value of all human beings. But to how much `difference' are children exposed? And do we live in a society that values difference? The honest answer is that we do not. For instance, generally speaking, children are not exposed to racial differences. They live in a very homogeneous culture where even immigrants from the Guangdong region (who are similar in race, language and culture) are viewed with deep suspicion. This is very much another area where children are absorbing and then replicating the values of their wider environment. The ideal type of the normative family (two parents and children living together, possibly with other family members) is all-pervasive and may almost be termed `aggressive' in its dominance of individuals' internal map of what a family should be. Non-normative families are often portrayed in public arenas as problematic, sources of delinquency, child neglect and abuse, and general lack of happiness. People will think less well of you if you do not meet the Happy Ideal Family Standard; and if you don't meet that standard then how can you be happy?

The re-constituted family is almost invisible, very little talked about and with virtually no positive role modeling to help families in this situation work through the amalgamation of two families into one new one. Yet with the rise in the divorce rate, increasing numbers of children will come from non-normative families and more and

more children will be in touch with them. This is likely to lead to strain in the interpersonal relationships between children that will be distressing to those from single parent and divorced homes.

Human communities are inevitably marked by a variety of distinctions. However, differences should not be construed as being 'better' or 'worse', 'more' or 'less respectable', and the like. A society marked by stark divisions whereby people routinely attach discriminatory labels to others will engender parochial and exclusionary attitudes. This will result in social costs for both the discriminated and society at large.

What is the association between demographic and socio-economic variables and students' attitudes?

On the face of it, certain demographic variables did seem to be associated with students' attitudes. Among the junior students, gender, forms and housing type were found to have a significant relationship to the family role attitude scores. Female students were less normative in their attitudes towards family roles, as were the students in F1. Students residing in different types of housing also had significant differences in their attitudes towards family roles. Age and housing type, however, were found to have little predictive power. Upon regression analysis, findings suggest that among the demographic and socio-economic variables, only gender remains as a significant variable in predicting student attitudes.

The picture was similar among the senior students. Among them gender, education of father, education of mother and housing types were found to have an association with the attitudes of students towards gender roles in families. Female students were less normative in their beliefs than male students. Contrary to usual expectations, students with parents with a tertiary level of education or higher were more normative in their attitudes towards family roles. However the predictive power of these variables was limited and regression analysis demonstrated that gender is actually the most dominant variable for prediction of family role attitudes among students.

Did exposure to educational programs have a discernible effect on students' attitudes?

Nearly 50% of the participants had never been exposed to educational programs about equal opportunities. Comparisons between the two groups on their scores on the

personality trait scale and the Family Roles Attitude Scale were made. Generally, no reliable differences were found between the two groups either among the junior or senior forms. However, we were only able to use the very blunt criteria of self-reported exposure to educational programs. Thus there was no consistency in type of program, program methods, length or depth of exposure and whether participation was compulsory or voluntary. All of these are potentially very important variables. It is our view that in order to explore this relationship properly, research carefully constructed specifically to do just this should be undertaken.

We have no doubt that educational programmes about gender equality, equal opportunities and respect for difference in relation to family structure are essential. However, it has to be acknowledged that there are limitations on how effective educational programmes can be in changing minds and attitudes when the social construction of gender is so pervasive and when gender identity is absolutely fundamental to individual development and the sense of self-identity. Educational programmes should be directed towards a critical awareness of gender bias in the mass culture and should legitimise querying the status quo. Many argue that the role of education in social structure is to support dominant ideas and ideologies but that does not mean that a contradictory element cannot be introduced. At least young people should be made aware that what is normative is not ordained by God and can be challenged and changed.

We need also to ask; how do we prepare students for the future in terms of occupational choices and preparation for family building? Individuals need to be able to make choices about their own lives enabling them to move beyond normative boundaries. Educational programmes, constructed to deal with these issues, need to be part of the curriculum at all age groups, with each `learning unit' building on the one before it.

Admittedly, schools are viable venues for promoting such programs because they can target a large group of 'captive clients'. However, there should also be similar effort paid to addressing the general public, adults at large, to inspire them to re-examine their preoccupations with gender-stereotypes. This is no easy task; public education does not achieve effects easily especially when it is attempting to persuade people to give up long entrenched positions that they believe are advantageous to them. But this does not absolve us from the responsibility of trying to change these views if we believe that they are harmful to society in general and one group in particular.

Limitations of the Study

In general the reliability and validity of the various measures has been assured and the major findings could inform future directions and practices in the education of students. However, limitations of the study have to be noted for the more accurate interpretation and utilization of the research findings. First, the sample did not correspond to the original sampling frame because many schools refused to participate. Eventually, all secondary and half of the primary schools in Hong Kong were approached and invited to participate, so there was no deliberate selection. However, it is possible that schools that agreed to take part in the research had a more positive approach to gender issues than those that refused. Thus a self-selection factor may be involved. Second, it was up to each participating school to select the classes for administration of the questionnaires. School staff were responsible for the selection and may have screened out those they thought would be less co-operative. So there may be sample bias towards a more compliant group within the general student population. However, this may have added to the plausibility of the research results because very few questionnaires were discarded due to suspected flaws or playfulness in students' responses.

Third, a great deal of effort was put into making the questionnaire as succinct as possible but it was still long and may have tested the patience and the concentration span of the respondents, especially the younger ones. Fourth, the socio-economic indicators that we were able to use had to take account of the age of our respondents and their sensitivities. Thus we were not able to collect the detailed information that we would ideally have wished to have on income and occupation. Fifth, the inclusion of a comparison group of students who had been exposed to equal opportunities programmes on gender in a consistent and identical way would have been highly desirable. However, identifying such students did not prove possible and a more general independent variable of exposure to equal opportunities material had to be used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The fundamental purpose of this research was to carry out a baseline survey of students' attitudes towards gender stereotypes, family roles and non-traditional family types. Instruments were devised and validated for use in the local context. A baseline survey facilitates the measurement of changes in attitude over time. Therefore **we recommend** that research using the same instruments is undertaken

at regular intervals as a means to chart changes in attitudes among our young people.

2. Children tend to mirror the attitudes of the prevailing dominant groups in society. Although school is a major socialization agent in society, it is not the only one. What children learn in their families and from the media are also crucial in forming their attitudes. In order to change attitudes (a notoriously difficult thing to do) children have to be exposed to different ideas and then given support and encouragement for espousing them. If attitudes towards gender and family issues are to be changed, then the whole school experience has to be enlisted in the change effort. Ideally this would mean changes in the curriculum but this might be beyond the remit of the Equal Opportunities Commission to achieve. However, their remit certainly includes teachers. Equal opportunity educational programmes aimed at students in school only target one side of the issue. Thus **we recommend** that the EOC liaises with the Education Department and the teacher training institutions to devise input that will

    a) ensure that teachers are educated in family and gender issues and helped to accept equal opportunity ideals

    b) make teachers more aware of their behaviours in classrooms and the school environment generally that have an impact on gender issues in schools

    c) lay down Gender Awareness Standards that will act as a benchmark standard for schools and challenge commonly accepted stereotypes (for instance, that the majority of `brilliant' students are male)

3. A major issue concerns the provision of equal opportunity programmes for children in schools. About half of our sample had been exposed to such programmes but we were not able to show a measurable effect in terms of attitude differences between them and those who had not been exposed to such programmes. However, we do not consider this surprising considering the eclectic nature of the programmes and the fact that our research was not designed to evaluate them. Thus there is nothing in this research that should be used to suggest that these programmes are not effective. But there is clearly a need to undertake a systematic design and evaluation of equal opportunities educational packages in schools. **We recommend** that such packages are devised taking into account issues such as consistency of content, age appropriate content and

delivery methods, program delivery methods in general, length and depth of exposure, interactivity, and compulsory or voluntary participation. Evaluative research should then be conducted with initial baseline measures of attitude, followed by on-going measures of attitude change to see how much change is induced and how long the effect lasts. However, we would expect that such programmes would need to be implemented (in an age-appropriate way) throughout a child's school career for maximum effect.

4.   There is obviously strong support, particularly among the older girls in our sample, for both female students and female staff to be allowed to wear pants. In this day and age when pants are widely worn by women of all ages, it is very difficult to see why these restrictions are permitted to persist. There are obvious advantages in terms of convenience and warmth. If objections are made they are more likely to come from parents, than from teachers or students. Therefore, **we recommend** that the EOC makes overtures to the Education Department that they undertake the necessary steps to ensure changes in the regulations across all primary and secondary schools.

5.   Our research has demonstrated significant differences between the ways that male and female teachers are perceived, particularly by older pupils. Male teachers were perceived as being more confident, especially by F4 and F6 students. Older female students thought female teachers were much stricter than male teachers. Male students did not perceive their female teachers as being so strict. There are many different and often personal factors involved in how teachers are perceived and the issue is a complex one. Nonetheless, with information suggesting that we have a situation where female secondary teachers are perceived to be more strict but less confident **we recommend** that further research be undertaken into this issue.

6.   In relation to gender roles, activities and the gender division of labour it is very obvious that young women are less normative than young men and have thus created a world in which they have more choices, because they are less likely to restrict themselves on the grounds of gender. Young men tend to be more stereotypical in their thinking, for instance in their dismay at the thought of a female boss, sharing housework or girls taking the initiative in dating. This lack of value given to activities they think of as feminine or concern about role reversal that will put them in the `feminine' position is almost certainly not in young men's long term best interests. Their lack of flexibility and possible sense of their

masculinity being under threat may contribute to the fact that they are falling behind girls very noticeably in academic results (Wong et al., in press). **We recommend** that particular attention be paid to offering young men role models in schools (male teachers) and in the media of adult males demonstrating more gender flexible behaviours. As we said earlier, if we want behaviour and attitudes to change those willing to take a risk in trying to do so need active and appropriate support.

7. Attitudes in this research indicate that both sexes believe that the care of children is primarily the responsibility of the mother. At the same time, there is a very strong plea for fathers to be more emotionally involved and to spend more time with their children. Hong Kong's fathers are notorious in international studies for spending very little time with their children. This is another example of there being a wider range of roles for women to choose from and again, their greater rigidity does men few favours and in this case may be damaging to their children. Consequently **we recommend** educational programmes in the media and in schools that emphasize the necessity of emotionally involved fathers in families and that portray fathers as a necessary part of the family unit, not merely the provider of material resources.

8. Respondents demonstrated themselves to have traditional and conservative attitudes towards those coming from non-traditional family types, demonstrating a clear preference for intact families. Such views are likely to have negative affects on children coming from such families with the resultant stigma and exclusion. This is particularly undesirable when one considers that the number of children coming from such homes is inevitably going to increase as the divorce rates rise and there are more marriages between people from the Mainland and those from Hong Kong. More effort needs to be placed in de-problematizing divorce, moving sway from seeing it as a social problem and towards an issue of personal choice. **We recommend** that Family Life Educational programmes be expanded to include material on the reasons for divorce presented in such a way that neither husbands nor wives are pilloried and that give proper information about what children of divorced parents are likely to experience and what support they may usefully be offered.