

Exploratory Study on Gender Stereotyping and Its Impacts on Male Gender

Report

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Principal Investigator

Prof. CHOI Susanne Yuk-ping

Director, Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

Associate professor, Department of Sociology, CUHK

Co-Principal Investigator

Prof. AU Winton Wing-tung

Associate professor, Department of Psychology, CUHK

Researchers

Prof. WONG Angela Wai-ching

Associate director, Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

Co-director, Gender Studies Programme, Graduate School, CUHK

Associate professor, Department of Cultural and Religious Studies, CUHK.

Dr. LIONG Mario Chan-ching

Member, Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

Researcher, Umea Centre for Gender Studies, Umea University, Sweden (Since January, 2012)

Lecturer, Division of Social Studies, Community College of City University (2008~2011)

Ms. WONG Margaret Fung-yee

ExCo member, Gender Research Centre, HKIAPS, CUHK

Research Assistants

Ms. LO Sally Ka-wing

Research coordinator, Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

Mr. CHAO Kin-chong

Research assistant, Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

Executive Summary

Background

1. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has commissioned the Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong to undertake the “Exploratory Study on Gender Stereotyping and Its Impacts on Male Gender”. During 2011, two open seminars were conducted to raise public discussion on the issues concerning men’s situation in face of social and economic restructuring. A total of 470 participants attended the seminars and 340 questionnaires were collected. Furthermore, 10 focus group discussion sessions and 9 individual interviews comprising 71 male participants were carried out.

Findings of Focus Group Survey

Men in Pain

2. As we have observed from the sharing of men of different ages, it is found that men in Hong Kong are still abreast of many traditional cultural norms of male identity. However, under the new economic and social environment, the foundation for upholding these traditional ideas is lacking. Traditional and transitional ideas often coexist. Amid rapid changes in gender relationships, it is inevitable that men and women would find themselves at a loss.

3. Firstly, most of our respondents, regardless of their backgrounds, consider paid employment the most important element in the construction of their self-identity. For these men, a paid employment enables them to financially support their family and allows them to take up the cultural norms of gender role prescribed for men. Some men even believe that harmonious family relationships can only be maintained when their income is sufficient to support a living for the family.

4. As for men, it is not their capacity to financially support their family, but also in relative terms: their ability to be a more financially resourceful provider compared with their female partner. In other words, male identity is constructed through their comparison with women and men gain self-esteem only when they have a competitive advantage over women. Consequently, one would expect contemporary men to have more stress because they are not only competing with other men; they are also competing with their female partner and exceeding her. In such an atmosphere, those men who do not meet the expectations will lose face, and have self-esteem and self-confidence damaged.

5. Although work is important for both the working-class and middle-class men, they project different ideal paths to economic success. As for working-class men, many believe that setting up one's own business is the only path to be successful. For the middle-class men, the cornerstone of the male identity is career. The career for them refers to two dimensions: upward mobility and job satisfaction.

6. Both younger and older respondents agree that structural conditions have created more obstacles for men to live up to the cultural ideal of male identity. The attainment of "hegemonic masculinity"¹ is even more unachievable. Primarily, de-industrialization has stripped many skilled job opportunities from men, who have found it difficult to adjust to the requirements imposed by elementary service jobs. Men's financial capacity and career prospect are greatly challenged. Next, the rising living cost has created more financial burden for men who are culturally expected to support their family. Once again, the change in the status of women makes men difficult to have absolute advantages. Lastly, it is hard for men to cope with the stress.

7. Rapidly rising living standards, property prices and rental costs mean that many Hong Kong households cannot rely on a single earner to support the family. Dual-income families have become the norm. Of course, the pressure on women in dual-income families are generally larger than men do, because women still have the responsibilities for most of the housework and childcare. However, due to commonly long working hours and much more requirements on helping children with their studies, men in dual-income families also feel the pressure.

8. Love with affections and feelings has become a cornerstone in modern marriages in Hong Kong society. However, how should men maintain a romantic relationship? Many of our middle-class respondents are apparently baffled by this question. Some respondents suggest that maintaining a happy marriage is like looking after a plant. Yet some are displeased that in order to maintain a happy marriage, the demand is solely on men that they need to be a good actor. When encountering marital conflicts, men in our focus groups tend to tolerate in order to avoid quarrels with their spouse as they believe a harmonious family is pivotal. Harmony can only be achieved by toleration. In addition, these men want to avoid the pain of trapping in a damaged marital relationship. However, men feel invalidated because they have the impression that their opinions are often rejected by their wife. This toleration does not actually deal with men's dissatisfaction within. It also provides no satisfactory solutions for both parties. Sometimes it even strengthens the impression of his wife's unreasonable image and suppresses more dissatisfaction with the partner.

¹ The notion of "hegemonic masculinity" developed by sociologist R.W. Connell is the normative ideal of male behaviour, endorsed by the society and culture, which male are supposed to fulfil.

A dilemma: Are women competitors or collaborators?

9. Men are apparently upset by women's increasing competition for jobs and salary scale. In fact, what underlie men's disgruntle are men's recognition of self-identity, their concern over earning ability and say in control, their stress to become an exemplary man as defined by socialization, and anxiety brought by the deep-rooted traditional gender ideologies. Men in general think that the distribution of power and status between men and women is like a see-saw that when one goes up, the other must go down. Male respondents do think that the general rise of women's status causes the decline of men's status. Men are increasingly worried about their vanishing power.

10. Due to stress derived from the societal, financial and traditional gender ideologies, male respondents do not perceive that they have received any support from social policies. Male respondents believe that social policies still consider women as the suppressed group and are lop-sided favouring women. Social policies do not provide any protection to men who are becoming the "under-privileged" group.

11. As changes appear in the society, both the husband and the wife in a typical family need to work in order to make ends meet. The wife has in fact contributed to lessening financial strain. Other than financial pressure, men are increasingly aware of the importance to have their share of responsibilities on taking care of the family and children education. Men enjoy taking part in these activities with their wife or their mate as partners.

Findings of Questionnaire Survey

12. Findings of questionnaire survey reveal that men and women are similar in satisfaction with the relationship. Furthermore, both men and women report the largest difference in perceived consensus with their partners is in household chores and ways of expressing affections. However, men show significantly lower consensus with their partners in these aspects than women do.

13. Among the eight types of daily hassles, men are mostly bothered by work and health. At work, men are more concerned about meeting deadlines, work load and job nature. However, men are not as bothered by work as women do. While 40%, 36% and 32% of men are bothered by deadlines, workload and job nature, 50%, 47% and 52% of women are bothered by the respective hassles. When compared with women, men have experienced significantly more hassles in financial matters, intimacy behaviours, sexual orientation and addiction.

14. Men are significantly weaker in using stress coping strategies when compared with

women. Both men and women are relatively more effective in employing coping strategies to solve problems but less effective in coping with psychological stress.

15. Men are weaker than women in their social support network across all three aspects of family, friends and particular persons. The largest gender difference appears in men not having some particular persons (intimate friends) in providing support to him.

Conclusion and Recommendations

16. From the discussions of our respondents, we sum up the major challenges that different men in Hong Kong face:

- With respect to their economic role, all the men whom we have interviewed are influenced by traditional gender norms and the capitalism hegemonic ideal of male identity. For them, the cornerstone of masculinity is some measures of economic success through either entrepreneurship or the obtainment of a job with upward mobility, and the ability to financially support the family. However, they have all realized the gap between this ideal and the structural obstacles to achieve it. This gap constitutes the major source of pressure for our respondents. Secondly, many of our respondents consider the improvement of women's status a threat to them. They are concerned about the competition from women in the job market. Some of them find it difficult for men to work for elementary service jobs. The difficulties that unskilled male workers face stem from their perception about elementary service jobs, which are sometimes not viewed as 'real jobs'. As regards middle-class men, they are concerned about the increasing importance of communication skills in many white-collar jobs and the competitive advantages women have enjoyed in this respect.
- As for cultural perception, most of our respondents still think that it is essential for men to be more successful than their female partners. Many admit that they would feel the pressure if their female partners have a more successful career. Although most of our respondents still dream of having a female partner who could fulfil the "three obedience and four virtues", most have realized that gender relationships have been changing, and that women increasingly have their views and demand to be respected and in charge. Based on the data, we concur the problems are two-fold. First, changes in normative expectations often lag behind changes in positions of women and men in different domains. Second, the pace of changes is uneven between men and women. It has also generated discontent among men who complain that women want to have it all: having new autonomies and power without giving up their traditional privileges.

- Family constitutes another source of pressure for men. On top of financial concerns, men often hold views different from their wives regarding the appropriate ways to raise their children. Moreover, working-class dual-income families face another set of challenges. On the one hand, long working hours have reduced the time parents in these families could spend with their children. On the other hand, unlike their middle-class counterparts who often employ domestic helpers to help ease the burden of household chores and childcare, parents in working-class dual-income families lack the resources to employ external help. The third challenge in family that men face is related to their lack of support during family crises. Due to traditional cultural perception about men as the tough and strong one in a relationship, male victims of domestic violence have found it difficult to seek help: their complaint is either ignored or not taken seriously by related service providers. In cases of divorce, men have found that it is difficult for them to win custody of their children because many judges and social workers still hold the stereotype that women are better care takers of children.
- At the individual level, most men are reluctant and ashamed to seek help when they face emotional problems. Our questionnaire survey shows that although men are more likely to experience hassles in relation to their finance, intimate relationships, sexual orientations, and substance addiction, they have fewer support networks and intimate friends to turn to, and are less likely to seek help when compared with women.

17. To tackle challenges and problems faced by men in Hong Kong, we propose the following recommendations:

- (1) As for cultural aspects, traditional gender norms are one of the major sources of men's pressure. To change these norms, the Government and related organizations such as EOC could work more closely with schools and education bodies to promote gender equality. It helps students explore how traditional gender norms have imposed unnecessary restrictions and pressure on men. Although gender roles in society serve different needs, it should emphasize common concerns and feelings between men and women. Men are not bound to exceed women in career because both alike have strong and weak perspectives. Men can protect others but sometimes they need others' concerns and care. They can be listeners but sometimes want to chat with others.
- (2) Educational settings are one of the most important socialization agents of gender roles and norms. However, biases of gender stereotypes are still common in the education process. We suggest that schools incorporate "gender equality" in their curricula and that frontline teachers and administrative staff need to receive "gender mainstreaming" training.

- (3) The media is another important socialization agent of gender norms. Sadly, the press is now filled with gender stereotypes against women and men. In order to change traditional gender norms, relevant organizations need to work with media agents. There is a necessity of using the media as a platform to promote ideas of gender equality.
- (4) At the policy level, it should develop gender-sensitive social service policies so as to identify different types of pressure undertaken by men and women in the social and economic transformation; to note the different aspects of needs of men and women for social services; to compile sex segregated data on social service recipients as a review on the situation; and to help men and women in adapting to the social and economic restructuring. In addition, “gender mainstreaming” should be incorporated into the training courses for frontline social workers.
- (5) As for the social policies, gender differences have not been reviewed and therefore it is difficult to achieve gender equality in their implementation. Furthermore, when men or women face difficulties, they are bound to affect the other gender’s situation. At the family level, it certainly affects the stability of the family. Therefore, to understand the needs of men is of paramount importance. It is recommended that social policies should be made in such a way that it can take care of gender differences. For example, to review the low participation rate of men in employment and training services; to encourage job seekers and employers to break the gender stereotypes for certain job positions; to provide social services for men’s needs, such as male specialist clinic, sheltered centre for abused men; to develop family leave, paternity leave and other family-friendly labour policies so as to encourage men’s participation in family life; and to review the need of observing the rights of men in law enforcement of family and marriage.
- (6) Based on the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the Women’s Commission issued a “gender mainstreaming” checklist in 2002. It is designed to promote a gender perspective at the legislation and policy levels. We look forward to speeding up the work in this area and “gender mainstreaming” will be incorporated into social service organizations. We hope that while our society continues to promote women’s status, we can also take into account changes of men’s status and make appropriate proposals in meeting their needs. The overhaul of the Women’s Commission into the Commission for Gender Equality might be the first step towards the advocacy of equality in both genders.

Chapter 1

Hong Kong Men in Crisis : Introduction

1.1 Over the past 50 years, Hong Kong has gone through major social and economic restructuring. The economic restructuring from labour-intensive manufacturing industries to finance and service industries has generated diversified impacts on people of different genders and social classes. Although both working-class men and women have been greatly impacted by de-industrialisation and the relocation of factories to mainland China, the emergent occupations in the service industry have absorbed more female than male workers. According to official figures, most elementary occupations in the service industries are low paid jobs without much job security, and a number of them are part-time in nature. The majority of these jobs have been taken up by older women or by women who need to take up family responsibilities. Although in general unemployment rates in Hong Kong have been falling in recent years, unemployment and underemployment rates among certain groups of men, such as middle- and old-aged men without educational qualifications and male youth, have remained high. Furthermore, despite their persistent advantages in managerial and professional occupations, educated men have started to worry about the rapid increase in female workers in these advantageous occupations, and there emerges a discourse that views women as formidable competitors of men in these high paid jobs. In fact, it seems that men from different classes in contemporary Hong Kong share a similar concern, which is about how the increase in women's educational level, labour participation rate and their elevated women's rights, and it distils awareness of crisis in men.

1.2 Are women in Hong Kong really dominating and men being marginalised? From official statistics, men are still overwhelmingly advantageous in economic and political domains. For instance, on average men still earn HK\$3,000 more than women in 2010 (C&SD, 2011). In 42 blue-chip enterprises in Hong Kong, top female heads (president/ CEO/ managing director) take up less than 3%. Women only account for one-third of the principal officials in the government. Women are still a minority in the Executive Council, Legislative Council, District Councils and other semi-official advisory bodies. In the domain of family, many women are having the dual burden of taking care of the elderly and children. Regardless of employment status, the situation does not change. Just taking a look at these figures, one may wonder if "men's identity crisis" is an imagination or a legitimate concern. However, if we look at things from another perspective: how men live up to the ideal notion of male identity enshrined in traditional gender norms, whether men are able to achieve the ideal in real life, we may understand the causes and consequences of the masculinity crisis that Hong Kong men face today.

1.3 Back in the 1990s in universities, most of the male students believed in the so-called

“Four Zaiism” (*Sei Zai Zyu Ji*, literally means four must-haves). “Four Zaiism” meant “Ce Zai (car)”, “Uk Zai (apartment)”, “Lou Po Zai (wife)” and “Jan Zai (kid) / Gau Zai (dog)”. Apparently the “Four Zaiism” was the dream of men, which was also an expectation imposed on men by the mainstream society. “Four Zaiism” was not only a cultural ideal used to measure men’s success, but also a means for men to establish their self-identity, confidence and recognition of male identity (so called “real men”). However, this ideology has become increasingly unattainable for most men. As higher education has expanded, graduates face ever-fierce competition in the labour market. Contract-based employment hardly leads graduates to promotion even though they can get a job upon graduation. An apartment is far from being affordable as the prices of properties in Hong Kong have rocketed in recent years. Without an apartment, it is difficult for most men to enter marriage and form a family, not to mention to have children. Without doubt, female university graduates in Hong Kong also face competition in the labour market. They are also disadvantaged in the labour market like their male counterparts due to increasing fragmentation of work. Both men and women have seen their living standards plummeted as a result of high property prices. However, traditional gender norms discipline men and women according to distinctive sets of requirements; men and women thus face different challenges. If the “Four Zaiism (car, apartment, wife and kid)” ideology is getting more and more difficult to be realised by men with university qualifications, one can image how hard it would be for working-class men to attain these cultural ideals of male identity and the subsequent frustration these men will experience.

1.4 Although gender studies in Hong Kong have proliferated in past decades (Cheung 1997; Cheung and Holroyd, 2009), most studies focus on women issues and relatively little attention has been paid to investigating the specific and changing circumstances of men. The lack of study on men obscures the origins, structures and dynamics of the system of gender inequality and how it evolves to affect both men and women differently at various historical junctures, and under different class and family contexts (Connell, 1995). On the one hand, the silence on men’s needs and problems provides opportunities for hostile ideas against women to prosper. These ideas lead to a hypothesis that often pitches the interests of women against men, and interprets the problems of men’s declining status as a result of women’s improving status. This line of hypothesis, which scapegoats men’s problems on women, is dangerous because it is easy to be understood, sounds reasonable and feeds into patriarchal logics of thinking. It is therefore essential to prevent this line of hypothesis to become part of everyday thoughts that are taken for granted, and are accepted to be the way how the relationships between men and women are and should be. In this study, starting from understanding men’s problems, it can enrich our understanding of the relationship between gender and social restructuring and also nullify the hypothesis of “men’s declining status is a result of women’s improving status”. In fact, the relationship between men and women is neither hostile nor a zero-sum game.

1.5 On the other hand, the lack of studies on men's problems and needs in contemporary Hong Kong ignores the very genuine pressure that men face, as well as sources of pressure. Despite the increase of education and work opportunities for women, and the changing positions of men and women in the family, economy and society, traditional gender norms related to marriage, family and personal life remain largely intact (Choi and Ting, 2009). For example, men are still expected to marry up – only with women who are shorter than them in height, less educated, and have lower earning capacity. At the family level, men are still expected to be the main provider for family. At the personal level, men are still expected to be aggressive, strong, and rational actors who do not express their emotion, pain and pressure, and who can solve problems all by themselves and do not seek help. Discrepancies between the normative ideals of male identity and the reality create pressure for men, particularly those who do not have the resources to live up to the cultural ideals of male identity. Studies in other western countries have shown that the pressure to act like a “real man” often compel marginalized and socially excluded men to use other forms of resources (e.g. violence) and deploy different strategies to develop alternative forms of masculinities. For instance, previous studies have shown how economically and socially marginalized men (e.g. unemployed men, ethnic minorities, and migrants) in the US employed physical and sexual violence against women, and the participation in gang and drug-related peer subculture to search for respect and to construct an alternate male identity (Bourgois, 2003).

1.6 The study involves focus group discussion sessions and questionnaire survey to collect public opinions. Also two seminars were held to serve purposes of furnishing public education, as well as recruiting participants for focus group discussion sessions. Specific research objectives are as follows:

- (a) To initiate public awareness of the issue of “Men in Pain” and men's struggles and concerns in the family, workplace and society.
- (b) To survey male individuals of their struggles and concerns, with respect to the following cohorts:
 - (i) young adults, including those who are categorised as “train man”, “*hikikomori*” and “*otaku*”;
 - (ii) middle-aged, including those who are unemployed/divorced; and
 - (iii) old aged retirees, many are deprived of the providing roles and feel “useless”.
- (c) The extent to which people react towards arrangement of family roles according to gender, which include responsibilities such as carer for children/elderly, household work, and being breadwinner.

1.7 We propose to apply the notion of “hegemonic masculinity” developed by acclaimed

sociologist R.W. Connell to understand the problems of men in contemporary Hong Kong and the cultural and structural origins of their “pain” (Connell, 1987; 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is the normative ideals of male behaviour, endorsed by the society and culture, which male are supposed to fulfil. Inspired by Connell, we argue that an investigation of men in Hong Kong necessitates exploration of the following four sets of questions:

1. The pressure that men today face in meeting the demands of the dominant cultural ideals of male identity;
2. The discrepancies created by these cultural ideals and men’s actual circumstances in family, labour market/workplace, and society;
3. The strategies that men employ in interpersonal interactions to meet the demands of the dominant cultural ideals of male identity and the consequences of their masculinity construction on the dynamics of family and other institutions;
4. To resolve the conflicts between unattainable cultural ideals of male identity and actual circumstances, what coping mechanisms will be developed by men?

1.8 This report is a summary based on our interviews and the questionnaire survey conducted. For the interview part, we mainly adopted focus group discussion sessions. Several individual interviews were also implemented for specific targets and issues. Focus group studies can provide an opportunity for researchers to obtain from respondents “deeper levels of meaning, making important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning” on the issues (Stewart et al., 2007, p.42). Through direct responses gathered from selected groups, we are able to collect more comprehensive, high-face validity and real-life contextualized data (Krueger, 1994, pp.34-27). It also provides a chance for participants to experience the investigation together. They can explore men’s issues by exchanging and comparing personal views (Morgan, 1998, pp. 9). For men’s concerns and struggles, which are poorly understood in Hong Kong, the focus group format provides us with an opportunity to explore the contexts of men’s problems, to interpret how and why men in Hong Kong think and act as they do, and to discover new insights from their interactions (Morgan, 1998, pp.13). The gathered responses, after careful classification and analyses by researchers with research skills of gender sensitivity, serve as valuable information for examining men’s issues in Hong Kong.

1.9 We recruited participants of different ages, incomes, education levels, professions and marital statuses in order to make comparative analyses based on their age and socio-economic status. Accordingly, we grouped men into the categories: 1) young men with lower education; 2) young men with higher education; 3) young men who are marginalized by the society, which included youth of ethnic minorities and unemployed men, “Otaku” and “Hikikomori”, which literally means “homeboy” or “weirdo”; 4) middle-aged working-class men; 5) middle-aged

middle-class men; 6) middle-aged men with family problems; 7) old-aged working-class men; 8) old-aged middle-class men; 9) old-aged men with chronic diseases; and 10) social workers who have provided services for men. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants with a diversified background. We mainly recruited respondents via NGOs, community centres, EOC, related bodies at higher-educational institutions and the two public seminars. We selected 71 respondents out of 116 applicants. Ten focus group discussion sessions were completed and each group included 5 to 12 participants. Nine individual interviews were also conducted to provide supplementary data on sensitive issues (see Appendix I). These issues included marital and addiction problems. All the interviews were recorded in anonymity and transcribed verbatim. These textual documents provided the basis for coding and thematic analyses.

1.10 A quantitative survey formed the second part of this study. The questionnaire was designed based on relevant rating scales from previous research studies. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to a set of attitudinal statements using a Likert rating scale. We used convenient samples and a total of 340 questionnaires were collected during the two public seminars conducted in 2011 (see Appendix II). The main contents of the survey included questions on the following areas:

1. Demographic background (e.g., age, education level, occupation, income, marital status, etc.);
2. Beliefs of gender stereotypes;
3. Satisfaction of daily life, work, marriage and health;
4. Marital, financial, and psychological stresses;
5. Social network and strategies of coping with stress.

1.11 In summary, the results of this study will enrich our understanding of contemporary men's lives in Hong Kong. They would also help policy-makers formulate appropriate measures to help disadvantaged men and those in need. By doing so, it would clarify the root causes of hostile perceptions against women and provide a platform for building a society of gender equality. We hope this publication can raise public awareness on "men in pain" and their struggles and concerns with respect to family, work and society.

1.12 This report is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction that provides background information and gives an account of research objectives and different parts in the project. Chapter 2 compares differences in gender norms and understanding of masculinities between younger and older men. In Chapter Three, we analyse the challenges faced by working-class and middle-class men. In Chapter Four, the focus is on the challenges men encounter in marital relationships. In Chapter Five, based on the findings of the questionnaire

survey, we compare and analyse different sources of stress, social support and coping strategies between men and women. In Chapter Six, we consolidate some comments on how men perceive women as competitors in the labour market. In the concluding chapter, we review and summarize existing provisions of social services and policies to men in Hong Kong. We hope these initial suggestions would facilitate policy makers to develop appropriate policies and measures to cater for the needs of men based on different backgrounds of culture, age and class.

Chapter 2

Younger and Older Men's Views on Male Identity

2.1 In order to study the men's crisis, we must firstly investigate how men consider what "male identity" is. The word "men" sounds so ordinary, but if we think deeply, the multiple meanings of this simple word have defined a man's life at different stages of his development. "Men" is not only a name, a social category, a gender, it also means a self-identity, a set of norms and how they actualize their identity. According to sociologist R.W. Connell (Connell, 1987), men in most societies are required to behave in certain ways. At the cultural aspect, there are cultural norms about societal expectation of male identity. In institutions and organizations, there are specific arrangements guiding the division of labour, power and distribution of resources between men and women. On the personal level, there are rules regulating and disciplining the interactions between men and women in intimate relationships. A man's life, in this sense, is a process of "practising male identity". Men are expected to be "real men" in family, labour market, nation, public sphere and social network (peer and intimacy); otherwise they are sanctioned by the society, humiliated by peers and even rejected by women. In recent decades, we have witnessed how some men have been disgracefully labelled as "Otaku" or "Train men" (loosely mean "nerds") in Japan and Hong Kong. These are negative stigmas against men who cannot fulfil the social expectations of male identity.

2.2 It is common to hear blaming like "You are not a man!", "How can you be a man?", "Are you a man?" and "Will you please act like a man?". The blames directly challenge the identities of those who are categorized as men. However, is it our gender in born? Is gender clear cut without doubt? Is it a man who has male sex organ? Although the society regards men who has male sex organ, men are also ranked: those meeting the societal expectations are regarded as "real men" whereas those failing are looked down as "men without masculinity". Connell named what mainstream societal expectations on men as "hegemonic masculinity". There may be different requirements for "real men" in different culture, society and generation. In Hong Kong modern capitalist society, the mainstream aspiration of a "real man" may be a heterosexual who possesses wealth, expertise and social status in the middle/upper level. The aspiration of course, reflects the continued advantages of men in the economic, social and political domains. But the aspiration to meet the "real men" is not a simple and easy thing to do. With the socio-economic structural changes, deterioration of the poverty problem, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, it may be increasingly difficult for men of the younger generation to achieve the so-called "real men". In addition, as there are more opportunities for women to receive education and participate in the labour market, the relationship between men and women also undergoes changes. To face this double transformation, how will different generations of men in Hong Kong read the word

"man"? What impacts will impose on their gender identity and situation?

It is difficult to be a man now!

2.3 Although there were various views on the definition of “real men” and hegemonic masculinity, both older and younger respondents agreed that it was more and more difficult to fulfil societal expectations of male identity.

“For the older generation, they could just work... if you worked for eight, or twelve hours, you would get paid then it’s enough to support the family. But in our generation the price of living is ever-rising, our salary can’t catch up with the rise, the society is more and more competitive. Education has become a must and it is truly stressful for young people who cannot obtain some higher education.” (College student, young men group)

2.4 Despite rapid economic growth of Hong Kong in the past two decades, deindustrialisation has greatly and negatively impacted on working-class men. On the one hand, a portion of middle or old aged men have experienced long term unemployment following deindustrialization. On the other hand, there has been skill mismatch between emerging occupations in the service industries and the traditional ideals of masculinity. This gender cum skill mismatch is particularly serious in elementary service jobs. One young man described his expectation of career in this way,

“(I want a) job that can earn me a living without idling around, cheating people and selling smiles all day long.” (Technician, young men group)

2.5 Apparently by his definition, service work was not considered a real job for a real man. After analysing men’s definitions of work, we found that work to a man was to provide them with “prospects”, about a “career” with “employment prospects”, “career path”, “life goal” and “satisfaction”. Working-class men, regardless of age, emphasized the “technical skills” and “craftsmanship” of work. They regarded service work as a form of labour in selling tenderness and smiles rather than real work. Young men, especially the poor-educated ones reported intense confusions when looking for jobs because of the mismatch between the requirements of working in service industries and the ideal characteristics of male identity they internalized and upheld. When compared with older men, young men were more worried about the negative impacts of shrinking opportunities for upward mobility and increasing competition in the labour market on their capacity to live up to the cultural ideals of male identity. Even older respondents perceived the stress.

“In the past even those with limited education had opportunities to join the police force. Now with so many university graduates applying to join the police force, what chance do those without a degree have? Now even university graduates cannot easily find a job.” (Retiree, old men group)

Male identity = Career (work + income)

2.6 The impact of de-industrialization illustrates the importance of work and income for male identity, regardless of races. Though 96% of our respondents were Chinese, we specifically invited three Pakistani men to join a focus group discussion session via a community organisation in order to understand ethnic minorities, especially the situation of South Asian men in Hong Kong. The following was a thought-provoking excerpt from this focus group:

"[From zero to ten, ten indicates a men's success while zero indicates unsuccessfulness, how would you rate yourself?] I am.....zero.

As a man, zero...socially I think I am strong... and in family...I think I am good to my family, but...financially, I think something is lacking.” (Unemployed Pakistani man, young men group)

2.7 It might sound surprising that an unemployed man who regarded himself doing well in family and interpersonal relationships would rate himself a zero just because he was unable to support his family financially. In this case, we recognized the great weight men placed on economic achievement as the core element of male identity. We could also observe this viewpoint from other respondents:

“A successful career is a must for a good family.” (Unemployed youth, young men group)

2.8 “Men must uphold the family financially” was certainly a pledge of all older respondents. However, as society become more affluent in resources, supporting the family is not just about meals, rather it is the capability to own an apartment, independently upholding the living of the entire family, and emotionally providing support and care for them.

“I can feel the economic pressure, but...for those who earn a great deal of money, they (usually have to work long hours) that they have no time left (for the family). Family members will complain that you don't take care of your parents or other family members, and that you are not filial....” (College student, young men group)

“The pressure from family depends on whether you can earn enough money...whether you can afford the living cost for two...whether you can buy an apartment, whether you can raise your child, and whether you can support your wife so she doesn’t need to find a job.” (Post-graduate student, young men group)

“You are safe if you earn 20,000 to 30,000 dollars (a month), if you get only 2,000 to 3,000 (dollars a month), people will say, ‘Are you a man? Are you lazy? If you work hard you should be promoted.’ These are the sources of pressure.” (College student, young men group)

Needless to say, as the life quality improves materially, there are increasing demands on the male breadwinners.

“Now people ask for more...more material enjoyments ...people compare...I don’t know if people live like this in the past, maybe many did so, but they were also many who were like me (just having a very meagre living standard).” (Retiree, old men group)

Male identity = Strong man

2.9 Owing to elevated living standards in the past two or three decades and more rich people are found in Hong Kong, greater stress has been derived from comparison with others. In contrast to older men, younger men now face another competitor: women. To men of different ages, in addition to economic success, the definition of men connotes one more core standard: to do better than women. A male college student described what it meant to be a “real man”. According to him, real male identity entailed having three ‘highs’:

“High education, high income, and physical height.” (College student, young men group)

2.10 “High” is a concept of relativity. Men demand themselves to be high in education, income and height; but with whom are men comparing? To most male respondents, regardless of ages, his female partner or spouse was the key target for comparison.

“If my wife earns more than me...I’ll try my best to earn more than her...because I think we were born stronger (than women) and we should do more (than them), we cannot lose to women.” (College student, young men group)

“In the case of Hong Kong, a man is expected to earn more than his female partner does.” (Post-graduate student, young men group)

“Don’t want to lose (to a woman)... I’ll lose face.” (Unemployed youth, young men group)

2.11 However, they all concurred that it was much easier to achieve this goal twenty or thirty years ago than now, because at that time women got rare chances to be educated and their salaries were generally lower than men’s. Up till now, more-or-less equal numbers of women and men are studying at tertiary institutions. More and more women work in high pay jobs in the labour market. It is relatively difficult for men to outperform their female partners in order to attain the ideals of male identity. One of our older respondents also commented:

“I think it’s happier to be a man in the past. Life was hard but happy because we had little pressure to constantly compare ourselves with (other men and our partners).” (Retiree, old men group)

Gender relations: Uneven paces of changing and not changing

2.12 While economic problems challenge the gender identity of men in Hong Kong, increasingly complex gender relation at the micro-level has also become another challenge, particularly for younger men. Traditional gender norms require Chinese women to conform to “Three Obediences and Four Virtues”, be gentle and to care for men. Despite radical social changes in the status of women, most of our male respondents, regardless of age, still hoped that their female partners would uphold these traditional values. When asked about their ideal partner, these men said that she should be:

“Tender and caring...no need to be very smart...cook my favourite dishes sometimes...give me massage.” (Unemployed youth, young men group)

“Women from mainland China...they will help you...they respect you...for example, when we hang out, drinking with peers, she will serve me well, like help me refill the drinks so that my friends will praise that I have a good girlfriend who treat me well.” (Unemployed youth, young men group)

2.13 Nonetheless, the respondents complained that Hong Kong women have changed. Not only they have their own views, they demand more from men.

“Traditionally women didn’t have a say. Women had less bargaining power...They couldn’t earn a living so they had to rely on men. They couldn’t complain. But now, more women outperform men in the workplace. They have more bargaining power...They don’t need to rely on you...So there are more quarrels.” (Professional, young men group)

“The last generation...if you could earn a living, you were regarded as good enough to be a husband But now women want their future husbands to be rich, handsome, caring, tender.... Now it’s more difficult for men...because women can earn more than men do, they have rights to speak out.... They can look for a higher qualification partner.” (College student, young men group)

2.14 According to our male respondents (especially young men’s disapproval), although Hong Kong women refuse to follow and take up responsibilities according to the traditional normative ideals of femininity, they continue to exercise their rights prescribed by this tradition.

“We’re talking about gender equality. Men now need to share some of their rights with women, but at the same time men are continued to be asked to bear more responsibilities than women.... For example, if a lamp is broken, a woman would ask a man to repair it. Repairing a lamp is really very easy, but if you tell the women to do it herself, they will challenge whether you are a man or not.”(Post-graduate student, young men group)

2.15 Other than finance, competition and relationship with women are problems that irritate men in Hong Kong. Most of our male respondents (especially young men) feel that they cannot voice out their discontents or grievances in the relationships. Young respondents of middle-class and high educational attainment experience much in this aspect, probably because they are more capable of expressing their needs.

“How to release our pressure? We usually don’t handle it until it explodes. (Laugh)” (Post-graduate student, young men group)

“Men should be strong...you are required to stand up as an individual...vigorously.... That is, you need to be seen as a reliable person, a dependable person.... A man should behave like a lion, a tiger, have the proper ability to do certain things, to give others’ the impression of being tough.... Men lack the flexibility to play the role of the weak.” (College student, young men group)

“Everybody has his weak spot ... but a man’s weak spot is something only he knows, or should only be known to someone who is really intimate to him ...the society doesn’t accept a man revealing his weakness ...But for women... they can display both their weakness and strength and most of us would accept that. But for men ... even though you are being badly treated, being scolded (by your boss), you just have to accept it no matter what. You have to cope with it yourself. The pressure turns inward and was kept inside.” (College student, young men group)

“Asking for help...showing your weakness is not allowed (for men).” (College student, young men group)

“When a woman was scolded by her boss, she could grimace, she could cry. But if a man was scolded, his only option was to grimace. He could not cry. No crying for men. Men have fewer options to cope with their emotional strain.” (College student, young men group)

Between tradition and transition: crisis or opportunity

2.16 As mentioned above, the gender identity of men in contemporary Hong Kong, especially young men, was challenged due to structural changes in the labour market and changing gender relations. Many younger respondents felt that it was more difficult for them to comply with the normative ideals of male identity compared with the older generations. However, do changes inevitably result in crises or will changes give rise to new opportunities? Some respondents suggested that traditional gender norms not only discipline women, they also discipline men. In this regard, there may be positive changes that can generate new possibilities of development for both men and women.

“To be fair, there are discriminations against women as well as against men. Discrimination is everywhere in our society.... What we want is less stereotyping, such as stereotypical cultural norms that expect men to always be the protector and women be protected. It doesn’t have to be like that....If there are less stereotyping, both men and women can have more space. I don’t mind giving women more freedom and flexibility, but men should also be given more, too.” (College student, young men group)

2.17 The problem lies in the fact that the paces of changing are not always the same. We can find some changes even in traditional ideas.

“I agree with the cultural norm that “men should be breadwinners while women be homemakers.” It is a good deal. It provides a clear division of labour and could prevent marital discord. It creates harmony (between the couple). Of course it would be better if men respect rather than dominate their partner.” (Professional, young men group)

2.18 As shown in the above quotation, even though this respondent still upheld the traditional gender norms (male breadwinners and female homemakers), he recognized that men need to respect women. This indicated some ideas of changes had instilled into the traditional ideals. On the other hand, there were traditional ideals still embraced by men who accepted changes. For example, a young professional was willing to share housework with his female partner and respected her intention to work, only on condition that family was her first priority and she had to take care of children personally.

“I don’t mind sharing (housework)...although I prefer working... and she (his wife) takes good care of the family. But if she really wants to work, then... alright, I have to respect her. But...if she neglects the home because of her work, then it’s not ok for me. If you have children you can’t focus on work only.... I don’t want to hire a domestic helper. I think we should take care of our children ourselves because as parents, we are the role models of our children. I would not want to leave the childcare work of my children to either helpers or grandparents. It would be unfair to my parents if I ask them to look after my children. It would be unfair to give them such a big responsibility. They are our kids and as parents it is our responsibility to raise them ourselves, to be good parents.” (Professional, young men group)

2.19 Another young male respondent thought that the traditional norm of “male breadwinners and female homemakers” and working parents were not problems. However, he rejected the idea of “female breadwinners and male homemakers”.

“Men as breadwinners while women as homemakers is ok. I think it’s also ok if both are breadwinners. But I don’t accept women as breadwinners and men as homemakers. Men should work...Men should not be restricted to home. I think it’s much harder to earn money outside. It’s an obligation for men....Men are escaping this obligation if they call themselves home husbands while their wives have to work.” (College student, young men group)

Summary

2.20 This chapter discusses men's understanding of male identity in contemporary Hong Kong society. Probably because of the challenges thrust on them, younger men have much more to say on this topic when compared with older men. They begin to consider their identity at the very moment when they are at crisis.

2.21 In summary, both younger and older respondents agree that structural conditions have created obstacles for men to live up to the cultural ideas of male identity. The attainment of hegemonic masculinity is even more unachievable. The major obstacles are de-industrialization and its replacement by service industries that challenge men's work prospects and abilities to earn a living. Next, elevated living cost increases financial burden on men. Furthermore, increased participation of women in the labour market suggests that some men have greater competition with women. At the personal relationship, raising women's status might suggest that fewer women would be submissive to men unconditionally. However, since most of our male respondents still hold traditional cultural norms of male identity that prevent them from expressing their feelings, men find it difficult to voice out their grievances and cope with their stress. Some male respondents also complain that women want to have it all: having new autonomies and power without giving up their traditional privileges.

2.22 As we have observed from the sharing of men of different ages, it is found that men in Hong Kong are still abreast of many traditional cultural norms of male identity. However, under the new economic and social environment, the foundation for upholding these traditional ideas is lacking. Traditional and transitional ideas often coexist. Amid rapid changes in gender relationships, it is inevitable that men and women would find themselves at a loss.

Chapter 3

Masculinity in Contexts : A Class Analysis of Male Identity

The struggle of being a breadwinner

“Work is the most important. You must have a job. You don’t need to get a very high income. You just need to earn enough to support your wife and your children. If you cannot support your family, that is true misery.” (Working-class man)

“It’s common that in most grass-root families that wives have to work outside home....I still hope to bear most financial responsibility and take care of my family. It would be better if I can support my family without my wife having to go out to work.” (Working-class man)

“I am married and I need to support my wife and children. Think about the education fees, the living cost, there is a burden on my shoulders.” (Middle-class man)

“We divided our economic responsibilities, which means, I take care of this part, and she takes care of another part. Usually, the part that I take care of is a much bigger part ...I need to pay for everything related to our main living costs, such as rent, mortgage instalment, wages for the domestic helper...while my wife pays for meals out, food and clothing for our daughter.” (Middle-class man)

3.1 In the course of building male identity, it is influenced by many self-inflicted and external factors. Similarly, most of our respondents, regardless of their socio-economic status, consider paid employment the most important element in the construction of their self-identity. For these men, a paid employment enable them to financially support their family and allow them to take up the traditional gender norms prescribed for men, though labour force participation of married women has increased gradually. According to a study on local family conducted in 2009, in nearly 20% of Hong Kong families, the wife earned more than the husband did (Ting, 2009). However conceptually, most men whom we interviewed continue to believe that men should be the primary provider for their families, and that women’s income should just be supplementary. Also men believe that harmonious family relationships can be maintained only when their income is sufficient to support a living for the family.

“If you earn good money, you can raise your family. As people said, when you have money, you get harmony. No money, no harmony, right?” (Working-class man)

3.2 Some respondents said that not only men who considered their role of provider essential to the family, their wives had the same expectation. In traditional concepts, men are not only the primary provider, they are also the household head with status and authority in the family. However, some of male respondents lamented that their status in the family was challenged. Some working-class men directly linked the decline of male authority at home to the increasing economic contribution of women to the family.

“Her (wife) ability to earn a living makes her voice louder than mine at home.”
(Working-class man)

3.3 Unlike working-class respondents, our middle-class male respondents did not directly link a husband’s financial contribution to his power in family. Nonetheless, they still regarded themselves as the main provider for the family.

“They (women) are now enjoying more authority (at home), but you (men) should take up more responsibility for the family (financially).” (Middle-class man)

3.4 Both working and middle-class men considered having a paid employment essential to maintaining their sense of dignity as shown in the following dialogues:

“I will be unhappy if my wife is the one who is supporting the family financiallyIt is a Chinese tradition that men should take up this role.” (Working-class man)

“If my wife worksto support our family, I would feel that I am not capable.”
(Working-class man)

“Women stay behind their husbands to take care of him and his miscellaneous chores...This is normal for me. But I think it would be a disgrace if a man follows his wife around to do the small chores for her like a servant or a nanny.” (Working-class man)

“It’s a matter of face. To ordinary men, they are expected to be the stronger ones in a relationship. If it turns out that he is weaker than his female partner...there would be pressure on him. How would other people judge him?” (Working-class man)

“Because we men don’t want to lose (to a woman).” (Working-class man)

“Very often men think that women judge us first and foremost by our paid employment.” (Middle-class man)

“If she earns more than me, it’s more or less a pressure, it is all about my self-esteem!”
(Middle-class man)

3.5 As for men, it is not their capacity to financially support their family, but also in relative terms: their ability to be a more financially resourceful provider when compared with their female partners. In other words, male identity is constructed through their comparison with women and men gain self-esteem only when they have a competitive advantage over women. Scholars have pointed out that men’s identity is based on doing things that are non-feminine. That is, inscribed in the notion of male identity is men’s superiority over women. That means men may feel incompetent if his wife or female partner has greater achievement and higher salary than he does. Consequently, one would expect contemporary men to have more pressure because they are not only competing with other men, they also strive to compete with their female partner and exceed her. In such an atmosphere, those men who do not meet the expectations will lose face, and suffer a blow to his self-esteem and self-confidence. If the men's self-identity is not based on surpassing themselves, but rather exceeding beyond women, it will be extremely difficult to achieve this today as women generally have attained same educational level as men and they largely participate in the labour market. Moreover, facing the rapidly changing social and economic structure, it will be more and more difficult for men to be “outstanding”.

Working-class men and entrepreneurship – vision and loss

3.6 Although work is important for both working-class and middle-class men, they project different career paths to success. As for working-class men, many believe that setting up one’s own business is the only path to be successful.

“You have to establish a business from scratch, that’s what I mean by being successful. If you work for somebody else, then your success can only be measured by how much you earn, but having your own business is an entirely different level of success.”
(Working-class man)

“It’s not just about earning money, but also about having your own business and to have somebody to work for you and for you to control. It’s not the case if you are being employed, because no matter how successful you are, you are still just someone else’s employee.” (Working-class man)

“You can never earn big money if you are just an employee.” (Working-class man)

3.7 Despite their aspiration for entrepreneurship, most of our working-class respondents are pessimistic when they face the gorge between reality and expectations.

“Decades ago in Hong Kong, you can find a job even if you are not eligible. Now it is not possible. There are no more factories. If you know little, you can’t compete with others.” (Working-class man)

“You want to establish your own business now? It’s no longer easy....It’s different from the past when there were ‘Shanzhai’ factory (small-scale factories) for people to start their own business with just a few employees. Now it’s impossible...Now all businesses are dominated by corporations. You can hardly get the opportunity to start your own business, if not impossible...No main industries are left for newcomers now to start their own business; all sectors in Hong Kong are monopolized by big businesses. Of course you could start your own business in some new terrains, but that is not easy ...” (Working-class man)

“If you want to start your own business, you have to have some start-up capital. If you don’t have this, it’s difficult to do so. It’s not like in mainland China where it’s still relatively easy for an individual to start his own business.” (Working-class man)

“Why is it difficult to establish your own business in Hong Kong? I think it’s because of the high property prices and high renting costs for shops. If you rent a store, it would at least cost you \$30,000 Hong Kong dollars a month; but then the property owner will monitor your business. If your business is running well, the owner will increase the rent. You would never be able to keep up with the ever rising renting cost.” (Working-class man)

3.8 The above quotation illustrates that working-class men, without educational qualifications, are alerted that they are disadvantaged by the restructuring of Hong Kong economy from labour intensive manufacturing industries to knowledge-based high-end financial and service industries. They also criticize that different industries are dominated by some huge corporations, and there are dwindling opportunities for ordinary people to start their own businesses. Exorbitant rents and severe competitions mean an increasingly harsh environment for small businesses.

Middle-class men and upward mobility - vision and loss

3.9 Similar to working-class men, middle-class respondents also feel confused about their work prospect. For middle-class men, the cornerstone of the male identity is career.

“I want to have a career and that is, to have some achievements to build up self-identity” (Middle-class man)

“I’m not talking about work. I’m talking about a career, which you can have some achievements, which provides room for creativity. I want to have a career.” (Middle-class man)

3.10 Gauged from the discussions among our middle-class respondents, career for them refers to two dimensions: upward mobility and job satisfaction. These men expressed their ideas as follows:

“I think work is important as you need to climb upward.” (Middle-class man)

“Whatever job you do or business that you run, if it is going nowhere...like you sat on this position two decades ago, and have continued to sat on it two decades later, or if you owned this store two decades ago and it stayed in the same scale.....then people would wonder what you have been doing and why hasn’t there been any progress or development...” (Middle-class man)

“On the contrary, if women stay on the same job and same position for decades, that’s fine. They are satisfied.” (Middle-class man)

“If men stay on the same position and on the same job for two decades, people would judge you, you would judge yourself, you wife would judge you. Nobody would let you get away with it.” (Middle-class man)

“Whether you are married or single, work is critical to a man’s identity...If your job is not stable, if there are no chances for a promotion, or if it is a dead-end job....It would be ok (to have this type of job) if you are in your twenties. But when you turn thirty, you would start to wonder why haven’t made any progress. Then when you turn forty, your stagnation would become a serious issue.” (Middle-class man)

3.11 However, chances of upward mobility are declining while there has been growing

fragmentation of work and job instability. Most middle-class men recognize that many jobs no longer provide an ideal working environment for them. Even though there are desirable jobs, competition with women is so keen that men feel themselves not at an advantaged position.

“When I returned from the US to Hong Kong in 2000, it felt like there were no longer any long-term jobs. More and more people could only secure part-time jobs”
(Middle-class man)

“Now so many jobs are contract-based. (The lack of job security) ... created a lot of pressure for men.” (Middle-class man)

“The social structure has changed, now it’s....I think communication skills are becoming more important in the job market. I think men are disadvantaged in this transition because nowadays service jobs have made up the bulk of employment opportunities in the Hong Kong economy....Not only do I think that men don’t have any obvious advantages (over women) in the labour market...when you look for a service sector job...Honestly, if you are the boss you’ll prefer (to hire) a woman than a man.” (Middle-class man)

Stress of dual-income families

3.12 Rapidly rising property prices and rental costs mean that many Hong Kong households cannot rely on a single earner to support the family. Dual-income families have become the norm. Of course, the pressure on women in dual-income families are generally larger than men do, because women still have the main responsibility for most of the housework and childcare. However, due to commonly long working hours and increasing demands on helping children with their study, men in dual-income families also feel the pressure. This especially affects working-class dual-income families. On the one hand, they lack the economic resources to employ domestic helpers to help with household chores and childcare. On the other hand, many working-class men work exceedingly long time, up to 12 hours. All these factors contribute to pressure experienced by the dual-income families, especially for the working-class men. The following are their voices:

“It is very difficult to have men as breadwinners and women as homemakers nowadays in order to maintain a living. It is true to say that prices of properties and consumables are escalating.” (Working-class man)

“It’s difficult to balance work and family responsibilities because the work hours are so long now. You just don’t have enough time for family. There are competing

demands (you don't have) enough time to spend with your family....(you) don't have time to take care of your children, (you) cannot accompany them for activities,(you) don't have time to help them with their study, (you) just don't not enough time.” (Working-class man)

“My wife works for a hotel....I work for a telecom company....I always need to work overtime....I get little time to communicate with the kids at home and (to talk) about their homework...That is, I work all day long. At the time I return home from work, my children would already be asleep. (I spend) probably one day in a week with them....” (Working-class man)

“It's supposed to be nine hours a day, but I need to work for twelve hours for almost every day....So when I come home (from work), although I really want to help my kids with their homework, but I can't (because I am too tired).....Sometimes, the kids would be naughty and I would lose my temper. I lose my temper and scold them because I am so tired and there are no outlets for my frustrations.” (Working-class man)

“Often I need to do the chores after dinner, it is usually at around eleven or twelve o'clock midnight. And I need to work the day after....Sometimes we need to pack and unpack clothes in-between seasons, often we don't even have time for cleaning or for anything. Many chores need to be postponed until another day...” (Working-class man)

New challenges for gender relations

3.13 Not only that middle-class men and working-class men differ in their ideas of economic success and ability to balance family and work responsibilities, we observe another difference between them. In contrast to working-class men, middle-class men seem to be concerned more about the new challenges to gender relations. In our focus group discussions, many middle-class men voiced out their difficulties in maintaining a good relationship with their female partners.

“It's easier to be a “big (macho) man”. I'm a Chiuchow (Chaozhouese) man. It's easy to be a macho man like my father, but it's more difficult to learn to be a man with responsibility or to have equality (with women). (Men nowadays) are always expected to behave and to care for women's feelings.” (Middle-class man)

3.14 Both genders get more opportunities to work alongside each other. This causes men to be more vigilant in handling the relationship with female colleagues.

“I have more chances to interact with women....The problem is, it’s true that I have developed some affectionate feelings towards some of them even though I’m married. Like it or not it just happens....Before 1972, it’s legal (for Hong Kong men) to keep concubines. What about today? The stress on men I think is, firstly, you have to care about gender equality; secondly, (you) need to liberate, (you want) to have an outlet, to let women to be equal, to give some of your rights to women; thirdly, you have to handle your own sexual relationships, you need to be very careful in handling these relationships....” (Middle-class man)

3.15 Love with affections and feelings has become a cornerstone in modern marriages. However, what should men do to maintain a romantic relationship? Many of our middle-class respondents are apparently baffled by this question. Some respondents suggested that maintaining a happy marriage was like looking after a plant, one needed to constantly put effort into it and to water it regularly. Yet some were displeased that in order to maintain a happy marriage, the demand was solely on men that they needed to be a good actor.

“You need to give her (wife) flowers regularly, (to) remember her birthdays, and, to pull the chair for her (when dinning out).” (Middle-class man)

“You need to be sensitive to her changes of appearances, such as her hair styles.” (Middle-class man)

“Sometimes you, as a man, you need to perform the roles expected from you if this satisfies your partners’ images of male identity. Very often as a man you need to put on a mask or a buffer to make your female partner feels comfortable” (Middle-class man)

“Women are like, let say when the couple have meals together, the wife would expect the husband to serve her. If you don’t do that, our wife would complain: ‘even if I can take my own food, it does not mean that you should not help me.’” (Middle-class man)

“Even when you win a quarrel, you are still the loser because if she leaves, then it is your fault and you are the one who needs to win her back. When she makes mistakes, she expects you to forgive her...But if you are the one who makes mistakes, then it is unforgiveable. You need to do many things to compensate her and to repair the damage.” (Middle-class man)

3.16 Interestingly enough, it is not only women who demand an intimate relationship with their male partner, in fact some middle-class men also voice out similar needs. The following male respondent elaborated in length his feelings of being neglected by his wife, who was too busy looking after their daughter.

“Now that my wife’s spending most of her time and her attention on our daughter, I feel being neglected....I am a human being and I have emotions...I feel being neglected. Men’s pain is, it’s a like a cycle. At this moment, if I want to go for a hike, I can only ask my friends to accompany me. My wife will never accompany me for a hike, neither would my daughter.” (Middle-class man)

Chapter 4

The Circumstances of Hong Kong Men's Family and Marriage

4.1 From the analysis in Chapter 3, it is shown that, regardless of working-class or middle-class, men have closely linked their male identity with their work and financial capacity. Since the 1990s, related studies on family or fatherhood in Hong Kong have indicated that roles of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers are still common in most cases. Although increasing proportion of women work outside the family, they have to bear the large share of housework while most Hong Kong fathers still play a traditional role as breadwinner. According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups in 2001, over 90% of respondents agreed that a “good father” should fulfil the responsibilities of affording their wives and children, parenting and keeping a happy marriage (The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, 2001). Another survey conducted by the Boys and Girls Club Association of Hong Kong found similar results. About half of surveyed fathers lacked the time to fulfil child-caring responsibility and 47% of fathers did none or little housework, while more than 50% of fathers thought that their main responsibilities were to financially support the family and parenting (The Boys and Girls Club Association of Hong Kong, 2003). Some working-class men and unemployed fathers were interviewed by Caritas Community Development Service in 2003 and 2004, respectively. It was concluded that financial means was a core indication of their masculinity identity (Caritas Community Development Service, 2003; 2004). In 2002, more than a thousand men aged 36~50 were interviewed by the Caritas Personal Growth Centre for Men and Department of Applied Social Studies of City University of Hong Kong (Caritas Personal Growth Centre for Men and Department of Applied Social Studies of City University of Hong Kong, 2003). Only one-fourth of the respondents were frequently involved in their children's homework, while 43% of them were involved in some housework. In 2010, Women's Commission reported that only 44% of men agreed that they should have a share of the housework (Women's Commission, 2010). Our study confirms that respondents still embrace the value that being breadwinners to provide financial support to their family is a sole responsibility for men.

Expectation on providing financial support to family

“Some people think that you are successful if you have a job and raise the family well. To my standard, I think it is a type of success. That is, you don't have much trouble in the family and the kids are doing well. Not much requirement of education. If you want to get higher educational attainment, then you have to work on yourself. If you

just want an average, like secondary school, to post-secondary education, if you can afford it. I'll have a sense of success as a father.” (52 years old, married, 2 children)

“My family has four members, including two children and a home-making wife. My salary supports the whole family. If this is called ‘satisfied’, then I feel quite satisfied.” (44 years old, married, 2 children)

4.2 Most fathers prioritise the responsibility of working outside over child-rearing and parenting at home. Some fathers think that it is acceptable to share wife’s housework and play with kids during weekends and holidays.

“(Do you do housework?) Somewhat, sometimes. (Such as?) Washing dishes, tidying the table, buying groceries. (What about the children?) Communicating well with them, such as hanging out with them on weekends and holidays. (What activities?) Swimming, playing ball games.” (44 years old, married, 2 children)

“I stay with them when I get the time. During holidays, for instance, they plea for going to Ocean Park, or anything they want. We go to have yum cha (family meal) together. Or go to Ocean Park sometimes, and places alike, try to put more time on it.” (56 years old, married, 2 children)

4.3 However, other than supporting the family financially, some men consider that men should do some housework in order to be a responsible family member. This is also an expression of responsibility for the children.

“As a good husband, a good father, work comes first. At least you have a job, you can support the family life. When the basic need of three meals is fulfilled, there comes the housing issue. Or you have to borrow money. You have to put every effort to earning money and spending it cautiously. Then the kids are born, go to kindergarten, primary school, secondary school and college step by step. You have to bear the cost of education as an obligation to the family. Some people get a fair income, but they spend on gambling, drinking, prostituting, that’s trouble. I think, in a family, to be a good man is not to be a macho man. You have to do everything. At home I do the cleaning and cooking....It’s an obligation to the family, you share the housework.....cooking, cleaning, buying groceries, washing clothes, I do everything. I could do more than my wife does in some aspects. I get used to it for a long time already.” (70 years old, re-married, 3 children)

“(Then what do you do at home?) Nothing special, rearing the children. There is a lot to do already. Though we have a domestic helper, but she is after all a helper. You have to take care of the children. They are yours....My wife doesn’t do any housework. Actually I do all....Such as cleaning the floor, I do it all by myself. I quite enjoy it, such as cleaning the floor and windows. I do all. The helper can help sometimes.” (56 years old, divorced, 3 children)

4.4 These men with progressive gender ideologies only made up a small part of our sample. Nonetheless, they pick work as the primary task of masculinity. Take the unemployed men as examples, although they are willing to have the share of household chores and child-rearing and they accept that their wives earn more, they still believe that men have to work. When work and taking care of family are in conflict, they consider men should put a higher priority on work.

“Men have to work after all. You can’t rely on a woman to feed you. It’s absolutely impossible....It is certainly not a good idea for you and your children if you take the child-rearing responsibility alone after divorce. As a man, how to rear children? I understand it. If you don’t have sufficient financial means, you can’t take care of them all the time, such as taking them home from school. You don’t have the time to do so. You won’t have a tender mind to take care of your kid even if you stay at home. After all, women think of the long-term planning.” (56 years old, divorced, 3 children)

4.5 Women greatly raise their economic ability by participating in the paid workforce outside family. When these wives could not pick up the entire housework, their husbands would share out some household chores (Tsang, 1994). Alternatively, middle-class families hire foreign domestic helpers to do the housework. Even so, women are still solely responsible for housework (Choi & Ting, 2009). Nevertheless, traditional gender norms, such as “It is father’s fault for not educating their children”, “Men is the authority of a household”, “Men as breadwinners, women as homemakers” are still embraced by fathers in Hong Kong. In such a demanding working environment, the ideology of masculinity based on financial capacity deteriorates the circumstances of men who wish to spend more time in the family. Also the relationship with children becomes a problem.

“In the past, I started to work in early morning, off at 9pm, back home at 10pm. I could get only 2 hours from 9 to 11pm to see my children. Even if I chatted with them during dinner, how much could it be? From then on, I could only spend weekends with them.” (56 years old, married, two children)

“Sometimes you get really stressful at work, which will affect your temper at home....Once in a while, the kids will be naughty, then your emotion is affected. You

scold at them as you have no place to release. It's bad for both sides (work and family). The emotion can't be balanced." (36 years old, married, one child)

"In the past, we said "men as breadwinners and women as homemakers". It's men's pain to lose family life. In consequence, there's a gap between my children and me. There's a lack of a sense of familial love. That's exactly happening to me now. (Sobbing) This is my experience ... in family, we take rest, we and children go picnic together, having tea. So can you imagine how happy it is? This in fact is important to a family." (58 years old, divorced, one child)

4.6 The environment of long working hours in Hong Kong compels men to spend a lot of time working outside home and lessen their time with their family. Most of the corporations and employers may assume that (male) employees do not play a family role, which reinforces the traditional division of labour in genders. Nevertheless, if arrangement of work allows, some men are willing to take care of family after work.

"As a civil servant enjoying more day-offs, it's not a big problem to take care of my family. When my children were little, I changed their diapers, fed them milk, and coached their homework. I started to do these when I got home from work to let my wife relax so that she could prepare dinner or do her own things." (60 years old, married, two children)

Marital problems

4.7 Family is a crucial domain of socialization, which constructs gender difference and division of work between genders. When the order of gender in the family is still limited to the traditional concept of "men as breadwinners and women as homemakers", it will be difficult to achieve gender equality in the society. Of course, gender perspective of the family will often be influenced by other social structures. Just take a look at the media promotion of Father's Day, there are watches, ties, audio devices, so on and so forth. These products represent the expectation of society on fatherhood and masculinity. Fathers need to establish their career, financially support the family, protect and support his wife and children. Coupled with the gender perspective of "men as breadwinners" in the work field, it appears difficult to break through the traditional confines imposed by gender stereotypes. And this traditional gender concept also affects the marital relationship. A work-oriented masculinity construction makes men to focus on relationships at work rather than at home. As a result, men may likely pay less attention to their marriage and feelings of his wife, which may ultimately lead to marital problems.

“Social life is a must at work; you’ll have to be late for home. Then, my wife starts to wonder where I go, especially if I go to mainland China. I work in this field of decoration that I have to go get materials in mainland China. Sometimes it takes one to two days per trip. These trips lead to quarrels. We have arguments...I socialise with the so-called bosses in daytime, having meals, having teas, playing mah-jong. They give me some jobs. It’s common in big companies. They are not the boss, but directors in charge of some departments. I have to stay with these people; I seldom stay at home at night. She has to have dinner by herself every night. It’s sad as I think of it again.” (56 years old, divorced, three children)

4.8 The male identity emphasising on the work domain increases opportunities for me to have extra-marital relationships that are related to social activities and frequent contact with women in the working environment. However, some men do not think that extra-marital relationship would affect marriage if they do not cross the line. But the definition of the “line” is vague. Some regard the line as a relationship with sentimental engagement, while some others define the line as a sexual relationship.

“To be honest, there is occasional sex. Everyone has it in that group of people. We’re not indulged. We can leave it and go....Everyone has a woman in mainland China. That kind of women does not matter.” (56 years old, divorced, three children)

“It’s false that I have no feelings on women, even though I’m married....Love without sex is ok, but love with sex is a big problem. That’s how I define the line....Love with sex, it’s difficult to handle....That kind of sexual relationship, and you have to handle it very carefully. My other line is, you have to be friends with many people; you can have affection, but you can’t have sex. That’s it. You have to control yourself.” (49 years old, married, two children)

4.9 Financial issues also cause conflicts in a marital relationship. Couples usually argue how each other spends their monies. As revealed in focus group discussions, men holding traditional norms as breadwinners tend to spend more on leisure, while their wives wish to spend more on children or family. On the contrary, family-oriented men who would do more housework tend to prioritise the spending on family over personal consumption. It reflects the fact that family values would affect spending preferences.

“It’s less frequent now to have quarrels over money issues. Now the economy is down, she told me to spend less. Sometimes we still go out. You know, men want to take family to have meal outsides. She said now the economy is not good. You better save

more. It's alright. But men are still more willing to spend." (56 years old, married, two children)

"On the contrary, men hesitate to buy new household appliances, but women are keen on having new stuffs." (52 years old, married, two children)

"At least I don't drink, smoke, gamble or go to prostitutes. I bear the family responsibility. I share the housework, cooking, cleaning, buying food, washing clothes, I do everything.... I save money for my children and let my family live better.... My wife and I are cautious in spending money. We both have obligations to the family. We finish paying the mortgage in ten years." (70 years old, re-married, three children)

4.10 Parenting is another cause of spousal conflicts. Some male respondents thought that their wives were too strict on their children, requiring too high on children's school performance, and arranging too many activities for their children. However, there were also some men who reported to be stricter on their children in order to keep them from delinquency.

"I suppose you should allow more space for kids. But then my wife will be irritated. She thinks, I do so much for the kids, why don't you support and appreciate what I do, instead of questioning me that the time on the kids is wasted." (49 years old, two children)

"For example, I don't think my children have to attend prestigious schools. I guess most fathers agree with me. The ones who force children must be mothers.... I give them freedom, she calls it 'unconcern'. Spoon-fed education is a way of caring? It doesn't have to be like that, right? That's her reasoning; wife's illogical reasoning." (54 years old, married, one child)

"I ask not to give too much tutoring to the kid. He has to attend tutor classes all day long. I'm not saying I don't want him to study. But it's very sad for him. He takes tutor classes right after school till 8, 9pm. He lives far away. Then he sleeps and wakes up at 6am for school. It's very hard for children. We hold different views on this issue." (56 years old, divorced, 3 children)

"(On parenting) we don't match, but if she thinks that is right, then I let her do so. Sometimes I think it shouldn't be this way. You have to discipline the kid, monitor him, then he will less likely be going down the wrong path." (58 years old, divorced, two children)

“I think for some cases, she treats our daughter in a lassie faire way. I am stricter....If I talk to my wife, then she will be upset.” (70 years old, re-married, three children)

4.11 However, most men think that they know more about parenting than their wives do. Even though some of the wives are full-time homemakers, these men still think that they know better and therefore are more suitable to coach their children in the school work.

“Usually I make the decision about children’s education. I arrange it. She is seldom concerned about it. She is in charge of household chores. We have a clear division of labour. It’s better to avoid having diverging opinions. Otherwise the kid doesn’t know who to follow.” (36 years old, married, one child)

“Mother’s way is no longer allowed. You have to let the boy know who he is. He has to find out his own direction. He has aspiration. He has to do the things he is good at instead of being what his mother wants.” (47 years old, divorced, one child)

“My wife has more time at home, so she does more parenting. However, if there is something about school work, she will ask me, probably because I’m more educated. The school work will be left till I’m back at home.” (52 years old, married, two children)

4.12 When encountering marital conflicts, men in our focus groups tend to tolerate in order to avoid quarrels with their spouse as they believe a harmonious family is pivotal. Harmony can only be achieved by toleration. In addition, these men want to avoid the pain of trapping in a damaged marital relationship. However, men feel invalidated because they have the impression that their opinions are often rejected by their wives.

“When you raise another question mark, she will easily be sentimental. It’s men’s pain. The more difficult part is you have to take it all. If you think she makes no sense, but that’s women’s right. No way. You have to take it all. I don’t want to argue with her in front of the kids. She doesn’t reason with logic.” (49 years old, married, two children)

“She’s more often in charge. I seldom make a comment. If I think it’s not right, I will talk about it only after some time in order to avoid an argument. If we argue, it is a quarrel. She always wins.” (56 years old, divorced, 3 children)

“When my wife is furious..., even if I know she’s illogical, I know it’s useless to reason. What’s more, if I reason with her, I can’t avoid to be sentimental.... Then I

always try to yield. After I yield, I don't think about it anymore. Wherever I go, maybe the toilet, I try (act of deep breathing)." (49 years old, married, two children)

"The rule of debate is....if she wins, it's logical; if I win, it's illogical. That's my situation. Then I learn what toleration is. At the end, I have to pamper her no matter what. Then I rather not argue with her. That's, if I have to pay double, triple or four times of time at the end, then I rather leave the place, take a deep breath. It's toleration." (38 years old, married, no child)

4.13 This toleration does not actually deal with men's dissatisfaction within. It also provides no satisfactory solutions for both parties. Sometimes it even strengthens the impression of his wife's unreasonable image and suppresses more dissatisfaction with the partner.

4.14 In this analysis, we can see that the traditional family gender perspective, particularly at the economic level is still held fast, but it begins to get loose somewhere. In many cases, the existing social structures do not foster gender equality in family and marriage, but rather consolidate the existing model. This hinders those men who want to break through the confines imposed by gender stereotypes.

Chapter 5

Findings of Questionnaire Survey

Background

5.1 In respect of the family and marital situation in Hong Kong, apart from collecting qualitative data from interviews with respondents as shown in Chapter 4, we conducted a questionnaire survey in order to gauge the concepts of gender stereotypes, marital and job satisfaction, hassles typically experienced in daily life and coping mechanisms. A total of 340 individuals participated in the survey. They were recruited during two public seminars conducted in June and September of 2011. They completed the self-administered questionnaires.

5.2 About 46% of the respondents were men. Their ages ranged from 15 to 65 with nearly half of the respondents being 15 to 24 years old. About 60% of the respondents received tertiary education. Two-thirds were never married. About 30% had ever cohabited or married, of which 70% had one or more children. 60% of the respondents earned less than \$10,000 per month. About 30% of the respondents' household income was below \$20,000 per month. When compared with the Hong Kong general population as reported in *Women and Men in Hong Kong: Key Statistics 2011*, our respondents were generally younger and more educated. Fewer respondents had ever cohabited or married. Their personal and household incomes on average were higher than the general population figures.

Method

5.3 With respect to the survey, we measured various attitudes and beliefs concerning gender stereotypes, marital and job satisfaction, hassles typically experienced in daily life and coping mechanisms.

5.4 As for the questionnaire design, seven areas were covered by means of a number of reliable and valid measures on a Likert scale: (1) gender stereotypes were measured by the Sex Role Stereotyping Scale (Burt, 1980); (2) satisfaction towards an intimate relationship was measured by the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976); (3) perceived stress was measured by the Perceived Pressure Scale (Cohen, 1983); (4) daily hassles were measured by a subset of the Hassle and uplifts scale (DeLongis, 1988); (5) job satisfaction were measured on five aspects specified by Job Descriptive Index (Smith et al., 1969); (6) coping mechanisms were measured by

COPE scale (Carver et al., 1989); and (7) social support was measured by Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). Internal reliabilities of these scales as measured by Cronbach's α were mostly above the acceptable level.²

Consensus with partner in married or cohabited relationship

5.5 We compared between men and women in their perceived consensus and satisfaction with their partner in a married or cohabited relationship. Men experienced weaker dyadic consensus with their partners than women did. Table 1 presents the percentages of cohabited-or-married men and women in their consensus with their partners on different aspects of daily life.

Table 1. Percentages of cohabited or married respondents reporting consensus (“Almost always agree” or “Always agree”) with their partners on various aspects of daily life.

Item	Men (n=84)	Women (n=76)	Difference (Women – Men)
Household tasks	11%	47%	36%
Demonstration of affection	24%	41%	17%
Leisure and activities	31%	47%	16%
Amount of time spent together	33%	57%	24%
Sexual relation	33%	59%	26%
Handling family finances	34%	43%	9%
Making major decisions	39%	59%	20%
Career decisions	53%	63%	10%

Note: The other four options are “Always disagree”, “Almost always disagree”, “Frequently disagree”, and “Occasionally disagree”

5.6 We do see that across all aspects there were fewer men who perceived consensus with their partners than women did. “Household task” was the aspect in which the smallest proportion of men reported having consensus with their partners; only 11% of men reported that they “almost always” or “always” agreed with their partners on household tasks. This is also the aspect in which the largest difference (36%) in perceived consensus between men and women; 47% of women perceived that they “almost always” or “always” agreed with their partners on household tasks.

5.7 The second aspect that fewer men reported agreement with their partner was

² If you want to obtain a copy of the survey questionnaire, please contact Gender Research Centre, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, CUHK

“demonstration of affection”. Only 24% of men reported consensus whereas 41% of women reported agreement with their partner was “demonstration of affection”. Career decision was the aspect in which there were the largest proportions of men (53%) and women (63%) perceiving consensus with their partners.

5.8 We deduce two observations from these results. First, some traditional women’s matters like “household tasks” and “demonstration of affection” are the aspects that the lowest proportions of men are in agreement with their partners. Comparatively speaking, in some traditional men’s matters like “career decision”, more men perceive agreement with their partners.

5.9 Second, we infer from the data that men are less expressive of their disagreement when compared with women. On the same aspect, we should expect that the proportions of dyadic consensus reported by cohabited-or-married men and women should be similar. The rationale is that if a husband disagrees with his wife on household chores, the wife should also report disagreement on household chores. Although the men and women completing our survey are likely not couples in this study, we still believe that what our results revealing a consistent gender difference in dyadic consensus is noteworthy of consideration. We reason that the gender difference in perceiving dyadic consensus could be a result of men being less eager to express their disagreement to their partners. If a husband does not express disagreement explicitly despite he disagrees with his wife, the wife may not realize there is indeed discord in their relationship.

Satisfaction with partner in a cohabited or married relationship

5.10 Men and women did not differ significantly on their satisfaction in a cohabited or married relationship. On a seven-point scale ranging from “extremely unhappy” to “perfectly happy”, mean ratings for men and women were 4.2 and 4.3, respectively. There were 78% of men and 80% of women who reported that they were either “happy”, “very happy”, “extremely happy” or “perfectly happy” with their relationship.

Perceived stress

5.11 Men and women, regardless of relationship status, rated their stress experienced in the last seven days. The mean ratings for men and women did not differ significantly. Both men and women reported that they “seldom” or “sometimes” experienced stress in the last seven days.

Hassles

5.12 All respondents indicated on a four-point scale from “None” to “A great deal” regarding the extent to which they experienced each of 36 hassles in eight domains in the past seven days.

The mean ratings for men and women are presented in Table 2. The mean values were around 1 to 2 indicating that in general respondents did not often experience these hassles in their daily life. Men reported that relatively they encountered most hassles related to work and health, and the least hassles in addiction and sexual orientation. Women followed more-or-less the same order. However, there were some significant gender differences. Men reported encountering more hassles than women did in finance, intimacy interactions, sexual orientation and addiction. Men and women did not differ in hassles experienced related to health, social and family life. Notably in this sample of respondents we found that women reported significantly more hassles at work than men did.

Table 2. Mean values of selected daily hassles reported by respondents in the past 7 days

Hassle	Men (n=155) Mean	Women (n=178) Mean	Difference (Women – Men)
Work	1.86	2.02	0.16
Health	1.82	1.89	0.07
Social	1.77	1.88	0.11
Finance	1.76	1.62	-0.14
Family	1.71	1.73	0.02
Intimacy	1.42	1.23	-0.19
Sexual orientation	1.30	1.07	-0.23
Addiction	1.20	1.04	-0.16

The four options were 1 - “None”, 2 - “Somewhat”, 3 - “Quite a bit” and 4 - “A great deal”

5.13 Table 3 presents the percentages of the frequency in encountering various hassles separately for men and for women. We combined the categories of “Quite a bit” and “A great deal”. 40% of men were bothered “quite a bit” or “a great deal” by having to meet deadlines. Respectively, workload and nature of work or study also bothered 36% and 32% of men. However, even more women than men were bothered by these aspects. The percentages of women bothered by deadlines, workload and work nature were 50%, 47% and 52%, respectively

5.14 There were 29% and 28% of men who were bothered by their physique and health. Regarding financial matters, about one-third of men were bothered by not having enough money to support daily necessities and entertainment, and for emergency and education expenditure.

Table 3. The percentage distribution on the four frequency options (viz. “None”, “Somewhat”, “Quite a bit” and “A great deal”) in 36 hassles under eight domains perceived by respondents in the past 7 days.

	Men (n=155)					Women (n=178)				
	None	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal	Quite a bit / A great deal	None	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal	Quite a bit / A great deal
Work										
Meeting deadlines or goals on the job	27%	32%	27%	13%	40%	23%	27%	29%	21%	50%
Your workload	34%	30%	26%	10%	36%	25%	28%	26%	21%	47%
The nature of your work / study	29%	39%	23%	9%	32%	19%	29%	34%	18%	52%
Your job security	48%	32%	15%	5%	20%	53%	22%	15%	10%	25%
Fellow workers	54%	34%	11%	1%	12%	60%	25%	12%	3%	15%
Clients / customers / patients, etc.	66%	22%	10%	2%	12%	73%	15%	11%	2%	12%
Your supervisor / employer (if your are in school, your teacher)	48%	41%	8%	3%	11%	43%	31%	17%	8%	25%
Health										
Your physical abilities	38%	34%	21%	8%	29%	32%	36%	23%	10%	32%
Your health	36%	36%	20%	8%	28%	26%	46%	21%	7%	28%
Exercise	46%	32%	13%	8%	21%	42%	36%	18%	4%	22%
Your medical care	51%	32%	16%	2%	18%	62%	25%	9%	3%	12%
Your physical appearance	55%	34%	8%	3%	12%	38%	40%	18%	5%	22%
Social										
Your friend(s)	47%	34%	13%	6%	19%	37%	40%	20%	3%	22%
Finance										
Enough money for necessities (e.g. food, clothing, housing, health care, taxes, insurance)	31%	32%	25%	12%	37%	41%	25%	25%	9%	34%
Enough money for extras (e.g. entertainment, recreation, vacation)	32%	36%	20%	12%	32%	42%	26%	24%	8%	32%
Enough money for meet emergencies	47%	24%	19%	10%	29%	50%	23%	18%	9%	27%
Enough money for education	49%	23%	19%	10%	29%	57%	15%	22%	6%	28%
Investments	60%	24%	12%	3%	16%	80%	13%	7%	1%	7%
Financial care for someone who doesn't live with you	66%	23%	10%	1%	11%	76%	16%	6%	2%	7%
Your financial debt(s)	88%	8%	3%	1%	5%	92%	5%	2%	2%	3%
Family										
Health or well-being of a family member	37%	37%	20%	5%	25%	37%	37%	21%	5%	26%
Time spent with family	40%	35%	21%	4%	25%	31%	43%	22%	4%	26%
Family related obligation	38%	38%	14%	10%	24%	35%	38%	23%	4%	28%

	Men (n=155)					Women (n=178)				
	None	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal	Quite a bit / A great deal	None	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A great deal	Quite a bit / A great deal
Your spouse	53%	26%	14%	6%	21%	67%	18%	11%	3%	15%
Your parents or parents-in-law	52%	33%	11%	4%	15%	28%	42%	26%	4%	30%
Your child(ren)	74%	14%	9%	3%	12%	89%	6%	3%	2%	5%
Other relative(s)	69%	23%	7%	1%	8%	68%	23%	8%	1%	9%
Intimacy										
Intimacy (e.g. holding hands, hugging, kissing)	66%	21%	8%	5%	13%	76%	16%	6%	2%	8%
Sex	64%	25%	8%	3%	12%	81%	13%	4%	1%	5%
Contraception	84%	8%	5%	2%	7%	92%	6%	2%	1%	2%
Sexual Orientation										
Your sexual orientation	82%	9%	6%	3%	9%	94%	4%	2%	0%	2%
Addiction										
Your gambling problems	84%	8%	5%	2%	7%	98%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Mood-altering drugs	87%	7%	5%	1%	6%	95%	4%	1%	1%	1%
Your smoking	88%	6%	4%	2%	6%	97%	2%	1%	0%	1%
Your drinking	86%	8%	3%	2%	5%	97%	2%	1%	0%	1%
Your drug abuse problems	91%	6%	3%	1%	3%	97%	2%	1%	0%	1%

The two options “quite a bit” and “a great deal” are combined and listed on the separate column to reflect the degree of hassles perceived by respondents.

5.15 In summary, the top two hassles experienced by men were related to work and health. Except for work that women experienced significantly more hassles than men did, men reported more hassles than women in the domains of finance, intimacy, sexual orientation and addiction.

Job satisfaction

5.16 Currently employed men (n=123) and women (n=121) reported on their job satisfaction. The mean ratings were 2.7 for men and 2.8 for women on a four-point scale ranging from “not at all satisfied” to “very satisfied”. These two ratings did not differ significantly. Overall speaking, there were 68% of working men and 70% of working women who were either “quite satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their work.

5.17 We also examined job satisfaction along five aspects including “career prospect”, “pay and benefits”, “supervisor”, “colleagues” and “work”. Table 4 presents the percentage distribution of satisfaction towards different job aspects separately for men and for women. We note that both

men and women were least satisfied with “career prospect” and “pay and benefits”. There were only 45% of men and 36% of women being satisfied with “career prospect”, and there were only 54% of men and 55% of women being satisfied with “pay and benefits”.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents on satisfaction of work-related issues.

	Men (n=123)			Women (n=121)		
	Unhappy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Happy	Unhappy	Neither happy nor unhappy	Happy
Your career prospect	33%	23%	45%	38%	26%	36%
Your salaries or benefits	33%	12%	54%	38%	7%	55%
You supervisor	28%	16%	57%	19%	24%	57%
Your colleagues	27%	16%	57%	23%	16%	61%
Your job	26%	13%	61%	19%	12%	69%

Stress coping strategies

5.18 All respondents reported their frequencies in using effective coping strategies on a four-point scale from “never” to “always”. Men were significantly less frequent in using effective coping strategies than women (Men=2.7, women=3.0). Table 5 presents the frequencies in using different coping strategies between men and women. We combined the categories of “sometimes” and “always” and presented their frequencies on separate columns. We also sorted the combined frequencies reported by men in an ascending order. We see that the rank orders of coping strategies used by men and women were largely similar. Both men and women were less likely to express their feelings or to seek emotional comfort from others when they experienced psychological stress. However, they were more likely to seek opinions and help from others when they encountered difficulties to be solved.

5.19 The largest difference between men and women appears in managing psychological stress. When compared with 63% of women, only 43% of men would often verbally express their psychological stress. Furthermore, there were 50% of men versus 76% of women, who would seek emotional comfort from friends or relatives when they encountered difficulties.

5.20 We draw two conclusions from these results: (1) Both men and women are significantly weaker in-soothing their psychological stress than solving problems; (2) Men, when compared with women, are less likely to express psychological stress and to seek emotional comfort from others.

Table 5. Percentage of respondents indicated their frequencies of using coping strategies

	Men (n=155)					Women (n=181)					Difference (Women – Male)
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes And Always	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Always	Sometimes And Always	Sometimes and Always
I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot.	6%	52%	37%	6%	43%	9%	28%	48%	15%	63%	20%
When I face difficulties, I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.	10%	40%	37%	14%	50%	6%	18%	47%	29%	76%	26%
I let my feelings out.	6%	38%	47%	8%	55%	7%	27%	45%	22%	67%	11%
I get upset and let my emotions out.	7%	35%	47%	11%	58%	3%	19%	52%	25%	77%	19%
I get sympathy and understanding from someone.	8%	34%	50%	8%	58%	2%	23%	52%	22%	75%	17%
When I face difficulties, I discuss my feelings with someone.	9%	32%	45%	14%	59%	3%	20%	41%	35%	77%	18%
When I face difficulties, I talk to someone about how I feel.	10%	31%	42%	17%	59%	3%	19%	46%	31%	78%	19%
When I face difficulties, I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did	2%	28%	46%	25%	70%	3%	16%	51%	29%	81%	10%
I get upset and am really aware of it.	6%	21%	46%	27%	73%	2%	15%	49%	33%	82%	9%
When I face difficulties, I talk to someone to find out more about the situation.	3%	24%	57%	17%	74%	2%	13%	50%	35%	85%	12%
When I face difficulties, I try to get advice from someone about what to do.	3%	23%	53%	21%	74%	2%	13%	52%	33%	85%	10%
When I face difficulties, I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.	3%	14%	63%	20%	83%	2%	10%	55%	33%	87%	4%

Social support

5.21 All the respondents rated their extent of social support on a seven-point Likert scale from “Very much disagree” to “Very much agree”. Men reported that they had significantly weaker social support than women did. We also classified social support as originated from family, friends and some particular persons. Across all three aspects, men also reported that they had

significantly weaker social support than women did. Table 6 presents the mean values of social support between men and women. We noted that men were particular weak in having social support from family (4.7) and some particular individual (4.8). Men were relatively stronger in having social support from friends (5.0). The largest gender difference appears in having social support from some particular persons (Men = 4.8 vs Women = 5.4). Compared with women, men tend to be lacking a soul mate to provide support to them.

Table 6. Mean values of social support rated by men and women.

Social Support	Men (n=155)	Women (n=182)
Family	5.02	5.49
Friends	4.77	5.42
Some particular individual	4.70	5.07

Summary

5.22 We examined through this survey the challenges faced by men in the areas of dyadic relationship, work, daily hassles and perceived stress. We also examined their coping strategies and social support. We summarized the findings as follows:

- Both men and women report the largest difference in perceived consensus with their partners is in household chores and ways of expressing affections. However, men show significantly lower consensus with their partners in these aspects than women do.
- Despite differences in perceived consensus on various aspects, men and women are similar in satisfaction with the relationship.
- Among the eight types of daily hassles, men are mostly bothered by work and health. At work, men are more concerned about meeting deadlines, work load and job nature. However, women are more bothered by work than men do. While 40%, 36% and 32% of men are bothered by deadlines, workload and job nature, 50%, 47% and 52% of women are bothered by the respective hassles.
- When compared with women, men experience significantly more hassles in financial matters, intimacy behaviours, sexual orientation and addiction.
- Men and women do not differ much in job satisfaction. Across the five aspects of work, both men and women are not satisfied with career prospect (45% of men and 36% of women) and pay or benefits (54% of men and 55% of women).

- Men are significantly weaker in using stress coping strategies when compared with women. Both men and women are relatively more effective in employing coping strategies to solve problems but less effective in coping with psychological stress.
- Men are weaker than women in their social support network across all three aspects of family, friends and particular persons. The largest gender difference appears in men that they do not have some particular persons (intimate friends) in providing support to him.

Chapter 6

Are Women Men's Competitors?

6.1 The silence on men's needs and problems under the social and economic restructuring provides opportunities for hostile ideas against women to prosper. These ideas lead to a hypothesis that often interprets the problems of men's declining status as a result of women's improving status. Rapid changes of gender relation in recent years have given rise to the perception of "gender imbalance", "women over men" and "carnivorous women, herbivorous men" in the press. Indeed men's dominant position in education has been vanishing. The introduction of nine-year compulsory education and the discontinued policy of gender-segregated secondary school placement³ contributed to a drastic decline of women illiteracy rate from 25.5% in 1981 to 7.5% in 2010 (Hong Kong Census and Statistic Department, 1985; 2011). Similarly, along with rising educational and occupational opportunities, the difference in labour participation rate between men and women has been minimising in the past decades from 53.5% in 1961 to 16.3% in 2009. Generally speaking, labour participation rates between men and women nowadays are nearly the same (Ngo and Pun, 2009; Hong Kong Census and Statistic Department, 2011). With the rise of women's economic capacity, they are increasingly advocating for their needs. Owing to changes in women's roles in the workplace and family in recent years, there has been a perception that men tend to be at a disadvantaged position. Without doubt, men no longer dominate the labour market whereas women commonly work in various industries. However, is it true that women's participation in the labour market directly threatens men's employment and life? Is it necessary that the rise of women's general status causes the decline of men's status? What is the genuine unfairness underlying the competition between men and women?

6.2 Findings of focus group discussions revealed that men generally endorse the concept of gender equality. However, when men are grappling with daily work and family life, their embraced traditional gender norms of "authoritative role" kick in to create great stress for both men and women. In general, men feel that women as competitors threaten them in two aspects. On the one hand, women seem to enjoy more work opportunities than men do in elementary occupations due to economic restructuring. On the other hand, men feel greater social pressure because the society evaluates men on their work and financial capacity. In this regard, men's achievements in these areas directly affect their self-esteem and self-worth, and therefore they are easily under stress.

³ Refer to EOC's report "Formal Investigation Report on Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System" published in 1999.
<http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/graphicsfolder/inforcenter/investigation/list.aspx?itemid=1210&investigationname=1>

More job choices for women?

6.3 As more and more women have participated in the labour market, young men with little education and middle-aged adults in the working class feel particularly threatened. While the Hong Kong economy used to depend on manufacturing in the 1960s and '70s, it has now transformed to a knowledge-based economy focusing on commercial business, finance and service industries. Educational qualification, interpersonal relationship and communication skills have become the most crucial assets in employment. Furthermore, as global economy and business environment have fluctuated in recent years, it severely affects employment and job security of the poorly educated working class. For instance, during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic and the subsequent financial crisis of 2003, men of middle-aged and working class, were prone to losing their jobs. It created much anxiety and feeling of helplessness. At the same time more women were entering the job market. Men increasingly felt that women were competing with them. As a result, men begin to blame and develop animosity towards the female competitors.

Unequal employment opportunities

6.4 The Hong Kong Men's Union presented statistics gathered from February to April of 2011 to show that unemployment rates for men and women were 4.2% and 2.8%, respectively. As for the unemployed, there was a significant gap in unemployment rates in the age group of 15-24 between men and women (10.7% for men and 7.3% for women). Reduced employment proportion for men also seemed to have taken place in the industries of wholesale, retails, restaurants, hotels, and import/export trades. In 1996, the employment ratio of men to women was 55:45 in 1996; in 2006, it was 49:51 (Apple Daily, 3 July 2011). Both sets of figures appeared to indicate that men's advantages in the labour market have been waning. Our male respondents claimed that apart from the circumstances that more and more women were taking up jobs that resulted in competing with men, some respondents claimed that in general, employers preferred to hire women than men. It was therefore easier for women to find a job and they tended to have more choices of jobs than men did.

6.5 Male respondents complained that even for many "gender-neutral" jobs (without a requirement on gender) like support staff, general clerks and bookkeepers that both men and women were qualified for the jobs, women had a "clear advantage" over men. An example was found in the service industries:

"I don't think that it has a large impact on me because, after all, what I do (computer technician) is typically populated by men. Similarly, the work that I do is generally more suitable to men. But I do think that if you are looking for jobs like business, public

relations, marketing, women would have a bigger advantage.” (Middle-aged middle-class group)

“Of course, in service industries like food and beverages, departmental stores, women do have their merits. Just that there would be some people, when they are enjoying your services, if you were a woman, you can be sure that they would feel a bit more comfortable! Say if you are going to receive some services, when you are comparing between a male versus a female service personnel, a typical person would also feel that a female personnel would give a better first impression.” (Old-aged middle-class group)

“Frankly speaking, for women, it is easier for them than for men to find a job. Say for a salesperson job, you won’t hire a man, especially an elderly man. You claim there is no age discrimination. It doesn’t matter what you guys claim; no one bothers.” (Old-aged with chronic disease group)

“Even for a woman aged fifty-something, it is still easier for them to find a job. But for a man over fifty years old, to be frank, people hesitate.” (Old-aged with chronic disease group)

6.6 In fact, it is observed that gender stereotyping for particular job types not only influences employers’ preference, but men’s self image will affect their choices of jobs. Women seem to be “easier” to find jobs because they are not picky about the work. An example was a couple filing for bankruptcy. The wife worked in the service sectors of cleaning, cosmetics and massage. The husband once worked in the kitchen but quitted the job to avoid meeting old mates. He tried to learn massage but gave up because he felt ashamed. He commented, “I can’t convince myself. I can’t touch somebody else,” and “I don’t want to work as a security guard.”

6.7 A study conducted by Professor Wong Hung from the Department of Social Work at CUHK found that when compared with women, men in poverty tended to isolate themselves out of impaired self-esteem. They felt ashamed because their skills appeared useless to earn a living. They could not accept to work in elementary “low-paid” labour market since they had been better off in the past (Wong, 2005). Comments were noted: “You don’t want to walk back” and “After all, I still have a psychological barrier” (middle-aged divorced man). This observation echoes our findings in Chapter 2 that men tend to take the view of service industries not desirable for them because skills and craftsmanship that men treasure to build up self-esteem are no longer required for the jobs.

Men are not as versatile as women

6.8 In general, respondents accept modern values of gender equality. However, while gender stereotyping on women has been challenged, gender stereotyping on men persists. Most men recognize that women can choose to work (instead of being a housewife) due to financial

needs in dual-income households. However, men still embrace the cultural ideals that men should “support the family” and women should take care of housework and childcare. As men still consider that their sole responsibility is to get a job in order to provide financial support for the family, men are more likely to consider that they experience more stress at work than women do. Young men with higher education have also shared this belief.

6.9 First, women have a choice of “whether they enter the labour market or not”. Men reckon that “battling at work” is their calling. Women however, can choose between “going out to work” to become “iron women”, and staying at home to “bring up kids and serve their husband” as a “well protected wife” in a wonderful marriage (higher-educated youth group). While both men and women can be “successful”, women can also be described “being blessed” in the family. In terms of career, women have “more flexibility” (more room and options) (higher-educated youth). Elderly respondents also considered that contemporary women have an option of going out to work and indeed women eagerly opt for this opportunity:

“Men who care for their families would definitely take up a job. Women’s role as a homemaker would definitely be taking care of small children. Hong Kong women nowadays, however, seem like they are even more eager than men in wanting to work. Women who could find a job easier than men do will have a larger say.”

“More varieties of jobs available for women indeed.”

“Indeed, more varieties of jobs available. It is the other way round that you have to give in to her. The husband has to give in to his wife.” (Old-aged working-class group)

6.10 We can see that while women have more choices at work, men in comparison feel ever more aggrieved. Men develop a sense of anxiety being threatened. They also feel that in terms of interpersonal relationships at work, women have more room to react differently. Take the example of being scolded by the boss. Some respondents claimed that contemporary women could behave in a tough and uncompromising manner, or they could behave in a tender way and even cried. On the contrary, men should never cry or express their emotion. Their weaknesses and irrational responses were never shown before people.

“It is like in the past women wanted to ‘ask for an option’. In the past women had to be weak. But now they could be ‘tough’ or ‘weak’. You can choose. But men always have to be tough. You may be a little weak. But it is still not quite acceptable. I do understand. It is just that it is not yet there.” (Higher-educated youth group)

6.11 As from the views of male respondents, women do not perform particular well at work and they are not committed. Due to the fact that it is not an option for men to shrug off responsibility, men have to rely on themselves to solve problems. They need to have leadership. “You will have to work it out even it cannot be worked out.” Men would seldom seek help. This is their merit that they have to pay effort and “get their hands and feet dirty” in solving problems, instead of “paying lip service”. Respondents felt that women needed not to work hard and relatively their stress was lessened.

“This is labelling. Men are there so solve problems. Women are there to get men to solve problems.”

“What the society expects of us does matter. We do have to solve problems. We do need leadership. We do need to work things out. The reason why we need to solve problems is that men’s nature is indeed solving problems, getting the job done. I cannot really say for sure, but women, relatively speaking, are free of this obligation; therefore, women’s main focus is not of solving problems. We are here to solve problems. This has to do with our role. Not necessarily that it is in born. I do not think that by nature men have to solve problems. This is not in born.” (Higher-educated youth group).

A dilemma: Are women competitors or collaborators?

6.12 As presented earlier in the analyses based on class and generation, we see that men are apparently upset by women’s increasing competition for jobs and salary level. In fact, what underlie men’s disgruntle are men’s self male identity, their concerns over earning ability and say in control, their stress of upholding socialized masculinity, and anxiety brought by the deep-rooted traditional ideologies of gender norms.

6.13 Interestingly, men in general think that the distribution of power and status between men and women is like a see-saw that when one goes up, the other must go down. Male respondents do think that the rise of women’s general status will cause the decline of men’s status. Men are increasingly worried about their vanishing power.

“Nowadays women have an ever increasing status that men’s traditional advantages are diminishing. It is a matter of distance between you and the lady next to you. Say in mainland where that lady has lesser qualifications or earns less than you do, your traditional male values can be lifted up again. On the contrary, say the lady who you are comparing with has better qualifications, earns more and has a higher status; you may have an easier time because this mighty career woman would have taken care of everything even before you have a chance to put your hand on it.” (Higher-educated youth group)

6.14 Due to stress derived from the society, economy and traditional gender ideologies, male respondents do not perceive that they have received any support from social policies. Male respondents believe that social policies still consider women as the suppressed group and are lop-sided favouring women. Social policies do not provide any protection to men who are becoming the “under-privileged” group. Chapter 7 will take an overview of social policies and services targeted for men nowadays.

“I personally feel that even at times when men appear more inferior than women do, people still think that women are disadvantaged and people continuously work to raise women’s position. You then have to listen “to what women say”. Women increasingly bring forth “our (women’s) concerns”. The end result is weakening men’s status”

“In some sense gender equality has become an excuse for womn rights.”

“This is just an excuse for women to fight for their benefits.”

“As always, men and women have never been equal.” (Higher-educated youth group)

6.15 The discourse “women are competitors” sounds fairly reasonable that men become uncomfortable with the rising status of women. The truth is that as our society has changed, both the husband and the wife in a typical family need to work in order to make ends meet. The wife has in fact contributed to lessening financial strain. Other than financial burden, we can see from the analyses regarding marriage and family in Chapter 4 that men are increasingly aware of the importance to have their share of responsibilities on taking care of the family and children education. Men enjoy taking part in these activities with their wife or mate as partners. As mentioned by one respondent, men have to change their attitudes in order for men and women to mutually respect and support each other. Not bounded by traditional stereotypes, both men and women could open up more room for their individual development.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: To Explore Social Services and Policies in relation to “Concerns about Men’s Needs and Gender Differences”

7.1 To sum up the major findings of interviews, we discover that in the times of social and economic changes and the rise of women’s status, some men have become stressed and worried towards the increase in women’s status; men have developed a sense of “identity crisis” and “Hong Kong women would surpass men in achievements”. However, a careful analysis of our focus group data reveals that the main source of men’s sense of identity crisis stems from the transition men need to take in changing from traditional gender roles to re-establish their own identities. It also includes their grope and resistance about adjusting gender roles and relationship with partners. Furthermore, from the findings of questionnaire survey, both men and women reported the largest difference in perceived consensus with their partners is in household chores and ways of expressing affections. Among the daily hassles, men are mostly bothered by work and health. This reflects men’s struggles in the face of socio-economic changes and their problems will have impacts on the wellbeing of the family.

7.2 Frankly speaking, cultural ideas that endorse gender equality have already sprouted in Hong Kong society. Women have been given more educational and occupational opportunities. Gender segregation has decreased in some domains of life. We now need to consider how men and women in both public and private domains (including work, education, family and gender relationships) could work together within a framework of mutual respect in order to reduce gender discrimination. Taking gender relationships and family life as examples, we have to reconsider the roles of men and women in dealing with decision making, domestic division of labour, childcare responsibilities, family relationships and marital problems because they are the gender issues argued most vigorously by the respondents.

7.3 Within the traditional framework, many of our respondents still dream of maintaining the traditional “men as breadwinners and women as homemakers” pattern of division of labour as the ideal gender model. Men are expected to be the sole provider of the family while women are expected to stay home and look after children. However, not only that many women have now aspired to have their own career and economic independence, and they want to share out housework with their partner; more importantly, economic structures in Hong Kong have changed such that it is struggling for men to support the entire family solely on their income. Dual-income households are no longer an atypical family arrangement, but rather have become the norm.

7.4 Therefore, the challenges to men's sense of pride and identity are two-fold. On the one hand, men's self-esteem is damaged by their inability to live up to the cultural expectation of being the sole provider of their family. On the other hand, influenced by their beliefs in traditional gender norms, men have refused to treat women as partners of equal status and share with them responsibilities, rights and power. More conflicts arise due to discord in gender relationships. This dilemma is particularly evident among our older male respondents. Nevertheless, we have also seen how certain ideas about gender equality have sprouted in some men, particularly in our younger male respondents. They are willing to share responsibilities with their partner in family or female colleagues in workplace, in a model of gender equality. However, they have been met with institutional obstacles. For this reason, we need to extend our analysis from men's daily experiences to the institutional arrangements and policies, including family, labour market, education and training, and social service provisions.

Family

7.5 A middle-aged married respondent expressed that long working time was the major obstacle inhibiting him from participating in the family and his supervisor did not recognize his request of taking a more active role in parenting. In fact, most enterprises have no provisions to help employees to balance family and work responsibilities. In the case of marital discord or breakdown, both the husband and wife may need counselling services, legal advice and mediation. However, some of our male respondents alleged that most lawyers and social workers have gender stereotypes and tend to provide more assistance for women. For example, a male respondent who claimed to be the victim of spousal violence complained that when he sought help, he was not treated with respect and the case was not taken seriously by the police.

“I called the police, but the police sided with her. I think it is not fair because when a man accuses a woman of assault, the police don't take the complaint seriously, but when a woman accuses a man of assault, I guess the police for certain would arrest the man?”

“(I felt) helpless, very helpless, I think it's unfair because when the husband was the one who wronged his wife, the wife would be given help. However, when the husband was the victim, he had no place to seek help. (In my case) I was the one who wanted to fix our family problems, (I was the one) who was beaten, beaten by my wife, physical assault, but (the police) still ignore my complaint.”

“Maybe I can tell you my lawyer's suggestions. We hired a female lawyer who specialized in divorce cases. She said ‘you know very well that you have no chance of winning this

case (child custody). In most cases, the woman wins the claim. In your case, it is fifty/fifty. If you still want to go ahead, I would help'. It is within this context that we decided not to pursue my case (divorce and child custody) through legal means.” (Middle-aged divorced man)

7.6 When men encounter problems, they seldom seek help. Rather they try to tolerate. Probably because of their self-esteem, most men consider “losing face” when they seek help from government agents like social workers. A social worker had the sharing as follow:

“My impression is that most men don’t seek help. They try to tolerate first. What I mean by toleration is that most men would not want to argue about trivial things. Probably because they feel that this would harm their male identity...But many trivial issues adding together would become a major issue that suddenly explodes. When it explodes the harm that it makes could be enormous.” (Frontline social worker)

7.7 At the individual level, certain gender stereotypes may deter men from seeking help when they need it. At the institutional level, men are regarded as the stronger ones. This may prevent policy makers from tailoring suitable services to cater for men’s needs and recognize the specific problems that men face. It certainly reduces men’s intention to seek assistance. Therefore, in helping men adjust to their new gender roles and gender relationships, it is necessary to explore the loopholes at the institutional level and develop appropriate policies to deal with the problems.

Labour market

7.8 Apart from family life, respondents also talk about other institutional problems that affect their wellbeing in employment. For example, quite a lot of respondents complained that in the labour market employers tend not to implement the policy of gender equality in the recruitment process. Therefore, male job seekers are discriminated in some occupations.

“Just like what they said, some occupations tend to hire only women. Some employers prefer to hire women rather than men.” (Old-aged working-class man)

7.9 Hong Kong is currently a service-based economy. Many elementary service jobs, such as waitpersons, sales clerks and customer service personnel have been stereotyped as women’s jobs. These stereotypes are so entrenched that even men have accepted them and take a pessimistic view on the labour market.

“Of course female cashiers and waitresses have advantages over male cashiers and waiters. Beautiful waitresses and cashiers are eye candies. Many people (men) go to restaurants

to enjoy the pleasure of looking at beautiful waitresses. This is the reality, a reality that we need to face.” (Old-aged working-class man)

7.10 Gender stereotypes at the institutional level will impose constraints on men. In the recruitment process, many employers identify men not meeting certain requirements or showing no real interests for the job, and therefore tend to hire women. In fact, statistical data have also showed that women have dominated in some elementary service jobs. This gender segregation is in fact double-bladed. It is unfair for both genders.

7.11 De-industrialisation has stripped working-class men of their skilled jobs in factories. Mismatch between traditional notions of male identity and the requirements of elementary service jobs have excluded men from newly created job opportunities in the service industries. Confronted with marginalization in these two dimensions, some working-class men will allege that it is women who have robbed their “bowl of rice”. As mentioned previously, what these men have overlooked is that women too have suffered from this gender stereotyping because they are confined to elementary service jobs that are low paid, insecure and part-time in nature.

7.12 To sum up, many working-class men of lower educational qualifications complain about their disadvantages in the labour market (especially service industries) due to increased competition from women and employers’ biases against men. This has resulted in certain hostile discourses against women in the society. To rectify these hostile discourses, more studies must be conducted to understand the root causes of lower representation of men in some service industries. For example, we need to collect data to answer the following questions: Is the lower representation of men in elementary service jobs a result of men’s refusal to take up these jobs? Do men lack the required skills and qualifications required for elementary service jobs? Do employers discriminate against male job seekers in these jobs? It is essential that before any policies are formulated to solve the employment problems of working-class men, we need to understand the causes lest the policies would be ineffective or even create more inequalities.

Education and training

7.13 Gender stereotypes exist not only in the labour market; they are also common in education and retraining settings. In the face of economic restructuring, respondents expect enhancement from policies to promote men's re-employment. Through education and training, the trainees will acquire new skills as well as infiltration of new ideas to reduce gender stereotypes, which will facilitate these unemployed men to re-enter the job market. However, according to available statistics since 1992, among the 90,000 graduates of the Employee Retraining Board

(ERB), only 24% are men, fewer than a quarter⁴⁵. With economic restructuring in Hong Kong, both men and women workers have to face changes in the working environment as it has shifted from labour-intensive manufacturing industries to service industries. In this process, middle- and old-aged working men with lower education level have faced a great challenge. Men generally possess strong self-esteem, emphasize the importance of being successful, and embrace traditional concept of pretending to be strong. This makes some men difficult to work for lower wages or accept jobs traditionally women have worked for. Some of them would even have deterred from the ERB courses. In our interview, a middle-aged man shared some experiences of taking ERB retraining courses after he went through bankruptcy and divorce:

“What have I done after my bankruptcy? (I worked at) kitchens (in restaurants). I enrolled myself into a culinary course, a kind of employee retraining. The course even provided me with a monthly subsidy of Hong Kong 1000 dollars a month... During the time when I was on welfare, I enrolled myself into some retraining course for massage skills...But I really cannot bear the job nature, I cannot accept the fact that I need to provide massage to another person...Regardless of how good my massage skills are, I just cannot accept the job psychologically, what can I do? Afterward, I also worked as a dish washer...”
(Middle-aged divorced man)

7.14 In fact, except that some retraining courses are designed and targeted at women, courses provided by the ERB cover a wide spectrum of professions and there is no evidence that there are any built-in gender biases in designing the courses. Then why are men underrepresented in these retraining courses? This is a question that needs to be further investigated.

Social Service Provision

7.15 Not only are men reluctant to join retraining courses, they are also not willing to seek help from social service providers. The following respondent is a frontline social worker with many years of providing services for men. According to him, the obstacles are multiple, covering issues related to person, organization, policies and even system. Even if they are approached, they are commonly reluctant to express their needs and share their problems with providers, and their dropout rates of service programmes are also higher than those of women. All these factors have made service provisions for men a more daunting and challenging task for frontline social workers.

⁴ Refer to Employees Retraining Board's "Major Statistics Figures".
http://www.erb.org/Corp/home/info_stat/en/?jsessionid=DF866FEEB7C62DC9F4E4408E5FF46781

“As far as I know, unlike women, men seldom actively seek help from social service providers. It’s also more difficult to establish rapport with male clients. Moreover, since there are fewer men seeking help, there are fewer services catering for their needs. It would be difficult to establish some service programmes just for men.” (Frontline social worker)

7.16 He pointed out that due to entrenched gender norms that men are expected to be strong and tough, most men are reluctant to reveal their weakness to a third party. For that reason, men are not willing to seek help when problems occur. When frontline social workers handle male clients, they need to have much patience and spend more time. Very often the problems that are revealed to service providers are only the symptoms of some bigger problems.

“You have to invest a great deal of time in men’s service because it takes longer to build up rapport with them. It is also because it is not easy for them to tell you their needs. For example, in some cases after we helped them find a job, after a short while they would have quitted already. We sense that there might be something else, some problems rather than unemployment, for example some emotional or attitude problems. To tackle these problems, we need to first establish rapport with them.”(Frontline social worker)

“As far as I am concerned, most parents in traditional Chinese families seldom teach their sons to handle their own emotional issues.” (Frontline social worker)

7.17 In addition, the social worker mentioned that social workers need to concern about male clients’ self-esteem. Influenced by cultural norms of male identity, most men aspire to be the stronger ones. These aspirations have created certain stress for men. In a competitive society, there are winners and losers. Most of those men who seek help from social service providers have been discredited by hegemonic masculinity, which stipulates that success for men means having a successful career, a high income, and an obedient female partner. Being discredited, men who seek social services are often in some degree being marginalized by the society, being looked down by their relatives and generally have lower self-esteem. For these reasons, social service providers need to be careful with their own words and behaviours so that they would not further damage the self-esteem of these help-seeking men.

“We found that regular counselling methods may not be effective for men as they show resistance (against our services). Let’s say, when you counsel a man, you can’t give him too many instructions and theories because they are sure of themselves. They think that they know a lot already. You cannot lecture them in ways like you lecture a junior person. I remember a case in which a male client whose application for something was turned down. It was probably because the social worker who handled the case was a female

colleague that the man felt twice humiliated: his demand being rejected and being rejected by a woman; he responded to the rejection by attempting suicide. I think frontline workers need to have a lot of patience, need to listen to clients, and need to have the gender sensitivity to handle male clients.” (Frontline social worker)

7.18 Since men are generally reluctant to express their emotions, most of men who seek help from social service providers lack social support networks and they are really helpless when problems occur. This is partially related to the traditional division of labour in genders, under which men are defined as the provider of the family. Men build up their work-based network in employment whereas women’s role in the family often facilitates their development of a community-based social network. Without social network in the community, the disadvantaged men (particularly unemployed men, unmarried men and men with family problems) face greater hardship in dealing with problems. It is important that social service providers can provide a platform for these men to rebuild their support networks.

“Community centres could serve as a platform for men to build up some support networks. They could provide a place for them to meet up, to share and to form some mutual support groups. If a man encounters problems, there is a place where he can share his problems and seek advice. I think community centres could play this role. Of course no single service provider can solve all the problems that men face, but I think a network of centres and also collaborations between NGOs and government could certainly help men to solve many of their problems.” (Frontline social worker)

7.19 Although service provisions that cater for men’s specific needs remain a rarity, some organizations have accumulated certain frontline experiences in this area. In general, social service provisions in Hong Kong mainly cater for the needs of the elderly and the youth, and the majority of their clients are women. However, there have been counselling services for gambling addiction, alcohol addiction, and drug addiction. Most of the clients for the services have been men. Other social service providers could learn from the experiences of these organizations and incorporate appropriate strategies and policies in reaching out to male clients. Furthermore, many men view social service providers mainly serving “women” (Chan, 2009). There is a need to change this perception in order to encourage men to seek help from the social service providers.

7.20 Furthermore, many frontline social workers may lack gender sensitivity and are therefore unaware of the specific circumstances and needs of men. This will result in high dropout rates of social service programmes. In fact, most social service providers have not offered any gender sensitivity training for their frontline workers. In order to understand the needs of male clients, their help-seeking patterns, and the cultural and structural obstacles that inhibit men from seeking help, we need relevant data of requests for assistance by both genders to help us make

evidence-based and informed decision on policies. Even though the Women's Commission has launched gender mainstreaming for nearly ten years, both the Census and Statistics Department and the Social Welfare Department have not released any gender segregated statistics on various social service recipients. Without these statistical data, it would be difficult to gauge existing condition of social service provisions and conduct a targeted review on policies and resources allocations.

7.21 Some social service organizations and scholars have started to pay attention to men's specific circumstances and needs. Their views are valuable references for policy makers of social service provisions. For example, some scholars argue that existing social service provisions are biased towards the needs of women, children and the elderly. This emphasis has shaped the design of programmes, the methods and languages adopted in counselling, and the feminization of the concept of social service provisions, so that men have not been provided with the most appropriate mode of services (Chan, 2009). Chen and Leung (2006) suggested gender mainstreaming of social service provisions. They argued that existing 'family based' social service provisions cannot cater for the rapidly changing gender relations and the specific needs of men. They proposed a 'gender-based' social service provisions that aim to promote gender equality. Within such a framework, the problems that men face would not be viewed simply as personal issues or the lack of communication skills, but rather as problems caused by inequitable social systems and traditional gender relationships (Chan and Leung, 2006).

7.22 Some other scholars argue that men particularly the elderly are influenced by their embraced self-esteem and tend not to seek help from social service providers (Li, 2006). To solve this problem, one of the social service providers has named their centre as men's services for 'growth'. According to its founder, this name gives male clients a very positive image and would avoid any stigmatisation of service recipients (Lai, 2011). In sum, in addition to developing services catering for the specific needs of men, we hope that mainstream social service provisions could take into account needs of different groups of men and women and incorporate these understandings into their service provisions. It is especially important for frontline workers to have gender sensitivity for providing family counselling and family education. Parents and their interaction in family life are important socialization agents for their children to embrace perspectives of gender. It is anticipated that the concept of gender equality will be incorporated in relevant counselling and education works in a bid to make adjustments under the social and economic restructuring.

Summary

7.23 To sum up, we hope this report could raise concerns about the challenges faced by men in contemporary Hong Kong and deepen our understanding of how cultural norms about gender

roles and structural changes in the society have impacted on the lives of different groups of men. By so doing, it might facilitate policy makers in formulating policies that promote gender equality, raise gender sensitivity and take into account different needs of both genders. Although social changes have imparted men and women in different ways, past studies focus on the situation of women and have neglected men's needs. Men's problems are worsening, particularly for the under-privileged groups. Rapidly changing labour market and family structure have gradually shifted the balance of power and men are no longer the advantaged group when compared with women. This is particularly true when we look at the situation of marginalized men such as men of ethnic minorities and unemployed youth. They are really in need of social services and welfare provisions.

7.24 From the discussions of our respondents, we sum up the major challenges that different men in Hong Kong face:

- With respect to their economic role, all the men whom we have interviewed are influenced by traditional gender norms and the capitalism hegemonic ideal of male identity. For them, the cornerstone of masculinity is some measures of economic success through either entrepreneurship or the obtainment of a job with upward mobility, and the ability to financially support the family. However, they have all realized the gap between this ideal and the structural obstacles to achieve it. This gap constitutes the major source of pressure for our respondents. Secondly, many of our respondents consider the improvement of women's status a threat to them. They are concerned about the competition from women in the job market. Some of them find it difficult for men to work for elementary service jobs. The difficulties that unskilled male workers face stem from their perception about elementary service jobs, which are sometimes not viewed as 'real jobs'. As regards middle-class men, they are concerned about the increasing importance of communication skills in many white-collar jobs and the competitive advantages women have enjoyed in this respect.
- As for cultural perception, most of our respondents still think that it is essential for men to be more successful than their female partners. Many admit that they would feel the pressure if their female partners have a more successful career. Although most of our respondents still dream of having a female partner who could fulfil the "three obediences and four virtues", most have realized that gender relationships have been changing, and that women increasingly have their views and demand to be respected and in charge. Based on the data, we concur the problems are two-fold. First, changes in normative expectations often lag behind changes in positions of women and men in different domains. Second, the pace of changes is uneven between men and women. It has also generated discontent among men who complain that women want to have it all: having new autonomies and power

without giving up their traditional privileges.

- Family constitutes another source of pressure for men. On top of financial concerns, men often hold views different from their wives regarding the appropriate ways to raise their children. Moreover, working-class dual-income families face another set of challenges. On the one hand, long working hours have reduced the time parents in these families could spend with their children. On the other hand, unlike their middle-class counterparts who often employ domestic helpers to help ease the burden of household chores and childcare, parents in working-class dual-income families lack the resources to employ external help. The third challenge in family that men face is related to their lack of support during family crises. Due to traditional cultural perception about men as the tough and strong one in a relationship, male victims of domestic violence have found it difficult to seek help: their complaint is either ignored or not taken seriously by related service providers. In cases of divorce, men have found that it is difficult for them to win custody of their children because many judges and social workers still hold the stereotype that women are better care takers of children.
- At the individual level, most men are reluctant and ashamed to seek help when they face emotional problems. Our questionnaire survey shows that although men are more likely to experience hassles in relation to their finance, intimate relationships, sexual orientations, and substance addiction, they have fewer support networks and intimate friends to turn to, and are less likely to seek help when compared with women.

7.25 As a whole, most social service providers in Hong Kong focus on meeting the needs of the elderly, women and youth. When they provide services for men, they cover mostly deviant behaviours such as gambling addiction, alcohol addiction and other addiction behaviours. In reality, when men face economic, family and emotional problems, they are bound by traditional gender norms and appear reluctant to seek help. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they do not need help. It only means that service providers are required to develop alternative approaches so that men in need would open up themselves for assistance. However, there is a lack of gender sensitivity in social service provisions and frontline workers are not provided with gender sensitivity training. In this regard, social welfare agencies and frontline workers in handling cases may fail to address men's specific needs and deliver appropriate solutions for them.

Recommendations

7.26 In this report, we would like to recognize challenges and needs faced by men at the policy level. These policies may cover areas of social services, family and marriage, employment, and education and training. In advancement, gender differences should be respected such that

gender equality can be achieved. However, we reiterate that by drawing attention to the needs of men, we do not suggest policies returning to traditional gender norms that favour men. On the contrary, we criticize biased patriarchal system and will explore ways forward for gender equality. Although the status of women has been raised during the past few decades, gender inequalities that disadvantage women are still common in most domains of life. Some men still embrace traditional gender norms and resist changes, and they blame women for their own difficulties and problems, without a reflection on their circumstances and the hardship encountered in the system. This makes their situation even worse. In probing into the issues that men face, we hope that this report will help dispel these hostile views on women.

7.27 To view from a different angle, we agree that with elevated women's status, men and women need to learn how to share duties and responsibilities and to live with mutual respect. While women have increased their participation in the labour market, we hope to see increase in men's active participation in the domains of family (e.g. pick up more housework and childcare responsibilities) and social services. However, the lack of a gender perspective in social policies imposes institutional restrictions on men to walk out of the dilemma. Therefore, we hope that through compiling experiences of dozens of male respondents and data of a questionnaire survey, some recommendations are proposed so as to provide social policies with a perspective of gender sensitivity. We should respect similarities and differences between men and women, in a bid to achieve gender equality in the long run.

7.28 To tackle challenges and problems faced by men in Hong Kong, we propose the following recommendations:

- (1) As for cultural aspects, traditional gender norms are one of the major sources of men's pressure. To change these norms, the Government and related organizations such as EOC could work more closely with schools and education bodies to promote gender equality. It helps students explore how traditional gender norms have imposed unnecessary restrictions and pressure on men. Although gender roles in society serve different needs, it should emphasize common concerns and feelings between men and women. Men are not bound to exceed women in career because both alike have strong and weak perspectives. Men can protect others but sometimes they need others' concerns and care. They can be listeners but sometimes want to chat with others.
- (2) Educational settings are one of the most important socialization agents of gender roles and norms. However, biases of gender stereotypes are still common in the education process. We suggest that schools incorporate "gender equality" in their curricula and that frontline teachers and administrative staff need to receive "gender mainstreaming" training.

- (3) The media is another important socialization agent of gender norms. Sadly, the press is now filled with gender stereotypes against women and men. In order to change traditional gender norms, relevant organizations need to work with media agents. There is a necessity of using the media as a platform to promote ideas of gender equality.
- (4) At the policy level, it should develop gender-sensitive social service policies so as to identify different types of pressure undertaken by men and women in the social and economic transformation; to note the different aspects of needs of men and women for social services; to compile sex segregated data on social service recipients as a review on the situation; and to help men and women in adapting to the social and economic restructuring. In addition, “gender mainstreaming” should be incorporated into the training courses for frontline social workers.
- (5) As for the social policies, gender differences have not been reviewed and therefore it is difficult to achieve gender equality in their implementation. Furthermore, when men or women face difficulties, they are bound to affect the other gender’s situation. At the family level, it certainly affects the stability of the family. Therefore, to understand the needs of men is of paramount importance. It is recommended that social policies should be made in such a way that it can take care of gender differences. For example, to review the low participation rate of men in employment and training services; to encourage job seekers and employers to break the gender stereotypes for certain job positions; to provide social services for men’s needs, such as male specialist clinic, sheltered centre for abused men; to develop family leave, paternity leave and other family-friendly labour policies so as to encourage men’s participation in family life; and to review the need of observing the rights of men in law enforcement of family and marriage.
- (6) Based on the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the Women’s Commission issued a “gender mainstreaming” checklist in 2002. It is designed to promote a gender perspective at the legislation and policy levels. We look forward to speeding up the work in this area and “gender mainstreaming” will be incorporated into social service organizations. We hope that while our society continues to promote women’s status, we can also take into account changes of men’s status and make appropriate proposals in meeting their needs. The overhaul of the Women’s Commission into the Commission for Gender Equality might be the first step towards the advocacy of equality in both genders.

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Appendix I

Statistics of Focus Group Discussion and Individual Interview

code	group description	Focus group	Participants per group	Individual interview	Total participants
	Youth men group (age 18-34)				
1.	Young lower-educated group	1	7		7
2.	Young higher-educated group	1	9		9
3.	Young marginalised group				
	3.1 Otaku subgroup			3	3
	3.2 Unemployed subgroup	1	2		2
	3.3 Ethnic minority subgroup	1	3		3
	Middle-aged men group (age 35-54)				
4.	Middle-aged working-class group	1	5		5
5.	Middle-aged middle-class group	1	8		8
6.	Middle-aged family-problem group			5	5
	Old-aged men group (age over 55)				
7.	Old-aged working-class group	1	5		5
8.	Old-aged middle-class group	1	8		8
9.	Old-aged chronic diseased group	1	10		10
	Social worker group				
10.	Social Worker group	1	5	1	6
	Total	10	62	9	71

Appendix II

Seminars

First public seminar

“Men in Pain? Where is the Pain?”

- Deconstructing Masculinities, Gender Identities and Changing Gender Roles”

Date : 18 June, 2011 (Saturday)

Time : 10:00am - 12:00nn

Venue : Auditorium Hall, HKCSS The Duke of Windsor Social Service Building

Language: Cantonese

Guest speakers

(provision of video-clips)

Mr. Shiu, Ka Chun Lecturer, Dept. of Social Work, Hong Kong Baptist University

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FadHcmDM-bY>

Mr. Lai, Wai Lun Supervisor, Caritas Personal Growth Centre for Men

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIVQ5WgskEE>

Prof. Choi, Yuk Ping Susanne Director, Gender Research Centre, HKIAPS, CUHK

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntud9dTG7rc>

Second public seminar

“Are Men being Marginalized?

- Analysis of Men's and Women's Structural Positions in Hong Kong”

Date: 17 September, 2011 (Saturday)

Time: 10:00 am - 12:00nn

Venue: Auditorium, North District Town Hall, No. 2 Lung Wan Street, Sheung Shui, N.T.

Language: Cantonese

Guest speakers

(provision of video-clips)

Prof. Lui, Tai Lok Professor, Dept. of Sociology, University of Hong Kong

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gPQJsfo5sQ&feature=relmfu>

Prof. Ting, Kwok Fai Director, Centre for Chinese Family Studies, HKIAPS, CUHK

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_AKNqZl8WE&feature=related

Mr. Leung, Hung Way Registered Social Worker, TWGHs CROSS Centre

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvPCyZd6_rY&feature=relmfu

Prof. Choi, Yuk Ping Susanne Director, Gender Research Centre, HKIAPS, CUHK

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdKpB6yME6Q&feature=relmfu>