

**Between Constraint and Autonomy:  
How Young White-Collar Women in Hong Kong  
Express Their Sexuality**

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In Hong Kong, the number of young, affluent white-collar women has increased significantly over the past few decades. As the education level of women rises and their financial power grows, they seem to be able to consume the commodified male bodies both visually and physically.

This research examines the different forms of capital that women possess, and how the newly acquired affluence of women affects the way they express their sexuality under a heterosexual mainstream discourse. The study makes use of data collected from content analyses of erotic scenarios found in public, and from in-depth interviews which explore young adult women's perceptions of sex, sexual fantasies, desires and behaviours.

Results of this study show that despite the increasing choices offered by global capitalism, women's autonomy in the expressions of their sexual desire remains restricted by the patriarchal values and norms in Hong Kong society.

## 摘要

在今天的香港，年輕及富裕的白領女性掌握了比以往更多的社會、文化及經濟資本。同時，在資本主義及消費主義下，為了滿足女性消費者而被商品化的男性身體已經變得越來越普遍。

本研究針對香港年輕白領女性群體，探討她們如何運用新獲取的資本，在異性戀的主流話語中表現自己的性徵及性慾，通過消費滿足自己的性幻想和需求。本文並通過研究男性身體商品化的現象及深入訪問女性，了解她們的性觀念和性行為。研究發現香港女性雖然在全球資本主義影響下獲得更多對性的消費機會，但是女性的性自主能力在父權主義及其中規範下，仍受到很大程度上的控制。

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

In Hong Kong, despite easy access to sexual information and pornographic material on the Internet, and the provision of sex education in school over the last few decades, open discussion about sex has not become prevalent. Sex is still very much a social taboo, so much so that parents and teachers find it very difficult to talk about sexual issues with the younger generations. Many young adult women in their twenties and early thirties grew up receiving a system of ambiguous sex education from school and their parents.

Interestingly, while sex is still a taboo, contemporary consumer culture is constantly exposing the city's residents to sexual images associated with commercial products. In recent years, young white-collar women have become economically, politically and socially more powerful. Nowadays they seem to have more opportunities to visually, if not physically, consume male bodies. Take for instance the billboard advertisements along Hong Kong's thoroughfares and in shopping malls, the half-nude, masculine, tall and toned male bodies showing the supposed results of slimming programs for men give the impression that Hong Kong has entered an era of the female gaze. Various modifications to the body, such as cosmetic surgery, beautifying products, and physical training programmes have become increasingly popular in contemporary Hong Kong society, not only for women but also for men.

Good-looking and muscular male models are now a common feature in different types of advertising everywhere. The promotion of sex consumption is evident in television productions, such as the Mr. Hong Kong Pageant. Male strip shows by troupes, such as the Chippendales from Las Vegas, and the Asian Adult

Expo held annually in Macau, are also examples. Some nightclubs and bars also organise events such as Mr. Gay Hong Kong. The exhibition of male bodies and a certain degree of nudity are some of the important elements at such events. The commodification of masculinity however is not limited to male nudity or sex; men's non-physical characteristics such as the qualities of a “good man”<sup>1</sup> (hou2 naam4 jan2 in Cantonese<sup>2</sup>; 好男人), are also appreciated.

Traditionally, women's bodies are said to be subject to the male gaze. However, with the new phenomenon of emphasising male beauty, can we now see a “role-reversal” where male bodies are subjected to the female gaze? If so, does it mean that the traditional patriarchal gender relationship has been subverted because women can now equally objectify men? Does the existence of the female gaze affect gender ideology and relations? Does women's improved social status pose a threat to traditional masculinity?

In Hong Kong society, it is commonly accepted that women naturally have lower sex drive compared to men. In fact, women's sex drive or need is hardly recognised. Sexual materials in the public, such as pornographic sections in newspapers and pornographic movies are mostly for men's entertainment and consumption. A local production of pornographic magazine or film for women has not yet to be seen in Hong Kong. However, it does not mean that women do not consume pornography in private. Not many surveys in Hong Kong pay attention to gender differences in the use of pornography or indicate women as a group of pornography consumers, even if these surveys are designed for investigating pornography addiction issues.

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<sup>1</sup> According to James A. Kennedy's book, *How to Fish for a Good Husband in a Sea of Bad Men - Qualities of a Good Man* (2012), some of the qualities include honesty, attractiveness, and faithfulness, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cantonese transliterations in the thesis are based on the Jyuping system



The fact that women's sexual behaviours should be carried out within marriage according to the patriarchal norm in Hong Kong, reveals what constitutes good sexual behaviour. Pre-marital sexual intercourse and masturbation are not desirable, and sometimes these behaviours could be condemned by mass media.

Many informants in the study believed that playing a passive role in sexual relationship was ideal. They believed that not only should they reserve the active role in sex for men, but also not to show they have strong sex drives or being dissatisfied with the sex provided by their men, otherwise they would be labeled as promiscuous.

However, some changes in attitudes of sex have been seen over the past few decades, mainly due to the rise of consumerism and feminist ideology. In a capitalist economy, the body can be transformed into a commodity for whoever has the greater economic power to purchase it and whoever has the body capital to sell it. Capitalist values and ideologies not only shape the ways in which we conceive, modify, and make use of our bodies, but also expose issues concerning gender relationships and politics. For example, under global capitalism, the commodification of male bodies is now legitimised. The increasing acceptance of the appreciation of male bodies, women's higher levels of economic and political empowerment, and more forms of exchange for visual pleasure in Hong Kong, all contribute to the commodified gender relations. This may disrupt the power balance of gender. In this research I seek to find out whether higher education, higher social status and more financial empowerment have made Hong Kong young white-collar women freer from the social constraints over their sexuality. Capitalistic consumerism seems to offer individualistic choices equally to everyone, as if purchasing power is the only concern. However, does it mean that women have obtained higher sexual autonomy?

Also, should the sexual consumption of male bodies be seen as evidence of a trend leading towards gender equality? How should we understand the way both men and women express their sexuality and sexual desire if objectification of the body itself is wrong in the first place?

### **Research Questions**

Through this study, I look into the sexual culture of Hong Kong and ask my young white-collar female informants the following questions:

1. How are their perceptions of sex formed?
2. How do they express their sexuality?
3. Given that their education level, social status, and economic power have generally increased in recent years, have they simultaneously obtained a higher degree of autonomy in their sexuality?

While the third question is the core topic of the thesis, all of the questions above are inter-related. In order to answer the third question, we need to have a more holistic picture of young white-collar women's attitudes of sex and sexual behaviours, which cannot be gained without looking at the first two questions closely. My central questions link up women's newly acquired affluence and their expressions of sexual desire/need/fantasies, and the consequences of more sexual consumption for women with regard to gender power relations.

I look into young women's upbringing and see how their perceptions of sex are formed. The knowledge of sex and meanings of intimacy are learned at a younger age through different social institutions and exposure to various sexual materials. These conscious and, very often, unconscious learning processes, i.e.

socialisation, not only form women's perceptions of sex, but also shape their sexual behaviours when they become adolescents and young adults.

In the process of socialisation, female informants absorbed the patriarchal values of sex and women's bodies. Many young girls have conceptualised pre-marital sex as a morally improper behaviour that should be repressed. Women's sexuality is therefore placed under greater social scrutiny in comparison to that of men. However, women's perceptions of sex are constantly being shaped and challenged in contemporary capitalistic society which commodifies the body and sexual intimacy. In my parents' generation, those who were born in the 1960s, pre-marital sex was less common. According to my father and uncles, holding a girl's hand used to be a very serious gesture, which usually indicated the man's willingness to marry her. Some changes in the attitudes towards sex have been seen over the past few decades. For instance, nowadays, even though women having pre-marital sex will still be frowned upon by the mass media, most young adult women who participated in my interviews expressed their opinion that it was in fact not a big deal. They even found the idea of still being a virgin on their wedding day as "horrifying".

In addition, I examine how male and female physical beauty is constructed and consumed, and how cultural values regarding masculinity and femininity are embraced, challenged, and consolidated. Finally, I discuss how my informants situate themselves when performing sex and displaying gender in a society filled with conflicting social values brought about by recent social and economic transformation.

My research is significant on two levels. At the first level, most of the papers, theses and books published since 1975 regarding gender and sexuality issues in

Hong Kong have not focused on female sexuality and the fulfilment of women's sexual fantasies, let alone women's sexual consumption patterns. Most of the previous research can be categorised into four groups: public health<sup>3</sup>, socialisation and education, women's employment, and the sexualities of "minorities of sexual orientations", such as lesbians, gays, or transsexuals. However, sexual behaviours should not only be studied for the sake of public health programmes, education, and preventing sexual assault in the working environment. Also, while much research has been done on the sexual behaviours of "minorities" in Hong Kong, very little has been done on the expressions of heterosexuality of the majority. The study of sex should no longer be limited by these functions and objectives. For many, sex is simply part of their lives, not just for reproduction but also for pleasure. Moreover, understanding perceptions of sex is a way by which we can relate ourselves to others.

Hong Kong young adult women's search for love, passion, and the satisfaction of sexual needs in heterosexual relationships is still an understudied area that warrants more research efforts. Increases in women's level of education, financial power and sexual consumption choices are also factors contributing to the widening gap between "what the society wants women to do" and "what women want and are able to do". It is difficult to find local ethnographic studies that tackle this contradiction. Thus, women's freedom and autonomy in the expressions of their sexual desire and needs remain a research area worth exploring. On the second level, research studies on the autonomy of women in expressing their sexuality have not received much attention even in the global field of gender studies. Since Shere Hite's pioneering research on women's sexuality in the 1970s, there has only been a small

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of topics under "public health" include prostitution as a social phenomenon and its relation with sexually transmitted diseases, young adults' sexual behaviours and their awareness of using condom etc.

number of scholarly works about women's agency in expressing their sexual desire. Even if they do, they focus mainly on women's consumption of pornography<sup>4</sup>, as if this is the only aspect related to women's sexual desire. My research not only investigates Hong Kong young white-collar women's perceptions of sex, but also their sexual consumption patterns and sexual relationships. This research also examines the relationship between women's increasing levels of education and consuming power, and their sexual autonomy. Research of this kind is limited in both local and non-local gender studies.

## Literature Review

Historically there has been very little scholarly research on the sexuality of Hong Kong women as individuals. *A Source Book on Women's Studies in Hong Kong, 1975-1985* by Fanny Cheung and Pun Shuk-han, was one of the first publications in Hong Kong to summarise the academic work done on women's studies. A total of 78 published studies were classified into six parts, namely "Deviant and Criminal Behaviour", "Education and Employment", "Family, Marriage and Fertility", "Physical and Mental Health", "Sex Roles, Feminism and Social Participation", and "Others". Despite the fact that the ten years of 1975-1985 was viewed as a "decade for women" (1987: i), which "marked a wave of consciousness" on women's changing social roles and status, this wave did not include much research on women's sexuality. In the 1990s, more studies in gender studies were carried out in Hong Kong.

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<sup>4</sup> Recent works such as Clarissa Smith's *One for the Girls! The Pleasures and Practices of Reading Women's Porn* (2007) and Katrien Jacobs's *People's Pornography: Sex and Surveillance on the Chinese Internet* (2010) look into British and Hong Kong Chinese women's attitudes towards pornographic materials.

In *A Bibliography of Gender Studies in Hong Kong 1991-1997* compiled by Fanny M. Cheung, Siumi Maria Tam and Serena Sheng-hua Chu, over 900 titles of research were included. In this volume, “Sex and Sexuality” was one of the subjects listed under the category of “Sex, Marriage and Family”. This indicates that women’s sexuality had gradually become more important as a research focus. Much of the research, though, focused on women’s sexual health, issues regarding pregnancy, and the psychological impacts on female victims of rape, domestic violence or extramarital affairs. There were also surveys on youths’ attitudes towards sex published by various institutions. For example, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups published *Teenage Pregnancy: Service and Policy Options* in 1995 and *Young People’s View on Marriage and Having Children* in 1996. Some research explored sexual behaviours, such as Ling’s *Sexual Behaviour of HKU Students (1989-1992)* (1993) and Tong’s thesis (1997) on the attitudes towards sex education of secondary school teachers in Hong Kong. Nearly all the sexuality studies published in the 1990s focused on adolescents’ attitudes towards sex and the related consequences. These studies targeted either adolescents or married couples. This may have been because the position of women in Hong Kong was still attached to the traditional gender roles of daughters or wives. In the 1990s, research on women classified them into different social groups based on their roles in Hong Kong society. Hong Kong women had seldom been perceived as individuals, and their sexuality was neglected.

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, research targets and foci became more diverse. In the past, research was more concentrated on looking into gender and sexuality aspects of Hong Kong Chinese. Very few scholars paid attention to the situation of other ethnic groups. Additionally, studies on queer sexuality and

homosexuality have become a clear focus in the field of gender studies in Hong Kong. These scholarly works challenged commonly held views of heterosexual relations as the norm. For instance, Chan's "Male/Male Sex in Hong Kong: Privacy, Please?" (2008) illustrated how hard it is for homosexual men to gain privacy and recognition from the general public. Some scholars, such as Nicole Constable (2004), studied the sexuality and discipline of Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong. It is hard to say whether young adult women's sexual experience and behaviours have now been placed under the spotlight in gender studies. However, we have witnessed an increase in the number of publications looking into the issue. For example, Ho, Wong and Cheng's "The Real Deal or No Big Deal – Chinese Women in Hong Kong and the Orgasmic Experience" (2005) was one of the few publications which touched on this sensitive topic. Jacobs' work on "netporn" (2007) studied men and women who engaged in cyber sex and filming their own amateur pornography. The Internet has become a new frontier for people to explore their sexuality and present their sexual identity through posting and sharing pictures and videos online. More studies on adolescents' usage of pornography (Lam and Chan 2007) have reflected a rapid transformation in our lives and our conceptions of sex.

In the recent decade, we also saw some breakthroughs in the field of studying Hong Kong women's sexuality. In the past, women's sexual expression was tightly linked with morality. Now, women's sexuality, attitudes towards sex and sexual behaviours can be represented independently. Pioneering works include Wong's chapter on narrating female sexuality in Hong Kong (2009), Ho's "Beyond Orgasms: Re-narrating of Hong Kong Si-nai"<sup>5</sup> (2008), and Cheung's article, "Creating Space

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<sup>5</sup> The English title is translated from the Chinese 《豁出高潮以外：香港「師奶」情慾再表述》

for Celebrating Female Sexuality”<sup>6</sup> (2004).

I have shown that not much work has been done on Hong Kong young adult women’s sexuality in the context of the changing political, economic and social situation in Hong Kong. For instance, in the 1960s, women's attitudes of sex tended to be more conservative. At that time pre-marital sex was severely condemned and sexual entertainment for women would have been unimaginable. Many changes have been taking place, especially since 2000, which can be reflected by the increasing scholarly works on women's sexuality. In fact, Hong Kong is a good site to look into the questions about the constraints and autonomy of female sexuality, as it is under the influence of different cultural values. The so-called “western and liberal” ideas about sex and supposedly conservative Confucian and patriarchal Chinese teaching coexist simultaneously.

### **Social and Biological Perspectives**

The idea that women are less sexually driven than men is prevalent in Hong Kong society. A common biological-deterministic argument is that women naturally have lower sex drive than men. It has been said that, women, as egg providers, are more careful in picking their partners, and hence they are seen to be more passive in matters of sex. In contrast, men as sperm distributors are more active and aggressive so as to increase their chance of passing on their genes. However, many scholars have pointed out that both women and men could be equally desirous in sex, and the ways these are manifested are subject to environmental and cultural influences.

Here, I want to discuss briefly the debate of biological and social approaches in understanding human sexuality and the conflicts found between these approaches. I

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<sup>6</sup> The English title is translated from the Chinese 《創造女性情慾空間》



will also critique the gender-biased perspectives of researchers and methodological problems in the debate.

Regarding the discussion of women's sexuality, many social anthropologists reject any biological interpretations in an effort to avoid stepping into the danger zone of biological determinism. For many social science researchers, the adoption of biological studies to explain human behaviours would mean that the observable behaviours could not be changed or shaped because they are like programmes in our genes. This idea fundamentally conflicts with the view of social science that believes human behaviours are shaped by cultural and social environments.

Tim Ingold raises an insightful idea about the debate on the approaches of studying human behaviours between social-cultural anthropologists and biological anthropologists. His view is that in order to escape from the “sterile cycles of accusation and counter-accusation”, one has to “dissolve the received subject-object dualism of Western thought” (2006: 131). He said the Orthodox distinctions in biology and social anthropology prevent us from seeing the nature of sociality, that society is neither built into the “individual human biograms”, nor the force of social “collectivity as opposed to individual natures” (2006: 190). He uses the example of studying the relationship between mother and infant to illustrate the blindness of the distinction between the two sub-disciplines. He concluded that the relation of motherhood is both “really social and really biological” (2006: 184), and we should not have a misconception that one can only exist without another.

Ingold did not use examples of human sexual behaviours to illustrate his idea of the problematic distinction between social life and organic life or persons and organisms in the eyes of biologists and social scientists. Yet, I think his idea is helpful for us in our understanding of the complexity of female sexuality. Very often,

we ask questions like “are women less sexually aroused in viewing sexual images, as compared to men?” or “do women generally have a weaker sex drive?”. These are still unresolved questions because of the tendency of seeing sexual behaviours as either social, or biological. However, both of these are contributing factors.

In addition, different research methods would lead to different results. There have been various studies adopting evolutionary biological explanations to examine women's sexuality, sex roles and sexual desire (Kinsy 1953; Morris 1967; Mitchell 1969; Tiger 1970). These studies use rhesus monkey, stumptail monkey, and pygmy chimpanzee, to explain human sexual behaviours. Weisstein in his article also said that many of these primate arguments and their usage in explaining sexual behaviours of human beings have “extremely limited functions”. After all, it is hard to relate primate behaviours to human females and males. All the evolutionary studies could do is “no more than to show some extent examples of diverse sex-role behaviours” (1971:10).

Secondly, the “scientific” interpretations of human sexuality are not absolutely objective. Weisstein stresses that the evidence of primate studies has been misused. He said that only the evidence that researchers wanted to be true for explaining human female behaviours has been used and cited. For example, if one intends to argue for women's natural passiveness and submissiveness related to sex, researches about rhesus monkeys and baboons were often cited (1971:10). But many other examples which show the exact opposite result, were ignored (See Mitchell 1969).

Weisstein concluded that the “present psychology (and biology) with regard to women” is useless (1971:11). He criticised psychologists for being responsible for “limiting the discovery of human potentials” because they do not “respect evidence” or “look at the social contexts” (1971:12).

Lloyd also pointed out that “observation, measurements, and experimental design” are all subjected to the influence of the background of scientists (1993:142). She used different cases of evolutionary biological studies to argue that science cannot be separated from the “social and cultural context” (Lloyd 1993: 150).

Even though Weisstein's paper was first presented in 1968, the female sexuality as being misunderstood because of biased scientific research findings is still an issue, which constantly challenged our construction of knowledge about the female body. Lloyd argues that the fundamental problem of studies done on female sexuality is that much of this research always tries to explain it in terms of “reproductive functions” (1993: 139). As an example, research studies on the orgasm of the female stumptail macaque tend to ignore the fact that female macaques have “no sign of orgasm when they are participating in heterosexual coitus” and “orgasms occurred during sex among females alone”. However, this evidence is not seen as “important orgasms” (Lloyd 1993:142).

Lloyd also points out that the vast majority of studies in psychology, behavioural biology and evolutionary biology conducted from the 1950s to the 1970s are wrong in assuming the sexual desire of human females is strongest when they reach “peak fertility” (1993:143). Kinsy's clinical literature (1953) and Singer and Singer's survey (1972) were used by Lloyd to support the fact that women experienced peaks of sexual desire at times when they are “invariably infertile”, such as before and after menstruation. Lloyd argues that “autonomous, distinct female sexual response” is not considered in the mainstream scientific discourse (1993:147). She also concludes that science could not be separated from the social and cultural contexts, which is the same position that Weisstein held almost 25 years ago. She also emphasised science as “(partly) a continuation of politics” (Lloyd 1993: 151).

More recently, Meredith Chivers in her study (2004) concluded that women are as visually stimulated and even more easily turned on than men. She said that despite self-identified sexual orientations, women have shown strong genital arousal to the sex videos of gay men, lesbians and heterosexual couples. However, because of some male-centered perspectives being prevalent in society, it is harder for women to express their sexual desire. This freedom of expression seems to be more restricted for women than for men.

In this research, I do not focus on studying my informants' expressions of sexual desire and needs with the use of biological studies. However, it is worthy to point out the debate and limitations of explaining human sexuality with the approaches of social science and biology. Following Ingold's criticism about the dualism of Western thought, the western way of doing studies in highly specialised and distinctive disciplines sometimes limits our research from obtaining a holistic understanding towards a particular subject, such as human sexuality. More interdisciplinary research and a higher awareness of the human factors affecting scientific results should be helpful for us to understand women's sexuality more objectively.

## **Methodology**

In order to study women's perceptions of sex, love, relationships, sexual behaviours and consumption of pornography, I carried out in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 32 women between ages 18 and 31 years old from June to August 2012. I managed to meet my informants using snowball sampling through introductions by friends. My friends played a big role in arranging interviews for me, as after understanding the criteria of informants needed for the research, they were able to ask their friends, whom they considered appropriate for the interviews. As for

the criteria of sampling, informants should be between 18 and 30 years old, were white-collar women who earned around HKD10,000 per month, and must be willing to talk about their attitudes of sex and sex lives. Among the 32 informants, not all of them fulfilled all the criteria that I listed here. However, they were highly interested in my research on female sexuality and were very willing to take part in it. Through my friends' introductions, I called up and arranged the date and place for interviews. As almost all informants had a full-time job, interviews took place after working hours, which was ideal for them. Sex seems to be a sensitive topic. But for my informants, they were quite willing to talk about it. Some of the informants were very open in sharing their sex lives. However, some tended to be more reserved. This is deeply related to the character of the informants.

Most interviews were done in public venues such as restaurants, coffee shops and parks in the areas where my informants worked. In particular, we looked for areas that were relatively quiet. Sometimes if informants felt that the environment was not suitable, they would suggest going to other places. They tended to be more relaxed if we had dinner before the actual interview. Only casual conversations about random things were exchanged during dinner. It was a good opportunity for us to become more familiar with each other in order to prepare for an interview about sex. Interviews lasted from one and a half hours to three hours in Cantonese. As to the design of the interview, it starts with questions about their family lives, and the formation process of their sex views. Gradually, even discussion about their own sex lives did not seem embarrassing for many women.

All of my informants were local Hong Kong Chinese, who were born and raised in Hong Kong and have been living here continuously for more than seven years. The average age of my informants was 24.5 years old. In terms of education

level, about two-thirds (21) of them had obtained a university degree. Three had obtained a master's degree. Five women were high school graduates. Three left school after finishing the Certificate of Education Examination. Most of my informants grew up in lower-middle class families. They have become white-collar workers in offices, with an average monthly income of HKD 14,250<sup>7</sup>. After graduating from university and starting a white-collar job, many of them at the time of the interviews were working hard towards becoming part of the middle-class. Many of them were the classic generation of which their families belonged to lower and lower-middle class. They had become the hope of the family to climb up the social ladder as they were usually the first in their family to receive a tertiary education. Even though they were relatively young for having their middle-class status secured, their current salary should not be seen as indicative of their potential earning power.

In terms of marital status, only two of them were married. One had a 3 year-old child, and another was pregnant at the time she participated in the interview. One of my informants had obtained a civil partnership with another woman in Canada two years ago. Regarding their sexual experience, four of my informants never had sex before. As for those who had had sexual experience, the average age of their first sexual experience was 18.5. Nine of them had their first sexual experience under the age of 18, including one who was 14. Most women (30 out of 32) identified themselves as heterosexual, while two self-identified as homosexuals.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Oxfam Hong Kong (2013), which quoted the statistics from the Census and Statistics Department and Social Welfare Department, the median monthly personal income for the second quarter in 2012 was HK\$12,700.

Table 1.1 Basic information of informants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Monthly Income(HKD)</b>
<b>Worm Yiu</b>	19	University	Single	5500
<b>Zacky Yau</b>	20	Form 5 Graduate	Single	7500
<b>Sandy Sze</b>	22	University	Single	10000
<b>Ady Ng</b>	23	University	Single	14000
<b>Cming Wong</b>	23	IVE diploma	Married	15000
<b>Kiki Kwun</b>	23	University	Single	10000
<b>Lam Tsz</b>	23	Form 5 Graduate	Single	20000
<b>Miko Lam</b>	23	Form 7 Graduate	Single	25000
<b>Sally Lau</b>	23	University	Single	15000
<b>Seiki Pang</b>	23	Form 7 (High school graduate)	Single	10000
<b>Sin Ting, Cheung</b>	23	University	Single	5000
<b>Vivian Chiu</b>	23	University	Single	12000
<b>Ariel Leung</b>	24	University	Single	9000
<b>Helen Lau</b>	24	University	Single	20000
<b>Jennifer Ho</b>	24	Master Degree	Single	13000
<b>Kamkam Lee</b>	24	University	Single	12000
<b>Karen Chung</b>	24	University	Single	13000
<b>Lucy Lui</b>	24	University	Single	15000
<b>Fandy Lam</b>	24	University	Single	14000
<b>Sarah Choi</b>	25	University	Single	11000
<b>Jenny Cheng</b>	25	University	Single	20000
<b>Joise Cheng</b>	25	University	Single	15000
<b>Lain Wong</b>	25	University	Single	13000
<b>Yvonne Lau</b>	25	University	Single	13000
<b>Candy Wong</b>	26	Master Degree	Civil partnership with a lesbian	11000
<b>Macy Lau</b>	26	Form 7 (High school graduate)	Single	13000
<b>Alice Ho</b>	27	Form 7 (High school graduate)	Single	12000
<b>Pauline Kam</b>	27	Form 7 (High school graduate)	Single	10000
<b>Irene Lai</b>	28	University	Married (has a 3 yr old son)	20000
<b>Corrina Yu</b>	29	Master Degree	Married	13000
<b>Bobo Cheung</b>	30	Overseas university degree	Single	40000
<b>Mandy Yeung</b>	31	University	Single	20000

Other than in-depth interviews with these 32 informants, pornographic material-screening interviews were also carried out with five of the informants, which took place after the aforementioned interviews. In this part of the interview, different pornographic and erotic materials were shown to the women. These included: photos of male pop stars; a strip show video of Chippendales; a few pages

of erotic texts and H-comic<sup>8</sup>; a catalogue of sex toys; and some pornographic videos. According to the research findings, compared with the other materials, women felt they were most sexually aroused when pornography was shown to them. It was also the main form of sexual consumption in which my informants engaged on a regular basis. Therefore, in the thesis, only women's responses towards the pornographic materials will be discussed. Women's aspirations towards certain male attributes were examined through these materials. I asked what the women liked and disliked in porn, what kinds of materials made them sexually aroused and why. Each of these interviews took more than one and a half hours, which facilitated the in-depth discussion about issues concerning female sexuality and women's sexual desire. All of the interviews were recorded with the informant's consent.

Ethical issues were sometimes encountered. Among the five informants who agreed to take part in the screening of pornographic materials, one of them had never watched pornography before. Out of curiosity and seeing the experience as a "rite of passage", she took part in the pornographic viewing, which went smoothly. However, in a casual conversation a few days later, she told me that the night after the interview she had a nightmare in which she was raped. Even though this informant was 23 years old and the interview was done with her consent, I may have underestimated the psychological and emotional effects that the introduction of pornographic materials had on adult women.

Interviews about women's sexual experiences can be sensitive. I was very grateful and indebted to my informants who were willing to share their emotions, and experience in love, relationships, sex, and even trauma in different phases of their

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<sup>8</sup> H-comics: "H" refers to Hentai, a Japanese word that means sexually explicit or pornographic elements in comics or animation. But the word "hentai" is more widely used by the non-Japanese world, such as Mainland China, Hong Kong, and western countries. In Japan, the term 18-kin (18-prohibited) is used, meaning prohibited to those who are under 18 years old.



lives. I admired every single informant who had the courage to participate in the interview. Even though I was just a stranger to them who was interested in others' sex lives, they had shown great patience, courage, and honesty not just in answering my questions, but in reviewing their past, re-examining the present, and looking into the future concerning sexuality and relationships as a woman.

Besides conducting interviews with women, I also participated in some erotic shows and events with my informants. For instance, I attended the Asian Adult Expo which has been held in Macau every year since 2008. The Expo is a gathering of manufacturers of sex toys from all over the world to promote their new products to the Asian market. It also attracts thousands of visitors to come and experience sexual culture. Every year, the organiser invites Japanese porn stars, writers of erotic novels and strip show troupes, to interact with visitors. Visitors can also pay to have photos taken with models, usually foreign performers from strip show troupes.

Moreover, I attended a Chippendales' strip show with two of my friends and their friends, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, on 17 June 2012<sup>9</sup>. In total we formed a group of six. Sexually suggestive physical contact between strippers and the audience were common during these events. Through participation in these events, I was able to observe the consumptive behaviours of women. Given that they had other choices available, I was able to find out the reasons women spending money on these events and whether they enjoyed the sexually suggestive gestures and interactions with male models and strippers.

Due to the small size of the sample in this study, one can hardly assume it can represent the entire female population in Hong Kong. However, certain degrees of similarity and consistency can be observed within this particular group of

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<sup>9</sup> Chippendales is a touring dance troupe from Las Vegas and is best known for their males' striptease. They perform erotic dances for the purpose of entertaining female audiences. (Chippendales 2012).

informants, indicated by age, educational level and social status. For instance, most of them thought that pre-marital sex was acceptable. This was commonly shared by informants who did and did not have sexual experience, and even women who claimed themselves to be Christian. Variations in the sexual behaviour of my informants can also be seen. For example, some women had multiple sexual partners, some dated with different men frequently and some had romantic relationships without sex. In general, I think my informants were open to talking about sex. Many of them actually enjoyed taking part in the interview exactly because sex was not a common topic for them to talk about even among close friends. In a sense, the interview itself was a rare opportunity for women to talk about the social taboo in a relatively relaxed atmosphere. Some of the informants felt that they could talk about sex openly because the conversations were for academic research purposes, which seemed to be a good excuse for the supposedly-awkward discussion about sex with a stranger like me.

Through in-depth interviews with 32 women and by doing context analysis on some major erotic events, including the male strip show of the Chippendales, the promotional event of Abercrombie & Fitch, and the Asian Adult Expo, I shed light on the sexual culture of Hong Kong and women's ideas of sex, love, and relationships as discussed by my informants. I hope that through this research, one can re-examine Hong Kong young white-collar women's expressions of sexual desire and needs through consumption of sexual materials and involvement in their sexual relationships.

## Structure of the Thesis

In this thesis, Hong Kong young white collar women's perceptions of sex, love, relationships, and sexual consumption of adult's entertainments are discussed. Talking about sex has always been a taboo in Hong Kong society. Women's sexuality is constantly under the control of patriarchal ideology, which imposes normalised expectations on their gender roles and behaviours and leads to their self-censorship and self-disciplining of their bodies. However, women who were born in the 1980s and 1990s are coping with great social and economic changes. Much more so than their parents and grandparents, these women are exposed to sexual imageries, which shape the ways they look at their bodies and sexual relationships. Even with increasing economic power, levels of education, and the increasing number of sexual consumption choices available to the population, the expression of female sexuality is still suppressed by the constraints of patriarchal beliefs.

In chapter 2, I look into the sexual culture of contemporary Hong Kong under the influences of conspicuous consumption and capitalist materialism. I carry out context analyses on three events in or near Hong Kong in 2012, in which male strippers or models were present for public entertainment, such as the promotional activity of the international fashion chain Abercrombie & Fitch, the "Chippendales" strip show, and the Asian Adult Expo in Macau. Each of these events provided opportunities for women to openly appreciate or criticise male beauty. I ask: What is the ideal male body image in the perceptions of my young white-collar informants? How do they commodify male bodies? Women's consumption of adult entertainment and expressions of praising or criticising male bodies openly would always be condemned.

In chapter 3, I try to answer the central question of how women's perceptions of sex are formed. I shed light on how informants acquire their knowledge of sex, and the roles of social institutions such as school, family and religion in the shaping women's perceptions of sex. Young white-collar women in their twenties and thirties with higher education, economic power, exposure to feminist ideology and ideas of gender equality, were generally aware of the social constraints on their sexuality. They also sought higher sexual autonomy.

In chapter 4, I explore women's sex lives and how they perceive "love". I found that women's involvement in sexual relationships was an important way for them to satisfy their sexual desires. They also performed as "good women/girlfriends" through making use of their bodies. Through different ways of expression, such as faking orgasms, learning sexual positions and oral sex skills from watching pornography, and manipulating men's sexual expectations, women performed their expected gender roles. They believed these were helpful for achieving successfulness in their relationships. I examine women's sexual autonomy in relation to their increasing power and their confrontation with the conventional male decreed society.

Chapter 5 focuses on studying young white-collar women's pornography consumption habits. Women are not the expected consumers of porn in Hong Kong. A survey carried out by the Hong Kong Youth Association on "adolescents' improper usage of the Internet" in 2009 has shown that men occupied a higher proportion in the consumption of pornographic material, but the number of female users was not indicated. However, in reality, both genders have more or less the same opportunity to be exposed to pornographic materials, such as erotic novels, pornographic magazines and films.

More than half of my female informants watch pornography at least once a month. This figure may not suggest that half of the women of the entire population in Hong Kong watch pornography at least once a month. However, for this particular group of informants, who were between the ages of 20 and 30, highly educated and economically able to make consumption choices that would satisfy their sexual desires, watching pornography was in general not an unusual activity. Half of the informants were occasional porn users, meaning they watch porn once a month. A few of them even watched porn frequently, i.e., 2 times per week, or more. Such consumptive behaviour was closely associated with their views on sex, sexuality and pornographic images. It should be clear that there were informants who had never watched porn or had no interest in it. But in this sample their numbers were small. Therefore, I think regular porn-users and non-users were like the two ends of a spectrum of women's consumption patterns of pornography in Hong Kong. Many of them were in the middle and occasionally watched porn. Through studying their usage of pornography and their porn tastes, we can see how women position themselves as porn users. Their struggles, concerns and enjoyment about watching pornography are also expressed.

In chapter 6, I conclude that even though Hong Kong young white-collar women nowadays possess economic and cultural capital relatively easily when compared with women of past generations, their expressions of sexual desire and needs are still very much restrained. Women's empowerment in various political, social and economic aspects does not bring with it the power that they need to break through the sexual control imposed by the patriarchal society. To a certain extent, the newly acquired economic capital, and the increasing consumption choices on women's sexual entertainment available in the market seems to offer women the

power to commodify men. While this new phenomenon looks like a picture of subverted gender relations between men and women, it should not be seen as evidence of gender equality. The commodification and objectification of women by the patriarchy has always been condemned by feminists. But now women can do exactly the same thing on men. Because the ideologies of global capitalism and consumerism have not been challenged, the attainment of more capital by women to commodify male bodies is just feeding an illusion that it is contributing to a balance in gender power.

To many women, their bodies are channels of love, sexual pleasure and pain, social recognition and prestige. Through this study of women's ways of expressing their sexual interests, needs and desires, I argue that it is high time for Hong Kong mainstream society to rethink our gendered concepts of sexuality, objectification and commodification.

## **Chapter 2 What Women Want: Sex Materials in Public**

A single act of consumption, according to Mark Paterson, is “a particular moment in which the consumer is participating in a series of processes, having taken account of branding, images, notions of self-worth, responded to themes and signs that trigger elements of the sensory consciousness and the non-conscious states, and exercised the temporary satisfaction of a desire or felt need” (2006:3). In a capitalist society, “desire” and “need” trigger us to consume more and more. Not only can various commodities be purchased, but even human bodies can be objectified and commodified under the ideologies of consumerism and sexual freedom. Sexually appealing bodies and images assume a market value, and it seems they are just another form of consumption that anyone with money can pursue.

White-collar women, who are relatively affluent, are a newly emerging group that can freely make consumption choices. Today, with publicly available sexual entertaining materials, such as male prostitution, male strip shows, and pornographic films for women, as well as television productions filled with sexually suggestive content, such as TVB’s “Mr. Hong Kong Contest” and ATV’s “Mr. Asia Contest”, women seem to have many more choices when compared with past generations. In this chapter, I focus on the three big erotic events in 2012 which are related to the visual consumption of male bodies, and ask the following questions: What kinds of male bodies are sexually attractive to women? How do women behave as consumers in the erotic economy? Can women really make consumption decisions to satisfy their sexual desires?

## **Women's Craze for Hot Male Bodies**

There are two main ways for women to satisfy their sexual fantasies through consumption. One way is through physical consumption that involves face-to-face interaction between consumer and service provider, such as strip shows and prostitution. Another is one-way consumption of images of desirable bodies and sexually explicit materials in print, television film and digital format, where no direct interaction between the “gazer” and “gazed” is involved.

In the following section I focus on the physical consumption and use three events in Hong Kong that took place in 2012 as examples to demonstrate how male bodies had become publicly viewable sexual objects for women's entertainment and visual pleasure.

As an international fashion chain, Abercrombie & Fitch celebrated the opening of its flagship store in Hong Kong on 11 August, 2012. A hundred and ten male models from all over the world, including the US, Germany, Italy and Spain, were sent to tour around the central areas of Hong Kong over ten days to promote the brand. They attracted great attention from the mass media and the general public. A group of topless male models wore only red board shorts as they stood outside the A&F store in Central's Peddar Building, posing for pictures and welcoming people on the streets to have photos taken with them. These male models were mostly Caucasian looking, and very few of them were Asian or African. The common physical characteristics among these models were that they had pumped chests with six- or eight-pack abs, broad shoulders, big and strong arms, and cheerful smiles. The A&F male models also boarded a roofless bus and cheered to attract attention.



Their appearance in Times Square, Causeway Bay, caused chaos as they were surrounded by a big crowd (see Fig. 2.1).



Figure 2.1 The promotional event of A&F in Times Square at Causeway Bay, Hong Kong attracted a huge crowd. People were busy taking photos of the topless male models (Source: Zeveloff 2012).

In addition, there were three promotional videos produced by Abercrombie & Fitch on the opening of its store in Hong Kong. Each of the videos had over 100,000 views on YouTube. These videos focused on the sexy bodies of the male models and the excited and happy faces of the women, which contained a very clear heterosexual message.

Central to A&F's marketing strategy was young, healthy, sexy male bodies. These perfect bodies were generally desirable as they were constructed through advertisements promoting health and body building. Influenced by commercial culture and the global health discourse, a toned and fit male body is greatly valued. Male consumers are persuaded by the advertisements to obtain a body for good self-presentation and a "healthy" modern lifestyle through dieting, exercising, eating supplements and bodybuilding in fitness centers.

According to Maguire (2008) and Luciano (2001), the unfit (especially fat) body is thought to be the "sinned body" as it is seen as a result of a lack of discipline and self-control. According to theories of the "sinned body" and "salvation", the body is an imperfect existence, which would age and decay eventually. Since the

modification of the body and the improvement of one's health condition have been emphasised as the individual's responsibility, consumers are educated and brainwashed by advertisements that their bodies need salvation achieved through the modern technology of physical fitness. The trend of aspiring to achieve a muscular body is very dominant in the context of Hong Kong, which can be seen from the advertisements of some of the most popular gyms in Hong Kong. The celebrity endorser of Physical (one of the biggest chain fitness centers in Hong Kong), Aaron Kwok, has tan skin, strong upper arms and six-pack abs, which are some of the most desirable male attributes that many Hong Kong men desire.



Figure 2.2 Aaron Kwok, famous entertainer in Hong Kong, the endorser of Physical (Source: Physical Fitness & Beauty 2012).

However, many journalist reports were critical of the use of male models in the Abercrombie and Fitch promotional event. They criticised Hong Kong women (港女 ; *gong2 neoi5*)<sup>10</sup> for objectifying men. The term *gong neoi* literally means Hong Kong

<sup>10</sup> The term has no clear definition but is widely used by mass media. Some writers in Hong Kong discussed the phenomenon of *gong neoi*, such as Yip Yat Chee's *The Kong Girls Bible* (葉一知《港女聖經》, 2007) and Cuson Lo's *My Gong neoi Wife* (《我的港女老婆》, 2010). Also, according to the website of Encyclopedia of Virtual Communities in Hong Kong (2013), the term generally refers to Hong Kong women who have "bad characteristics", such as narcissism,

women, but it carries a negative connotation. It generally refers to women in their twenties to thirties who are highly materialistic, self-centered, and indulge in expensive, branded products.

Chan Wan (陳雲) openly denounced the seemingly sex-crazed women who responded to the Abercrombie and Fitch promotion, in his article on Hong Kong Yahoo News (2012). He asked,

What kind of gender relations in Hong Kong and economic relations (Hong Kong's education system and working environment emphasise the protection of women!) made Hong Kong women acquire such misbehaviour in public, but still feel good about themselves and show no self-reflection or shame? Those so-called feminists, have they ever thought about this?<sup>11</sup>

Chan believed that the protection provided by the educational system of the Hong Kong society would prevent young women from wanting to obtain personal satisfaction in a way that he considered to be shameful. In this instance, what he considered to be shameful behaviour was the public display of sexuality. Chan went on to say,

After the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, Japan was under the American Occupation for some years. Japan wanted to please the U.S.A. Quite a lot of Japanese women wanted to subordinate themselves to American men, therefore many Japanese women got raped by the American soldiers in the station of the United States Armed Force in Japan. In contrast, the American soldiers in South Korea were more behaved. It is because sexual violation was

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materialism, and a sexual desire for foreigners. However, the definition of the term is not universally agreed upon and subjected to debates and discussions within Hong Kong society.

<sup>11</sup>The Chinese original is: 「是什麼樣的香港性別關係和經濟關係（香港的學校制度和職業環境偏重保護女性！），令香港女子可以變得如此囂張失態而自我感覺良好，不知反省的呢？那些所謂女權者，想過沒有？」

an intrusion of a great power. If you (or your body) had become submissive under the great power, the enemy would bully you even more. The self-submissive behaviour of a person would also affect the interest of other women.

Chan used the examples of Korean and Japanese women during the American Occupation and concluded that Japanese women were not respected because they were subservient to the Americans. Chan disparaged Hong Kong women for offering their bodies to please western men (the male models). In the article, he also went on to say those women had lowered their self-value and ruined the reputation and honour shared by all Hong Kong women. He said Hong Kong women's craze towards western male bodies was just another form of self-subordination to the imperialist West.

Chan reprehended Hong Kong women's "misbehaviour" in touching foreign male bodies in the public. He also imposed his biased gender expectations on Hong Kong women, asking them to show "self-respect" instead of showing obvious interest in the Western men such as having their photos taken with them. Chan's wording reflects the assumption that Hong Kong women need to be protected by social institutions because he assumed that they are unable to protect themselves. This perspective is representative of Chinese gender relations particularly in regard to the development of a daughter into a wife, and then into a mother where the female is always considered to require protection from her father and husband in an exchange of bearing a son.

When Hong Kong women expressed their sexuality in public, it appeared contradictory to Chan's assumption that Hong Kong women require protection which led him to have a very negative opinion of these women. Individual women's needs

or desires thus had to be sacrificed for the sake of maintaining the reputation of Hong Kong women as a whole.

As to the question of whether the education and work institutions in Hong Kong are over-protective of women, there are numerous studies by various organisations that prove quite the opposite (Cheung 1981; Ng 1996). Based on the article which clearly seeks to relate the A&F promotional event to the issue of women's self-respect and the honour of Hong Kong (written as the title), I interpret this as Chan's way of pitching good women (those who respect themselves and show discipline in public) against bad women (those who allegedly do not have self-respect), which is guided by the suppression of female sexuality. In fact, Hong Kong men showing sexual desire towards American porn stars is not uncommon, which can be seen on online discussion boards/chat rooms of various forums, such as Hong Kong Discuss (2013). This however, would not be seen as disgraceful or disrespectful to the honour of Hong Kong. Men expressing their sexual desire towards foreign women are not being seen as a shame to our country. Chan's perception of the female body and female sexuality is male-oriented and influenced by the discourse of nationalism.

Lo Si-Tak's article entitled "A&F, Feminism, Politics of Academia" at 無待堂 (DADAZIM.COM) criticises women's organisations, local feminists, and scholars of gender studies. Using the publication and distribution of erotic photo books of young female models as an example, he argues that these stakeholders have a double standard. On one hand they criticise men for commodifying women, but when it came to women commodifying men, they have a different view. The appearance of the publications of almost-nude young models at the Hong Kong Book Fair in recent years which attracted huge crowds of male consumers, was severely criticised by

feminist organisations—with the men buying the books and related products having to bear the brunt of the criticism. In stark contrast, when A&F's promotional event used male bodies to attract business, it was not condemned by local feminists, despite the fact that both share the same commercial nature. Also, the selling of erotic photo albums portraying women's semi-nude bodies was seen as an objectification of women's bodies. However, when women touched the A&F topless models and had photos taken with them, they were not being criticised for objectifying men. He concludes that,

Hong Kong women are too clever. Men are so stupid that they think tolerating the evil behaviours of gong nei is a manifestation of chivalry. Gong nei know how to use the little space that patriarchy gives them by claiming themselves as the weaker sex and then taking advantage of the double standards of gender relations. In Hong Kong, all men and women are equal but some women are more equal than other women.<sup>12</sup>

However, the fact that Hong Kong young white-collar women have to find a small space within a patriarchal system to express their sexuality makes it clear that they are in general the powerless in society. The marketing stunt by this American fashion store provided a rare opportunity for local women to openly scream for, touch, or take photos with the hot male models. The A&F promotion event was one example showing how Hong Kong young affluent women could make use of a small opportunity to challenge the constraints on their sexuality and obtain relatively higher autonomy. Indeed, not all women are powerless, and a few women even enjoy greater power than most men in society. On average, in most political, social,

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<sup>12</sup>The Chinese original is: 「然而香港的女人太聰明了，而男人也太蠢，以為容忍港女惡行就是男性風度。港女懂得利用父權的殘留罅隙，以弱者自居，以雙重標準在人際交往中撈盡著數。在香港，所有男女都是公平的，但有些女人比其他人更加公平。」

economic and sexual contexts, it is men who are more privileged than women. We need to be cautious, however, over any simplification of the gender relationships between men and women. There should be a better way to understand the sexual views and behaviours of Hong Kong young affluent women beyond this simple oppression and objectification argument. Women are not the only sufferers of patriarchal social values; men suffer as well. Lo's comment on the double standards of the commodification of men reveals that feminists tend to use the singular logic of domination and subordination to illustrate the relationship between men and women.

The A&F promotional event was a heated topic in Hong Kong because it was a rare occasion when, during the ten-day event, foreign male models became the objects of desire and women were able to make use of the chance to express female sexuality. Nonetheless, the general opinion tended to be negative, largely because photo taking in public with foreign men who are almost nude, was seen as an open expression of local women's sexuality and sexual desires, which should be repressed and controlled, otherwise it would threaten the order of Hong Kong's predominantly Chinese society. Except for the A&F promotional event, Hong Kong young adult women could also "consume" male bodies through participation in male strip shows.

### **A Strip Show for Women: Temporary Space for Expressing Female Sexuality**

The first time I heard about "Chippendales", a strip show in Las Vegas for women, was in 2011 when I was having a talk with a female friend about women's sexual fantasies. She told me when she travelled to Las Vegas in the previous summer, she came across the advertisement of the dance troupe, which promoted themselves to be "the world's most recognised brand name in ladies' entertainment"

(Chippendales 2013). She said that she had never seen so many men with such good body shapes ever in her life. “When one of the hot guys came down from the stage and walked towards the audience, I touched his bare chest. It’s strong, hard and sweaty, 100% man-muscle! You should see it once. You know, I should have seen it one more time before coming back [to Hong Kong]. Hong Kong’s sexual entertainment for women is just so ‘dry’<sup>13</sup>,” she exclaimed.



Figure 2.3 Poster of Chippendales (Source: Hip Hong Kong 2013).

Chippendales came to Hong Kong in June 2012 to give a one-night performance, as part of its world tour. Customers could choose over three types of tickets: HKD\$580, \$480 and \$380, depending on the area in which they want to sit. I went to the show with five informants and had an informal focus group discussion after the show. All five informants consented to having the discussion recorded and analysed in the thesis. They were all women aged between 22 and 30, and everyone in the group had a postgraduate education. Two were doctoral students in Hong Kong and one had obtained a doctoral degree in the United States. Four came from a

<sup>13</sup> “Dry” is the exact English that my friend used. It is a common usage among young adults in Hong Kong to refer to a boring life, or “nothing is really going on in life”. It is also often used in a sexual context. For instance, to refer to someone’s sex life as “dry”, it means there is a lack of or inadequate sexual activities.



middle class background.

The show was held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center in Wanchai on the evening of 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012. As far as I could observe, around 60% of the audience were non-Chinese, who probably came from European countries or America. However, I was not able to tell whether they were expatriates or tourists. The Asian audience accounted for approximately 30%. There were about 10% that were Mainland Chinese tourists coming for the show in a group tour. They all wore a group badge and sat in the front (the most expensive area). From my perspective, judging from their clothing, bearing and hair styles, the other 20% were local Hong Kong young adult women. I also found that around 60 to 70% of the audience were young to middle-aged women who came in small groups of around three people. Gay men were also easily spotted in the venue but they only made up a small percentage.

Before the show officially began, there was a short video introducing the Chippendale dancers, showing some of the troupe members modelling beside a swimming pool. Not many of the audience were interested in it. As one of my friends put it, “I came here to see real hot male bodies, not to watch videos. If I want to watch porn, I could just stay at home to search online for even more erotic pornographic videos.” She considered the strip dance to be an erotic activity that she could legitimately watch in a public space.

When the lights dimmed, the spotlight zeroed in on the four men dancing on stage. They all had healthy-looking tan skin, broad shoulders, pumped chests and wide visible six or eight-pack abs. Throughout the show, they moved their bodies in sexually suggestive gestures. The male strippers dressed up as construction workers, plumbers, fire-fighters, pilots and businessmen in tuxedos. These roles are representations of different aspects of masculinity. For example, men in firefighters’

uniforms represented bravery, discipline, strength, helpfulness and devotion in saving lives, whereas men in pilots' uniform represented middle-class status, professionalism, intelligence and precision. These male characteristics were appreciated and "consumed" in the context of the strip show. No matter what kinds of roles they were playing, they would stir up the audience's emotions by tearing off their clothes and pants, leaving on tiny T-back underwear. Loud screams echoed around the hall when the strippers took off their clothes piece by piece, and the noise got louder when the performers came down from the stage and engaged in close interactions with the audience.



Figure 2.4 Chippendales performing on stage. (Source: Asia City Online Ltd 2013).

At one point during the performance, three female volunteers were asked to go on stage to "assist" the performance of the male strippers and entertain the audience. The stripper only invited women to come on the stage. Even though it was observed that gay men were also in the audience, their chance of being invited to be volunteers was low because the strip show was designed to be a purely heterosexual setting. One of the female volunteers was a local Hong Kong woman who sat in the row in front of us and could speak English fluently. Her language ability was an example of the cultural capital of a highly educated woman. It shows that not only economic

capital, but also cultural capital is essential for a woman to attend a strip show, otherwise she might not fit into the environment. Women with a similar background could obtain relatively more opportunities in consuming sexual materials in public. On stage, the strippers danced around the women, and guided their hands to touch their bodies. At times when it seemed that the men allowed the volunteers to touch their penises, they usually turned their back towards the audience. Therefore, it was not clear if the women actually touched the men; but the bare, muscular backs of the strippers and the women's exciting facial expressions, were enough to conjure up the impression that they did. The audience thus was guided, as were the hands of the women, to "feel" the men's private parts, and this imagined public sex successfully stirred the emotions of the audience. The screams got louder and louder.

Yet, in another scene, very different feelings were created among my informants. One of the strippers sat on a chair in the center of the stage, and the three female volunteers were asked to perform an erotic dance one by one to entertain the stripper. Then the volunteers were asked to put a condom on a banana that he was holding close to his penis (with his pants on). The women could ask the stripper to stand, lay or sit as they did this. The stripper would then decide which woman was the best in the performance. In the process, he teased the losers for not knowing how to put on a condom for men. Most of my informants disliked this part of the show for two reasons. First, they felt that the stripper seemed to assume that women should know how to put condoms on men. Second, the women had to please the stripper, as well as the audience, as the reaction from the audience was one of the criteria for choosing the winner. My informants had different opinions towards this condom-wearing performance. One said, "The lucky girls (the volunteers) should have just sat on stage and enjoyed some physical and intimate interactions with the hot guys. Why

were they the ones to give the stripper pleasure?” She thought the women had paid for their ticket and this exchange legitimised the relationship between the object (the male body that women can gaze upon and touch) and the subject (female viewers with economic capital). Therefore, my friend insisted that the interactive games were not for women’s visual or physical pleasure, but the other way round. She saw the women who assisted the performance on the stage as “subjects” who should not have to bear any responsibility in satisfying the pleasure of the objects.

Another informant however, saw both the strippers and female volunteers on stage as “objects”. She said, “I am not really interested in watching other women having fun with handsome guys. I didn’t get the chance so why should I bother?”. From a consumer’s point of view, the picture of having other women dancing with the “hot guys” was not visually pleasing to her. She saw these “lucky women” as her competitors as she could only sit and watch whatever was presented on stage, while the three volunteers were able to become part of the show. She did not expect or purchase a ticket to see the performance of other women. Moreover, the enjoyment of these three women was definitely not her concern.

The subject-object relationship on stage was complicated because the relationships were interchangeable during the 90-minute performance. When there were only male strippers on stage, the subject-object relationship was very clear: the male strippers were objectified and the audience (both men and women) were the subject or the gazers. However, when the three female volunteers were asked to assist in the performance, they had become objects to the audience, and the male stripper had become the subject to the three women.

Other women, as the major audience of the show, felt relatively free to express their sexualities without being under the constant gaze or monitoring by men.

Nonetheless, in such a sexual setting, women themselves were under the surveillance of other women and practised self-discipline over their own bodies. My informants did not enjoy watching the naughty dances or sexual gestures of the volunteers and described the performance as “dirty”, “ugly”, “ungraceful” and “something that you can’t bear to watch”.

These reactions by my informants may relate to their interpretations and expectations of how a woman should act. As a profession, female prostitutes and strippers are perceived as “bad women” in a male-dominant society. When the female volunteers were on stage, their roles temporarily turned to bad women, who entertained the audience in sexual ways. Due to the nature of the job, which involves the selling of their bodies in sexual ways, strippers and prostitutes sometimes are condemned as social evils. In other instances, they are accepted by society because of the claim that the profession is needed, but they would still be looked down upon. Either way, female prostitutes and strippers are marginalised. They can either be totally unaccepted by the mainstream society or they are expected to conform to their social roles as a professional bad woman. Due to the lack of their training in striptease dancing and interactive skills with the audience, it was difficult to consider the performance of the three volunteers as entertaining and it was described as “ugly” and “ungraceful” by my informants.

However, it would be interesting to understand why “beauty” and “gracefulness” were expected from the volunteers’ performance. Usually, in a strip show where a sexual display of the body is expected, the audience is looking for eroticism. In contrast, the dances of these normal “good women” in public should always be “beautiful” and “graceful”; even though a certain degree of sexual elements would be expected in this situation, the overall movement of the body

should not be sexy and erotic. Confronted with the conflicting roles of the volunteers, my informants did not know how to classify them. The volunteers were neither professional strippers (bad women) nor normal (good) women, thus the fact that they were neither “subjects” nor “objects” complicated the perceptions of their performance.

### **Commodification of the Male Body**

In the form of physical and direct consumption of the body, such as prostitution and strip shows, the bodies are consumed through giving sex services or erotic dances to entertain clients in an exchange for monetary gains. In the sex industry, prostitutes and strippers are fully aware of the values of their bodies. Every part of their bodies, such as women’s breasts, legs, hip and vagina; men’s chest, hip and penis, is given a market price and has been fetishised as if the body part represented the woman or the man was a whole (Kong 2005). As in the strip shows, even though no genitals were shown, most of the audience members were waiting for the last piece of clothing on the male body (which barely covered his penis) to be taken off. Yet, everyone clearly knew that it would never be removed. But the desire to see “just a little bit more” was strong. The design of the male strip show was such that every dance started with strippers wearing all of their clothes. Slowly the upper shirts were taken off, revealing the broad shoulders, strong arms and bare chests of the strippers. At first, the audience (mostly women) screamed over the “hot” bodies because “perfect” male bodies such as these are not easily seen at a close distance in real life.

In one dance, after the stripper took off his trousers, he laid in the bed, making

sexually suggestive poses. He made use of the bed, pillows and blanket to display his body in a seductive manner. In the eyes of the audience, he was inviting women to climb onto his bed. At the end, like everyone expected, only a T-back underwear remained on his body, and his firm and muscular hips could be seen. This scene only lasted for less than a minute but it was certainly one of the climaxes of the night, and screams of women echoed round the hall. After that, other strippers came on stage with a different set of costumes to perform another dance. The cycle then repeated. The strip show did not consist of just men taking off their clothes, but also singing performances, in which erotic elements were taken out. Instead, a romantic atmosphere was created with the use of dimmed lighting and soft music. There were three parts of singing performances in between sections of strip dances. Singing served as a transitional performance, which bought time for the other strippers to change costumes. It also acted as a stage relief to prepare the audience for the next visual excitement. During the singing performance, many women around me started to use their mobile phones, indicating their lack of interests, patience and attention.

The singing was performed by two strippers; one was a Caucasian and the other was a Singaporean. The Caucasian wore a pilot's costume as he tried to play the role as a man with cultural capital and not just physical attraction. The Singaporean did not wear a special costume when he sang two Mandarin songs. He was skinny, in moderate build compared to the Caucasian strippers. Thus his body type was a very big contrast to the audience as they had just seen the muscular Caucasian strippers wore nothing but a T-back. According to my informants, the Caucasian singer was "erotic", "symbol of strength", "sexy", "desirable", and "masculine like a real man". However, his Asian counterpart was considered "boring", "funny", "a bit short" and "sexually undesirable". One of the women

expressed her dislike towards the singing part of the show and said, “I paid to watch hot guys and not a skinny man. I’ve got nothing to watch now.”

Having an Asian sing Mandarin songs in this situation was a marketing strategy of Chippendales. It was not included in the ordinary routine of the show in Las Vegas. As Hong Kong was one of the stops of the world tour in Asia, the company assumed that having a Singaporean man to sing in a language that Hong Kong people were familiar with would suit the Chinese taste. However, the performance did not fit the expectation of the audience. First of all, Mandarin is not the lingua franca in Hong Kong. While it is true that most local females in the audience would understand some Mandarin, they were not familiar with the Mandarin songs chosen on the night. This can be easily seen by the reactions of the audience. Secondly, the singing by the Caucasian and the Singaporean were not popular even among non-locals in the audience, which took up a big proportion of the audience. Compared to the cheering and applause for the Caucasian strippers who showed off their nearly nude strong muscular bodies, the two singers received much less attention, and the Singaporean singer received even less. This led me to think about what male attributes were desired in a strip show.

The male strippers of Chippendales presented themselves in different ways on stage, but there was only one goal – the pleasure of the women. On the official website, it says, “Just as each woman has a different fantasy and attraction, each Chippendales performer has his distinctive look and mannerism.” Even though the company aims to provide women from all over the world with pleasure through male erotic dances, white women perhaps were the real target group. Among the 19 strippers featured on the website, only three were not Caucasians. From their physical features, the three non-Caucasians probably had African or South American



ethnic background. And none of the men on the website were Asians. It was not surprising that Caucasians were the dominant ethnic group as the company targeted mainly the Euro-American market. Despite the difference in ethnicities, all of the strippers had broad shoulders and six- or eight-pack abs, strong and muscular legs and arms. In the pictures, they were all tan and looked shiny, and they all carried a seductive smile on their faces. All these features represented the confidence, cheerfulness, sexiness and virility of the men. These body types symbolised the strength of men and were ideal for the exhibition of hegemonic masculinity.

As a well-known strip troupe, Chippendales “is proud that the show is designed to satisfy all women’s needs” (Chippendales 2013). Through selecting strippers and adopting professionalism, such as requiring the strippers to have four-hour rehearsals each day, Chippendales had a standard of male beauty that the strippers had to conform to in order to get the job. Such standards have also become more prevalent not only in Euro-American societies, but also in Asian countries largely due to the images of idealised men spread by mass media. For example, during the Mr. Hong Kong Contest and the Mr. Asian Contest, annual events organised by Hong Kong’s TVB and ATV, a muscular man always has a higher chance of winning. In the Mr. Hong Kong Contest produced by TVB, all of the judges of the contest are women.<sup>14</sup> Over the past few years, men with strong and muscular physical characteristics have always been preferred. The most popular part of the contest would be contestants wearing swim suits and displaying their body.

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<sup>14</sup> For the first two years when the show came out, it was criticised by the mass media and general audience. People wrote letters of complaints to the Hong Kong Broadcasting Authority (now the Communication Authorities), saying that the show was controversial and objectified men. The female judges and the 700 to 800 female audience members present in the venue could vote for the winners. Starting from 2007, female audience outside the venue can also vote through phone calls. The contest had been designed to be a very heterosexual setting that only women could select their favourite participants. It was not until 2010 that TVB eliminated the limit on sex in voting and now men can vote through the Internet and phone calls as well.

While the nature of Chippendales and Mr. Hong Kong Contest are not entirely the same, they share some similar elements, including the display of objectified male bodies, hints of eroticism, and women being the gazers/subjects in the process. Even though the former targets a broader worldwide audience, while the latter focuses mainly on the local Hong Kong market, in both contexts, men with stronger and more muscular bodies, which clearly show that they had been working out in gyms or even taking other supplements, were more appreciated. Does it mean that a monopolised standard of male beauty is prevalent among women from all over the world?

Male attributes are not just about physical characteristics of men but also the non-physical elements. Therefore, the strippers of Chippendales not only took off their clothes (even though it was the most important element of the show), through the use of costumes, they also showed their non-physical masculine attractiveness with qualities such as bravery, ambition and competitiveness. From the reactions of the Asian audience members, it was obvious that they preferred the Caucasian strippers compared with their Asian counterpart. Does it mean that Caucasian men have some male attributes that make them more desirable? From the interviews with my local female informants, the answer was not that simple. From the cultural imaginations of women regarding male bodies, a hierarchy of ethnicities related to masculinity is played out. White men were preferred to the Asian men. What do women want when they are seeking visual pleasure? What do they want when they are looking for a male partner in a romantic relationship? Are there any differences? Annie Au, a 23-year-old said,

I don't usually like muscular foreign guys. If I am looking for a boyfriend, I won't choose muscular foreigners as I think they are violent and they would

threaten me. But for a show like this, I prefer watching strong foreign guys instead of thin short Asians. I've got to admit that their bodies are more attractive when they are on the stage. You can tell that they have been working out in gyms to maintain such a perfect male body.

Annie looked for different male attributes from men for different purposes. Mass media produces the masculine body images and claims that these bodies are attractive to women. In a show, which is far from her real life experience, she expected to see something more erotic. The payment also legitimised her right to maximise her consumption of a more attractive male body. But she also realised that the body of extreme masculinity could not be attained easily in reality, and that it might also represent negative qualities such as violence. Also, in a relationship, male attractiveness is of limited importance to her.

The conversation also revealed an objectification of the male bodies by the informant. She tended to praise the physical strength and bigger body shapes of Caucasian men. Another informant described how women can act a little bit "wild" and "crazy" in this setting, because it allows women to be relatively free from the social expectations and constraints on their behaviours. Coco Leung, 25-year-old said,

I think women screamed so loud when they saw hot male strippers taking off their clothes not because they really liked these strippers, but because they can seldom see such a thing, men taking off their clothes for entertaining women, in their daily lives. I screamed too as everyone was so excited. No one was going to say bad things behind your back just because you screamed and acted crazily. In the hall, where women made up the majority of the audience, we felt free to act a bit crazy.

It was not the male bodies which made women go “wild” but the general atmosphere of being free of the social controls over their sexuality. Such an experience is not easily found in Hong Kong. Even the local male beauty contest, The Mr. Hong Kong Contest, received a number of complaints regarding how the show disrupted social order because men were objectified. As a result, TVB announced plans to cancel the Mr. Hong Kong Contest in 2013 due to the complaints they received over the past few years. The female judges were criticised for having “no ladies’ manners” and “screaming like crazy women” by some major newspapers (Yu Ong; 娛翁 2012). Not only were the female judges condemned but the female members of the audience were as well, causing them to feel a great deal of social pressure for being “bad women”. However, in the hall of Chippendales' strip show, women were allowed to express their emotions and excitement relatively freely. The overall atmosphere encouraged women to scream, jump, cheer and clap their hands when they felt the performance was good and enjoyable. If they found the performance unsatisfying, they could choose to leave the hall. This relative and temporary freedom was established mainly by the sanction of payment.

Following up on Leung’s comment, it seems that in Hong Kong, there are generally not enough opportunities for women to express their sexuality in the public, similar to the way they can at the A&F promotional event and the strip show. For instance, male prostitution is not common in Hong Kong. Many of the male prostitutes serve mainly homosexual customers (Kong 2005). Moreover, male strip shows are only held once or twice a year.

### **A Game of Jealousy and power**

Chippendales has established itself as “THE ULTIMATE GIRLS NIGHT OUT!” (Chippendales 2013). Three of my informants were dating at the time when the interviews were done and one of them was recently married. All of them told their boyfriends/husband about the strip show beforehand. They all agreed that watching a strip show was a very “unusual social activity”. When asked about why they decided to tell their partners, honesty was considered to be the main factor. “I don’t want to lie to my boyfriend,” Joyce, a 25-year-old young woman said. Another 23-year-old informant, Joanne said, “It’s not a big deal. There is no point lying to him. I don’t want to keep things from him.”

Nevertheless, it was found that “being honest” was perhaps just one answer to this question. Playing with jealousy, however, was the true reason that women gladly wanted their partners to know they were going to watch a male strip show. For example, Joyce said, “You know, it was really funny when I told my boyfriend I was going to a strip show...He searched Chippendales on the Internet and checked out the guys.” As in the case of Joanne, she said her boyfriend had heard about Chippendales before and he was not happy about her going to the strip show. In terms of physical attractiveness, he found himself inferior compared with the strippers. Joanne teased her boyfriend for watching a strip show in Holland with friends, thus he was in no position to discourage her from watching the show.

Liza, a 27-year-old woman who was recently married said,

I can tell he [husband] was a bit jealous when I said I was going to a strip show with my girlfriends. But he said as long as I am happy, he can’t stop me from doing what I want. He emphasised though, I can’t touch those guys.

My middle-class female informants who had high educational background, tended to use the strip show to stir up jealousy in a relationship. They enjoyed the

feeling of being cared for and valued. Telling their partners that they were going to have some fun without their presence could make them feel a bit insecure. The idealised body shape and appearance of the male strippers threatened the male partners, as they were afraid of not being strong or masculine enough to visually satisfy their ladies. However, the informants knew that they had to play the game of jealousy carefully; otherwise it would turn into a real issue in the relationship. “Of course, I don’t want my husband to be really angry at me. That’s why I won’t tell him the details of the show of how hot these male strippers are,” Liza said.

Going to a male strip show does not only provide women a temporary time and space to obtain sexual stimulation relatively free of social constraints, but also a chance to manipulate the event as a leverage in the game of jealousy with their partners. As a result, watching a male strip show is also considered a kind of sexual empowerment for women. There is a lack of sexual entertainment for women’s pleasure in Hong Kong. Clubs or any kinds of venues for watching male strip shows are hard to find. This kind of information is not easily accessible on the Internet. Occasionally clubs would invite strip troupes to come and perform a one-night show, but it is very uncommon in Hong Kong. There was a time when a club in Tsim Sha Tsui organised a Women’s Night with a male strip show performed as a special event on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012– the International Women’s Day. However, when I called to check it out, I was told that the strip show was cancelled as they expected it would not attract enough customers. For some women, the act of going to a male strip show carries important symbolic meanings, for example, women's sexual entertainment and stimulation of their sexual fantasies, desires and imagination could now be justified. Joanne said, “My boyfriend watched a strip show with his friends a few years ago, why couldn’t I watch it with my girl-friends now?” Many informants saw

their participation in a strip show as a way to demonstrate their power in gender relations. In a sense, this kind of power was gained through the objectification and commodification of male bodies. This empowerment could be problematic as well. Feminists have been fighting for women's rights in terms of political, economic and social aspects. They see the objectification of women as male oppression, and the societal objectification of women causes self-objectification on them. (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Mckinley and Hyde 1996) According to this logic, can we see women's objectification and commodification as a form of oppression over men? How should we understand gender relationships when the commodification of bodies has become unavoidable in a capitalist society? These questions will be discussed more in chapter 5.

The aforementioned two events were about the display of male bodies in public. However nowadays women could also have more chances to explore and consume other sexual materials in a public space, such as sex toys.

### **The Asia Adult Expo: Sensational Experience for women**

The Asia Adult Expo, which has been held in Macau every year since 2008, always attracts media attention and has become a heated topic in Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China. Sex toy manufacturers and distribution companies from all over the world participate in the Adult Expo and aim at sharing a piece of the large Asian market. The organiser also invites AV porn stars from Japan and strippers (both female and male) to entertain the audience. Even though most of the performances are aimed at attracting the male audience, there is also entertainment for women and homosexual men, such as the male strip shows.

I participated in the Asia Adult Expo in Macau in 2011 and 2012 for this research. The Expo lasted for three days and it was held in the exhibition hall of the Venetian Macao Hotel. According to the Show Report of Asia Adult Expo and Intimate Lingerie 2012, the Expo had over 150 booths, 80 exhibitors and 38,300 visitors. Different products were displayed in the venue, for example, adult novelties and gifts, sex toys, lingerie, lubricants, as well as adult pharmaceuticals and supplements, but not all of these were available for sale to individual visitors.

From the experiences of participating in the Asia Adult Expo in 2011 and 2012, most of the products that they sold were more likely to be used on women, such as vibrators and dildos. There were also sex toys for homosexual couples. However, by viewing the male-oriented entertaining activities that the Expo had arranged and experiencing the service at some of the counters, I began to realise that the organiser and many companies assumed most visitors were males. According to my observation, the Adult Expo was most commonly attended by male visitors who came on their own or with male friends. The second biggest group was women who came with their sexual partners. The third group of visitors were women who came with their female friends.

At one point, I approached a counter and asked about certain sex toys and how they were used. The male salesman winked at me and said, "It's kind of embarrassing, you know. You will know how to use it after buying it." Despite the efforts to push further and ask for clear instructions of how to use the sex toys, they could not give any useful information. I was not the only woman who experienced the same situation. There were also two young women asking a male salesman about how to use lubricants. Again he failed to answer their questions. As the counter was small, while the two women stood close to the shelf where the sex products were



placed, five to seven young to middle-aged men were standing behind them, looking at the products and the curious young women from a short distance. The salesman was embarrassed to answer questions and his reluctance created an awkward atmosphere. The male customers then grinned at the two young women and teased them for asking “silly questions”. Thus we can see that women buying sex products in an open exhibition may encounter some problems. Most of the salespersons that I observed seemed to be able to answer the questions of male customers more easily than those posed by women customers. Also, single women who were not accompanied by men sometimes would be gazed upon as they were seen as highly sexual for purchasing sex products.

### **Hong Kong Young White-collar Women’s Taken-for-granted Passivity in Sex**

In the Asia Adult Expo in 2011, there were young Chinese women dressed like Japanese maids distributing free condoms to male visitors (see Figure 2.5). They were also available for photos. These female employees only distributed free condoms to female visitors if they asked for them. The fact that the free condoms were mostly available for male visitors reflected the ideology of sex behind the product’s promotion activity that women were viewed as passive in the act of sex and very much were excluded from the group targeted for condom distribution. This example seems to be contradictory to the expectation of the male stripper discussed above, who expected women to know how to put condom on men. In fact, women in different sexual contexts are expected to behave differently for fulfilling various social demands. Sometimes these social expectations are contradictory to each other.



Figure 2.5 Two young Chinese women dressed like Japanese maids distributing free condoms at the Asia Adult Expo in 2011.

While condoms are designed to be used by males, it would be problematic to assume that women do not have to gain access to them. In fact, some schools that were attended by my female informants, allowed their students (both female and male) to have a lesson on the correct usage of a condom. However the number of schools offering condom-wearing lesson was very small. There were two female informants who attended a girls' school who said a class was given to teach girls how to put condoms on a male's penis and more importantly, to request their sexual partners to take protective measures when they have sex for the sake of preventing unexpected pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs for short). Seeing that condoms are still one of the most effective means in preventing STDs for both men and women, the sexual knowledge of proper condom usage should not be limited to men only.

However, the knowledge of sex is easily excluded from women because their passive and subordinating roles in sex are assumed. Male sexual behaviours, in contrast, are assumed to be active, aggressive and dominating. As condoms are used by men, it further strengthens the logic that women have no reason to learn about

condoms, which is reflected in the small number of informants who were taught about this in school. The social expectation on women's passivity in sex also makes it not easy for them to request their sexual partners to wear condoms, for fearing of being seen as bossy or threatening towards male ego. The fact that women were teased for not knowing how to put a condom on a man by the stripper of Chippendales reflected two contradictory discourses. On the one hand, it seemed that women were not expected to buy and use condoms (as the samples were not distributed to them); on the other hand, they were still expected to know how to use them.

### **The Strippers**

The strippers were hired by the organiser to perform during the three-day exhibition. They usually performed one or two sessions each day. Every session lasted for only 15 minutes. When their performance was over, they would return to their own counter in the venue and invite visitors to take photos with them. Visitors were charged HKD/MOP \$50 for the photo-taking service. Female strippers were more popular compared to the male strippers.



Figure 2.6 Male strippers on stage at the 2012 Expo.

## Women's Affluence and the Access to Sex Materials in Public

While researching public opinion of the Asia Adult Expo, I discovered comments on discussion forums about the relatively expensive entrance fee and also the openness of the sex culture in Hong Kong. For example, Ho Kwan discussed the event on the website of Ezone. He said,

Recently Hong Kong people have a relatively greater acceptance towards sex culture. Hong Kong women touching A&F male models freely in public can be seen as one of the examples. Additionally, the Asia Adult Expo has been reported by mass media widely in recent years and is no long seen as a social taboo.<sup>15</sup>

The organisation and promotion of the Asia Adult Expo were viewed as an expression of sexual freedom by the general public. As a commercial activity, mass media tends to report and sometimes is even paid to report the event as fun, entertaining and fulfilling the visual and sensational pleasure of visitors' needs.

From a male perspective, Ho Kwan saw the A&F promotional event as a manifestation of the openness of the sexual attitudes of women as they were allowed to touch the male bodies openly. From the A&F incident, he observed that the power of gong nei had increased. My question is what are the connections between the A&F event and the power of gong nei or between the Asia Adult Expo and the free expression of sexuality? The key rests on whether or not women have access to publically viewable sex materials. These sex materials were seen as "evidence" of a more open social atmosphere of sex in Hong Kong, which also revealed that such

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<sup>15</sup>The Chinese original is: 「近年香港人對於性文化的接受程度，相對於過往為高，大家見 A&F 男模任港女通街去摸，已是一例。另外，亞洲成人博覽展，近年亦已被傳媒廣泛報導，再不像過往般是一個禁忌。」 (E-zone 2011).

phenomena are not common in a male-dominated society. Women's sexual empowerment was seen and observed by some male members in the society.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the A&F promotional activity, the Chippendales' strip show in Hong Kong and the Asia Adult Expo in Macau were discussed. They were viewed as sex materials available in the public for the consumption of women.

Karl Marx's fetishism of commodities illustrates how social relations between people have been transformed into objectified relations between commodities and money under the market economy, where everything has been given a market value. Marx said "the existence of the things (commodities) and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (1978: 329).

Human labour has been commodified and objectified in contemporary societies. To a certain extent, Marx's analysis on political economy is a bit gender-blind. However, there are close correlations between gender, consumption and commodification of human labour and body.

The fetishism of the body for sexual consuming purposes can be seen in the erotic economy, such as prostitution, strip shows, erotic television shows, and other sexually explicit materials. A sexually appealing body is desirable, and available for purchase so as to satisfy consumers' sexual desires as well as visual, sensational, and emotional needs. As the satisfaction of sexual desires and fantasies has now been

legitimised under the discourse of the market, it is becoming economically, if not morally, acceptable to gain such satisfaction by consuming bodies physically and/or visually.

With increasing levels of education, social status and financial power, young white-collar women in Hong Kong have become consumers of sexual entertainment. The above examples illustrate that women nowadays have relatively more opportunities and greater public access to sex materials. Nevertheless, these are only occasional (or seasonal) activities, as most of the strip shows and the Asia Adult Expo are held in the summer. In general, the channels for women to publically access sex materials are lacking. According to my informants' consumptive habits, most of them turned to pornography when sexual materials in the public were not available. The consumption of pornography, including pornographic films, online-pornography and sexually explicit materials (magazines, comics, and images) is also a part of the erotic economy. Cybersex, as another form of consumption, in which a woman or man entertain clients through performing sexually suggestive behaviours in front of camera, is also available. Many of the new modes of consumption involve the use of modern technology. The usage of the Internet provides rooms for the selling and consuming of different sexual representations without geographical constraints. It also helps generate great economic revenue from the cyber world.

Despite the consumption choices that women seem to be able to make, the gender ideology and the taken-for-granted gender roles in our society, such as the passivity of women in sex, still impose constraints and limit women's choices for expressing their sexuality. Conflicts exist between the ideology of market, which tells us we can take whatever we want, and the gender ideology that we have already internalised. The patriarchal gender ideology shapes us to conform to the socially

acceptable gendered manners. However, through the participation of the aforementioned events, women can proclaim their political right to consume sex materials just like men do. However, women's ability to consume for sexual purposes should not be seen as evidence of gender equality. Capitalist ideology legitimates the commodification of bodies and human relations, which has not been challenged. As a result, even though we have witnessed women having more chances to consume sexual material in public, it only shows that commodification of both female and male bodies have become more common and accepted in today's society.

### **Chapter 3 Perceptions of Sex in Patriarchal Milieus**

In this chapter, I would like to illustrate the changes and continuity of young white-collar women's perceptions of sex and sexual behaviours by examining Hong Kong's social institutions which are influenced by patriarchal ideology, in the contexts of family, school and religion.

Through such an examination, we can understand how women's perceptions and knowledge of sex are constructed. By examining women's upbringing, we can see a more holistic picture of how sexual attitudes are formed, consolidated and challenged, and how women perform their gender and sex roles according to the expectations of the male-centered society in which the expressions of female sexual desire is monitored and controlled. However, to a certain extent, women's sexual autonomy can be seen when they rebel against the system by re-interpreting and even acting out certain sexual behaviours, such as pre-marital sex.

#### **Sex Education at Home**

Hong Kong young adult women's perceptions of sex are formed at a young age. Some sex educators such as Went, believe that home is an "ideal environment" for sex education to take place. It is the role of parents to provide a "caring and loving home" where they can show affection to each other and allow their children to form a positive self-image and acquire knowledge of sex gradually (1985: 12). While parents should provide moral education and teach their children codes of behaviour, sex educators also warn that parents may need to adapt and adjust to face the



changing society. In Hong Kong, sex is very much a taboo. Parents who were born in the post-Second World War era, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, tend to be conservative and are reluctant to talk about sex with their children. However, this does not mean that moral values regarding sex and appropriate behaviours are not taught and passed onto the next generation. Additionally, compared to the era when today's elderly generation (the grandparents of my informants) was growing up, changes in perceptions of sex can be seen among the parents' generation. For example, holding hands between lovers in public used to be considered an excessively intimate behaviour for my grandparents' generation. Among my parents' generation, holding hands in public is still considered as a serious gesture. Among my generation, however holding hands between heterosexual couples is a common gesture which does not necessarily suggest a serious relationship. While parents have been trying to uphold and educate their children the core moral values of sex and relationships, such as celibacy before marriage, they have adjusted their attitudes towards the sexual aspects of their children's development due to socio-cultural changes in Hong Kong society.

Sex and relationships have always been perceived as adult talk. For young white-collar women, the period between leaving university and their wedding day is a transitional time. During this period, many young women are not yet recognised as adults. After the completion of education, many women enter the workforce, become financially autonomous, and are able to financially contribute to and support the family, which is also viewed as a manifestation of filial piety. In spite of their ability to earn money, most of the young and unmarried Hong Kong women would still live with their parents due to the mutual support and care that they can provide and receive from the family. Additionally, high rents in the housing market prevent them

from moving out. Living with their parents under the same roof, young and unmarried women's financial power alone cannot bring them the sexual autonomy that they want.

Almost all of my informants expressed that their parents had never talked about sex with them or taught them how to prevent unexpected pregnancy and sexual diseases. In fact, many of them were not aware that their parents engage in sexual activities at home. An informant said,

My mum had an unexpected pregnancy once. My dad asked my sister and me whether they should keep the baby or not. And then they decided not to have it.

It was only after that incident that I realised they have sex. Before that, the idea of my parents having sex was almost unimaginable.

Many informants said sex between their parents was beyond their imagination. It was mainly because sex was not discussed at all at home and no trace of parents having sex could be found (or they were not intended to be found). The households in Hong Kong had very limited space and privacy. Many informants assumed that even if their parents had sex, it would be infrequent because they were thought to be relatively conservative in the aspect of sex and parenthood.

While the practical knowledge of sexual intercourse was not discussed at home, informants did learn moral values regarding sex and relationships from their family and school. They were taught to keep their virginity until they were married. In addition, they were taught to perform the gender role of a woman by interacting with the opposite sex in the family, such as father and brother, and observing the gender and power relations of the parents. Lucy Lui, a 24-year-old flight attendant said, "My parents always said girls should know how to protect themselves. But they have never taught me how because they insist the best way to protect myself is not to

have sex.” She continued,

We don’t talk about sex. I can’t remember if I asked them how I was born, but even if I did, they probably would have given me a very vague answer...Until very recently, my mum asked me not to live with a guy unless we were married. She assumed I knew what sex is really about. She is very conservative and shy. My mum said, “Don’t get taken advantage of by guys”. But she would never explain to me what it means by “taken advantage of by others”, like being kissed? Being touched? Or what? She would never talk about my relationships or sex with me unless it was very necessary. Sex is really not a topic in our family.

My conversation with Lui revealed some important elements regarding the sex attitude that most parents wanted their children to have. First of all, more than half of the interviewees said their parents warned them “not to be taken advantage of by others” from time to time. It usually started when the daughter had reached puberty, but some parents only gave a warning when the daughter started dating.

In addition, while the sensitive word “sex” may not be mentioned, warning the young women not to be “taken advantage of by others” is not just a manifestation of the patriarchal view of how pre-marital sex and the young female body is perceived. This ambiguous figure of speech is also understood in the sense that the female body is considered to be vulnerable and that virginity is highly valued by the society. Also, men are usually viewed as “virginity takers” or “aggressors” and women are regarded as “passive” and naïve in sexual matters and thus they are the ones to be “taken advantage of”.

In contrast, few parents, if not none, would warn their sons “not to be taken advantage of”, even though stories of boys being sexually violated are not uncommon. At the same time, as young women are warned, their own sexual desire

is denied, leading to their sexual expressions being neglected and suppressed. Moral condemnation is imposed on women who engage in sexual relationships before marriage; though we see the degree of condemnation has been lessened.

Moreover, the mother is usually the one to communicate with the daughter and gives her moral education. In Goldman's study (1982), he found out that children rate mothers as a better source of information on sex compared to the father or other male members of the family. Young women interviewees expressed that their bonding between mother and daughter was generally tighter compared to the father-and-daughter relationship. There were a few informants who said they had a better relationship with their father than with the mother but even then, the topic of sex and relationships would never be mentioned. However, despite the fact that sex is such a forbidden topic at home, informants could tell the difference in attitudes towards sexual behaviours between the mother and the father. Vivian Chiu, a 23-year-old project co-ordinator in a Japanese corporation in Hong Kong said,

I only talk about sex with my mum. I could never talk about it with dad. Even though I am not in a relationship yet, my mum and I would sometimes talk about what a good guy should be. And I remember she asked me if I could accept having oral sex. I would say my parents are quite conservative but my mum is relatively open-minded. She is willing to talk about it but my dad has only one principle, which is not to be taken advantage of by guys. My mum said it is okay to have sex if we have a stable relationship, but then the bottom line is not to become infected with a sexually transmitted disease. My mum also used stories of other people that she had heard from friends or relatives, to give me moral education.

According to my informants, talking about sex is like a game between mother

and daughter. To what extent should a mother talk about sex and romantic love with the daughter without making her annoyed? To what extent should a daughter reveal her feelings to her mother without making her worried? Instead of asking the daughters about their personal relationships, many mothers chose to talk with their daughters about men in general such as which male attributes were considered to be desirable. The strategy also reflects an adaptation and an adjustment by mothers who talk about sex and relationships with their daughters in face of the generational difference and changing attitudes.

Corporal punishment used to be commonly adopted by the grandparental generation in disciplining their children and was seen to be normal. Occasionally we see news about parents showing great opposition or adopting corporal punishment when they discover that their young daughter is in a relationship, which could end up with the daughter committing suicide. For example, a 14-year-old young girl committed suicide after having a big argument with her father about her relationship (Hong Kong Daily News 2013).

It could be seen that strong objection and harsh treatment towards teenagers' relationships may jeopardise family relationships and lead to fatal consequences. As a result, the strategies of parents to teach moral education have changed. For instance, according to some so-called modern ways of nurturing, the showing of a degree of trust is regarded as important in maintaining a harmonious relationship with children in today's society (Zhang 2010).

Moreover, if we look into the parental discourse about teenagers' sexual behaviours, we see that its content has actually changed from pre-marital sex being strictly forbidden to being undesirable, as long as no unplanned pregnancy and infection of sexual diseases are resulted. The two ways of dealing with unplanned

pregnancy, i.e. giving birth and having abortion, are not ideal in the eyes of the daughter's parents. In the conservative view of some parents, it is assumed that not many men are willing to marry a woman who has already given birth for another man. Therefore, the first option would mean that the daughter's opportunity in finding a good spouse in the future is limited. Also, having an abortion is considered as undesirable because it may cause harm to the female body and lower the chance of giving birth to a child successfully in the future. For instance, my informant was told by the staff in the Family Planning Association that if a woman had an abortion twice, her rate of fertility would be affected. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs for short) as another possible consequence of unprotected sex would also cause harm to the body. More importantly, some STDs are incurable, such as AIDS.

From the perspective of informants, even though they knew that having pre-marital sex was discouraged, they tended to talk about their pre-marital sexual behaviour as a way to break from the control over their sexuality by family expectations. However, they also emphasised that they did not want to do “anything stupid”, such as getting pregnant, raped or contracting STDs, to upset their parents. Corrina Yu, a 29-year-old part-time lecturer who married to a foreigner after a six-year long-distance relationship said,

My mum wouldn't talk about sex when I was young because I studied in a girls' school and there was no sign that I was dating anyone. She didn't allow me to go out at night as she thought it was dangerous. My first date was in Secondary 6 but it was like a puppy love. We kissed and cuddled, but nothing was really serious. My mum knows that I have a bottom line for myself and I will not do things beyond my parents' expectations, therefore she has never talked too much about sex with me. Perhaps she is also afraid that if she said

too much, I would be annoyed.

Although my informants were taught “not to be taken advantage of by others” and that they should consider themselves to be “precious”, such views took various forms. Another example provided by Kamkam Lee, who was a 23-year-old bank clerk and had been having a long-distance relationship with a Chinese mainlander for three years, also related to the conventional sex view and gender roles maintained by a local family as well as the adjustment the parents made in their expectations towards their daughters’ sexual attitude and behaviours.

I come from a lower-middle class background. My dad works as a tour guide in Macau. He has always been the breadwinner of our family. My mum only has started working a few years ago. She had been a full-time housewife until I finished university. We have a good family relationship. My dad is quite androcentric though. He loves my mum and me very much but he also needs to be the boss and makes all the major decisions. My mum is very conservative. Her first boyfriend was also my dad. They had their first sex after they got married. But she doesn’t expect me to be like this or follow her model. The bottom line is not to get pregnant. She will also tell me her opinions about my boyfriends.

From the above interviews, we can see the changes and continuity in the parents and daughters’ perceptions of sex and young women’s sexual behaviours. Although parents have modified their ways to communicate with their daughters on the matters of relationships and adjusted their own attitudes when knowing that their daughter’s sexual encounters may be unavoidable, the continual concern of parents that their daughter might become pregnant and or contract STDs continue to perpetuate the conservatism regarding young women’s sexual behaviours.

From an economic and practical perspective, for most parents and daughters, getting married to a man who is from the same or even higher social class is still the ultimate desirable achievement for a young adult woman. Being a young single mother may hinder the possibility of finding a desirable spouse in the future, who is economically stable enough to secure her upward social mobility and bring her a comfortable and happy life. Therefore, for many parents, the dating relationships of their daughters with any men who are considered non-preferable whether due to age, social class or family background, can only be “temporary”. Parents’ attitudes towards their daughters’ relationships also becomes more serious when the appropriate age of marriage is reached.

I have analysed above the reasons why the topic of sex was barely mentioned in local Chinese families. Local parents provided their daughters with moral education. Their rationales for restricting sexual behaviours were discussed. Many sex educators addressed the difficulties of parents in talking about sex with their children. Dilys Went (1985) suggests a few factors that contribute to the failure of effective communications between parents and children on the topic of sex, including (1) that the parents’ own sexual knowledge may be lacking; (2) that parents may assume that their children’s innocence can be preserved if they do not know too much; (3) that parents do not want to be asked personal questions by their children, such as how sexual intercourse is carried out. Restricted by their own values of sex and what parenthood should be, many parents are unable to provide the sex education that their children need. They feel embarrassed whenever the topic of sex is mentioned. Worse still, some parents may have negative responses towards children’s curiosity of sex and discourage them from asking further questions. Jennifer Ho, a 24-year-old clerk said,



Home is not a place for us to talk about sex. When I was small, I didn't know the difference between men and women. The first time I was aware of the concept that my father was different from me was when I saw his penis as he went to toilet without locking the door. I couldn't see much, mostly the hairs. There was a time I drew a picture of a woman with breasts and some hairs around the private area. I didn't really know what I was drawing. For me, it was like drawing a tissue box. It carried no sexual meaning. My mum was so angry and made me promise that I would never draw something like that again.

Candy Wong, a 26-year-old, master's degree holder shared the same idea that her parents and relatives were not the source of knowledge regarding sex. Sexually-related materials at home, even tampons and pads, were well-hidden by her mother. Therefore, her knowledge of sex was gained by self-learning. She said,

When I was in primary 1 or 2, I watched tampon commercials on TV. My mum hid these things so well that I could never find any...I knew there's something called menstruation. I had the concept that people grow up, get married and have children. It's like a process. But I thought about what if I were pregnant before marriage, what would I do? Because when I was small, I thought having a baby was like a part of our uncontrolled growth, like the growth of hair and nails, so when I reached that age, my body would grow a baby inside of me. But what if I had not married yet? I wondered why people could have a baby at that exact time! They always got pregnant after marriage. I was so curious! There was a time when my relatives left a pad in my house. I took it and told my auntie and mum that I didn't know how to use it. But they hushed me and asked me to put it away immediately because it was embarrassing. Therefore, I confirmed that the pad meant something; otherwise people wouldn't find it

embarrassing.

Thus we can see that Wong learned about the changing states of the female body, sex, and women's reproductive power on a self-learning basis. Nonetheless, there were also some exceptions in which the mother did not find it embarrassing to talk about sex and share sexually explicit materials with her daughter. Ariel Leung, who was 24 years old and attended a local university, shared her experience of watching Level 3 movies<sup>16</sup> with sexually explicit elements with her parents when she was small. She said,

My parents always rented Level 3 movies and watched them at home. I remember this being the case ever since I was still in kindergarten. And we watched it together. After the VCR was outdated, they rented DVDs. I remember one of the movies my mum rented. It was about a couple having sex in the swimming pool. My mum didn't mind showing sex scenes to me. She also liked reading news about prostitution, rape, or other sexual assault cases. She liked to share her opinions with me. My mum was very open-minded. My dad actually didn't like to watch Level 3 movies with his young daughters. And now we have grown up but sometimes I will still watch these movies with my mum and sister in the cinema. My sister is six years older than me. She is very open-minded too. If I have any question about sex, I will ask my sister. Most of my sexual knowledge actually came from my family, especially my mum and sister. My mum is very proud of being so honest with us. And she thinks this is the right way of teaching us about sex.

Perhaps it is not very common for parents to watch Level 3 movies with their

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Hong Kong motion picture rating system, if a movie is rated as Level-3, it means it contains scenes of violence, crimes or sex. Level-3 movies are considered to be for persons aged 18 or above. No one younger than 18 years of age are permitted to rent, purchase, or watch the film in a movie theatre.

children. Ariel's unusual experience allowed her to have early exposure to the concept of sex. Her mother's attitudes towards sex and ways of education also have greatly influenced the shaping of Ariel's perceptions of sex. However, seeming very open-minded in talking about sex, Leung's mother was also worried that her daughter would actually have sex. "She was actually worried that I would lose my virginity to the guy I dated in Secondary 6. She is very open-minded on the one hand, and not so much on the other. But I don't always listen to what my mum says."

The topic of sex is a very complicated issue in most Hong Kong Chinese families. The continuity and transformation regarding attitudes of sex and communicative methods between parents and young daughters can be seen from the interviews with informants. Many informants agreed that family was even more significant than school in shaping their values of sex. However, they did not always conform to parents' expectations. Moreover, most of them said mass media, such as television, magazine and movies, was the main channel for them to gain sexual knowledge and had great influence in shaping their sexual behaviours.

### **Sex Education at School**

Many informants commented that the sex education in Hong Kong is not adequate. Li and Yeung (2001: 19) contended that back in the late 1980s, the government had been aware of the concern of society in implementing sex education in schools. Due to the changing socio-political ethos of Hong Kong and in the face of the "sexual profanity and promiscuity" brought about by mass media, and the relatively "pandemic openness of sex" in daily lives, the government therefore introduced the first *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* in 1986. In response to the request of the Legislative Council, the first set of *Guidelines* was revised and a

new edition was issued in 1997. Ever since then, the *Guidelines* have not been revised again. In other words, schools in Hong Kong are still following the set of *Guidelines* which was issued more than a decade ago. In Li and Yeung's study (2001: 34), they criticised that the indifference of the government and schools to the implementation of sex education led to the result that students no longer obtain their knowledge of sex from formal channels, i.e. school, but resort to pornographic materials. Some may argue that even if a comprehensive sex education is provided in school, youth nowadays are just too "smart" that they would still search for pornographic materials. However, it is the responsibility of the school to prepare youth with the sexual knowledge to function as sexual beings of the community equipped with positive values and concepts about sex and relationships.

Another decade has passed with advancements in technology and the spread of the Internet, we have entered a world with information being collected, shared and exchanged at an unprecedented scale, which greatly shapes and challenges our conceptions of gender and sexual ideology.

Resorting to pornographic materials for finding answers about sex was exactly what most of my informants did when they were young. "Self-learning" was a term used by an informant to describe her experiences in figuring out what sexual intercourse meant when both parents and school failed to teach her.

According to my informants, sex education in primary and secondary school was severely inadequate, in fact only six of my informants actually received sex education. Most women in my study learned about the biological differences between the two sexes in Science or Biology classes in secondary school. Around two-thirds of my informants had never seen a condom before they needed to use it. Only a few of them have seen it during a sex education lesson. If my informants

could recall anything related to sex education, they mostly would talk about the experiences of attending a class/talk in primary school about how to use a sanitary napkin. Kiki Kwan, a 23-year-old administrative assistant who had no sexual experience said,

Sex education was very lacking in primary school. They didn't teach us about sexual organs. There was only a talk for girls about how to use pads.

Knowledge about sperm and eggs came from the General Education textbook. In the book, it told us how frequent a female body would release an egg; however it did not mention anything about a condom, penis, or ovary. In secondary school, sexual knowledge was given in Citizenship Education and Integrated Science lessons, but it was only limited to the moral but not physical aspects. There was a time in a lesson of Citizenship Education on “True Love and Worshiping”. They tried to teach us how to distinguish between having true love and blindly worshipping or looking up to someone. I also remember there were pamphlets provided at health clinics when we were undergoing the annual body check. Those pamphlets gave “love advice” for adolescents, like “it's better to go out with a group of friends if you don't really want to date a particular person, otherwise you would give him/her an illusion or the wrong idea”. Also, they advised adolescents not to break up at home, in case someone would commit suicide or harm you.

Kiki's experience was very similar with that of other informants. Besides moral values, sex education provides very little practical knowledge about the bodies of different sexes, the process of sexual intercourse and its outcome. Another informant, Lucy Lui shared how sexual knowledge was only given on reproduction.

I didn't know anything about sex before the age of 12. Sex education at school

was more like human biology. I knew that sperm from a male and an egg from a female could create a baby but I didn't know how it was created. It was not until much later that I knew what sexual intercourse really was.

In general, most informants said the sexual knowledge that they gained from schools was superficial and shallow. A few informants said they were taught about how to put a condom on a penis-shaped model in class. According to an informant, in a class session of Secondary 2 or 3, a female teacher asked a male student and a female student as the representatives to stand in front of the class and give a demonstration about how to put a condom on a penis-shaped model, which the informant recalled in the interview as "European sized" and "obviously too big compared to the Asian standard". However, when she first saw the model, she was only horrified by its size but had not acquired a concept about the difference in sizes of genitals of different "races". She also commented that the attitude of the teacher was "serious". This level of seriousness was considered to be positive in teaching students the correct concept about precautions of sexual intercourse. Nonetheless, within the same class, not all students were given the chance to try putting a condom on the model. Most students were only given the chance to look at the model with and without the condom and to touch the texture of the condom.

There were also two informants who told me that their male class teachers used a ball-pen and the handle end of a mop instead of the penis-shaped model to give the demonstration. She said the attitude of the teacher was not very serious and he was obviously embarrassed. As a result, most students only found the class "funny", "amusing" and they made fun of each other with dirty sex jokes.

The above examples were only exceptional cases. Very few informants actually had a class about the use of condoms. For many others, a sex education class was not

different from a class of human biology. Only two informants watched a video with a detailed description of sexual intercourse. Vivian Chiu, a 23-year-old administrative assistant said, in Science class when she was in Secondary one, the teacher showed a video about inserting a mini camera into a woman's vagina. The video also showed the sexual intercourse between a man and a woman with a penis being inserted into the vagina. She also emphasised that the boys were sitting in the front of the class, while girls, even though they were also very curious and excited, were afraid of showing their eagerness in learning about sex, for fear of being judged by the boys.

Even with the educational video shown in class, very often the follow up discussion was limited to a heterosexual and reproductive setting, assuming that sexual intercourse is penetrative in nature, which involves a male inserting his penis into the vagina of a female, and ends with the male climax.

According to my informants, sex education in Hong Kong was inadequate, and the context and the ways of its presentation were problematic. These may lead to the negative effects in the understanding of the male and female bodies, and even relationships among students. In fact, for most informants, they had their first sex education class/talk about the use of pads not in secondary school but elementary school. Only one session would be given. It was usually carried out in Primary 5 or 6. Only girls were required to take the class. Candy Wong, who was 26 years old at the time of the interview, recalled a Primary 4 girl being looked down upon because her first menstruation came earlier than others in her class.

She was pushed aside by other girls because she reached puberty and had menstruation earlier than other girls. Those girls were really bad. What's wrong with having menstruation? They said she was gross. The reason why people knew the girl had menstruation was because there was a talk in school about

pads and the difference of male and female genitals. The talk asked the girls to close their eyes and raise hands if they started menstruating. Someone didn't close her eyes and peeked at who raised their hands. That Primary 4 girl raised her hand, and told her friends that she has had it since Primary 2. I was also told that she once made her dress all red and dirty, and dropped the bloody tissue on the floor. People talked about these things behind her back.

Li and Yeung's study concluded that Hong Kong society has come to a point that the implementation of sex education at full length in schools should be done promptly. It said, "Our society simply cannot afford to leave its youth alone, struggling with the pains of growing up and functioning optimally as a sexual and social being" (2001:40). Nonetheless, another decade has passed, and yet no fundamental changes have been seen. In the 1990s, some surveys were done to study students' attitudes towards sex education at school. For instance, according to a research conducted by Breakthrough in 1994, 95% of young people thought they needed to be provided with more information about sexual intimacy and how to handle it properly. Their needs have not yet been addressed largely due to the indifference of parents, teachers and principals in providing sex education. Many of them are still in fear of exposing the "forbidden knowledge" to teenagers, which may encourage them to try the sex act.

Moreover, sex education is not introduced in the regular curriculum. Schools are only advised to reserve a number of teaching hours for sex education. However, this is not a mandatory policy. Schools have great autonomy in deciding how many hours are allocated for sex education. Many schools value students' academic performance more than that of moral education, so both teachers and students should devote their strength and time to preparing for public examinations. Even if teachers



are aware of the need to provide sex education, many of them are not well-trained to teach it. Many informants commented that the government had no intention in directing the implementation of sex education. Wong, one of the informants who had an unexpected pregnancy before her twenties said, “The society doesn’t explain clearly to teenagers what sex really means. Schools have not yet taken up the responsibility. When the youths take the wrong path, the society blames them for causing all the consequences. It’s not very fair.” In general, unplanned pregnancy, abortion and women being single mothers are not seen as structural issues, but rather the behaviour of individuals, especially that of women, is to be blamed. When they fail to meet the expectation of society, it is viewed as a result of lack of disciplinary life and moral values.

Many informants turned to the mass media, such as television, movies, newspapers, magazines and the Internet for knowledge on sex. For instance, Helen Lau, a 24-year-old flight attendant said,

I read Apple Daily<sup>17</sup> when I was small. They had a section of pornographic materials, showing pictures of beautiful, partially nude women. My dad read the *Fung1 Jyut6 Baan2* (風月版) and I remember telling my mum about this. She said, “Let him read. He can’t do anything anyway.” Then I started to read it as well.

For Helen, she understood that the consumption of pornographic materials was “wrong” even when she was small, otherwise she would not report her father’s consumptive behaviour to her mother. She considered her father’s viewing of bodies of other women in a newspaper as a betrayal to her mother, as she, through

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<sup>17</sup> Apple Daily is a one of the most popular tabloid-styled Chinese newspapers in Hong Kong, which features its clear political stand of pro-democracy in Hong Kong. According to AC Nielsen, a global marketing research firm, it is the second best selling local newspaper.

socialisation and enculturation, learned that loyalty and the belonging of the body between husband and wife was important in a relationship. Through her mother's response, Helen also learned that it was fine for men to read pornographic materials. From the perspective of her mother, and perhaps many other women as well, men's visual consumption of pornography, was considered to be acceptable as it was better than men having extra-marital affair. However, Helen also understood that women's consumptive behaviour of pornographic materials would be seen as lascivious. They would be seen as unchaste women who have excessively strong sexual desires.

Candy Wong, a 26-year-old Master's degree holder and obtained a civil partnership in Canada with another Hong Kong woman, shared how her knowledge of sex was self-learned with exposure to the various kinds of sexual materials at different ages. When she was in Primary 4, she read magazines and newspapers, which contained some articles about sex. She was excited to "study" the articles repeatedly. She recalled reading a Chinese story about a girl who got pregnant before marriage. The girl and her lover were tied up and thrown into the water by the villagers of their hometown. These stories contained a strong moral message and served as a tool for sex education of teenagers. Besides the moral messages, most stories had detailed descriptions of sex scenes which excited her a lot. However, she also realised that the possession of those materials and her excitement were wrong as women were not expected to be the active consumers of sex. She would lose her reputation and be called an unchaste woman if her consumptive behaviour was discovered by others. Therefore she kept those materials well hidden from others. She continued,

I also remember that our family read Sing Pao Daily News<sup>18</sup> at that time. You know the local newspapers always have those adult pages, for example *Fung1 Jyut6 Baan2* (風月版) and *Naam4 Gik6 Gyun6*(男極圈). I pretended to flip over the newspaper and read the news but in fact I wanted to read that particular section. I usually took a whole pack of newspaper with me to the toilet when I went for number two. There I could enjoy it with enough privacy. My mum asked, “What takes you so long?” And I said, “I’m not finished!” (Laugh) They published something new every day. I loved to follow the serials of the story. And of course, when I was done in the toilet, I acted normally like nothing happened. By reading these materials, I put every clue together and gradually formed my concept of sex.

At that time, there were numerous sex stories written in the local newspapers, for example sex and affairs in the office, sex between a man and his female boss, or sex between a man and his friend's wife. These stories were created for satisfying men's fantasies. Teenagers also explored sex through talking about it among peers at school, reading sex materials secretly in their private space and time at home, and sharing those materials among friends. At the initial stage of the exploration of one's own body and sex, sexual materials could be influential on teenagers as their perception of sex was only gradually building up. Candy Wong read an erotic poem in the newspaper when she was young. Even though many years have passed, she can still remember it clearly. The English translation of the poem is:

This is an amazing girl. There is a river between two mountains. Even though there is water in the river, you can't find fish. Even though there is no forest, a

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<sup>18</sup> Sing Pao Daily News is one of the oldest Chinese local newspapers in Hong Kong. Its popularity has decreased in the past decade in the face of competition from other print media.

bird can rest there.<sup>19</sup>

She thought that the sexual innuendos of the poem made use of the natural environment to imply a beautiful female body. The river between the two mountains refers to the female genital between the two legs. Water in the river means the wet female genital. The “bird” means the penis. Therefore, according to the understanding of Wong, “a bird rests in the river” suggests the penis “rests” or “penetrates” the vagina or “is embraced by it”.

The informant said she was very inspired by the poem as only a few Chinese words were used but the sex scene was depicted clearly. The poem seems “safe” in a sense that no words are directly used to describe either the act of sex or the sexual organs. However the meaning of the poem is so subtle and filled with sexual images. In fact, many mainstream materials that appear to be “safe” are actually filled with erotic messages.

Boys’ Love (BL) comics were another source of sexual materials for some informants when they were teenagers. The comics and animation of Boys’ Love have been imported to Hong Kong from Japan since the 1980s, according to Katrien Jacobs (2011). Boys’ Love comics have attracted some female readers as it fulfils their “soft-core home-erotic fantasies” (160). As they read BL, female fans enjoy the romantic stories and sex scenes between two young beautiful homosexuals. An informant told me that she enjoyed reading BL because she did not feel the pressure of competing with any female character in the story. She could also enjoy love stories between the two men who were clearly characterised as the “submissive” or “penetrated” one and the “active” or “penetrator”. The stories of Boys’ Love comics and animations are usually created for heterosexual imaginaries of female readers,

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<sup>19</sup> In Chinese: 「呀妹真稀奇, 雙峰夾一溪, 有水魚難養, 無林鳥可棲」.

even though the main characters are homosexual males.

Reading Boys' Love animation and comics has become an informal source of sex knowledge for some teenage girls, especially when they had limited access to pornographic materials on the Internet a decade ago. The practice of renting or buying Boys' Love animations was largely developed under peer influence. It was also regarded as one of the ways to fulfil teenage girls' sexual fantasies about male bodies. Sharing this kind of material was also a way to develop bonding between female friends who shared the same hobby. Cheung Sin Ting, a 23-year-old university graduate said,

I studied in a girl's school and we loved to read and talk about BL comics. We talked about how hot and handsome the male characters were in comics. Then, in secondary 6, we went to a girl's house and we bought a pornographic DVD to watch together. Only at that time we finally knew what sexual intercourse and a real male body were like. It was really different from those we saw in a comic book.

While for many informants reading BL comics was a hobby during their adolescent years, watching pornography, however, was an experience that most of them still enjoyed even after they had grown up. Pornography may not depict sex in real life but when compared with the love stories in BL comics, it is closer to reality. Some female fans were a bit shocked when they watched pornography the first time as it was so different from the sexual fantasy they had developed through their reading of BL comics. None of my informants were reading BL comics now, as they had found other substitutes.

In conclusion, since there is a general lack of sexual knowledge provided by the family or schools, in Hong Kong, most of my informants learnt about sex through

informal means, for instance magazines and comic books. Though they were exposed to pornographic materials in magazines, newspapers, BL comics and so on at a young age, watching pornography was said to be the only form of consumption in which my informants would still engage in. Many of them had given up purchasing or reading pornographic materials to fulfil their sexual fantasies. They mostly relied on the Internet for their knowledge of sex and satisfying their sexual needs and desires by searching and downloading online pornographic films.

### **Religion**

Among my 32 informants, only three identified themselves as Christians and two as Buddhists. In fact, many others believed in folk religions, usually a mixture of Buddhist and Taoist elements, in which guidelines of sexual behaviours are not a focus. About one-third of the women attended primary and/or secondary schools which had religious backgrounds. However, most of them claimed that the religious background of their school was not as important as family education in shaping and disciplining their sexual behaviours. My investigation into my informant's religious background showed that religion does not have a close relationship with women's sexual experiences. Only one out of five of my informants who did not have sexual experience at the time of the interview was a practicing Christian.

Although different religions could generally be practised freely in Hong Kong, there is no one single religion which has become so dominant and influential enough to form a monopolised voice. More than two-thirds of my informants identified themselves as non-religious. Some of them believed in folk religions or followed their parents to worship Chinese gods or goddesses. Among all of my informants about one-third studied in schools with a Catholic or Protestant background.

However, even though they may have been exposed to certain religions and engaged in religious practices for a while, many did not devote themselves to the religion. Most of the informants said the religious background of school did not shape their sex views and behaviours to a large extent. Helen Lau, a 24-year-old flight attendant said,

I don't believe in any religion. But my primary school was a Catholic one. I don't really believe in god now even though I used to go to church regularly with my friends. My mum worships Chinese deities. I don't think the Catholic values influenced me very much. For example, I don't think pre-marital sex is bad. I lost my virginity to a guy when I was a year one student in university. I have never regretted it at all even though the relationship ended after two years.

Helen did not think that her sexuality was bounded by religious influence. Another informant, Lucy Lui, went to a primary and secondary Christian school but she did not go to church. She claimed herself as a Christian and believed in god but she did not feel the need to explore this religion further and did not obey its teaching fully. She said,

I don't want to be bound and controlled. For example, I don't agree that women should not have pre-marital sex but it is one of the rules of Christianity. I don't really care. I do what I want. In my mind, I always think that virginity is nothing. It is like the appendix in our body. It is useless. That's why I don't feel like virginity is so valuable even though Christianity and my mum told me it is.

The majority of informants, who were highly-educated, tended to be aware of the influence of religion in shaping and controlling people's behaviours. Even though believers would be condemned if they do not act correspondingly to what the

religion says, many of them are still highly selective towards religious doctrines and rules. For instance, Lucy picked what she wanted to believe and chose not to see the virginity of a woman as a gift to her husband. Greater exposure to education on critical thinking and life experiences have led to more ways of living (or more troubles) for women. Many of them struggled to find their place and made a balance between believing in religious teaching and developing their own way of thinking.

However, for some informants, religion could be more influential in guiding thoughts. For instance, Jennifer Ho, a 24-year-old informant believed in the teaching of Christianity when she was 20 years old. At that time, she had her first experience of masturbation. She felt guilty of having masturbated because she was taught that sexual desire and lust are sins. She said,

I was 19 when I first masturbated. I was so scared after watching a movie and I was lying in bed. And I just suddenly got the feeling that I wanted to touch that part... and it felt really good. But then I stopped myself quickly because I still believed in God. And I remembered I attended a workshop, which taught people to admit their sins. They asked everyone to close their eyes and to raise their hands if they had ever masturbated. I didn't raise my hands of course. But I opened my eyes to see how many people did. We were told not to masturbate as it was against God's will. It was quite funny to me when I look back now. I no longer see masturbation as a sin.

Some parents also played a role in encouraging their children to participate in church services. They believed the positive influence of Christianity and its guidance and control over the lives of adolescents could prevent them from meeting “bad friends” and engaging in romantic relationships too early.

Among all of my informants, only one claimed herself as a strong believer in



Christianity. Irene Lai was a 28-years-old married woman who had a 3-year-old son. She had six siblings and she was the eldest sister in her natal family. She was always required to be a good model for her younger sisters and brother. She was the first child in the family who obtained a university degree. She was expected to have good manners in many different aspects, including sex and relationship. She said,

At first, I hated myself for losing my virginity. But the friends around me were quite open-minded so later on I learned to let it go. Ideally, I wanted my husband to be a virgin before marriage, otherwise I would feel like he had been used by somebody else. But I knew in reality it was very hard to find a man who was still a virgin on the day of marriage. Sometimes I would reassure myself that even though my first boyfriend penetrated me for just one second, it was an incomplete process for me. And maybe I was still a virgin when I met my husband...my husband didn't care about it actually. He didn't even notice that I was not a virgin when we had sex for the first time. I lied to my husband for a while. After believing in god, a sister in church told me that I should be honest with my husband, so I confessed to him and he was fine with it.

Lai realised that according to the teachings of her church, the control of sexuality was stricter on women. She also hoped that by playing with the meanings of virginity, she was still entitled to be a virgin after she met her husband. When I pushed by saying, "but he was inside your body even though it was just a very short time", she said, "yes, but he hasn't moved yet and I pushed him away immediately." This conversation shows how Lai tried to make up for her "mistake" by re-examining the meaning of sex. In fact, she did not find her definition very convincing but the psychological effect was apparent. By emphasising that she did not want sex and her refusal for further intimacy, she was saying that she was a good

woman after all.

In fact, informants always make use of different interpretations to make sense of their actions. Despite the fact that Lai was a Christian, she thought pre-marital sex was fine under only one condition, which is if one wanted to be with another person forever. She thought that if a couple is determined to get married in the future, then “having pre-marital sex just makes the relationship proceed to the next stage faster, as long as the two were determined to get married eventually”. On the one hand, she understood as a Christian, she should not accept pre-marital sex. But then on the other hand, she said, “in this society, it is really hard to remain a virgin for both men and women.” She had her own set of values in this matter because she and her husband also had sex before marriage.

When asked if she worried she and her husband would not get married in the end, she said,

I did. I worried about what if this guy would not be my husband, but I decided to do what I wanted and not to hold back. The outcome (whether we can have a good marriage) is also important but it is not something I can control. In a sense, you can still get a divorce even though you have married. There is no guarantee that things would work out.

She justified her pre-marital sexual relationship with her husband by using the goal-oriented approach. In this context, since they had eventually married. The goal was accomplished and the pre-marital sexual experience with her husband had become a relatively minor issue.

Lai was well aware of the contradictory aspects of her own values and the biblical teaching she received. She was constantly coping with the internal struggles as she realised Christian values’ influenced her but she did not precisely obey the

biblical teaching from the church all the time. For example, with regard to specific aspects of sex, she expressed her concern to me about the way her husband would sometimes ejaculate outside of her body, which was not allowed according to her understanding of the Bible. She admitted that she felt guilty about this sometimes. Lai chose to interpret the Bible and practise its teaching (or not) in her sex life. She and her husband's sexual behaviours were under surveillance and they had also become the ones who inspect and discipline themselves the most.

The biblical teaching about sex and sexuality was similar to what she was taught by her family education. Lai had 3 younger sisters who were still studying and a brother who was currently working. As the eldest sister of the family, Lai had always been asked by her parents to be the good model for her brother and sisters. She was also the first member in the family to receive a university degree. Lai was not a blind follower of religious values and she realised the gap between the doctrines and reality. However, she believed Christianity was a positive force in shaping good behaviours and attitudes. She particularly mentioned her wish to have her child grow up in a Christian environment. Believing in biblical teaching was good for maintaining a healthy and harmonious family relationship, the couple attended church with their child regularly.

The theory of Foucault's sexuality and surveillance (1979) suggests that institutions monitor people's thinking and behaviours. People would internalise the ideology and social rules, and self-monitor their behaviours. Social order is maintained through surveillance and differentiating and punishing those who fail to follow the social norms. These people are named as "deviants". They fall into the depth of despair and self-blame, and are encouraged to correct their "mistakes" and follow the path of "normality". Even if they fail, they would not blame the society

but would attribute the failure to their own weaknesses.

Lai did not see herself as an active agent and practitioner of reinforcing the ideology at the expense of her autonomy in body and mind. In the example of Lai, she had a hard time dealing with the identity of whether or not she was a virgin. She did not want to become the “unwanted element” according to the patriarchal Confucian and Christian teaching. She constantly felt ashamed of and guilty about her loss of virginity. When she could not cope with the stress, she needed to make sense of what she had done. She played with the two discourses, i.e. the rules in heaven and the rules on earth. When she said, “I know in reality it is very hard to find someone who is still virgin on the day of marriage,” she is applying the rules on earth to legitimise the fact that neither she nor her husband were virgins on their wedding day. Through emphasising the “reality”, she admitted her weakness for not being able to reach the standard as a perfect human being because of the failure to fulfil certain expectations in their lives.

Due to the high education background of women, they were aware of the influential force of religion in controlling their sexuality. Very few informants claimed they were believers of a particular religion. Even for those who were believers, they usually insisted that they were not blind followers. However, when their attitudes of sex or behaviours were not seen as “appropriate” according to their interpretations of religious scripts, internal struggles were common. They would also make sense of their behaviours, such as having pre-marital sex, by giving new meanings to certain doctrines or taken-for-granted social ideas.

### **Violations of the Body**

When it comes to violation of the body in a sexual way, such as rape and sexual harassment, the impacts can be deeper, more emotional and long-lasting than other physical violence because sex is very much associated with self-esteem and value. According to my informants, sexual harassment and other kinds of violations of the body are more common than what many people think. Victims may suffer from shame and guilt when their bodies are violated, and even see the experience of violation as a destruction of their personal values.

There has been research studying the psychological impacts on victims who were raped or sexually harassed. While the research contributes to our understanding of the physical and non-physical harm women suffer from this kind of violence, the research targets are selected and classified based on the body conditions of women on the matter of sex, which may in turn, cause more pain to the “victims”. Undoubtedly, having these experiences does not make a woman labelled as victim forever. Informants tended to see the experiences of their body being violated as “the past only” and “things that women face”. It is not my intention to over-emphasise these experiences as permanent traumas, however the violations do matter at the moment when they happen (Cheung 1979; Cheung and Chung 1982).

Jennifer Ho, a 24-years-old clerk shared her experience of being the victim of domestic violence when she was small. She also suspected her sister’s body was sexually violated by her father. She began her story by talking about her relationship with her sister. My informant came from a lower social class background. She and her mother lived together. Her sister had moved out and stayed with her boyfriend a few years ago. She said,

My sister...she was so sick and crazy. She used to ask me to act as a boy to hold her down and kiss her breasts. I was primary one and she was primary six.

She always asked me to play a boy role. Maybe that's why I have some lesbian fantasies. Sometimes I dream about having sex with one of my best friends. Anyway, I didn't really like my sister as she always threatened me to make me kiss and "play" with her. If not, she would talk to my dad and say I did something wrong so I would be punished. At that time I didn't think it was morally wrong. I just found it annoying. She also invented a game between us. And I needed to swallow her saliva when we kissed. Later on, when she had a boyfriend at 14, she stopped doing this to me. She had her first sexual experience at a very young age. She always took her boyfriends home and had sex very loudly. My parents were at home of course and they always had arguments. Our house had two rooms. I slept with my mum in one room. My dad slept on the sofa in the living room and my sister had her own room. But these rooms were not separated by brick walls but wooden boards so you can hear the noise very easily.

My dad seemed to have a strange relationship with my sister. They really hated each other but my sister had a way to fight back. My sister said our father fucked<sup>20</sup> her. I don't know if it is true or not. My sister always wanted to run away from home and my dad always kicked her out. The boyfriends that she brought home seemed not to care even though they could feel the tension in the family. When my dad kicked my sister out, she would leave home for several days. When she came back, my dad would put up with her for a bit. But it wouldn't last long. One or two days later, they argued again. It was like a cycle. She needed to come home, as she needed the money. Every time she came back, my dad felt very guilty and he would give her a lot of money.

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<sup>20</sup> Informant used the English term "fuck" in this conversation.

Ho described her family as “abnormal” and the tensions between her father and her sister were always strong. One time, her father opened her 16-year-old sister’s legs to examine if she was still a virgin.<sup>21</sup> According to Ho, that incident completely ruined the relationship between her father and sister.

My dad always suspected my sister had already lost her virginity already. But my sister always denied it. She was forced to lie in bed to be examined. I heard her screaming as I was behind the door. Ever since then, my sister always wished that my dad would die. When we were young, I remembered there was a night when my sister and I were sleeping in bed together. And the next morning, our pants were gone. And my sister said my dad took them off. I was so scared. But I didn’t believe that my dad would do that. My sister hated my dad so much. She said he raped her. I didn’t believe it. He hit her. But I don’t think he raped her.

Ho’s father committed suicide when she was a year 2 student in university. The fact that her father was gone and the traumas she had experienced due to her father’s psychological problems, such as depression, would still cause her pain sometimes. Ho grew up in an environment where there was not enough private space or sense of security. Domestic violence occurred frequently in the household. Ho blamed her mother for not being strong enough to divorce her father. Her household was never a safe environment. The bad family relationships and her upbringing also shaped her concepts of sex.

In some women’s lived experience, domestic and sexual violence are never too far away. They happen to people around us and many women have to live with that.

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<sup>21</sup> Even though the informant said her sister at age 14 started having sex at home when their parents were in the house, she said the incident of her father checking her sister's body did not happen until she was 16. It should be noted that the father had serious depression and probably bipolar problem for many years. The incident, as recalled by my informant, happened when the father was in a bad condition and had become more violent towards his wife and the two daughters.

There are also women whose bodies were sexually violated by the people they trusted the most. The sexual abuse offenders mostly are acquainted with their victims, such as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles and cousins (Whealin 2007). A 25-year-old informant, Lain Wong, told me a story about her upbringing. She said,

When I was small, I had a close relative who I trusted very much. And he used to play...role-play sex games with me. He is very close with my family up to today. I remember it started when he asked me if I knew how women could get pregnant. I said I didn't know. He tried to do so many different sex acts with me. For example, we touched each other's bodies, including the genitals. And he also explored my body with the use of sex toys. This continued for six months. Theoretically, I should have known what happened and how it was wrong. But I didn't relate this "game" with what my mum taught me. I thought it was a game and I enjoyed it. We always had gatherings among family members. We had this game in a room during those gatherings. No one in my family knew that. This stopped somehow when I was primary five or something. I can't remember how it stopped. There was no one single and obvious incident that stopped the whole thing. The six months that I had this weird relationship with this family member did not have a long-term negative effect on me I think. I know more about sex or men and women's bodies because of this...but I felt unhappy because I realised that he did it with me not because he loved me but because he used me as a tool. This made me feel bad. Later on, when I had a boyfriend, we wanted to have sex but for the first few times I couldn't move. When I said I couldn't move, I am saying like...literally that I really can't move my arms or any part of my body. I felt weak so I talked



to him and explained what happened to me before. He understood me. After a few trials, we could do it without problems. It is just...sometimes when I have arguments with my boyfriend, I would have negative thoughts like...are you treating me as a tool like he [this other guy] did? This thought makes me angry and upset.

Wong's experience caused difficulty in her ability to have sex with her boyfriend at first. Even though the problem was solved later on, she admitted that sometimes she found it hard to trust men. During the interview, she reassured me, as well as herself that no long-term negative psychological effects seemed to occur to her. It may be true or it is just a way she comforted herself. But these were the real feelings of a woman who had gone through things that a girl would not normally experience.

The aforementioned experiences may seem extreme. More than half of the informants, however, had experienced sexual harassment. They usually were sexually harassed in public areas, such as on the street, at a public library, and even in school. Another informant who lived in Sham Shui Po, an old district in Hong Kong where prostitution is more common, said many young girls were sexually harassed by strangers. She encountered an old guy who asked her to give him her underwear.

There was also an informant who was sexually harassed in a public library when she was a secondary school student. She recalled that there was a man who purposely sat next to her. She found it strange because there were many empty seats in the library but he chose to sit closer and closer to her. He put his hands on her lap and moved his hand upward. She did not report this to anyone. She simply changed the seat and luckily the man did not follow.

Last but not least, an informant was sexually harassed by a classmate when she was Primary 5. She thought that sexual harassment in primary school did not receive much attention; even though some girls had already reached puberty and their breasts had become fully grown. Teachers tended to see it as “minor incidents”. This informant sat with a boy who suggested to play a game of “hitting the laps” with her. He put his hands on her laps and moved his hands upward. She said it was disturbing as she just wanted to study. Finally she told the class teacher and she was able to change the seat afterwards. But the male student did not get punished. The teacher did not even talk about this incident to the male student.

In conclusion, it seems that girls suffer sexual harassment more easily (Ng 1996; Zeng 2000). Many informants encountered sexual harassment in public areas, such as on the bus and MTR. It was described by one of the informants as “part of the adolescent time of her life”. Throughout the interviews, I found that sexual harassment was more common among women than I had imagined. The experiences also shaped women’s sex views and perceptions towards men (sometimes women) in mostly negative ways.

## **Abortion**

Abortion is seen as a consequence of unprotected sex for which women are usually the ones to be blamed. One of the common ways to have an abortion done is to insert a metal tube in the female vagina to get rid of the unwanted pregnancy. It is viewed as an “intrusion” of the body by some of my informants. In this sense, abortion is an experience of the violation of the body.

It is a general attitude that young women who have unexpected pregnancy are

ignorant of the consequences of sex due to their lack of sexual knowledge.

Teenagers' unexpected pregnancy is commonly considered by Chinese parents as a disgrace to the honour of the family. Therefore, bad family relations and the inadequacy of moral education in the family are thought to be the main reasons that contribute to these bad behaviours. The Chinese term “*mou4 gaal gaau3*” (無家教) is often used to criticise an individual's behaviour but it is particularly intense as it is also a criticism of the individual's family. The picture is in fact far more complicated. Two of my informants had undergone abortions due to unexpected pregnancy. One of them came from a lower-middle class background and she started to work after completing high school education. The other, however was from a middle class background and was able to receive university education. Contrary to what people expect, both of them had very close family relationships. Chung who came from a middle-class Christian family, said she loved her family. Even though she did not have a good relationship with her younger sister because of differences in their personalities, she saw her family as being full of love and caring. Another informant Wong also said she liked to talk to her mum as an old friend. Her brother was also a very important person who was, as she put it, even more significant to her than her husband.

Young women were condemned for being “irresponsible” in their sex lives and bad family relationships were just one of the negative stereotypes associated with such irresponsibility. Women, who had an abortion done before, could be anyone from various social, economic, educational and religious backgrounds. Both of the informants were fully aware of the consequences of sex without protection, i.e. pregnancy and transmission of sexual diseases. They also understood that asking their sexual partner to wear a condom was effective in lowering the chances of

getting pregnant and contracting STDs. Taking oral contraceptive pills was considered to be a more effective method in preventing pregnancy, but it could not prevent the transmission of sexual diseases. It showed that my informants were not ignorant and that they had acquired this kind of basic sexual knowledge before they became pregnant and in their own words, “put themselves into trouble”. If they were fully aware of the consequences of sex and the contraceptive measures, why did they not “protect” themselves? This is very much related to their conceptions of sex, the female body, the self and relationships with men. Wong, 23 years old at the time of our interview said,

I regret what I have done. At first, I was so naïve. I just wanted to be happy and I didn't care if there was any consequence. I dated and I had sex with men who I did not love very much. But after I chose the wrong guy and had an unexpected pregnancy, I finally realised it was not just about “me” and my relationships with men. I used to be quite self-centered. I always considered my feelings in the first place. But that incident made me realise it was not just about what I wanted and how much I could devote to a relationship. If there was no mutual understanding and communication with your partner, then having sex without a second thought could be disastrous. But in fact, I didn't blame the guy for making me pregnant and not being able to take up his responsibility. He was way too young. We were way too young. We simply couldn't bear the consequence. What can I expect from a boy who was the same age as me?

For Wong, the abortion was certainly not a memory that she wanted to recall. She did not regret having the abortion as it was considered to be the only way to solve the “problem”. Wong's unplanned pregnancy is a result of a combination of

decisions, such as playing with luck, making pure sexual pleasure a top priority, and more importantly, her non-insistence on using condoms. She had the abortion at the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong. She was asked to attend counselling in a private room with a social worker before and after the abortion. She said,

I remember when I was waiting at the lobby, I saw a couple enter into a room and the social worker yelled at them loudly, saying they were irresponsible and they did not carry a brain when they acted. I was quite scared as I went there on my own and I didn't tell my parents. Even up to today, my mum still does not know that I had an abortion. When it was my turn to enter the room, I was scared as I had never expected that they would shout at you for what you had done. But maybe because I was alone and my ex-boyfriend was not even there, the counsellor was nice to me. And I arranged for the operation. The operation was...unpleasant. They put a mental tube into my uterus and removed the thing from my body. I rested at home for a few days and then I went back to work.

Sometimes, if women do not insist that their male sexual partners use condoms, they are said to be irrational. Both women and men are blamed for causing an unplanned pregnancy. However, the social pressure on women is usually higher. Similarly, women are blamed for not covering their bodies well which results in their getting sexually harassed. It is also the same logic that it is the women's fault for not asking their sexual partners to use condoms, therefore they "deserve" to bear the unwanted outcome of their "irrational" behaviours. Instead of accusing women of being "irrational" for having sex without protection, we should perhaps examine the bigger social structure which contributes to such a phenomenon and see how women make sense of their own behaviours.

Another informant Chung also had an abortion at the age of 19. She did not

insist that her sexual partners should use a condom before sex because it was too “awkward” and they were afraid of “spoiling the good atmosphere”. “It’s a bit awkward, isn’t? I mean stopping the guy when he is so turned on already and you two are almost in the middle of it,” Chung said. Informants might have different rationales when they had intimate physical interactions with men. When they consider whether or not to ask their partners to use a condom, some of them seldom thought of safety, but what the request meant in the relationship. “I don’t know. I think I am just silly. If I ask a guy to use condom, it’s like I don’t trust him. You may not believe me, but I am not a slut. I don’t give my body away to anyone. I like the guy and he likes me. Then we have sex. I don’t want to make him upset and risk this relationship,” Chung said. Clearly, she used her own rationality to make sense of the reasons for not asking her partner to use a condom. She perceived sex as an intimate behaviour that she would only do with someone she had feelings for. Sex was thought to be an expression of “love” in a relationship, in which trust is an important component. She thought not asking her sexual partners to wear condoms was a way to show trust. Wong and Chung said most of their sexual partners were not willing to use condoms unless they asked. They also expressed that if the partner had automatically thought to use a condom before sex, it would have actually prevented a lot of “trouble”.

Women’s perceptions of sex, love, relationships and the female body are all influential in making sense of why they are willing to have sex with their partners without protective measures, knowing that their bodies could be harmed. In a patriarchal society, women consciously and unconsciously act in certain sexual ways that they think men would appreciate. It should be clear that men might not think women should behave like that. But it is in women's perception and imagination that

they think they should perform sex and gender in some ways, and sometimes some women subordinate themselves to men in a sexual relationship. At the same time, they understand their female bodies could be used to secure a relationship. Even though my informants may not always commit themselves to a relationship, their showing of trust, affection and a desire to please the ego of men are still considered to be “rules of the game”. Informants’ hesitation in asking the partner to wear a condom was probably because they saw some of the rules would be broken if the request was made.

Unplanned pregnancy and abortion may affect women’s physical, mental, social and emotional well-being for a period of time. Many of the young women will be under enormous stress because of the lack of support from their sexual partner, family and friends. Very often, their practical social and financial circumstances simply cannot afford giving birth to a child. Self-condemnation resulted from this decision causes negative psychological effects.

The Family Planning Association in Hong Kong provides two operative methods for the termination of pregnancy. For early pregnancies which are less than 12 weeks in duration, suction evacuation is commonly used. As for pregnancies which have progressed beyond 12 weeks, it is advised that they be terminated with drugs such as prostaglandins, administered through intravenous injections or by vaginal suppositories. In this way, the uterus is stimulated to contract and the foetus is expelled (Family Planning Association of Hong Kong 2012). Both of my informants had their abortion by using suction evacuation. One of them described the tube as “cold” and the operation as an “intrusion” into her body. “It’s more than a penetration...it’s an intrusion. It’s like ‘I’ do not even exist. Here they found this body. They needed to stick a tube into it and take something out,” Wong said.

From the experience, both informants reflected on the meanings of love and their relationships with men. Both of them had moved on into new relationships now. They were not advised to have sex for six months after the operation. When I asked Wong how the abortion affected her health, she said she was not sure yet. Her friends said it would lower the chance of getting pregnant again and affect her health. She was pregnant at the time of the interview and she did not know if the last abortion had affected her. She was in a period of confusion after she had done the abortion. “You know, sometimes I just sat in a place for a long time and I wasn’t really thinking. I just felt a bit lost,” she said. Nine months later, Wong had a new relationship with a man in his thirties. However, they broke up a year later.

Another informant, Chung, who was a Christian, was in a friend-with-benefits relationship with an African stripper at the time of our interview. She did not insist on using any protective measures even after her abortion a few years ago. “I know he is sleeping with other women. They like him and he would not say no to them. But even though our relationship is not very serious, we are special to each other. Well, if I get hurt in the end, I still need to take up the responsibility and bear the consequences.” She knew that her behaviour was not appropriate and she might get pregnant again. However, she thought God is forgiving. He understands the weaknesses of human beings. She said, “I am not saying that we could ignore His teaching and ask for forgiveness every time we make a mistake. This is bad. I know it really is.” However, she could not help but to continue this sexual relationship. The way she dealt with the dilemma was to keep on praying, even though she knew protective measures were more effective.



## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, young white-collar women in Hong Kong's perceptions of sex have been shaped by institutional forces, such as family, school and religion since they were young. By examining the upbringing of women, we know how moral values regarding sexual behaviours are learned, and how sexual knowledge taught by formal channels is inadequate. Women's experiences in learning about sex through different ways and the sexual violations of their bodies also influence their perceptions of sex and behaviours.

The formation of women's perceptions of sex starts in family and becomes socialised in school. Education is inadequate so women depend on self-education for the information about sex that they need. Religion does not have a large influence overall, but for some informants, it was important for shaping their sexuality. The violation of the body in specific instances, such as abortion, sexual harassment and rape have a deep influence on the development of some of my informant's perceptions of sex. Informants' perceptions of sex were an ever-changing process. Their perceptions of sex also affected how they performed gender and sex roles in their sexual relationships, which will be discussed in next chapter.

## **Chapter 4 Surveillance of Female Sexuality**

In order to study Hong Kong young white-collar women's attitudes towards sex and their sexual behaviours, in this chapter I look into how women define romantic love and its role in sexual relationships. I also investigate the performance of sex and gender of women, and how and why women play out "sexual drama" on a daily basis. While performing as a "good woman/girlfriend/wife", many informants manipulate and discipline their bodies to achieve certain means. While it seems that female sexuality is under surveillance in many aspects, women find space to exercise their sexual autonomy by manipulating men's expectations of sex. For instance, in a short period of time, my informants had had different sexual partners or they had been involved in a series of brief monogamous relationships. In this way, they could experience different sexual encounters in a short period of time.

### **Women's Sex Life and the Idea of "Romantic Love"**

Throughout the interviews, almost all informants talked about the concept of love in relation to sex. For the majority of interviewees, romantic love was regarded as an important component in an intimate relationship. Viewed as "immoral", thus the most ideal relationship is one which does not separate love and sex. However, 7 out of 32 informants said they had experienced relationships without putting "love" in them, and claimed that all they wanted was purely sensational pleasure.

The idea of romantic love has been studied from an anthropological perspective. Some looked at the meanings of romantic love and how they changed over time. For instance, when Charles Lindholm (1995) analysed how love has been

defined throughout western history, he described love as an “experience of transcendence”. He found out that love is sometimes thought to be related to erotic feelings and sexual desires. But under certain circumstances, such correlation is lost, and “love” is described as “pure” and “being two in one”. The “modern” definition of love is often built on the foundation of monogamy and heterosexuality. The concept was widely accepted by my informants. According to most informants, love and sexual relationships were intricately intertwined. The feeling of love, or the lack of it, was considered to be extremely important as a way of showing how much a woman was devoted to a relationship. Also, not many informants talked about romantic love in relation to the concept of reproduction.<sup>22</sup> Two informants talked about “love” in relation to their religious beliefs. For them, the most ideal form of “love” is the love of God, which is considered to be unconditional and unreserved. When love becomes a human experience, they should follow the model of God to love on a reciprocal basis. Based on the teaching of Christianity and biblical interpretations, a calculated appraisal of love is perceived as a sin.

In present day Hong Kong, “romantic love” is widely accepted as a tender attachment and it cannot be separated from erotic sensations and desires that one associates with a particular person. Shaped by such definition of “romantic love”, my female informants considered some sexual behaviour as ideal and others as unacceptable.

Very few of my informants (only three out of 32) said they had more than one sexual partner in a particular period of time. Even if they did, they would say it was just a very short transitional period between breaking up with a current boyfriend and

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<sup>22</sup> Anthropologists, for instance Helen Fisher (2009), have also considered “romantic love” from an evolutionary perspective, which is based on the practical need of reproduction through pair-bonding. From a biological point of view, “romantic love” is merely the feeling generated by the powerful chemicals in the brain.

starting a new relationship with another. Despite the fact that very few informants had more than one sexual partner at a certain time, more of my informants (11 in total) happened to have a series of sexual partners in a short period of time. For example, one informant ended a sexual relationship with a man after just two weeks. Then one month later, she started a new relationship with another man and they broke up within a month. The cycle repeated and she managed to have a series of six monogamous sexual relationships in less than a year.

In general, informants who had multiple sexual partners at the same time, or changed sexual partners frequently, had negative comments towards their past relationships. Wong Sze-ming, a 23-year-old married woman, who had undergone an abortion at the age of 16, shared negative opinions about the several sexual relationships she had in a short period of time before meeting her husband. She used to have casual sex with men for whom she did not have intimate feelings. However, she emphasised that even during that “*wan6 lyun6*” (混亂; chaotic or messy) period, she only had one boyfriend at a time. In this sense, to a certain extent, she was self-censoring her own sexual behaviour. “Having multiple sexual partners at a time was beyond consideration”, she said. Her comment may suggest the prevalence of the monogamous sexual ideology in our society, which prevents women from challenging the idea. Our conversations together made me realise that they were afraid of being called “promiscuous” as this label would result in great deal of social pressure and moral condemnation which draws from the male-dominated discourse of women's sexuality. Women having casual sex, one-night stands, multiple-partners, or being a mistress, are generally seen as immoral behaviour. This is not to say that men who are involved in the aforementioned sexual behaviours would not also be condemned. For instance, a man who keeps a mistress would still be morally

denounced. However, compared to the man who keeps a mistress, the woman may receive even more intense social pressure for “destroying the family”. Moreover, compared to a man who has an affair outside of his marriage, a woman who does the same would be condemned more severely.

In an interview with Wong Sze-ming, she admitted that in the past she did have more than one sexual partner at a time. She remembered a guy initiating sex with her but she had not yet broken up with her ex-boyfriend at that time. This period of having two “boyfriends” lasted only about two weeks. She thought that women were not capable of loving more than one person at a time and they could not separate love from sex. This idea was also shared by many other informants, such as Lain Wong, a 25-year-old teaching assistant. She said love should be the foundation of a relationship.

However, there were also informants who thought that sex and love could be separated in a relationship. While it seems that informants had different opinions towards the subject, if we examine their views carefully, they were actually describing the same thing. The answer to the question depended on the kind of relationship women desired. When informants said they could have sex with men that they did not love or admitted that they only cared about pure sensational pleasure, it was exactly because they did not emotionally care about these men. They did not take the relationships with these random men seriously. This idea did not however, challenge the concept of the idealised relationship with “love” or “true feelings” as the fundamental element of a relationship. Yvonne Lau, a 24-year-old civil servant, who only started dating random men after a break-up said,

I was a bit scared at first. I thought I wouldn't be able to separate love and sex or I would become attached to that guy after we had sex. But, none of that

happened. In practice, I felt like I can actually separate the two (love and sex). When we were done, I didn't want to stroke or touch him. I would pretend that I was contented. But the feeling of love? I could hardly feel it. Now, I know love and sex can be separated. Sometimes I think maybe they could be separated because those guys were not really my cup of tea.

Yvonne Lau revealed that she viewed the relationship with a playful attitude.

Many informants recalled sexual relationships with men that they did not love in the past as a pursuit of "lust". They tended to de-romanticise the feelings they had for their "former lover(s)". For instance, Wong Sze-ming emphasised that having sex with someone that one did not "really love" was bad as it was just a fulfilment of sexual needs without any emotional attachment to that particular person. In comparison, she saw her love life with her husband as completely different from the several relationships in the past. Sex within marriage is a symbol of "love" but not "lust". As a married woman, she found her life was a "complete" one.

Many informants were cautious about the relationships they put themselves into and the prices they had to pay in this game of love or lust. Even though they may have sex with someone that they did not have strong feelings for, a degree of emotional attachment to that particular person was not uncommon. Also, as impossible as it seemed, many of them hoped the relationship (even though it was not a serious one) could have some sort of "future". When a relationship failed, for a period of time, they experienced disappointment and some other negative emotions. While they emphasised that their experiences in different sexual relationships made them become more mature and sophisticated, they were also aware of the emotional, psychological, and even physical impact that resulted from the failure of these relationships, for instance, their loss of faith in men. Wong Sze-ming said,

You can have sex with a guy that you barely know and you might truly enjoy that moment. But after that, you feel even emptier. The feeling is different from having a man who truly loves you. After getting married, I value love more than physical needs. Now I know what I really want and what I need in life. With more experiences, I have become more mature. But at the same time, having too much experience is not always good. Now, sometimes I worry if this guy [her husband] wants me only because of sex. It makes you feel insecure. It makes it hard to trust people again.

Helen Lau, a 24-year-old flight attendant shared similar thoughts about the separation of sex and love. She condemned herself for being a “bad woman” for taking gifts and having sex with men she was not in love with.

Before I met my current boyfriend, there was a period that I...slept with guys with whom I had no formal relationship. In my previous company, people would go out to drink in Central but I had never done that before. The world was big. At that time, I had a terrible break-up with a guy who I had been dating for 3 years. And in order to prove that I was still sexually attractive and charming, I went out with guys even though I was not really interested in them. I actually looked down on them but I didn't mind receiving gifts from them. My mum noticed I had changed a lot. After I broke up with my ex-boyfriend, she encouraged me to go out and meet some new people. But later on, she noticed that I had gone too far, that I took advantage of the men I was meeting. I am very scared that my current boyfriend would find out about my past.

In Helen's case, in order to show that her current relationship was different from the previous “non-serious” ones, she emphasised that “real love” had been placed into her current relationship and no material gains were expected. Indeed, a

“real relationship” is about attachment, security, caring and other positive virtues with no expectation of material benefits (at least it is not supposed to be an important reason for having or maintaining the relationship). Helen was afraid of letting her boyfriend know that she had sex with many men in the past. As women’s fidelity is valued by her parents and society, the number of sexual partners a woman has had may indicate her potential seriousness in and commitment to in a relationship. However, despite the fact that Helen saw the past as a bit “shameful”, she did not really regret what she had done. She said,

If I were given another chance, I am pretty sure that I would still do it. I stated very clearly to all the guys that I just wanted to have fun and there was no need to take things seriously. I didn’t like them at all. I had sex with them because I used to please my boyfriend so hard and now they needed to please me. But I still wouldn’t give a shit about them. I just wanted revenge. I felt good. I enjoyed that. I felt like I was a queen.

There were also women who, in the past, had multiple sexual partners at a time (3 among 32) and one-night stand(s) (3 among 32) but most of them were having a “formal relationship” with someone at the time of my interviews. Jennifer Ho, who was 24 years old and in a long-distance relationship with a man in the U.S, had experienced a period of multiple sexual partners when she was twenty.

In the past, I had multiple sexual partners at a time and one-night stand. And I can’t say that it would never happen again. But now I don’t want to do that. If I don’t have a boyfriend, I will definitely have more one-night stands. But now I want to be loyal to him. I enjoy having sex with my current boyfriend. It doesn’t mean that sex with other men was bad. Some of them were really skilful. I could have multiple orgasms. But sex with a real lover is different. It



is a very special and spiritual feeling. It almost feels like there is a way to connect to heaven through having sex with each other. After having sex with my boyfriend, I feel like I am very contented. Some books said through having virginal sex, you can return to a pure and unpolluted world. It's like going back to the beginning of the world or the universe.

When she tried to distinguish the difference between having sex with a real lover and a random man, she used the dichotomy of "body" and "heart". In the Western philosophical dichotomy of "body" and "mind", the "body" is usually degraded as it is associated with animalistic instincts, while the "mind" is associated with rationality and logic which are appreciated elements of humanity. In the dichotomy of "body" and "heart", however, "heart" is comparatively valued because it represents the emotionality and "true" feelings of a person which are seen as being unique to the human race. My informants kept on using the aforementioned dichotomy between "body" and "heart" to explain the differences between "serious" and "non-serious" relationships. They said bodily reactions to the experience of sex with a lover or a random man could be the same. Not only could their "true" lovers give them orgasms, but other men could do the same. However, having sex with a lover in a formal relationship is thought to be the most ideal as her "heart" could tell the difference. They were generally more passionate towards a formal and serious romantic relationship. They also tended to think more about the future and the prospect of being with the men.

### **"Wan Lyun" Sex Life Vs Marriage as the Normal Path For Women**

According to my informants, the monogamous heterosexual relationship, which is built on "romantic love", is regarded as the social norm. Having more than

one sexual partner at a time and same-sex relationships are seen as “abnormal” and “bad sexual behaviour”. Wan lyun (messy, chaotic, disorderly, etc.) was a term that was commonly used by my informants whose sex lives did not follow the norm. Unexpected pregnancy was also regarded as wan lyun as it did not happen in a legitimate marriage.

Marriage is a rite of passage. It is seen by society as a mark of transition to becoming a “good woman” (Wolf 1972). Even in present day Japan, a woman’s value is still attached to her reproductive power. It is recognised by the patriarchal institutional force.<sup>23</sup> Women are being told that their successfulness in finding a spouse, managing their marriage and building a family with one or more offspring, determines their self-value. Some of my informants gave up “messy” sexual relationships to obtain the ultimate goal of marriage.

According to my informants, there were three criteria for finding an appropriate spouse. The spouse should be financially stable, from the same or preferably higher social class, and “truly love” the woman. It does not matter if a woman has sexual experience with different men, what is important is marriage with a man who could fulfil these criteria. Within the cultural understanding of marriage in Chinese society, there is an assumption of shared property. In order for that property to be used only by the members of the household, marriage becomes a kind of social contract which controls the sexuality of both the husband and the wife. Thus according to Chinese social norms, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of marriage, women’s sexuality had to be controlled for the stability of the family. In Hong Kong society, there is an assumption that men are easier to break through these social

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<sup>23</sup> In 2003, Yoshiro Mori, Japan's former prime minister said women should not be given pensions if they do not give birth. He said, “...welfare is supposed to take care of and reward those women who have lots of children. It is truly strange to say that we have to use tax money to take care of women who don't even give birth once, who grow old living their lives selfishly and singing the praises of freedom.” (Anthony Faiola 2004).

controls than women. Women's sexuality is assumed to be less intense because they are supposed to focus all of their attention on taking care of the household and raising the children whereas men are working outside and in social contact with members of the opposite sex on a regular basis, making it difficult to control their sexuality.

Even though women nowadays could obtain higher economic power and educational levels, these kinds of "capital" do not provide women with a social status that is equivalent to that of men with the same kinds of capitals. This is because their value to society is still very much attached to their successfulness in marriage and family. As a wife, her sexuality does not belong to herself but to her husband, as he is the one who owns her body. As a mother, her sexuality is even more problematic as the idea of motherhood, which is supposed to be pure and innocent, contradicts the "sexual" female body, forcing women to perform as both the seducer and the nurturer at the same time (Kristeva 1995).

Following interviews with my informants, I argue that from the perspective of women there are different stages of constraint and celebration of female sexual autonomy. First of all, the sexuality of female adolescents is controlled by parents. Even though institutional controls from family and school could be strong still, after women become legal adults, they tend to experience a relatively freer period by expressing their sexuality through dating, engaging in sexual behaviour, and consuming sexual entertainment, such as pornography and erotic novels. However, when they are at the appropriate age of marriage, many women are willing, in some cases even hoping, to "start a new page of life" at the expense of their relative sexual autonomy. The idea of marriage is idealised and is thought to be an essential part of a woman's life. Marriage as an ultimate goal for women has not been challenged by

my informants. While it is true that not every Hong Kong women see marriage as the goal of their lives (Nakano 2011), however, more than 90% of my informants still wanted to get married in the near future. Having a career and a stable marriage were perceived as an important part of the “ideal life”.

While sexual behaviours of women are restrained (sometimes women also impose self-restrictions), there is another perspective from which we can look into women’s sexuality and their autonomy in relation to marriage. According to my findings, women who had many sexual partners could maximise their access to sex with different men but not break the fundamental rule of monogamy.

Many informants thought of sexual relationships before marriage as unimportant, provided that these relationships did not devalue a woman and decrease her likelihood of finding a good spouse of the same or even higher social class. It means that women could have many sexual relationships at different times under some pre-conditions. But the condemnation of women would be great if these sexual relationships resulted in an unexpected pregnancy or other negative outcomes, which may lower a woman’s value in the marriage market.

In addition, many informants justified their behaviour of changing sexual partners before marriage from one to another by saying, “This is not the right guy for me. I should move on and try to find the right one”. In order to find the right person who was compatible with her in many aspects, including sex, Bobo Leung explained to me that the “experimental spirit” was significant. She continued, “How could I know if he is sexually disabled or not if we have never tried it? If you were married to him and discovered he had an erection problem only at that point, your happiness for the rest of your life would be gone.” Through these quotes from informants, we can see how some women make justifications for having more sexual encounters.

Moreover, women also strategically maximise the advantages gained from men by performing sex, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Performing Sex and Gender: “Faking Orgasm”**

The discussions about “faking orgasms” with my informants revealed how they manipulated men’s expectations in sex and gained power in a sexual relationship. For my informants, sex is a performance. “Men always think they are very powerful if they can make women come. But sometimes they are just so foolish that they don’t know I lie when I said I have come,” Wong Sze-ming said. For them, “ideal sex” should be done with a “real lover”, however sexual performance, such as faking an orgasm, is also a part of “ideal sex”.

Inspired by Erving Goffman’s theory (1959, 1967) of drama, performance and self-presentation, in this section I propose to discuss women’s faking of orgasms with the theory of “sexual drama”. Using a heterosexual relationship as an example, every individual to a certain extent performs “sexual drama” in a sexual relationship on a regular basis. Both men and women usually stick to their gender roles in the matter of sex in order to fulfill their personal expectations that are molded by social norms. Sometimes they would disregard their feelings, emotions, and willingness to perform gender roles for the sake of the successfulness of the relationship. This indicates that a gender hierarchy or power relationship is practiced, reinforced and sometimes challenged through the staging of “sexual drama”. However, there are exceptions. For some couples who like to play games of sex domination and submission, especially when the woman plays the dominant role, the traditional gender role would be subverted temporarily.

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity (1990) can be used as an

analytical framework to explain the existence of “sexual drama” and the participation of informants in it. She suggests that everyone in the social world has to perform gender as their first level of identity and self-representation. A set of rules of appropriate behaviours has been set for being a woman or a man. By engaging in “sexual drama”, we are performing our genders. Some studies emphasise sex work as a performance with the devotion of physicality and emotionality.<sup>24</sup> However, not just sex work is a performance. According to Goffman, “performances” refers to “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (1959: 22). His theory of drama argues that every individual constantly performs/acts in front of people, whether we are conscious or not. In fact, many informants played their “sexual drama” by faking an orgasm. In my study, about half of the informants who had sexual experiences (13 out of 27) said they had faked an orgasm in front of their sexual partners. Another informant, Corrina Yu who got married after dating her boyfriend for six years shared her thoughts about faking orgasms.

I tell my husband that “I am coming” to let him know. Sometimes I think he has worked so hard to make me come. And it is good to let him know that he

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<sup>24</sup> As Kong’s *The Hidden Voice: The Sexual Politics of Chinese Male Sex Workers* noted, male sex workers and their female clients “seem to play different sets of sexual scripts in which a traditional dating scene was staged” (2005: 37). For instance, in the sex industry, drinking with clients is very common and is a skill that both female and male prostitutes should acquire. According to Kong’s findings, if a female client asked a male prostitute to go out with her and introduced him to her friends, he is expected to drink for her so as to “protect” her. Female clients would sometimes look for “romantic elements” and play “gender games” by acting like “real girlfriend”. These practices reinforce the traditional gender roles on a superficial level, noted that they are actually the ones who pay, which in fact contradicts the gender norm. It implies that even though a woman has money to “buy” a male body and has power over this sexual relationship, she may still choose not to manifest her power in a “male way”. Traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity are conformed and have not yet been challenged. According to male prostitutes interviewed by Kong, not many female clients would take the initiative role when they had sex. Although some women looking for sex services may have relatively stronger sex drives, they may still let the male prostitute perform the leading role.

has succeeded! It is a reward, right? I used to say “I am coming” like it was a habit or something. Now I won’t fake an orgasm with my husband. I did it in the past as I felt like I would disappoint him if I didn’t have an orgasm or show that I had.

Women performing roles as housewives and child-carers have been widely discussed in gender studies in Hong Kong (see for example Salaff 1976; Ho 1984). I argue, however, that women do not just perform their gender responsibilities or roles, they also perform their sexualities. It was my intention to understand how informants made sense of their “performances” in sex and how these “performances” reflected the deep-rooted and taken-it-for-granted gender ideology.

For informants who said they have never faked an orgasm in front of their partners, they can be divided into two main groups: one group who were confused about how to fake it, and another group that claimed they knew how to do it but chose not to. The variations in the answers showed that informants had different understandings of the male and female body.

A female orgasm is always open for question because it is not as obvious as a male orgasm. From my interviews with informants, it is clear that the majority of women said they did not understand the female body well when it came to sex. For instance, seven informants said they were not sure if they ever had an orgasm and wondered if every woman experienced the same feeling and reactions when they obtain an “orgasm”. Some informants thought that it was impossible to fake orgasm because men would be able to tell if a woman has come or not. When asked the question, an informant said, “How to fake an orgasm? I really don’t know. But I heard some girls do that. I just don’t know how. A real orgasm squeezes the penis inside you. You can’t really fake that. My boyfriend asked me to squeeze him with

my vaginal muscles but I simply can't." She distinguished herself from women who claimed they had faked orgasms. She looked down upon those women as their experiences of orgasm were not real. She thought that "faking an orgasm" was bad because it indicated women were dishonest. In contrast, women who cannot or refused to fake an orgasm were good as they were "real".

However, some informants said men could not tell and they would fake orgasms as they thought men would be happy if they had orgasms. They would moan "louder than it should be" to show the pleasure, excitement or pain they experience in sex as a way to respond to the performance of their sexual partners. These informants believed they were good actresses as they felt good about their performance. Those who had never faked an orgasm said they wanted the sexual experience to be real. While they maintained that honesty in a sexual relationship was very important, it was also a kind of performance as they were performing as good girlfriends who did not lie to their lovers. Instead of performing as a sexually satisfied woman, some informants chose to perform as honest women who would only show their real feelings.

My interviews showed that very few women were willing to reveal their emotions and sexual needs to their sexual partners. They assumed their sex partners would be unhappy if the men knew that they were unable to satisfy women's sexual needs or "make women feel good". By not demanding sex, these informants performed as "good women" who were "contented" with the quality of sex that their boyfriends offered.

With the influence of the culture of pornography, sex within a heterosexual monogamous setting seems to have established a standardised procedure. In particular, this procedure involves penetrative sexual intercourse followed by a male



orgasm. Very few informants thought their male sexual partners were concerned about the female orgasm. Under the androcentric view of sex, which focuses on the sexual needs and pleasure of males, women's needs and feelings towards sex are usually neglected, not just by men but also by women. It is not to say that informants were not aware of their sexual needs or had no desire in obtaining an orgasm, nonetheless, they preferred not to express their sexual needs and desires to their sexual partners. Some informants said there was no need to talk about their feelings related to sex because they had a lower sex drive compared to their male partners. Even though more than two-thirds of my informants believed that the sex drive of women was biologically weaker than that of men, it is hard to tell whether it is biologically true, it is just an excuse that the culture offered to justify the social suppression on women's sexuality, or both.

There were many things that a woman "should do" and "should not do" to be a "good woman" in the aspect of sex. For both married and unmarried women, these "rules" were quite similar. At the beginning of the interviews, women very often answered my questions regarding their sex lives in a standardised format. For example, they told me they were embarrassed to be asked about sex and they had nothing special to share with me. However, as the interviews went on, they were usually quite willing to talk. Sometimes their attitudes towards sex were different from what they had acted out. A conversation with a married informant, Irene Lai who is 28 years old, showed the contradictions between how she wanted to act as a "good woman" and how she felt.

I felt very embarrassed when my husband asked me to watch porn with him. I didn't want to watch it. But still, we watched it and we had sex afterwards. I found it [the pornography] sexually stimulating. I didn't have any sexual

experience before meeting my husband. I was quite passive at the beginning of our relationship...but I used to learn different sexual positions through watching pornography [found on the Internet].

From the first three lines of the conversation, we can see Lai struggled in positioning herself as a “good wife”. The embarrassment towards her husband’s sexual request of watching pornography together, and finally her yielding to husband, showed that she wanted to be the “good woman/wife”. Based on what she conceived as a “good woman”, she believed she “was supposed” to be embarrassed about her husband’s sexual needs. Her husband may not expect her to be embarrassed towards his sexual request. However, my informant’s cultural imagination of the attributes that a woman should possess determined her sexual behaviours. In her imagination, the “bad woman”, in contrast, was a highly sexual woman who was eager to have sex; and the “good woman” should not demand sex and should not enjoy watching pornography. She saw embarrassment as a “natural” feeling that a woman should have in response to her husband’s sexual request. However, since a “good woman” should also satisfy her husband’s sexual needs, even though she “did not like” watching pornography with him, she yielded to her husband’s sexual request. One can see how she constrained her ways of expression regarding sex even though she admitted she was sexually aroused by the porn. She made sense of her behaviour by saying it was one of the gendered responsibilities of a married woman to sexually satisfy their husbands.

Lai imagined that inexperience in sex and sexually passivity of women was valued, which showed that she was “pure” and “innocent”. Nonetheless, seeing as she “actively” learnt about the sexual positions from watching pornography (not the porn her husband wanted her to watch with him), it would seem she was not as

“sexually passive” as she claimed to be. The actions of searching for pornography on the Internet, consuming and imitating the female characters’ sexual positions, all demonstrated that she was not just led by her husband in the matter of sex. She was an active agent who took the initiative to explore the different ways of having sex. However, she insisted that watching pornography was not for her enjoyment but for a “learning purpose”. In other words, she learned about the different sexual positions to better satisfy her husband.

In section above, I explained how women performed sex to facilitate the successfulness of their relationships and manipulated men’s expectations. But the question is, why do they believe that performing sex and a good use of the body can secure a relationship? Based on what rationale, are women willing or unwilling to discipline their bodies to please their lovers? Understanding the deep-rooted ideological interpretations of women and their sexual bodies is the key to answering these questions. By unpacking this ideology we can see that even though the material lifestyle (Hong Kong white-collar women have more money nowadays) and the social status (women have higher social status) of Hong Kong women has changed compared to the 1960s, the roles within sexual dramas and intimate relationships remains very much the same.

Fandy Lam, who was 24-years-old and was currently in a relationship with her second boyfriend said she disliked giving her ex-boyfriend oral sex. “He asked me to give him oral sex while he was watching porn. I tried it once. But the second time when he requested it, I just couldn't do this anymore. I really dislike the experience. It was like I was a tool and was humiliated”, she said. She was hurt because her ex-boyfriend did not pay attention to her except for the sensational stimulation that she gave. He did not even look at her as he was obtaining visual pleasure from the sex

scenes of the pornography.

Yet, a woman giving oral sex to a man may not be an act indicating submission to him. An overwhelming majority of informants did not oppose giving oral sex to their partners. Equally, these women tended to enjoy receiving oral sex from their partners. Five women disliked having oral sex. Very few of them thought oral sex was dirty and described it as a “submissive sex act”. However, Fandy’s experience made her feel like she was “being humiliated” because she thought she was being objectified in the process. Her mouth, which could give him the sexual pleasure, was alienated from the other parts of her body. He also objectified the female character in the pornography whose body was subjected under his gaze to bring him sexual arousal and stimulation. Despite her unpleasant feelings, she believed that such practices made her a good girlfriend and the romantic relationship would be secured. Nonetheless, she did not respond to all the sexual requests of her ex-boyfriend when she found them unacceptable. When deciding whether or not to perform certain sex acts, she was considering to what extent, she should exercise her sexual autonomy, and to what extent she would make some sacrifices to perform as a “good girlfriend”.

Through performing sex and engaging in “appropriate sexual behaviour”, my informants performed their role of a “good woman”, for example, by satisfying their partners’ sexual requests, not demanding sex, faking an orgasm (or not), and by being a bit submissive but not too sexually passive. These performances in a sexual relationship were considered to be “ideal”. However, while gender politics are always involved in a sexual relationship, not every single act should be seen as a manifestation of power with one gender being dominant over another and being pleased by the subordinated one, which will be further explained in the next section.

### **Women's Disciplined Body and its Uses**

Foucault (1976) suggested that those whose sexualities are controlled are viewed as “normal” by society. For those who refuse to live within the “norm”, they are regarded as “abnormal” as they do not perform their genders in socially expected ways. The definitions of normality and abnormality have the social function of maintaining social order. From an individual perspective, many informants could gain an advantage if they conformed to normality.

Young adult women in Hong Kong are aware that they can use their bodies to facilitate successfulness in relationships. In Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), he further built up his theoretical framework of seeing the body as an object and subjected to power by introducing the idea of the “docile body”. He said, “a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136). In other words, individual bodies could become effective tools for domination. Anyone who becomes the subject of surveillance constitutes a body for self-discipline. Sex, body and power are inter-related. Women do not just discipline their bodies without reason. Many informants, who were highly educated and economically empowered, placed their bodies under surveillance in order to increase their sexual attractiveness and thus have a successful relationship. There could be exceptions. Certainly not all women improved their physical appearance for the sake of improving their chances of finding a mate. Yet, my research findings have shown that being sexually appealing to the opposite sex was one of the most important factors for women's desire to improve their appearances.

Other informants believed that delaying sex was useful in “keeping a man's

heart”. These informants believed that women would be more valuable and harder to get if they rejected the sexual pursuits of men. They also believed that when a man was being challenged, he would only try harder to prove that he was good enough and ultimately could have sex with the woman.

Nonetheless, for other informants, having sexual intimacy was a good way to express their love for their sexual partners. Having good sex with partners was thought to be a positive influence in a relationship. For women who wanted to “save the relationship” which was thought to be in danger, making themselves even more sexually attractive than usual was also a common practice. The value of women is tied to their body appearance and sexual attractiveness. The idea is so predominately powerful that women themselves see their bodies as weapons or the means to securing their relationships with men. Helen, who had a relationship with her ex-boyfriend for three years, said it took her a year to heal after they officially broke up. As her ex-boyfriend was one year older than her, he left university and started to work a year earlier. He then showed his wish to break-up with her three times within a year. She said,

I tried to save the relationship. I felt that he lost interest in me and I was scared. I started to buy very sexy bras and underwear. I wore less and less when I went out. At first, he would be angry if I wore less because he didn't like his girlfriend being gazed upon. But later, I felt like he didn't love me anymore and he didn't care what I wore. Before my boyfriend broke up with me, I tried to stimulate our sex life by buying sex toys but he wasn't really interested in those. I even bought a book, which taught women how to keep a man's heart. He understood that I tried to keep this relationship. Every time I changed myself a bit to please him, our relationship would get better. But then I realised

that there was no way to keep him as mine.

Helen was very eager to save the relationship with the use of her body. It may be true that trying to be sexy cannot guarantee the salvage of a problematic relationship. It was still considered as one of the last resorts for many of my informants. Usually, they felt these strategies did prolong relationship but it also prolonged the inevitable pain of breaking up.

My informants admitted that it may seem to be a bit negative that they were using their bodies to please men for the sake of maintaining a relationship. Power relations between the two sexes are complicated. Under many circumstances, these women know how to gain power over men through sex. One informant told me that when her boyfriend was away to pursue study in the United Kingdom, she refused to have sex with him every time when he returned to Hong Kong during the holiday, even though they had sex before he left for the United Kingdom. It was only three years later when her boyfriend returned to Hong Kong that she let her boyfriend initiate sex. She also admitted that many of her friends said it was impossible for her to forbid her boyfriend to have his “sexual privilege” over his girlfriend for three years. She understood the “risk”, as many of her friends put it, that her boyfriend might cheat on her or break up with her. However, she was willing to take the “risk” because of her personal belief in their love and the relationship. By denying his access to have sex with her, she had power and control over him. Her friends’ “worries”, however, suggested that sex was widely perceived as a means to keep a relationship by young adult women of similar age.

Another informant gained power over men with the use of her sexuality. She said,

The way I dealt with guys... I sometimes forbid them to come (have an

orgasm). I whispered into their ears and said, “You are not allowed to come.” It makes me feel proud as a woman and I have the power to control them and their bodies.

According to this informant who had sexual experience with more than five men in the past few years, the purpose of the teasing game was not to stop the sexual partners from having an orgasm but to show a degree of control over their bodies and minds. Her strategy actually triggered them to achieve orgasm rather than stopped them. However, she thought that in order to get what they wanted; men would try harder to please her and give her more sexual pleasure. However, when a guy could not hold on long enough to reach orgasm, it would hurt her “female ego” as she imagined that she was not sexually attractive enough and could not make a man come for her.

Male orgasm was perceived as a common ending of sex by many informants. They said they learned this idea from watching pornography, in which no matter how long or short the video was, it always ended with the orgasm of men. Sex without a male orgasm was interpreted as incomplete. With the use of their body and the manipulation of men’s expectations, some informants were able to exercise certain kinds of sexual control over men’s bodies. In a sense, these women actively performed the passive role in the matter of sex not because they had no choice, but because they could sometimes gain power over men through sticking to the culturally assumptive gender role.

Informants complained that they often had not attained an orgasm when the sex ended with a male orgasm. Compared to the lack of female orgasm, many informants expressed they would worry even more if their male partners did not have an orgasm at all. They saw the failure of their partner’s ability to orgasm as their own fault,



indicating their lack of sexual attractiveness and sex skills. Men also feel pressure to perform their masculinity by attaining an orgasm because it is a symbol of a completed sexual performance. If a man fails to have an orgasm, it would hurt the self-esteem of men and women simultaneously.

### **Ideal Female Body Image and Body Modification**

Besides manipulating their bodies to gain power in a sexual relationship, some informants also disciplined their bodies (i.e. better appearance or body shape) to obtain sexual capital. A standardised female body in Hong Kong should be tight, toned and slim with big breasts and tender skin. In Hong Kong, women describe losing weight as a lifetime career or mission. They are never thin enough. Body weight has become one of the most significant aspects of appearance, affecting not only health but also the social and psychological well being of individuals (Hesse-Biber 1996). Interestingly, while almost every part of the female body should be small, the breasts - the symbol of women's reproductive power, should always be big, round and firm but not bulbous. Those women, who challenge the norm by building up big muscles and obtain larger bodies, are not generally considered "beautiful". Pushed by advertisements, men are encouraged to have a strong and big body shape through intensive training, dieting and eating supplements. Perhaps not all women and men desire these body types; yet, these are the images that commercials try to implant in consumers' minds so they would look for services and products relevant to this kind of body discipline.

When asked about their opinions of women's body shapes, many of my informants had an idea of what an ideal woman's body should be but they denied it at first. Higher education and an increasing awareness of the influence of mass media in

shaping our perception of the ideal body type are perhaps some of the reasons that most of my informants were sensitive to this question. They refused to admit that they were one of the followers of a culturally defined standard of beauty. Lain Wong said,

I don't have an ideal body image in my mind. When I see some beautiful women in the advertisement on television, I enjoy watching them, as they are really beautiful. But does it mean that I want to have the same body just like those women? No. It may not fit me.

But by saying this, Wong already had her aesthetic judgement and differentiation of what "beautiful bodies" are. Despite the fact that informants had a strong tendency to stress the significance of individual agency in fighting against the idealised image generated by the mainstream discourse, they sometimes contradicted themselves. For instance, an informant told me that she was concerned about the state of healthiness of her body rather than the pursuit of perfection in her appearance. Her biggest fear, however, was getting breast cancer in particular. Women's breasts are universally perceived as an important biological trait. She said she cannot imagine the pain of losing her breasts as it greatly affected a woman's general physical appearance.

Undoubtedly, the ideal of thinness is in our culture. Many informants wanted their bodies to be slim so they would look good. The culture of thinness is so prevalent that many sociologists and anthropologists, such as Hesse-Biber (1996) and Dworkin and Wachs (2009), have studied how capitalist values and consumerism play a role in shaping our understanding of beauty and how the overwhelming commercial advertisements with portraits of idealised images of men and women force individuals to conform to the standard of beauty. In modern societies,

slenderness is considered to be good because it indicates ones' own virtue of self-discipline of suppressing the urge to over-consuming food and maintaining a healthy lifestyle even when materials are abundant.

Mass media fails to acknowledge the diversity of women's bodies. A narrow definition of female beauty is provided, which ignores the "imperfections" of women's bodies in real lives (Richardson and Shaw 1998). Very few bodies could "naturally" fit mass media's standard of beauty. The body is flawed and needs to be perfected. Perfection is accomplished in many ways. However, some ways are not socially acceptable, particularly permanent solutions, such as plastic surgery. Therefore, the body becomes sacred in this sense. Even though there is an ambiguous "acceptable range" of body beautification and modification, maintaining the "naturalness" of the body seems to be a goal which most informants strive to achieve.

Even though the highly educated informants tended to deny the influence of mass media in shaping their conceptions of female beauty, in fact, the great majority (27 out of 32 informants) engaged in different ways to improve their body shapes, such as dieting and exercising. Many of them said they cared about the opinions and satisfaction of their boyfriends or husbands in regard to their bodies, however, they emphasised that they did not have the intention of permanently modifying their bodies to please their lovers. For instance, they were especially against the idea of increasing their breast size artificially. An overwhelming majority of informants agreed women's breasts are a significant symbol of their sexual identity, but they refused to alter them as it was considered to be an "unnatural" way of modification and the idea of increasing one's breast size for the visual or sexual pleasure of men makes them uncomfortable. It is possible that the educational background of

informants is perhaps the main factor leading to such a research finding. Many of them came from middle-class backgrounds or had been working to achieve it. They also received a higher level of education, which increased their self-esteem as a female member of the society who possessed the cultural and economic capital to obtain a higher social status. However, women also realised that compared to men whose success depended very much on their work performance, women's appearance and body shape were more influential in determining their social position. Helen Lau, a 24-year-old flight attendant said, "If my breasts could be bigger and I was taller, I would be very satisfied." Many informants shared the same wish of having bigger breasts. Another woman, Kiki Kwan said her ex-boyfriend had never said to her that her breasts were small, however, "from my point of view, I think my breasts are indeed small. I have regretted that I didn't drink more milk when I was small, or ate more papaya."<sup>25</sup>

Women's breasts symbolise motherhood and sexuality. It is a predominant idea that a woman's sexual identity is defined by the existence and size of her breasts. Women's bodies and their biological traits, such as their breasts, are constantly under the male's gaze (Young 2005). Fearing objectification, informants were sensitive to the permanent alternations of their bodies. They did not want to be labelled as women who had changed their bodies for the sake of pleasing men. They also tended to distinguish themselves from women (the "materialistic whores" as one of my informants put it) who had done plastic surgery or considered doing so.

While there was a general non-acceptance of plastic surgery, over 90% of my informants constantly wanted to improve their appearances through relatively "natural" ways. Kiki Kwan said,

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<sup>25</sup> It is a common belief among Hong Kong women that adolescent girls should eat more papaya and drink more milk to enlarge their breasts when they are still in a developmental stage.

In order to maintain white, soft and tender skin, I always have to work at it. For the eyes, I have been saving up for a Lasik operation because I am not able to wear contact lenses. I have always been thinking about how to make myself look good...Appearance is the first step in attracting the opposite sex. If you were ugly, why would people bother to hit on you?

Maintaining the “youthfulness”, “whiteness” and “tenderness” of women’s skin are the core ideas that manufacturers of any kind of skin products sell to their customers in Asian markets. As a highly capitalist society, the images in Hong Kong advertisements are usually of young, attractive and confident women with tender skin. The consumption of cosmetics is also encouraged as, for example, the skin and make-up products claim to help women become more presentable by achieving better skin. In order to follow the standard of female beauty, women discipline their bodies and increase their sexual capital. However, the acquisition of sexual capital does not result in higher sexual autonomy for women in their relationships.

## Chapter 5 Secret Complex Pleasures

Improvements in technology and the invention of the Internet have made the sharing of pornography very easy. The creation of a cyber world makes it possible for people to live a life that is different from their real social life, especially when it relates to sex. The private space at home is probably one major arena for people to consume pornography as they are able to access lots of explicit sexual images through the computer at home, which is obscured from the view of others. Today, anyone could become a hidden consumer and provider of pornographic material, and we need to rethink the traditional relationship between gender, power and sexual satisfaction.

Through snowball sampling, I selected informants who were willing to express their perceptions of pornography and sex. The interviews consisted of two sections regarding the porn tastes of my informants. For the first part, I interviewed 32 informants to see how women consume pornography and their attitudes towards it. This also included women who did not watch porn at all. After the first interview was done, I asked if my informants were willing to take part in the pornography-screening interview. In the end, five informants agreed to participate.

I was fortunate to have gained the trust of my informants even though sex was such a sensitive topic. The informants in my study were not shy in talking about their consumptive behaviours of pornography. It is important to recognise, that not all of the five informants who participated in the pornography-screening interview were frequent porn users. Among them, one informant had never watched porn before the interview. Two only watched porn occasionally. Even though the sample size was small, informants in this research included a variation of women in terms of their

consumptive behaviours of pornography and porn tastes. Informants who were relatively less exposed to pornography were also equally capable of pointing out what they liked and disliked about particular types of porn.

Women are not expected to be consumers of pornography, as it is a general belief that pornography is produced for men's entertainment (MacKinnon 1987). This is also true in the Hong Kong context. For example, one recent research on the "improper usage of the Internet" has done by the Hong Kong Youths Association in 2009 only include data of male porn users. This shows that female teenagers have not been considered to be consumers of online pornography even up to the present day. For quite some time, some feminists have argued that pornography is a means of objectifying and degrading women (MacKinnon 1987; Russell 1993). Very often, the female bodies portrayed in pornographic materials are submissive under men's dominance. Many feminists see heterosexual pornography as a reflection of a clearly sexist ideology in which men dominate and women submit. They also argue that women are portrayed as lascivious sluts or unsophisticated young girls waiting to be "explored", "initiated", "opened up" and "submissively penetrated" sexually. Of course, due to the extensive variety of pornography, there are exceptions to this discourse. For instance, the production of DIY (self-made) porn has shown that the representations of women and men in it could be very different from those in mainstream pornography. Nonetheless, in the context of commercial productions of pornography for men, we do see a general pattern, setting, or routine in the plot and visual representations, as the process of sexual intercourse, and content of sexual fantasy, all seem to focus intensely on stimulating the sexual arousal of the male audience.

In Hong Kong, this is also the case. On public transport, it is not unusual to see

men reading the pornographic section of local newspapers, which contains pictures of semi-nude female bodies and recommendations for brothels in Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China. In contrast, one is unlikely to find women reading similar materials in public areas. Also, when compared with their male counterparts who tend to exhibit a higher frequency in exchanging pornographic materials, such as magazines and DVDs, women are less likely to share pornography with each other (Jacobs 2012). However, we cannot ignore the fact that women, especially young women with economic means, make up a proportion of the pornography consumers population. According to the Internet Pornographic Statistics, which analysed the worldwide consumption behaviours of pornography and pornographic revenues, one in three visitors to adult websites are women (Jerry Ropelato 2006).

We need to acknowledge Hong Kong young adult women 's sexual desire and their consumptive behaviours of pornography. In this study, I asked the following questions:

- What turns my informants on in pornography?
- What do my informants like and dislike?
- Do my young affluent informants think pornography depicts sex in real life?
- How do my informants perceive the male bodies in pornography?

In general, pornography is sexually explicit material which depicts a sexual subject for sexual arousal/release and erotic satisfaction. Mainstream pornography, by definition, is an "objectifying and commodifying form" (Wicke 1993: 67) and the "dialectic of power" is involved as one gender is objectified more often than the other, and the sexual pleasure and excitement of one gender is more emphasized. As Anna Arrowsmith, an independent female director making pornographic films for women, said in an interview, "[O]ral sex for men [in films] can last forever, but when



women's turn comes it lasts 10 seconds. Female orgasms are not an issue in most of the films" (Catalina May 2011). Many feminists think that the female character in pornography is mostly objectified as a tool for men's sexual satisfaction while her emotions and pleasure have always been neglected.

Political opposition to pornographic films, arising from the school of radical-cultural feminism, resulted in their domination of this discourse in academia throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, including the publications by Catharine MacKinnon (1983, 1987), Andrea Dworkin (1981), and Diana Russell (1993). Pornographic films sometimes are heavily criticised due to their negative effects on moral values, attitudes and behaviours, such as its potential encouragement of violence against women and destruction of childhood innocence. For radical-cultural feminists, pornography is a symbol of male-controlled female sexuality. The absence of women's subjectivity in pornography is also one of the significant concerns for them. Some come to an extreme conclusion that women could not and probably should not obtain sexual pleasure through consuming sexually explicit materials, which tend to objectify women and sometimes even humiliate them. This position, however, undermines the possibility of women in gaining visual stimulations and sensations through consuming pornography. From the production side of pornography, recent research has paid more attention to the female porn actresses as a profession and how they perceived their job. While radical-cultural feminists may deny the enjoyment and the sense of achievement that female porn actresses proclaim, viewing their "positive" responses as merely reflections of "false consciousness", some radical-libertarian feminists do see the subjectivity of female characters in it. This kind of subjectivity is hard, if not impossible, to observe. They argue that female spectators when consuming heterosexual mainstream pornography

may find it uneasy to identify with female protagonist as they are portrayed as the objects of males' desire.

### **Women as Consumers of Pornography**

In previous decades, very little research investigated Hong Kong's porn culture, but recently some scholars have started to look into the cultural phenomenon, such as Ho and Tsang (2006) and Jacobs (2011). Some of my research findings are consistent with these previous works but contradictory results are also found. I will discuss both the similarities and differences below.

Table 5.1 Female informants' consumptive behaviours of pornography

<b>Consumptive behaviours of pornography</b>	<b>No. of informants (N = 32)</b>
Home as the only place of watching porn (including relatives' or friends' homes)	23
Watch porn on her own	23
Watch porn regularly during teenager	21
Has her own bedroom	20
Watch porn occasionally (once per month or more)	18
Watch porn regularly as a habit (2 times per week or more)	5
Watch porn with partner before	3
Never watched porn before the interview	2
Only started watching porn after 20	2

Among the 32 informants, only two said they had never watched pornography, nor had any exposure to it. One of them participated in the pornographic materials' screening interview, in which she had her first exposure to pornography. Nearly all informants watched pornography when they were teenagers. Most of them said they accidentally clicked on websites containing pornographic images and videos. It was seen as their first exposure to pornography. While most informants described their

first experience of watching pornography as “shocking” and even “disgusting”, 21 said they used to watch porn regularly between the ages from 12 to 18. Two informants started watching pornography after the age of 20. Some searched for porn on the Internet, and some had never taken the initiative to search for porn but had access to it in different ways. Some also said male classmates in secondary school “supplied” pornography to them by sending these files via the Internet.

From the table above and the information collected in this research, my informants' habit of porn usage is very much related to the environment in which they grew up, as well as being related to peer influence and socio-economic backgrounds. For instance, some informants had their first encounter with pornography when they found hidden files containing pornographic materials in the computer they shared with their elder brothers. However, for some informants not having a private computer also limited their chances to consume pornography. Informants who had their own bedrooms and individual computer at a young age tended to have earlier exposure to pornography and had become frequent porn users.

In Hong Kong, living space is very limited within a household. According to my informants' recollections, it is obvious that the living conditions and limited space in a household are certainly factors affecting their sexual behaviour and consumptive pattern of pornography. Space and resource distribution within a household greatly affects the habit of porn usage, as sex and watching pornography are considered highly private matters. For instance, Jennifer Ho only started watching pornography after high school. She lived with her parents and sister, and the house was so small that she did not have her own bedroom. It was only after her sister moved out and her father died, leaving her and her mother in the house, that she started to develop this “new hobby”.

At the time of the interview, 20 out of 32 informants had their own bedrooms. Having their own individual space made it much easier to watch pornography without being discovered by their parents. However, it did not mean that they watched porn whenever they wanted. Those who did not have their own bedrooms said they would wait until nobody was home to watch it. Timing was important for young women to “play it smart and safe”. Lui, a 24-year-old occasional porn user said,

My sexual knowledge mostly comes from watching porn on the Internet. I think girls have higher sexual desire a few days before their monthly period comes. And sometimes when they get bored, they watch porn, but it is not a regular pattern. My first experience of watching porn was at 14 years old. One of my elder cousins brought us some pornographic VCDs and we watched together with other cousins, including boys and girls in the [extended] family. It was my first time to realise the private parts of both men and women, [and I thought it was] quite disgusting. It was like watching a horror movie - very scary but you would still watch it until the end; and you would watch more continually [afterwards]. Ever since then, I have started to search for porn [on the internet] by myself.

However, only 21 informants who watched pornography when they were teenagers continued this consumptive behavior up to the present. Some of them said they had stopped for various reasons, and this includes having a stable sexual relationship. When these informants were able to have regular sexual activities, they did not search for pornographic materials for self-pleasure. This general pattern also explains the reason that some informants tended to consume pornography more frequently when they had no sexual partner. Others had given up the habit because of

religious reasons. As for informants who did not have the need to watch pornography, they said, as they had grown older, they just found their sexual needs for pornography had decreased. They claimed that it was a very “natural” change. The change could be a result of biological or cultural factor (that women’s sex drive is usually suppressed/weaker than men’s), or a combination of both.

Using the biological reason alone to explain women’s seeming less intensive consumption behaviours could be problematic. Even though some informants had stopped watching pornography, 18 out of 21 said they still watched porn occasionally, i.e. once per month, when they were in the mood. Five of them watched porn on a regular basis, i.e. two times per week or more, and described this behavior as a “habit”.

Due to the ready availability and easy access to online sex videos, there were very few women among my interviewees that had never watched pornography. With technological advancement, both young men and women have literally entered an age in which exposure to sexually explicit materials is almost unavoidable. The Internet allows the exchange of information on an unprecedented scale, which has a great influence over the shaping of our ideologies and understanding of the world. Many women watched pornography regularly during their adolescence, after their puberty had started; they became curious about sex and sexuality. Some women admitted they had a period of addiction to pornography, which usually lasted from three months up to a few years when they were teenagers. Boredom was one of the main reasons that these informants indulged in watching pornography. Eighteen of them said they watched pornography occasionally when they were “in need” or “had nothing to do”. Lam Tsz, a 23-year-old insurance agent recounted,

I didn’t have anything to do at home after school. I was not a hardworking

student anyway. My brother downloaded a lot of pornography and I knew where he stored them. Whenever I felt bored, I watched porn. But I stopped watching it after leaving school at the age of 18.

Not many informants (only three) had watched porn with their sexual partners before, indicating the consumption of pornography was a very personal matter for my informants, but not for sexual stimulation among a couple. According to them, it was common that their male partners would take the initiative to ask them to watch pornography together, instead of the other way round. Some informants tried to watch porn with their sexual partners together, but they decided not to do it again because they realised their porn tastes were very different. While some people may think that it provides sexual stimulation for couples, my informants generally thought it was not as enjoyable as watching porn on their own.

Another informant Zacky Yau, who had been living with her current boyfriend for four years since she was sixteen, refused to watch porn with him again. Her fear of being treated roughly was the main reason. She said,

My boyfriend liked to watch porn when he was having sex with me. He liked to imitate the sexual positions people used in pornography and he would ask me to do the same thing, but I didn't really like it. There was a time the woman in the porn was giving a blowjob and my boyfriend wanted me to do that at the same time. Even though I didn't like it, I didn't want to spoil his mood by saying no. And then he pushed his dick into my mouth very deep and I found it hard to breathe. He was getting so turned-on that he didn't realise he was hurting me. And he didn't stop until I almost cried. Ever since then, I refused to watch pornography with him. Every time he tried to persuade me, I said let's just have sex.

Ariel Leung recalled her only heterosexual relationship in her life and said, My first boyfriend was very horny. He always sent me porn online and he always asked me to watch porn with him when I came to his house. I didn't really enjoy watching porn with him as he would get so turned on and started to take off my clothes. I was not ready for sex at that time as I was only sixteen.

Among my informants, the consumption of online pornography and masturbation are strongly related to each other, though there was a wide range of variation in terms of their habits of consuming pornography and masturbation. For example, many informants admitted that they would "touch their private parts", especially the clitoris, and put finger(s) or insert items, such as a cucumber, dildo, vibrator, etc. into their vagina. Two informants said they enjoyed watching pornography without masturbating.

Masturbation is one of the important subjects in Shere Hite's *The Hite Report on Female Sexuality* (1976). In her study, most women could masturbate and achieve orgasm easily in just a few minutes. She also discovered that masturbation was almost always done when women were alone and it was a "pure biological feedback" (Hite 1976: 54). Bobo Cheung, a 30-year-old real estate agent said,

Usually when I watch porn, I will touch myself and make myself come. But I only need to achieve orgasm once. If I have come, then I will stop watching porn. I don't need to come for the second time. Once I've been satisfied, I don't want to touch that part again. After that, I usually would take a nap.

Women's consumptive pattern of pornography sometimes is related to their biological cycles and also stress. Helen Lau, a 24-year-old flight attendant said, I remember when examination period arrived, I used to masturbate more

frequently than usual to release the pressure of studying. When I am experiencing a very horny period, I would watch pornography every few days. But it really depends on a woman's biological cycle. When the period comes, you don't want to touch your body and you have about seven days when your sexual desire is very low. After the period ends, it enters a very horny week. And actually just one week before my period comes, I will also be in the mood for sex....I would not mind even if I were treated violently.

In the conversation with Helen, she not only talked about her habit of consuming pornography and that its frequency varied in different times of the month. She continued,

It is quite time-consuming as I need to spend quite a lot of time searching for some good porn to turn me on. It may take half an hour and sometimes even an hour! You watch the first few minutes of it, and you think, "Nah, this is not what I want", then you give this up and try to find another one. It could be quite frustrating.

The process of searching for pornography, even though it could be long and time-consuming, helps women in understanding what they like and dislike in their sexual fantasies. Many informants talked about how pornography shapes their sexual behaviour as it was the main channel to learn about sex. However, they also realised the differences between the sex in reality and the sex portrayed in pornography. For instance, an informant said she liked to watch hard-core pornography in which the woman would be treated violently. However, she did not want rough sex in real life. Women's porn tastes very often are different from their own sexual experiences. Many of them had no intention or desire to imitate sex in pornography and use it in real life.



Women also had different opinions towards watching pornography and masturbation. For those who were not interested in pornography would usually describe the acts as dirty and immoral, but even for those who engaged in these activities, they did not always see it as a positive behaviour. Jennifer Ho, a 24-year-old civil servant said,

I find masturbation a “guilty” and “shitty” act<sup>26</sup>. And now I need to watch porn in order to get an orgasm. In the past, I used to be able to get one merely by touching myself, but not anymore. I am so used to the visual stimulation provided by pornography. Now I can’t have an orgasm without turning on my laptop. If it is real sex with my lover, I will be able to come many times within an hour, but if it is masturbation, I simply can’t. Having an orgasm once is enough for me.

Her statement reveals important issues regarding pornography, sexual liberation and repression. Jacobs’s research found that Chinese women were aware of the social restrictions on their sexual behaviours and conceptions under the names of religion, morality and patriarchal tradition (2011:114). They did not want to follow the “normalised expectations” as a “subdued sexual being”. According to my data, my informants have mixed emotions towards the consumption of pornography and other sexual behaviours, such as using sex toys, either alone or with their partners. While women are rather alert to the repression of women’s bodies and sexual behaviour imposed on them by mainstream society, they constantly undergo internal struggles because of the conflict between individual desire and long-established societal values.

For women who were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they have

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<sup>26</sup> The informant used the English terms “guilty” and “shitty” directly in this quote.

experienced great social transformation and had relatively easy access to information technology, tertiary education and feminist ideology. All these contribute to a general discourse circulated in this generation of women who are relatively high educated - it is fine for women to watch pornography and masturbate. The informants believed these behaviours should not be condemned by men or women. When answering the questions like “Is it acceptable for women to watch pornography?” and “Is it normal for women to masturbate?”, nearly all my informants responded that watching pornography and engaging in masturbation were completely fine. For these informants, it seemed to be politically correct to agree that women could enjoy the same right as men in watching pornography. Only one insisted that women should never watch pornography. According to her, pornography is equally bad for both men and women but men could somehow be tolerated as they had “different needs” and “stronger sex drives”. Nevertheless, if we look closer at what the informants said, women’s own perceptions of their pornographic consumptive behaviours are indeed very complex. On the one hand, they said it was fine for women as a social group to consume pornographic materials; but on the other hand, many said watching pornography should not become a personal habit. Jennifer Ho also added,

I don’t want to masturbate too much as I think it is bad for our bodies, especially because it lowers our sexual sensitivity. I want to keep my body highly sensitive so my boyfriend would feel good when he has sex with me.

You know...that he feels good when I am so easy to come. But if I masturbate too much, I may not be that easy to come. It may hurt his feelings.

There were a number of informants who thought over-masturbation would affect their sex performance and consequently harm the ego of their partners due to their imaginations towards the female and male bodies. “When I touch myself, I

would never put any objects, not even my fingers into it, I don't want that part to become loose...Men always want it to be tight, right?", Bo Leung, a frequent porn user said.

These responses suggest that even though masturbation was a channel to satisfy personal needs, some women tended to restrict its frequency, not only for physical and psychological health concerns, but rather for "maintaining high sensitivity". Most informants acknowledged that men and women's feelings were equally important in sex, but for various reasons some of them agreed that their feelings could be suppressed if they thought their male partners enjoyed having sex in certain ways that they did not enjoy in order to maintain their relationship. For instance, they would discipline themselves for not indulging in watching pornography and masturbation for the sake of having a body which can please their sexual partners better.

There is a gap between the discourse, which is formed and circulated among women as a social group, and what individuals do in real lives. As mentioned before, almost all informants agreed that they were "living in a liberal age" and women's exploration of sexual pleasure should not be denied. However, their behaviours would contradict with what they claimed.

From a feminist perspective, women themselves are also active agents causing the subordination of women's status under men. However, whether women pleasing men with their body is equal to a submissive act is arguable. Men are also able to please their sexual partners in various ways. These informants' voluntary action of limiting the frequency of masturbation is considered to be a patriarchal practice by feminists, who see it as the result of an internalisation of patriarchal social values. How can we analyse the power relations between men and women without falling

into the loop of the domination – subordination dichotomy? Could the voluntary manipulation of the body of women ever be “politically correct”? How can women's agency be seen and recognised instead of being explained as “false consciousness”?

### **Women's Porn Tastes**

According to a study by Meredith Chivers (2004), women tend to have a wider range of preferences when they are exposed to sexually explicit materials. They also have different patterns of arousal. In contrast, their male counterparts usually have one specific sexual preference and are not as flexible as women. Jacobs's research about how Hong Kong university students responded to sexually explicit media was one of the few works addressing sexuality and porn tastes in Hong Kong. In general, sources on the topics in the context of Hong Kong are extremely limited. She found out that female students thought they were “too alienated” from the low-quality “cheap” productions of pornography (2011:121). They claimed they would not watch these products for sexual arousal. Jacobs' informants were aware of the phenomenon of male dominance. Many of them said the so-called “mainstream” pornography cannot address their needs, such as the lack of storyline and romantic elements. My research findings, however, tell a different story.

I used four videos for the pornographic materials screening. Five out of the 32 informants took part in it. The way of conducting the interviews was flexible. While the materials used in the screening were the same, the duration and parts of each video that informants saw varied. In order to have a better understanding of how informants felt about the selected materials, I chose not to raise questions after watching the videos but during the viewing process. Informants could also skip or fast-forward certain parts of the videos if they wanted. Due to time limitation, even

though every selected video took about an hour, we managed to finish each one with detailed and thorough discussion within 15 minutes. Below are the four hard-core<sup>27</sup> pornography selections:

Porn #1 Eon Mckai's Art School Sluts

- US production from the 1990s
- Setting of story: An American teacher has sex with a school girl in front of other students in an art class

Porn #2 Eon Mckai's Art School Sluts [lesbian sex]

- US production in the 1990s
- Setting of story: not specific. Starts with two girls touching each other's bodies in a bed and focuses on women having oral sex

Porn #3 First (time) Anal! Even so, Sadistic Anal Training! And Black Anal Double

Penetration (2 Hole) FUCK! (初アナル!なのにサテ イステックアナル調

教!そして黒人アナル2穴 FUCK!)

- Japanese production in 2006
- Setting of story: not specific. Starts with a woman being held by a black guy, who pees to water some plants, followed by injection of different kinds of liquid into the woman's vagina, then her belly is pressed so the liquid eventually came out.
- Interracial

Porn #4 Tokyo Lovers' Life

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<sup>27</sup> According to Purcell, "hard-core" pornography is defined as "depictions of explicit sexual activity". It depicts "actual people engaged in actual intercourse of any varieties" (2012: 202). My usage of the term is consistent with the above definitions. Also, in my understanding, "hard-core" pornography is not censored. The intercourse is visible for the audience.

- Japanese production in 2011
- Romantic setting: Stories about four heterosexual couples' sexual relationships
- Female-oriented

For the first porn, *Art School Sluts*, I asked informants what they generally thought. Jennifer Ho did not like the film, because she thought the guy (teacher) was too old and ugly, and the woman put on too much make-up.” She added,

I don't like these pornography which only focus on fucking...putting the penis inside and then in and out...I don't like it. It is like they are fucking machines! On the scene of spitting saliva into the ass, she had very negative feedback. She said, [It is] so disgusting. It is very dirty. Do you know if they have brushed their teeth before? See? That's why it is such a big turn off! It's so unhygienic! Also this woman's pussy is so ugly. It is like she has been fucked by millions of men. It is very important for it to have a beautiful shape. This one... you look at it, it is like broken...I don't know why it is like this. Maybe the woman has given birth before? Or maybe she uses sex toys too frequently? ...It is just too disgusting...like she is an old prostitute.

Ho's comments on the hygienic problem of the sex and the appearance of the female and male characters and their genitals show that as a female porn user, she could not be sexually aroused if the sex scenes were not what she expected. The bodies in pornography and the ways they had intercourse greatly affected her perceptions towards the material. From the above conversation, it revealed not only Ho's porn tastes, but also that her sexual pleasure was gained through the objectifications of both the actress and actor in the pornography. Her criticisms

towards the bodies of actor and actress in the pornography also indicated her biases in viewing certain types of bodies.

Another informant, Sandy Sze, however, paid more attention to the issue of gender equality portrayed in the pornography and expressed her general preferences towards “western pornography” to “Japanese pornography”, saying the latter tended to portray women as subordinated, and the gender relationship seemed to be more unequal. She commented,

The guy is not handsome...please don't focus on his face...but I have to say this one is more direct... It just goes straight to the point (the sex scene). I tend to like watching western pornography more. It seems like the women and men are slightly more equal in it. But the women in the Japanese one are usually suffering, like they are the tools for satisfying men. You can usually see both the faces of men and women in western pornography. But in Japanese productions, they seldom show the face of the male actor because they assume that all the porn users are men. And men only like to see the faces of women in pornography. As a female porn user, I want to see the faces of both.

Informants' statements contain their subjective feelings and understanding about pornography, which may not reflect the reality but their stigmatisations only. Many informants seemed to see “western pornography” as an opposition to “Japanese pornography”. However, their categorisations are problematic. The pornographic materials that they consumed were highly selective, many women therefore failed to see that there are many sub-categories of the so-called “western pornography” and “Japanese pornography”. In fact, there is also “western pornography” which tends to use more violence on the actress. At the same time, not all so-called “Japanese pornography” is discriminative against women. The

interviews however reflected the perceptions and imaginations of women towards certain pornography. Their general preferences towards the so-called “western pornography” could be a result due to their stereotypical beliefs in the “liberal ideologies of the West”.

Another informant Miko Lam also talked about the “equality issue” portrayed in the selected pornography. She said she liked the oral sex the female character received from the man, which was seen as the expression of female's sexual pleasure. The scene also fulfilled the sexual fantasy she had but had never dared to try out. She said,

I like this one. I always find a guy giving oral sex to a woman very sexy. It is definitely a big turn on for me. But I don't allow my boyfriend to do it to me as I find it very dirty to use mouth to touch that part. However, when I see people do this so freely without any holding back, it arouses me a lot. But in pornography, it is usually the woman giving oral sex to the man. And whenever I see the scene, I skip it. Also, the guy always pulls the women's head towards him so his penis goes deeper in her throat; it is a big turn off to me as well. It is only for men's pleasure. I find it unacceptable. I can't let this happen to me. The guy shouldn't move when his penis is inside her month as it makes hard for the woman to breathe. He should let the woman take control. If he moves like fucking in the mouth, it is a very violent act. It makes the woman like a doll only. Her body is just a channel to release his sexual needs. But if the woman can take the control and the guy stays still, then oral sex is like a kissing scene. It is gentle.

Lam expressed her dislike towards women giving oral sex to men and described it as for “men's pleasure” only. Even though she would not give oral sex to



or receive it from her sexual partner, she had a double standard about it. She was indifferent towards the sex scene of a man receiving oral sex from a woman because she could not relate herself into the pornography. She saw the woman as a “pleasure-giver” but not a “receiver”, therefore the scene did not give her sexual stimulation. Moreover, she also had stereotypical assumption that all women disliked giving oral sex to men. But for some women, they actually enjoyed it because they saw giving oral sex to men as a sexual arousal. Lam also commented on how men should just stay still to let the women take control. This was perceived by her to be the “ideal” way in having oral sex because women's autonomy can be seen.

Jacobs in her study concluded that women generally do not enjoy hard-core selections and prefer something more soft-core with “cinematic narrative”. (2011: 122) According to my research's findings, the first thing that most women usually paid attention to was not the sex act itself, but the faces of both actor and actress (in a heterosexual setting).

Very often, female informants did not just watch the sex scenes, but also were concerned about the “small things” in pornography, such as if the actress or actor had cut their nails or not. (An informant said, if the male actor keeps long nails, the actress may feel pain when he fingers her, or if it is an actress who keeps long and sharp nails, it give the man an unpleasant feeling to the man when she is giving a hand job.) Therefore, many informants did not choose pornography based on the categorisations of “hard-core” or “soft-core”, but according to the details of the pornography, such as the appearances of actors and actresses and their genitals. They could easily point out when the appearance of whether the actress' vulva is “not right”, which may indicate that she is a woman who has given birth or has had too much sex. They also commented on the actor's penis' size and shape, saying it is

“big/small”, “fake” and “strange”. In this sense, both the female and male bodies in the pornography are under the objectification of female porn users.

While some feminists condemned men's consumptive behaviours of pornography for creating “double objectifications” of the actress in it, it is undeniable that women, as porn users, also play a role in objectifying men and women. A body hierarchy, which largely conforms to the general discourse of society, is built up through such objectifications. According to my informants, actresses whose genitals' appearance was “not right” were considered to be the lowest caste in the pornographic body hierarchy. For female porn users, a good porn actress should have a beautiful face, youthful body, good looking genitals and a high-level of sexual performance. Any physical characteristics which may possibly indicate the actress is a “slut” would affect her overall presentation in the eyes of the female audience. “Porn actresses are bad women. But a porn actress who is really slutty is even worse,” an informant explained. If the acting of the porn actress and her body suggest a non-disciplined and promiscuous sex life, female porn users tended to show little interest in watching the pornography.

In short, informants generally were not in favour of this particular kind of hardcore pornographic film. However, some women liked it, saying that it was more “direct” and “intense”. “We watch pornography to have a quick come. It is just a waste of time if you tell me a long story before getting to the sex part,” Sandy Sze said. Yet, it is important to be careful, as a pornography which tends to be more hardcore, does not necessarily mean that it cannot gain popularity among female porn users.

In the second porn about lesbians sex, which is also part of the film of *Art School Sluts*, two lesbians gave oral pleasure to each other and had sex with the use

of sex toys. According recent research by Shere Hite on lesbian relationships, she found out that many women said sex with another woman was great and they can have a “higher percentage of orgasms” compared to women in heterosexual sex (2007:147). I wondered if women culturally perceive lesbians' sexual relationships in pornography as a symbol of warmth, passion and equality, as Hite suggested. It turned out that even though all my informants who participated in the interviews were heterosexual, most of them enjoyed watching the lesbian porn. Although informant had a negative opinion towards the appearance of the genital parts of the two actresses, others described the oral sex scene in the porn as “enjoyable” and “quite intense”. Sandy Sze said,

You know what, I find a woman giving oral sex to another woman quite a turn-on. I guess lesbian pornography is somehow more pure. Of course, there are always exceptions in which you see violence and humiliation in lesbian pornography.

To Jennifer Ho, the sex act was cleaner and the relation of the two actresses seemed to be more equal in lesbian pornography. She said in heterosexual male-oriented pornography, however, not only the woman was the oral sex giver, but the action usually ended with the guy ejecting on the woman's face or in her mouth, which was unpleasant.

Lesbian pornography was described as “pure”, “tender”, “clean” and “equal”. My finding of women's general perception about lesbian sexual relationships was consistent with Hite's observation. Female porn users that I interviewed generally enjoyed the oral sex part in the porn and they found it easier to relate to the lead characters. Sex between women is considered to be safe by some informants. Having sex with another woman involves no semen, which means there is no need to worry

about unexpected pregnancy, and women would not be exposed to the risks of HIV and AIDS (compared to having sex with men).

For the third video, an extreme hard-core Japanese pornography - “First (time) Anal! Even so, Sadistic Anal Training! And Black Anal Double Penetration (2 Hole) FUCK!” was chosen for testing the reactions of informants in viewing pornography in which the actress was being toyed. This video lasted for an hour. The first 45 minutes depicts a woman being injected with different kinds of liquid into her vagina. The man then presses her belly so the liquid leaks out. The process is repeated several times and finally she is arranged to have sex with an African guy. Most informants described the video as “unacceptable”, “sick”, “disgusting” and “a big turn off”. Many of them found themselves not able to identify themselves with the actress because she was being tortured and toyed by some men. The gender hierarchy of men subordinating women was clear. In the eyes of female porn users, in the video the actress’ feelings were neglected. Vivian Chiu said the sex scene was not enjoyable for most female audience. She added,

It’s very kinky porn! (The girl’s peeing scene) ...can we skip it? It’s very disgusting. I just don’t understand why some guys like this kind of thing. Come on, it’s so sick...the Japanese girl is saying, “please stop, it will leak out.” (she understood Japanese) I find it very inhumane. Maybe at some point the girl would gain some pleasure, but most of the time I think she was in pain. This pornography was probably produced for some people who have a special taste of enjoying seeing women being toyed by men.

Most informants had never watched this kind of pornography before. However, an informant said she had seen something “even more disgusting”. She watched a pornography in which tiny fish were injected into a women’s vagina. While she did

not like this type of pornography, she would not be surprised if some women enjoyed it.

Women's porn tastes are complicated. Even though almost all informants were aware of the influence of pornography in shaping their perceptions of real sex in their lives, they also understood that there was a gap between sexual fantasies and real sexual behaviours. For instance, a woman who enjoyed watching one woman having sex with multiple men in pornography might not want to practise it in real life not only because of the social constraints on sexual behaviours, but also her own agency in preferring to have sex with one man at a time.

### **Feminist Concern: The Male Gaze Vs Female Gaze**

In this session, feminists' concern for the issues of the “male gaze” and the “female gaze”, and women’s presentation in movies and pornography are discussed. After that, the “female-friendly pornography” (or fem porn) produced mainly by feminists is introduced. Feminists perceived it as one of the most ideal forms of pornography for women. However, according to the informants of my study, the “female-friendly pornography” was not very successful in gaining popularity among women, which will be explained later.

Laura Mulvey coined the term “male gaze” in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in 1975. In the 1970s, feminist film theory emerged as a product of the second-wave of feminism, which aimed at proclaiming political rights, emancipation of women and gender equality. Some of the pioneering studies, such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1989) and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* underpinned the radical political stand of the feminist movement.

Like Firestone said, “Culture is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes” (1979:149).

These theoretical accounts are concerned with the images of women, which are created for males’ needs under the impact of our dominant culture and defined by androcentrism, patriarchy and heterosexuality. Given that the socio-cultural construct of femininity has long been criticised as the primary source of women’s subordination, political and social marginalisation, and historical invisibility, feminist film theories look into the problem of women’s representation and subjectivity in the area of mass media, such as how women are depicted to fulfil the sexist context of cinema narratives and objectified as a sex object.

Mulvey claims that among all forms of art and media, such as paintings, films, advertising and television, the unspoken truth is that the producers, consumers and viewers are presumably heterosexual males. From the perspective of male spectators, women become the object of desire to be looked at, while the spectators enjoy the privilege of looking “without being looked back” (Stacey 1988: 21). Female spectators could either identify themselves with the female characters, who are victims both in and outside the film, or they have to undergo a temporary perspective transformation process to “appreciate” the works of art (e.g. looking at the body of a female model on advertising) from a male’s point of view. This is a masculinisation process (Mulvey 2009). Mulvey was primarily interested in the “relationship between the images of women on the screen and the ‘masculinisation’ of the spectator position, regardless of the actual sex (or possibly deviance) or any real live moviegoer.” (2009: 31). In other words, as men occupy a dominating position in the public discourse, and movies are made by male filmmakers and for male audiences with a heterosexual orientation of sexuality, women could only temporarily identify

with heterosexual men in viewing.

Generally, Mulvey ideas received criticism in the feminist circles mainly because of her seemingly essentialist view of the dichotomy of associating masculinity with activity and femininity with passivity. There is also a presumption about spectators' heterosexuality. Moreover, Laura fails to recognise female spectators' pleasure and how this pleasure could be gained through the look.

From Mulvey onwards, there have been feminist theorists researching the "female gaze" and the possibility of female spectators gaining pleasure in films in their own subjective positioning. Nonetheless, there is a lack of a common consensus of the "female gaze" among feminists. For feminist theorists, such as Mary Ann Doane (1982), Gillian Swanson (1991) and Miriam Hanson (1984), the "female gaze" is more than just a reverse of the "male gaze". For instance, Gillian Swanson (1991) in her article stated that, "The female spectator formed in a delicate balance between the recognizable common strands of female subjectivity and the disparate particularities of her own history." In addition, Miriam Hanson (1984) mentioned that female spectators are able to see male characters as erotic object of desire.

### **A New Type: Pornographic Films for Women**

For cultural-libertarian feminists, pornographic films produced for women are differentiated from the so-called "mainstream" pornography which targets male audience. According to Wicke, pornography is not just consumed, but "is used, worked on, elaborated, remembered, and fantasised about by its subjects" (1993: 70). It encourages self-reflexivity of the "viewing subjects" who "might explore and celebrate the multifaceted dimensions of their sexualities" (Brien 2004:132). More importantly, in what ways are pornographic films for women useful in understanding

the relationship between the “female gaze” and women’s subjectivity? It should be noted that pornography for women is mostly produced by female filmmakers.

Perhaps it is better to understand the nature of pornographic films for women by looking into the interviews with Anna Arrowsmith, Erika Lust and Petra Joy and watching their films. These are just three among many highly educated female directors. In spite of the different filming styles and natures of their pornographic films, such as soft core or hard core, they tend to see pornography for women as a more legitimate and appropriate way to express women’s rights for sexual fulfilment and consumption. In a sense, making pornographic films for women is more like a political act demonstrating women’s freedom to break away from sexual repression and take-it-for-granted sexual passivity. Given the political stand of female directors, the reasons for women in consuming this type of pornography become more interesting. Female consumers’ viewing expectations, feelings and feedbacks are the main focus in this chapter. Feminist directors of pornographic films open a market for the audiences and provide them with other alternatives in consuming pornography. However, what do the female consumers expect from this type of female-friendly pornography?

Erika Lust, who has directed three fem porn films and written three books on sex states on her website, “We enjoy exciting you and exciting your mind. We make love, not porn. And we do all this with a feminine, aesthetic and innovative approach” (2013). Cinematic narrative or storyline, female pleasure, longer intimate interactions between characters seem to be the characteristics of fem porn. Jacobs’ research suggests that women become aroused by “narratives of love” rather than hard-core selections. “Female-friendly pornography” is viewed as a “new type of knowledge” (2011:122) and women support it for “political reasons” (126). For the



true followers of fem porn, the film itself represents a “taste”. It is anticipated that women who have adequate educational level and awareness towards women’s political liberation and consumption choices are more likely to have a preference for this type of pornography.

Pornographic films for women, in contrast with the mainstream ones, bring out the issue of the “female gaze” and how by consuming this pornography it may help female audience reposition themselves from the status of object to the status of subject. In fem porn, the subject-object relationship is flexible and changeable. In a heterosexual sex scene, female audience members can maintain their subjectivity by gazing at males’ bodies on the screen. In a lesbian sex scene, women could identify with the female characters. As a result, the hierarchical relationship as discussed earlier, assuming it exists, is, in a sense, blurred. In addition, for some feminists, identification with female protagonists in a lesbian sex scene is one of the few occasions that female audience could consume without sacrificing their subjectivity.

Based on this theoretical foundation, female consumers undergo the transformation from object to subject in the process of watching fem porn. However, it is more than a reversal of power relations between men as the “viewers” and women as the “viewed”. More importantly, female consumers/spectators are able to re-examine their relationships with the “self” (as an individual consumer) and identify with the subjectivity of other women as consumers of the objectified male body. It also provides the possibility to break the androcentric norm of pornographic production. The strong political implication behind the action of consumption is undoubtedly something that feminists seek to attain beyond the sexual fantasies and pleasure that they may obtain. Consuming pornographic films for women is to consume a sexual identity with a certain political point of view. Such identity could

be demonstrated by giving a statement, such as “I am a straight women and I enjoy watching hot male bodies in pornography that fits my taste and needs.” The consumptive behaviour and resistance towards “mainstream pornography” may suggest women’s desire for the fulfilment of sexual pleasure and an alternative outside the male-dominated production and consumption model.

For cultural-libertarian feminists, women are able to exercise the female gaze while watching pornographic films for women. Ideally, female audience can identify with the female protagonist without the need to pass through a masculinisation process. Mulvey said, “The masculine identification, in its phallic aspect, reactivates for her a fantasy of ‘action’ that correct femininity demands should be repressed. The fantasy ‘action’ finds expression through a metaphor of masculinity” (2009: 39).

When women watch fem porn, such masculine identification is not necessary. Moreover, female protagonists and spectators do not conform to the notion of “passivity”. Unlike mainstream pornography in which the female character is usually depicted as a passive receiver of whatever the male forces upon her, such as being instructed by men to position herself in certain sex positions, the female character in fem porn is relatively active and sophisticated in her ability to acquire what she desires.

While some feminists, through theoretical discussion based on psychoanalysis, tend to believe that the functioning of the “female gaze” in fem porn can solve the problem of women’s previously ignored subjectivity, they have not considered how women perceive the pornography in their real lives. The fact is, many informants did not enjoy watching the fem porn despite the “advantages” it seems to bring. This will be illustrated in the following section.

### **The Problem of Pornographic Film for Women**

Despite the fact that the issues of women's subjectivity and sexual pleasure in consumption of pornography were addressed in the production of female-friendly pornography, my informants did not generally see this type of pornography as being better than others, which indicated that women's porn taste was complicated and the boundary between what they desire in imagination and what they do in real life was blurred. The responses of informants have shown that some symbols are not getting through to the audience as intended by feminist filmmakers and critics.

Nearly all of my 32 informants had never heard of "female-friendly pornography" before they took part in my interviews. Many women doubted if such a thing existed. However, when asked about what they expected just by hearing the words "female-friendly porn", they can easily describe some of the elements of it, such as a romantic and gentle sex scene. However, about two-third of women did not find it particularly preferable to other so-called mainstream commercial productions. Interestingly, those who thought the new type was better than others were women who seldom watched pornography. They agreed that it "addresses women's special needs", "is less violent", "has more romantic elements" and "focuses more on women's pleasure rather than pain". Nonetheless, they were not particularly interested in seeing it, not even for curiosity. "It's good to know that they now have something different for women and that it is available on the market, but it is not related to my personal life," Ady Ng, a 23-year-old clerk said.

In addition, among the five informants who participated in the interview of pornographic material screening, only two of them said they were interested in the pornography for women.

The selected fem porn was a Japanese production – Tokyo Lovers' Life, by a

company called Silk Labo. It is a series of seven episodes about the relationships of four couples. I chose the first and second episodes for the screening.

Jennifer Ho: I don't like the guy. He is so ugly. I don't like Japanese guys.

They are weak. You can't see this guy's penis now as it is censored, but if you can see it, you will feel like...so disappointed. Too small. Disgusting. I can't believe how the penis size can be that small...I am talking about what we can see after erection. Women will not have pleasure with a small sized penis inside them. It cannot arouse me anyway. Asian men's bodies are too feminine.

The informant objectified the male body in the fem porn and gave negative comments on his genitals. She saw Asian males' bodies as inferior compared to those of "westerners" probably because of the influence of colonial ideology.

Theoretically, the "female gaze" seems to increase women's sexual autonomy, but it also creates the problem of male body objectification, which hinders the achievement of gender equality.

When asked about the differences between the so-called mainstream pornography and fem porn, Jennifer Ho said the latter was more about emotionally charged sex but not sex per se. She continued to express her negative perceptions towards the Japanese pornography.

If it is mainstream Japanese pornography, it is more about forcing the girl to do something that she is not willing to do. This type is more about women's sexual fantasy. Pornography for men always contains setting like sexual relationships with beautiful female students, nurses and even mothers. I find this really strange. Most pornography produced by the Japanese is not about a "normal" romantic relationship. But the one you showed me is quite normal. I would say the Japanese female-oriented one is better than the so-called

traditional one. This is real for me. It is like when a couple gets together, they have sex. It is normal. Women can also enjoy the touching and kissing in the foreplay more.

In the conversation, she commented on the “normality” and the “abnormality” of pornography. These concepts were formed largely based on the socialisation and internalisation of values. Sexual relationship of a “couple” was regarded as “normal”, but other sexual fantasies, such as sex between a teacher and a student, were not.

Interviewer: Do you like the part that I showed you? Do you like to watch the foreplay?

Ho: Yes, I like to watch the foreplay in pornography. Sometimes it can be quite a turn-on for me. And sometimes I can only be satisfied by watching the foreplay. It is very sexually arousing. Also, the characters in the pornography are very important. If you don't like them, you won't be sexually aroused. But if the guy were like David Beckham, it would be awesome! It is very hard to find a good pornography. I used to spend a lot of time to search for one that I feel like I can really relax and have the moment to myself. It is like continuously changing channels when you are watching TV until you find the one that you truly like.

The conversation reveals the impact of consumerism and commodification of the body on the ways we perceive sexual entertainment and satisfaction. According to their personal preferences, female porn users could have complete control over the type of online pornographic materials they would like to consume, which could involve both male and female bodies. Race, gender and class are all factors in women's preference for pornographic materials. In the case of my informants, the

comments on Japanese men's bodies and genitals in pornography, once again reflects the existence of a body hierarchy based on biases and racism. Four out of five informants said bodies of Caucasian males were generally preferred to those of African and Asian males in pornography. With regard to fem porn, other than the appearance of the male actors in the female-friendly pornography, Vivian Chiu also disliked the slow pace of the pornography and the "lack of passion" in their sex. She said,

The Japanese guy is too thin. Is it true that all Japanese guys have a small penis size? ...It is true that this one is quite a very soft-core one. It is gentle enough for girls...I can tell that it is really for women as it focuses a lot on the foreplay. But I don't really like it. It is too slow. I want the sex scene to be more intense, more hard-core, as you may put it, but not too violent. I would say the new one does have some benefits. Some hard-core porn for men is really disgusting. They have many guys fucking a girl or many girls having sex with one guy. Sometimes they have a long oral sex scene. But all of these are for men's pleasure. In these kinds of pornography, women can't enjoy much.

After watching all the porn, an informant introduced me to a specific type of pornography called X-arts. It is a Euro-American styled pornography, which, as she put it, combined "artistic and commercial elements". According to her, the pornography gave the audience a romantic feeling, like the actor and actresses were really in love and wanted to give sexual pleasure to each other. This is also the kind of pornography that she would use an artistic point of view to watch it, and she claimed that only beautiful "western-faced" actors and actresses were seen while soft background music during the foreplay could be heard. But when it finally came to the sex part, the soft music would stop so the porn viewers could hear how they

moaned.

### **Conclusion**

By consuming pornography, informants explored the female bodies, sexual desires, needs, identities and tastes. By studying how the process works, I hope to have contributed to the understanding and the remapping of the frontiers of women's sexuality.

From the variation of my informants' backgrounds, it is possible to demonstrate that despite the restrictions of female sexual expressions that are found throughout Hong Kong society, the way my informants consume pornography reflects the conflict between sexual capital and sexual autonomy. Although my informants were not necessarily able to obtain an absolute understanding of sexual autonomy, their ability to practise their agency in consuming pornography represents an attempt to achieve a relative sense of sexual autonomy.

Nonetheless, just as in the end of Chapter 4, here I want to use the example of Hong Kong young adult women's consumption of pornography to argue that an increase in sexual capital does not mean one will gain sexual autonomy. Originally, by consuming pornography, women had hoped to gain control over the discourse which influences their own subjectivity and sexuality. However, they cannot take control because the structural features of patriarchy in Hong Kong are too strong. There is an illusion of achieving sexual autonomy with the increase of capitals of women. However, the persistence of the patriarchal ideology is the real reason of why informants felt that their sexual autonomy has not been increased.

Many informants were concerned about the male dominance in pornographic production and consumption. In heterosexual "mainstream pornography", female

porn users found it unsatisfying because the actress was always objectified. This harks back to Laura Mulvey's theory regarding the male gaze in the production and consumption of pornography. Women also could not be properly represented in pornography. Even with the emergence of "female-friendly pornography" under feminist filmmakers, the issue of how women's sexual desire can properly be presented remain.

In fact, through the interviews with informants, I find out that while women actively seek to challenge the normalised expectations of being the objectified "others", they also objectify men and women as they consume sexual materials. Women's perceptions of pornography are also heavily shaped by their stereotypical understanding of the male and female body. For instance, men in pornography who have a strong physical body and bigger penis size were regarded by my informants as more sexually attractive. Some bodies would be criticised by my informants as they were seen as inferior. This could be regarded as the result of patriarchal socialisation. Women's objectification of men can be seen when informants expressed their sexuality in the consumption of pornography, just like what men can do on women. However, is this "gender equality" that we have been seeking? Is becoming more sexually autonomous a way to achieve gender equality? How can we understand the autonomy and constraints of women's expressions of sexual desire and needs and their contradictions?



## Chapter 6 Conclusion

The thesis has illustrated how young white-collar women in Hong Kong express their sexuality and sexual desire in a heterosexual setting, and the individual autonomy and constraints that women experience. In spite of capitalistic consumerism which tells us we can buy whatever we want given that we have enough purchasing power, the conventional gender ideology of a male-oriented society is just another force, which is constantly in conflict with the market ideology. Therefore, even though economic development has given women certain forms of capital and the means for self expression, in a capitalist society like Hong Kong, the constraints of women's sexuality has not changed. Moreover, these constraints have been internalised, leading to women's self-monitoring of their own sexual behaviours.

All cultures regulate sexuality. Societal control over the expressions of sexuality sometimes is needed to maintain order. In nearly all human societies, this kind of order is created in the form of marital relationships which are a foundation of elements of societal structure. Thus to change these relationships is exceptionally difficult. As a result, we can see that despite the agency of my informants in wanting to further their sexuality, they remain constrained by the desire for a happy marriage and family. These are the ideas that do not co-exist well with their own desires to publicly display their sexuality or to engage in the consumptions of male bodies.

Through this research, I try to understand the recent phenomenon of women attempting to gain more sexual satisfaction through various kinds of consumption, as illustrated in chapter 2, and its implications for gender relations. Some changes regarding women's public expressions of sexual desire and sexual interest towards

male bodies can now be witnessed in Hong Kong. Higher economic, social and political capital for women have lead to more adult entertainment designed especially for them, such as male strip shows and female-friendly pornography.

While it seems that the market has made the commodification of male bodies for women's entertainment possible, and women seem to be able obtain a more equal ground in this game of gender politics, it would be a mistake to assume that gender equality could be achieved in this way for two reasons. First, balance in gender power could not be achieved because women would be denounced for their "bad" sexual and consumptive behaviours due to the traditional patriarchal gender ideology. It is not to say that men's consumptive behaviours for sex are not to be judged, however generally women tend to be criticised more harshly because they are denied their potential agency to express their sexual desires. In this thesis, I have thought of agency as the ability for my informants to make their own choices regarding sex based on sexual preferences. This is also related to the second reason, that while both men and women should be regarded as having the same degree of agency in their ability to express their sexuality, this is seldom addressed as an issue related to equality between the two sexes.

Much academic literature has tried to study the issue of gender equality by comparing women's situations in their workplaces, households, and relationships with men. However, the issue of sexual expression in relation to sexual autonomy has not been considered enough in feminist literatures. Is this because it is generally believed that women's sex drive is biologically assumed to be weaker so their sexual desire has not been recognised? Is it because women's empowerment in the working environment could easily be observed but not so in the aspect of sexual consumptions and/or relations?

By conducting this research, I hoped to present the narratives of sexual attitudes, sex lives, pornographic consumptive behaviours and perceptions of the male and female body of 32 female informants. The in-depth and semi-structured interviews with young white-collar women aged between 18 and 30 reflect the sexual attitudes of the post-1980 generation that was born when Hong Kong's economy was strong and provided women with white-collar job opportunities. Even though the research focuses on studying the sexual attitudes and experiences of just a small segment of the population, I hope to show how women make consumption choices regarding sex, how they seek sexual autonomy, and why these women's sexuality is restricted and by whom.

### **Rethinking Women's Empowerment in the Aspect of Sexuality**

Women's desire for change, such as claiming more space for the expression of female sexuality, and the general atmosphere for the appreciation of male beauty can be seen in Hong Kong. The use of the male body in various industries or service sectors, such as advertising, is not uncommon in Hong Kong these days. The productions of entertainment for women, such as the A&F promotions featuring male models, the male strip shows and the consumption of pornography, are now available, allowing my informants to exercise their sexual autonomy to a certain extent.

However, for Hong Kong young white-collar women who are highly educated and have obtained lower-middle to middle class status with high consuming power, the gender power balance has not been challenged. With the newly acquired affluence of Hong Kong young adult women, their consumptive choices for satisfying their sexual desire and fantasies have increased, compared to women of the previous generations. Despite the fact that the visibility of male body images have become

more prevalent in our daily lives, which I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Hong Kong young white-collar women's sexuality and behaviours were still very much attached to their given social values. With the legitimisation of the ideology of consumerism, some male bodies are positioned in public places, such as Aaron Kwok's advertisement for Physical that I discussed in chapter 2, where they are gazed at and objectified by female consumers. However women's open appreciation and criticism towards male beauty which is against the societal expectation of how a woman should behave, is still regarded as improper.

Context analyses were done on three events: the Abercrombie & Fitch's promotional event, the Chippendales strip troupe's world tour, and the Asia Adult Expo held in Macau every year. While women are not excluded from the participation of the aforementioned public events and sexual materials, such participation is only organized on an occasional basis. Thus the space and time for the expression of female sexuality is fleeting and rare in Hong Kong, which is another reason why the accumulation of economic capital and sexual capital does not necessarily result in sexual autonomy.

In order to understand why women's autonomy in expressing their sexuality and their freedom to consume male bodies were very much restricted despite their affluence, one should understand how the perceptions of sex of women was formed, consolidated and challenged. To do so, I have first analysed my informants' answers to structured interview questions, which made it possible to understand the source of their knowledge of sex and their sexual experiences during adolescence and/or early years of adulthood. Based on the research findings, it is clear that the family plays the most important role in shaping the perceptions of sex of young white-collar women. Even though parents did not usually provide practical knowledge of sex, they gave

moral education to their daughters and shaped their perceptions of sex and relationships. For instance, girls were taught not to be taken advantage of by men and not to get pregnant. Secondly, these moral values acquired were then challenged by the sexual messages from mass media. For instance, mass media usually portrays sex as the “free” expression of “romantic love”. Even though family and school were regarded as formal channels for sex education, many informants thought the institutions were unable to teach them the knowledge of sex that they needed. Most of them learned about sex in their own way, such as by consuming pornographic materials in magazines, newspapers and on the Internet. More importantly, informants were able to explore their sexual interests, and some women enjoyed satisfying their sexual needs and desires through making certain consumptive choices. Lastly, the contradictory coexistence between the continuity of and the transformations in my informant's the sexual attitudes, sex lives and consumptive sexual behaviours further validates the argument that the sexual capital of Hong Kong young white collar women is not to be equated with their sexual autonomy.

Next, as watching pornography has become the most available consumptive choice for fulfilling sexual fantasies, desires and needs, the consumption and production of pornography have to become an topic of contestation for some feminists, regarding the theoretical discussion of the subject-object relationship between protagonists in pornography and female spectators. Radical-cultural feminists are anti-pornography because they believe women in pornography are objectified. It is also assumed by radical-cultural feminists that female audience cannot gain pleasure from the viewing process as they have to identify themselves with the male protagonist in the pornography and objectify the female protagonist. However, for radical-libertarian feminists, subjectivity can be seen from the

perspective of the female protagonists as they choose to take part in the production of pornography. The subjectivity of female spectators and whether it can be legitimate for women watching pornography has become the questions.

In spite of the debate between radical-cultural and radical-libertarian feminists, in reality, however, many Hong Kong young white-collar women were usual viewers of pornography. Pornographic materials were easily accessible, partially because censorship on the use of the Internet was not particularly strict in the context of Hong Kong. Many informants expressed that the most common and direct way to gain sexual satisfaction was through masturbation while watching pornography. However, women were still not the expected consumers of pornography due to the taken-it-for-granted female passivity in sex.

Some feminist filmmakers have made pornography which fits women's tastes better with more cinematic narratives, the soft-core tendency, and a more equal relationship between the two genders portrayed in it. This new type of pornography is called female-friendly pornography (fem porn for short), which is mostly produced in Euro-American countries and Japan. No local production of this type could be found. Despite the availability of the new type of pornography, female informants were not particularly interested in it. Women's porn tastes were complicated and varied. Feedback from informants who participated in a viewing of this kind of pornography was generally contradictory to the expectations of fem porn producers. Based on my research findings, frequent female porn users tended not to like the porn very much. Some of them said they looked for pornographic materials that were more intense. In contrast, for women who had never watched pornography before or non-frequent porn users, they tended to enjoy the female-friendly pornography more than the other selected materials.

After the discussion of women's porn tastes, I also examined the gender politics in pornographic consumptive behaviours of women. For instance, while some women said that the consumption of pornography was for self-satisfaction, others said that they also watched it to learn more sex skills, such as different sexual positions and techniques in oral sex. Watching pornography in a private space without supervision or disciplinary gaze upon them was the most common way for young adult women to explore sex, their body, and the male body. Through this consumptive process in which women's sexuality was relatively less repressed, they obtained a greater degree of agency in exploring their porn tastes, what they liked and disliked, and what sensational stimulation they wanted. However it is not to suggest that the consumption of pornography and masturbation have an absolute and direct relationship. Women could experience their sexual fantasies and desires without the use of any kinds of materials. For instance, a few informants expressed that they did not rely on watching pornography to masturbate. Their minds were the best tool they had. For quite a number of informants though, pornography brought women quick and direct sexual stimulation. Once they got used to it, they could not masturbate without watching pornography.

Nonetheless, unlike male college students who tend to share pornography or pornographic information with their male friends (Jacobs 2012), my female informants said they would never reveal their secret of enjoying watching pornography with their close friends, nor would they share pornographic materials with them. Watching pornography was generally considered to be bad behaviour. But when men did it, it was regarded as an "unavoidable" act by my informants. Women however felt that they would be denounced more harshly due to the dominant gender discourse of repressing women's sexuality.

Only a few informants who had started masturbation when they were young said it was a pure biological urge. Many of the informants picked up the habit of watching pornography and masturbating under the influence from society, such as mass media. They said they only learned to masturbate after consuming pornography for a while. Some of them said they needed to suppress negative feelings, such as guilt and shame, generated from obtaining orgasm through masturbation because they were told not to touch their private part by their mothers.

Informants in this study were highly aware of the societal gender expectations imposed on women. They also reflected on how social institutions, such as family, school and religion, shaped their sexual attitudes. They were aware of the different societal treatments and standards men and women received in the aspect of sex. In Hong Kong, women's virginity is considered to be more valuable. Therefore pre-marital sexual behaviours should be prevented. In the face of such an awareness of the social repression on women's sexuality, some informants chose to rebel against it by participating in all sorts of consumptive activities for women's pleasure.

The increase in financial capital may lead to an increase in sexual capital/attractiveness through consuming beautifying products and conducting plastic surgery. However, it does not mean women's sexual autonomy will be increased. In Chapter 4, I examined the relationship between sexual capital and sexual autonomy. It was illustrated that in the traditional definition of sexual capital, which more or less equalled the notion of sexual attractiveness, the issue of women's agency in their ability to express their sexuality has not been addressed. Women's sexuality in a patriarchal society is very much controlled and manipulated.

Twenty-seven among 32 informants had sexual experience before the interviews. Eight of them had their first sexual experience before the age of 18.



Almost all of the informants said that having pre-marital sex was fine. In chapter 4, I studied women's sexual relationships, such as how their sexuality was under surveillance by society and how they sought to challenge gender expectations and restrictions imposed on them by society. In some situations, such as saving a nearly-broken relationship, some informants would try to increase their sexual attractiveness and improve their sex skills in order to please their partners. There were also informants who limited their frequency and duration of watching pornography and masturbation as they believed that such behaviour would lower the sensitivity of their bodies, and so, they were not able to provide their partners with enough sexual pleasure. However, women's self-surveillance of their bodies cannot be simply explained with the use of patriarchal ideology. Hong Kong young adult women's self-restriction on their sexuality was partly due to the benefits they could gain from it. Most of my informants came from lower-middle class background. Despite having a decent white-collar job, many of them saw marriage with a man from the same or preferably higher social class as their ultimate goal. Making use of their sexual capital was seen as essential for achieving this goal.

In fact, my informants not only performed gender and sexual roles in a heterosexual relationship, as suggested by Judith Butler (1990), women also gained power over men in sexual relationships by manipulating men's expectations through the performance of sexual drama. These women also expressed their sexual desires and fantasies, which were usually forbidden within a patriarchal society, with the use of a set of male-oriented moral codes. In order to obtain or secure their middle-class status, many informants learned to control their sexuality more as they grew older. They also learned to perform the gender role of a good wife or girlfriend. In order to be a good wife or girlfriend, many informants made use of their sexuality and played

a role of pleasing their partners. For instance, some of them faked orgasms in front of their boyfriends or husbands. While some informants were skilful in playing the sexual drama of faking an orgasm, there were also others who insisted that honesty in a relationship was most important. Their refusal to lie to their partners has shown that they performed as a woman who would only show their “real” sides to their partners. Female informants manipulated sex, and the female body, and the concept of romantic love to facilitate the successfulness in a relationship.

According to my informants’ experiences, not many men expected their girlfriends or wives to be a virgin these days. For women, it was still not a good idea to give an impression to their partners that they were libidinous and had many sexual relationships. Heterosexual monogamous relationships are seen as the ideal model in Hong Kong society. However, some women legitimised their behaviours by saying if they had not tried, they would never know the level of compatibility with their partner, and whether the relationship could develop further or not.

I tried to illustrate how “wan lyun” (messy) sexual relationships, for example, having multiple sexual partners at the same time or a series of sexual relationships in a short period of time, may lead to more sexual encounters and less restrictions on their sexuality. Indeed, the “messy time” in some of my informants’ lives might lead to a more mature understanding of sex and sexuality. This is reflected in the conversations with my informants. Very few of them regretted the “mistakes” they had made.

In this study, I come to the conclusion that even though Hong Kong young women nowadays are highly educated with increasing financial power and social status, the ways of expressing their sexuality are still limited. But many of them seek for more sexual autonomy and freedom through consumption of sexual entertainment

and playing with their gender and sex roles in relationships.

In this research, one of the biggest questions that I had to ask myself constantly was whether my informants wanted to express their sexuality and obtained higher sexual autonomy, or they were actually completely fine with the current situation. Some informants did not desire for more ways to express their sexuality or satisfy their needs. In other words, a portion of my informants (with or without sex lives) were contented with the situation. Thus within certain contexts, the issue of women's sexual autonomy, fantasies, and satisfaction does not have a crucial impact on the everyday lives of all Hong Kong young white-collar women. However, about two-third of informants expressed that they wanted more consumptive choices offered to women by the sex entertainment industry in Hong Kong. Even though there is a variation in the opinions of my informants, I tend to agree that more and more young adult women are concerned about their sexual autonomy because of the modern consumerism and the increase in Hong Kong women's social status. These changes play great roles in encouraging women's consumption of certain commodities and service, such as attending a strip show, developed by the sex entertainment industry. The issue of women's sexual constraints and autonomy is therefore worthy studying.

### **Women Speaking for Themselves**

“Women speaking for themselves” is also an idea inspired by Shere Hite, who first looked into similar issues in the 1970s by distributing a detailed questionnaire regarding women's sexual attitudes and behaviours.

Throughout the process of interviewing, my informants always amazed me and challenged my understanding of women's sexuality, emotionality and physicality not just on an intellectual level, but also on a personal level. I thought I had known quite a

lot because I am a woman as well. Their willingness and honesty to share with me their family lives, relationships, sex lives and sexual consumptive behaviours were the greatest contribution in helping me in the process of writing this thesis. Many of my informants talked about their happiness, frustrations, sadness and all sorts of emotions related to their relationships. Beyond that, they realised through participating in this interview, they reflected on their present and past, and tried to provide reasons for their behaviours. While this reflection process was easy for some informants, it was not for others. As a researcher, it may be easy for me to justify my intention and techniques of doing interviews for the sake of understanding certain social phenomenon. However, when I was sitting in a café and having face-to-face interviews with my informants, their emotional responses towards my questions were so real that I could not ignore the fact I might have forced the informants to rethink about the past that they might prefer not to think about again. Owing to my informants' sincerity and helpfulness, I hope that this research can, to a certain extent, allow women to speak for themselves and allow others (men or women from different age, social, economic, cultural and ethnic background) to gain a better understanding about their emotionality and physicality in the aspect of sex.

I hope that their voices can be heard and more space and tolerance will be created for women to pursue their happiness and pleasure in sex. Young white-collar women in Hong Kong can also be the agents of change, yet due to the constraints on their sexuality and limitation on their sexual autonomy, a great transformation has not been seen.

Sex is still a social taboo in Hong Kong. Talking about sex to a stranger/researcher could be sometimes awkward and embarrassing. Some readers may think that some of my informants were "extremely" open and "unusually

sexually active". Through introductions by friends, I managed to meet women who were more willing to talk about sex. In fact, it happened that many women had a few close friends who tended to be more open on the aspect of sex. Among the 32 informants, I met some who were not very willing to share their love and sex stories. Two informants turned me down when I asked for an interview. The number was small mainly because my friends selected the potential informants for me after knowing the criteria of my sample, such as age, monthly salary, and educational level. Among these women, some of them were sexually more open, for example, they changed sexual partners frequently or had multiple partners at a time. But I also encountered women who had no sexual experience or never watched pornography. From these 32 interviews, we can see a great variety in informants' sexual experiences, upbringing, perceptions of sex and sexual consumption behaviours.

While young white-collar women in Hong Kong have recently obtained economic, cultural and social capital, they are also new to exploring ways to express themselves sexually. Their participations in male strip shows and their craze for male models in public were seen as a rebellion against the social constraints on female sexuality. Nonetheless, while male commodification of female bodies has always been condemned, women's commodification on male bodies is equally problematic. Through studying the expressions of female sexuality and sexual desires, I find it necessary to re-examine the relationship between commodification and objectification. In the first place, discussions with my informants made me realise it is very difficult to have sexual imaginations/fantasies/desires, and to express them without objectifying someone (a man or woman). In order to tell and describe a sexual fantasy, it is almost impossible to avoid objectification. Under the capitalist ideology, strip shows, prostitution and modelling are seen as the commodification of women

and men, which are very often condemned. But rather than morally criticising people who work with the use of sexual capital, and claiming that these activities should be eliminated, more and more researchers see these economic activities as normal and a way of living among many others (Kong 2005; Cheng 2013). Following in this trend of gender-based research, it is possible to say that to a certain extent, objectification and commodification are unavoidable, especially for the expression of sexual desires.

While my project focuses on young white-collar women as my targeted group, there could be projects concerning the expressions of sexuality of adolescent girls. Recently, there are more research studies about adolescent girls' sexual empowerment. For example, Lamb and Peterson (2012) identify three factors, i.e. age differences, exposure to sexualised media, and the pressure to please a partner, which determine adolescent girls' "subjective sense of efficacy, desire, and pleasure" (703). However, similar studies are limited in Hong Kong. The studies of adolescents' sexuality in Hong Kong are mainly related to health, sexual violence, and exposure to sexual materials, such as Tang's study on peer sexual abuse (2004) and To and Ngai 's research on the impacts of online sexual materials on shaping adolescent's sexual attitudes, knowledge and behaviours (2012). As far as I know, according to my informants, when they were young, they watched pornography and read sexually explicit materials, such as H-comics and romantic novels with sexual elements at home. For both teenage boys and girls, home, and especially the bedroom, is supposed to be the safest place for all kinds of fantasies to take place. For girls, many of them stick posters of their favourite male film stars, sportsmen, and artists on the walls of their bedrooms. Even though the male figures depicted on these types of posters may not be completely or semi-nude, they do reflect some of the appreciated characteristics of masculinity found in young girls' fantasies. A study of focusing on

these activities may help us to understand how young girls in Hong Kong express their sexuality.

Moreover, more research can be done on studying the expressions of sexuality of middle-aged women and elderly women aged 65 or above (who are often regarded as sexless due to their age and their loss of sexual attractiveness). For instance, Fookien (1994) shows that “health variables” have little influence on the development and/or maintenance of sexual activity of women in old age. Rather, elderly women's “psychological well-being” and “keeping sexuality alive” would be affected by the body images portrayed by mass media (227).

Different groups of women from various social, economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, have different sex views and sexual behaviours. Making Hong Kong women the focus of our research, allows us to engage with a wide range of ethnographic and theoretical work related to sex, gender, power, and the continuity and transformations of the sexual behaviours of women.

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