

The Girl in Contemporary Hong Kong

by
KAM, Chui Ping Iris

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Cardiff University, Wales
July 2010

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SUMMARY

The Girl in Contemporary Hong Kong

Submitted by
KAM, Chui Ping Iris

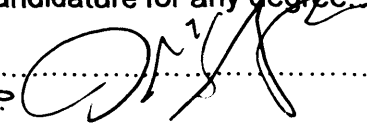
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The twin aim of this thesis is (1) to enlarge the field of girl studies at a conceptual level, so as to include the non-western girl, and (2) to develop a detailed case history of the girl in Hong Kong. In order to identify what is distinctive about the everyday life of these girls I focus on three areas of experience – sex education in secondary school, made-for-teens romance films and teenage lifestyle magazines. Particularly, I highlight how the questions of ethnicity, tradition and religion play a greater part in the everyday life of girls in Hong Kong than they do in the life of the girls considered by Driscoll's study. It is the major claim of this thesis that girl studies as it is presently practised is western-centric and its outlook needs to be broadened to include the non-western world. The significance of this thesis lies in the findings of the various form of heterosexuality in different social fields, which provides different space for girls to live in the present. However, this thesis also finds out that the argument of the non-correlation between the female body and the constitution of femininity is not sufficient to the conception of girlhood. This is because, as this thesis has indicated, the concept of Hong Kong girls cannot get rid of the shadow of the theories of modern subjectivity, in which the construction of the girl is in opposition to, or defined otherwise than, the mature, independent woman. In a long run, it is important to strengthen the power of 'becoming' in the construction of the concept of the girl in gender studies and cultural studies.

(272 words)

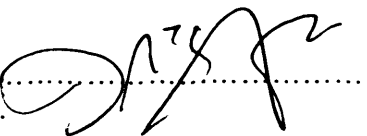
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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy ^{PhD} (insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PhD etc, as appropriate)

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This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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Conclusion

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Introduction

The Girl in Contemporary Hong Kong

As Catherine Driscoll demonstrates in her seminal work *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (2002), the everyday life of girls – what they read, what movies they watch, how they dress, their attitude to school, and so on – is an important concern within both gender studies and cultural studies. In various forms, it has been the subject of several well-known books that have helped to define these interrelated fields.¹ Yet, as Driscoll argues, in spite of this high level of interest, there is a tendency in these various studies of the everyday life of girls to treat the notion of the girl as self-evident.

It seems self-evident that girls are female children, or young women.

But this self-evident understanding raises a number of questions.

When speaking to or of girls as female children or as young women,

¹ See, for example, Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava, *Gender and Generation* (1984); Catharine Lumby, *Bad Girls: The Media, Sex and Feminism in the 90s* (1997); Lauraine Leblanc, *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* (1999); Barbara Findlen, *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995); Phil Cohen, *Rethinking the Youth Question: Education, Labour and Cultural Studies* (1997); Marion des Ras and Mieke Lunenberg, *Girls, Girlhood, and Girls' Studies in Transition* (1993); Pam Gilbert and Sandra Taylor, *Fashioning the Feminine: Girls, Popular Culture and Schooling* (1991); Mica Nava, *Changing Cultures: Feminism, Youth and Consumerism* (1992); Leslie G. Roman and Linda K. Christian-Smith, *Becoming-Feminine: The Politics of Popular Culture* (1988); Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up* (1993); Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture: From "Jackie" to "Just Seventeen"* (1991); and Angela McRobbie, *Back to Reality?: Social Experience and Cultural Studies* (1997). Other books that are also important in the field of gender studies and cultural studies include: Dawn Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers* (1999); Kathleen L. Endres and Therese L. Lueck, *Women's Periodicals in the United States: Social and Political Issues* (1996); Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (2000); Joke Hermes, *Reading Women's Magazines: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use* (1995); and Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (2000).

do these two understandings actually mean the same thing, and how are they defined? When we call an older woman a ‘girl’, are we really evoking characteristics of childhood or youth? And what does it mean for girls that girlhood is a stage to be passed through on the way to something else – mostly to ‘being a woman’. While it seems every woman has been a girl and every female child is one, it is not clear what this means given, for example, the differences between my own and my grandmother’s ideas of what a girl is, or given the necessity and importance of mediation between us of what girlhood means.²

As Driscoll shows, the apparent self-evidence of the concept of the girl is problematic because it obscures both its intrinsic complexity and its significance for the lives of everyone whose identity is shaped by it. Driscoll’s problematisation of the concept of the girl is an important cornerstone of the present thesis for two reasons: on the one hand, it maps out a field of inquiry, and on the other it defines the limit point of that field, which might be called ‘girl studies’. As Driscoll demonstrates, works in this field tend to focus on girls’ use of and interaction with media, particularly music, film, magazines and (in more recent times) digital media such as mobile phones and the Internet.³ Obviously important, too, though not generally considered by mainstream cultural studies, is girls’ experience of schooling.⁴ Research on this aspect of the everyday life of girls tends to be reserved for specialists in education, but I will argue

² Driscoll 2002: 2.

³ Driscoll 2002: 150-154 and 203-247; McRobbie 2009: 11-23 and 54-93.

⁴ McRobbie and Driscoll both briefly cover the realm of schooling in their respective discussions. For instance, McRobbie mentions education when she argues that work and wage-earning capacity come to dominate women’s self-identity (McRobbie 2009: 61) and Driscoll discusses sex education as a form of social regulation of society (Driscoll 2002: 150).

that it forms too great a part of girls' lives to be set aside in such a way.⁵ As even this brief summary of the field makes clear, the range of issues and concerns covered by girl studies is too great for a single work to encompass. Yet, having said this, it is also apparent that in all these studies there are three thematic areas that stand out as being particularly important, namely the issues of identity, sexuality and citizenship.⁶ These three themes are in themselves reflective of the overarching concern of nearly all forms of girl studies with change, development and growth. The girl is of interest to both gender and cultural studies because she is perceived to be in a constant state of becoming – she is becoming a woman, which is a different state of being to that of girlhood; she is becoming sexual, but is not yet a sexual being, hence her sexuality is a 'problem' or a 'concern'; and she is becoming a citizen, though she is not yet of an age to assume either its rights or responsibilities.

This thesis will explore these three themes in a Hong Kong context via an interrogation of girls' experience of secondary school (focusing particularly on sex education), made-for-teens romance films and teenage lifestyle magazines. I single

⁵ See Choi, who discusses the social dynamics of education (Choi 2004: 246-275) and the relationship between education and gender (Choi 2003). On the relationship between schooling and gender formation see also Chan 1996 and Tang 1998.

⁶ The three terms – citizenship, sexuality and identity – are closely linked in relation to the construction of the girl. For instance, both McRobbie and Harris argue that girls have gained recognition as subjects worthy of governmental attention and that this has replaced any need for a feminist critique of hegemonic masculinities. The reasons why it is girls who have been invested in symbolically and materially in these ways are twofold. First, changing economic and work conditions – such as the expansion of girls' education and employment opportunities coinciding with a restructured global economy – have created new possibilities for girls. Second, new ideologies about individual responsibility and choices also make girls the most likely candidates for performing a new kind of self-made subjectivity. In contemporary culture, the dynamics of regulation and control are therefore less concerned with what girls ought not to do, than with what they are able to do. Having been assumed to be headed towards marriage, motherhood and limited economic participation, girls now found themselves charged with the requirement that they perform as economically active female citizens. In other words, the figure of the girl is now more weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation – which are regarded as necessary for full engagement in citizenship – while sexuality in terms of recreational sex and reproductive sex has become the subject of more intense government attention (McRobbie 2009: 57-58 and 87-90; Harris 2004a: 6-8).

out these areas because, as I will try to show, they are the arenas in which these issues are most directly debated, engaged with and problematised. They are not necessarily the most influential spheres of influence on the lives of Hong Kong girls, but they do have the advantage of being the most legible. As this thesis will argue, questions having to do with identity, sexuality and citizenship are important to an understanding of the everyday life of Hong Kong girls, but not in the same way (or for the same reasons) as they are elsewhere in the world. In particular, I want to show that issues to do with ethnicity, religion and tradition play a much larger part in the lives of Hong Kong girls than Driscoll allows for in the case of western girls. There is no 'universal' concept of the girl and no 'universal' experience of girlhood. This points to the limitation of Driscoll's work that I alluded to above: it is very Anglocentric. This is not necessarily a fault, inasmuch as Driscoll nowhere claims to be speaking about anything other than the Anglophone world. But it does leave the way open both for the further development of her work (and of the field itself) and for an extension of its case histories into non-Anglocentric and non-western realms, which is in effect the twin aim of this thesis. On the one hand, I want to enlarge the field of girl studies at a conceptual level, so as to include the non-western girl, but in doing so I also want to develop a detailed case history of the girl in Hong Kong.

What is a girl?

What is a girl? Is it even possible to answer such a question? Perhaps it is enough to assume that the answer isn't known or indeed finally knowable for the question to have critical value. Certainly what it does do is open up the field to a host of other questions. Starting from the position that what constitutes a girl in western culture is

neither self-evident nor known, Driscoll focuses on three key problematics: (1) What is a girl?⁷ (2) Why has the concept of the girl been neglected?⁸ (3) What would 'girl studies' look like were such a discipline to exist?⁹ These three questions provide a framework for this thesis by mapping out the context in which its study of Hong Kong girls is situated. Moreover, as I will try to show very briefly in this section, these questions relate directly to the three areas of girls' everyday lives that I have opted to focus on here.

With respect to the first problematic, Driscoll's priority is to separate the concept of the girl from any biological or physiological determination. She argues that theories of development in which the biological is emphasised in the construction of girlhood restrict the meanings of adolescence and femininity and thus naturalise the process of girlhood into one of becoming the right kind of woman in the future. This is so because the form of girlhood seems to be predictable in terms of an increasing maturity and (eventual) stabilisation of identity in keeping with a biological logic of development.¹⁰ It is the presumed predictability of the concept of the girl that explains the neglect of that concept in both cultural studies and gender studies. Yet, as Driscoll argues, neither the concept of adolescence nor the concept of femininity is fully adequate to account for the set of experiences, practices and ideas we associate with girlhood:

This identification [with puberty and with teenage years] remains incomplete in the sense that someone who is called a girl or is visible

⁷ Driscoll 2002: 1-12 & 107-138.

⁸ Driscoll 2002: 107-170.

⁹ Driscoll 2002: 139-301.

¹⁰ Driscoll 2002: 5.

as a girl is not necessarily any particular age or at any particular point of physiological development. Despite how obviously puberty seems to define a boundary between girlhood and womanhood and a field for female adolescence, adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behaviour, or identity.¹¹

Once the conception of girlhood is seen to fall in between the concepts of adolescence and femininity, the claim of the biological to apprehend the concept of the girl becomes problematic. This is because such theories of development oversimplify how a girl's experience of the inevitable biological events accompanying sexual development – such as the onset of menstruation and the appearance of breasts – may differ between both individuals and generations, depending on the world in which the girl lives at its own point in history. On this point, Brumberg offers a very precise argument: “Every girl suffers some kind of adolescent angst about her body; it is the historical moment that defines how she reacts to her changing flesh. From the perspective of history, adolescent self-consciousness is quite persistent, but its level is raised or lowered, like the water level in a pool, by the cultural and social setting.”¹² The girl in the stage of adolescence is supposed to develop from a state of immaturity (or irrationality) to the stage of maturity (rationality) along biological lines. The tricky point with such theories of development, however, is that they assign the concept of the girl with an impossible mission. In theory, it is impossible for the girl to reach the point of rationality if she is still in transition from girlhood to being ‘the right kind of woman’ – that is, to being feminine.

¹¹ Driscoll 2002: 5-6.

¹² Brumberg 1997: xviii.

On this point, both Walkerdine and Leblanc make very precise comments on the double bind or double standard involved in the conception of girlhood. For Walkerdine, the theories of development have set the girl up “as faulty reasoner who is never considered to be rational enough to be a natural child.”¹³ As she argues, the possibility of the girl being reasonable is neglected because the concept of the girl is inextricably linked to femininity (as the opposite of masculinity and rationality). According to this logic, there seem to be only two pathways left for the girl’s development: she is to be either (1) a natural little woman incapable of reasoning, or (2) an unnatural little woman who has such a capability. Leblanc argues that this double bind or double standard for the conception of girlhood is a result of the binarism between the concepts of femininity and masculinity, which in turn makes the concept of adolescence highly problematic for the concept of the girl. This is because the theory of biological determination infers that the girl is becoming a woman, which is a different state of being to that of girlhood. Also, while being sexual, she is not yet a sexual being. Both destinations of femininity and womanhood forestall the possibility of the girl being a reasonable being:

The goals of the game, the attributes of femininity, are specifically constructed to contrast with those of masculinity. Whereas men ought to be aggressive, women ought to be passive; whereas men ought to be strong and direct, women ought to be subtle, coy, weak, timid, and so on. This part of the game, otherwise called the social construction of gender, not only considers femininity and masculinity as opposites, but as hierarchically related. Not only are masculinity and femininity

¹³ Walkerdine 1997: 80-81.

diametrically opposed, but masculinity is set above femininity. This is not to say that traditionally feminine characteristics such as caring and nurturing are in fact inferior to traditionally masculine characteristics. However, because traditionally masculine characteristics are valued highly, and because femininity is constructed as masculinity's opposite (ostensibly, one cannot be both rational and emotional), femininity is deemed inferior. This arrangement becomes especially problematic in adolescence, when gender games become especially important to young people.¹⁴

A central question that frequently concerns the tradition of gender studies is how the meaning of femininity should have been constructed as the polar opposite of that of masculinity and the possible ways in which that meaning might be deconstructed and reconstructed. The impetus towards deconstruction lies in the fact that the logic of binary opposition presumed in gender studies excludes the possibility that an individual may be both rational and emotional simultaneously. Along this line there seems to be an irresolvable dilemma for the construction of girlhood, namely, the impossibility that the concept of the girl might embrace the attributes of what a typical adolescent should be like – moodily, recklessly, selfishly rebellious – without infringing the dictates of femininity. As Walkerdine argues,

¹⁴ Leblanc 1999: 136-137.

discourses of femininity and adolescence as reason provide a complex of positionings for girls, in which they are caught: if they are feminine they cannot be brilliant, if they are brilliant they cannot be feminine.¹⁵

Simply put, Walkerdine argues that in western philosophy women have tended to be aligned with the affective and juxtaposed to the properly human and rational. Adolescence, on the other hand, as Rishoi puts it, has been defined as a second birth for man (not woman), who is characterised by rationality.¹⁶ When it comes to girls, the situation becomes problematic. Whatever girls do, they run the risk of being interpreted either as having failed in terms of femininity or as incapable of fulfilling the normal developmental pattern of adolescence. This is because, as Hudson (1984) argues, adolescence is a 'masculine' construct (at odds with femininity). As a result, any attempt by girls to satisfy society's demands with respect to adolescence will result in them becoming trapped in the conflicts between the cultural notions of femininity and of adolescence – the two major concepts that regulate their behaviour as girls.

Driscoll maintains very firmly that there is no direct correlation between the female body and the constitution of femininity. She therefore utilises the term 'feminine adolescence', as distinct from 'female adolescence' (which is predominantly a discourse on puberty), for the conception of girlhood. However, she does not deny that biology plays an important role in shaping ways of speaking about girls. The girl *is* and *is not* her body: her body does not define who she is, but it does set out the cultural conditions of possibility for who she might be. Female does not equal

¹⁵ Walkerdine 1993: 16.

¹⁶ Rousseau, as quoted in Rishoi 2003: 54.

feminine, then, but in a cultural sense it does amount to a demand for at least the performance (as Butler argues) of femininity.¹⁷

In place of the biological determination of the girl, Driscoll offers a constructivist or discursive determination. “Girlhood is made up and girls are brought into existence in statements and knowledge about girls, and some of the most widely shared or commonsensical knowledge about girls and feminine adolescence provides some of the clearest examples of how girls are constructed by changing ways of speaking about girls.”¹⁸ The discursive vehicles that *produce* girls are of course very varied – as I explained above, this thesis concentrates on three main types: sex education in secondary school, made-for-teens romance films and teenage lifestyle magazines. This by no means exhausts the field, but, as I will show, the analyses of these three discursive fields, as they might be called, enable the issues of identity, sexuality and citizenship to be brought into relief. The girl *is*, at least in part, her encounter with these fields.

According to Driscoll, girls are not only positioned by the explicit demands of social structures – such as compulsory school attendance – but also by the tacit and less direct demands of cultural forms and practices, such as popular cultural texts like films and magazines.¹⁹ These direct and indirect forms are combined in school-based sex education, which employs cultural texts to model social relations for girls and instruct them how to ‘perform’ their (future) sexual selves. Driscoll argues that the dominant model of sexuality as prescribed for girls by compulsory sex education is

¹⁷ Butler 1993: 238; Butler 1999; Butler 2004: 44-45.

¹⁸ Driscoll 2002: 5.

¹⁹ Driscoll 2002: 150.

one which constitutes girls as an object of masculine desire, and frames girls' lives (school, family, etc.) in such a way as to naturalise this outlook.²⁰ This framing usually employs a discourse of 'risk' – girls' sexuality is presented as a 'risk' the girls must constantly be aware of.²¹ As the institutional form of the dissemination of knowledge about appropriate sexual behaviour and identification, sex education positions girls in relation to dominant and resistant ideas about sex through the educational, legislative and familial reproduction of normative social values centred on sexual identities. For instance, Ho and Tsang comment on the revised *Guidelines on Sex Education in Secondary Schools* in 1997 that they have “a strong bias towards teaching teenagers socially accepted morality while aspects of human sexuality were largely confined by discourses on emotional well being and human relationships.”²² Girls are repeatedly urged to act responsibly as though this distinction between the sexual risks and opportunities of girls and boys was somehow natural. (Figure a)

Girls' magazines provide a kind of counterbalance to the official discourse of sex education. While they rarely deviate very far from the official line, as articulated by school-based sex education, they do nevertheless provide girls with a forum in which to raise questions about the cultural and social expectations that accompany their developing sexuality.²³ As such, from a research point of view, magazines are an exemplary space in which girls' relations to each other and to social norms can be

²⁰ Driscoll 2002: 156.

²¹ Thomson and Scott 1992: 41.

²² Ho and Tsang 2002: 65.

²³ For instance, Driscoll argues that girls' magazines invoke a simultaneous and equated development of gender identity and sexual identity and produce a normative image of the girl, despite the fact that the responses of readers to the normative image may vary (Driscoll 2002: 156-157).

Figure a. A safe sex campaign in HK – Poster of ‘Domdom’

"Domdom"

Dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom

dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom

dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom

dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom dom

這首歌，人人愛唱！
Let's sing along with this safest song!

記得這首Dom Dom歌，愛自己同愛別人，正確使用安全套有效預防性病和愛滋病。「要有一套」

Remember this Dom Dom song, then you could take action to protect yourself and your partner from Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV. "Use a condom for safer sex"

網址 Website: www.27802211.com
 愛滋熱線 AIDS Hotline: 2780 2211

observed.²⁴ As Driscoll argues, mainstream girls' magazines assume heterosexuality is the norm and therefore equate the development of gender identity with sexual identity – to become woman is to become heterosexual. Consequently they (re)produce a normative image of the girl. Driscoll argues that girls' magazines constitute girls as both viewed (desired) object and viewing subject. Girl readers looking at girls in a girls' magazine are expected to respond favourably to the magazine's framing discourse and reinforce its model of what Driscoll refers to as subject-object gendering.

Driscoll points out that there are two main types of image of girls in girls' magazines: partial and situational. The partial image fragments the girl's body and focuses on the possible (im)perfection of that formal component of her body, while the situational explains how this perfectible body should be used. As Driscoll argues, "the genre's processes of identification thus produce anxiety based on difference between girls (and between girls' bodies) manifest in body and beauty problem pages and coverage of body image problems and bodily health problems."²⁵ Images of adolescent girls mark feminine adolescence as an object of contemplation, disciplined observation, and desiring interpretation.²⁶ Their characteristic ambiguity – the openness of these images to interpretation (and their resistance to complete knowledge) – means that these exemplary girls have materialised not only ideas about feminine adolescence but also ideas about representation, interpretation and knowledge.²⁷ (Figure b.)

²⁴ For the argument that girls use the form of girls' magazines as a point of comparison to other elements of girls' lives, see McRobbie 1981, 1992, 1997, 2000 and 2004. She mentions that girls' magazines such as *Jackie*, *Seventeen* and *More!* assume a common experience of womanhood or girlhood, taking it for granted that, for example, all girls want to know how to catch a boy, lose weight, look their best and be able to cook.

²⁵ Driscoll 2002: 247.

²⁶ McRobbie 1997: 192-193.

²⁷ Driscoll 2002: 145.

Figure b. Examples of women's magazines in Hong Kong, the US and Japan



At the top: Hong Kong

In the middle: the US

At the bottom: Japan

The girl as an ideal heterosexual object is always framed as being in conflict with the ideal notion of feminine adolescence as a nonsexual 'pause' before adult heterosexuality. So while the imagery encourages girls to desire other girls as images of her and to see her as the desirable mirror image of other girls, this is always guarded by a strong discourse of limited homosociality.²⁸ This is because, as just mentioned, the genre's processes of identification also "produce anxiety based on difference between girls (and girls' bodies) manifest in body and beauty problem pages and coverage of body image problems and bodily health problems" (which are kept distinct within the genre). As well as the body and beauty problems posed in magazines that may discourage identification between girls, the possibility of girls becoming potential enemies of one another also forestalls their potential to desire each other. One example is the discussion of the phenomenon of 'frenemy' in the Chinese-language version of *CosmoGIRL!*, published in Hong Kong, which reminds teenage girls not to share everything with same-sex friends.²⁹ This is because conflict among teenage girls tends not to be resolvable or avoidable if boys are involved as a source of conflict. The failure of girls to identify with each other is based on the assumption that the gaze is necessarily heterosexual in the sense that it affirms the Subject against a feminised object.

In spite of this policing, girls' magazines do nevertheless act as a point of identification for lesbian desire and produce a desiring of and for the girl, according to

²⁸ Driscoll 2002: 247.

²⁹ According to *CosmoGIRL!*, 'frenemy' is the combined words of 'friend' and 'enemy'. In other words, it means a girl is a friend but also an enemy of the other girl – that girl is supposed to know the other girl the best and thus she will hurt the other girl the most (*CosmoGIRL!*, 'How to deal', September 2001: 88-89).

both Eve Sedgwick and Diana Fuss.³⁰ With reference to Sedgwick's work on homoerotic desire, Driscoll argues that girl readers of girls' magazines look at each other as desirable.³¹ The heterosexual frame provided by the magazines does not erase what Fuss identifies as the articulation of lesbian desire within the identificatory move itself.³² This is because the 'spectatorial' object of girls' magazines is not an object of desire but a point of identification. As a result, eroticised images of girls in girls' magazines "compel that audience to verify herself endlessly, to identify all her bodily parts, and to fashion continually from this corporeal and psychical jigsaw puzzle a total picture, an image of her own body."³³ Driscoll argues that the differentiation between desiring to be and to have the girl in girls' magazines produces desiring the girl *as* being the girl. This contradiction produces girls among girls in a situation of identification as a becoming that does not erase desire.³⁴ This is because the desire of a reader to be a girl is fulfilled and manifested through the identification with the girls in girls' magazines.

The problematics of identity and desire are also central to cinema aimed at the teenage market. As Driscoll argues, so-called 'youth films' frequently push the boundaries of what young people are supposed to be, do and see. Cinema responds to and exploits the culturally disruptive role played by youth subcultures in terms of both its production and marketing.³⁵ Driscoll argues that the teen genre often contains the disruptive drama of youth within specific social institutions, such as family or school, and inflects it with youthful romance or sex, for the purpose of social regulation. As a

³⁰ Fuss 1992: 713-737.

³¹ Driscoll 2002: 246.

³² Driscoll 2002: 246.

³³ Driscoll 2002: 247.

³⁴ Driscoll 2002: 247.

³⁵ Driscoll 2002: 214.

result, the youth subcultures in such films are generally portrayed as creative and rebellious, whereas the teenage world based around school and home is presented as mainstream and conformist. This conformism is rewarded with the expectation of conventionally happy endings.³⁶

With respect to the second problematic – Why has the concept of the girl been neglected? – Driscoll argues that the concept of girlhood has been overlooked not only in relation to the concept of adolescence, but also within theories of modern subjectivity, even though girls have become increasingly visible in public life and have taken on increasingly diverse public roles.³⁷ Yet feminist discussions of girls rarely engage with feminine adolescence without constructing the girl in opposition to, or defined otherwise than, the mature, independent woman as feminist subject. The ‘moment’ of girlhood is thereby effectively glossed over. Driscoll argues that the lack of feminist interest in girls on their own terms not only helps shape a dominant feminist address to a woman-subject defined in relation to norms of independence, agency and originality, but also restricts and homogenizes the category of women.

Despite the exemplary modernity of girls, the Subject on which modern popular, public, and academic discourses center is never a girl, even for feminism. Feminist practices (including feminist theory) are still dominated by adult models of subjectivity presumed to be the endpoint of a naturalized process of developing individual

³⁶ Driscoll 2002: 217.

³⁷ Driscoll 2002: 9.

identity that relegates a vast range of not only people but roles, behaviors, and practices to its immature past.³⁸

As far as feminist studies is concerned, the concept of the girl serves the narrow purpose of prefacing (and projecting) the establishment of womanhood (in which the modernity of girls is based on the adult models of subjectivity). The concept of the girl is used as a proving ground by feminism in the struggle against any reliance on the normative heterosexual subject. The construction of the girl is contested by feminism as a means of contesting the 'destiny' of the woman, but in doing so the specific set of discourses and experiences that define the girl tend to be given scant regard. Driscoll's project, then, which my own study here hopes to extend, involves the rescuing of this lost 'figure', that of the girl herself.

So, what would 'girl studies' look like were such a discipline to exist? Driscoll poses the problematic like this:

If a girl is not and will never be either woman or man, father or mother, her unfixed positions relative to dominant sex/gender structures might provide a point for poststructuralist consideration of identity in relation to sexed/gendered development.³⁹

The first step in the creation of girl studies is therefore to rethink the nature of the supposedly essential difference between woman as representation and woman as experience. As Driscoll argues, the essential difference between the two, as it is

³⁸ Driscoll 2002: 9.

³⁹ Driscoll 2002: 129.

articulated by feminism, ignores how girls live and understand their lives in relation to such histories and images;⁴⁰ “girlhood as an historical object is best addressed by reference to discourses that constitute understanding of girlhood experience.”⁴¹ As a result, she argues that “[r]epresentations of girl sexuality are inseparable from girl sexuality as a lived experience or as an object of analysis.”⁴² It is therefore important to construct the concept of the girl in relation to daily lives and practices. In doing so, the figure of the girl as a figure will be possible to exist in the popular imagination. As Driscoll argues, if woman is an ideological construct then for it to have the social and cultural significance it does will depend on girls learning how to embody it.⁴³ Women may be continually learning to be women, but feminine adolescence is the space in which this learning principally takes place. Defined as a set of experiences mediated via social structures and cultural texts, girlhood is, Driscoll argues, highly amenable to the type of analyses typically found in cultural studies. So in order to develop the field of girl studies she recommends that it be modelled on cultural studies, but inflected via feminist studies. This is because, for Driscoll, the discipline of feminist cultural studies is equally interested in theories or reflections on culture and in the kind of everyday life specific to late modernity.⁴⁴

According to Driscoll, cultural studies is consistently framed by discourses of modernisation, including those relating to new technologies and new processes of urbanisation and industrialisation. As such, cultural studies analysis is tied to changing modes of producing cultural subjects. Cultural studies also often analyses

⁴⁰ Driscoll 2002: 142.

⁴¹ Driscoll 2002: 145.

⁴² Driscoll 2002: 144.

⁴³ Driscoll 2002: 108.

⁴⁴ Driscoll 2002: 8.

culture as a field of power relations, focusing on what Meaghan Morris describes as the historical and social constraints and pressures experienced by people in their everyday lives, constraints that can and sometimes should be changed.⁴⁵ For this reason, Driscoll makes a sharp distinction between discourse analysis and textual analysis: textual analysis, she argues, looks at the superficial properties of a cultural form, while discourse analysis treats texts as inseparable from their conditions of possibility, including their history.⁴⁶ While discourse is concerned with statements – the articulation of knowledge – such analysis is not confined to linguistic objects because, for Foucault, as Driscoll argues, language and objects, things and words, are not separable in any causal way. Subject positions, and the experience articulated in those positions, are exemplary instances of how discourses constitute the objects they describe.⁴⁷ This thesis will deploy a similar distinction and focus on discourse rather than texts, the production of statements rather than the meaning of images.

The Hong Kong girl

This thesis proposes that the everyday life of girls in Hong Kong is distinctive and aims to show both why this is so and why it is important. In order to identify what is distinctive about the everyday life of these girls I focus on three areas of experience – sex education in secondary school, made-for-teens romance films and teenage lifestyle magazines – and try to show how the problematics of identity, sexuality and citizenship are inflected by the circumstances of life in Hong Kong. In particular, I highlight the way questions of ethnicity, tradition and religion play a greater part in

⁴⁵ Morris 1997: 50.

⁴⁶ Driscoll 2002: 149.

⁴⁷ Driscoll 2002: 150.

the everyday life of girls in Hong Kong than they do in the life of the girls considered by Driscoll's study. It is the major claim of this thesis that girl studies as it is presently practised is western-centric and its outlook needs to be broadened to include the non-western world. Hong Kong provides a particularly interesting case study in this regard because although it is a highly westernised 'global' city, it nevertheless retains many non-western features and values. The legacies of British colonial rule are everywhere to be seen, even though the reunification with mainland China in 1997 has also brought great changes to the city.

Given the fact that ninety-five per cent of the population in Hong Kong is Chinese (Chinese in a broad and abstract sense, since it comprises several different ethnic groups such as Cantonese, Hakka, Hokkien, Shanghainese and Teochew⁴⁸), Chinese traditions became one of the crucial factors in the construction of identity as a Hong Kong citizen both before and after the reunification with mainland China in 1997. Before the handover, the meaning of those traditions was used in an abstract sense in relation to the formation of the personal identity of students as Hongkongese. After reunification, however, it was reinterpreted in personal and social education as a tool to aid the reestablishment of feelings of attachment towards mainland China. Nevertheless, this change in the meaning of Chinese traditions, following the shift in political orientation within the secondary school system, was not so great as to wipe out the influence of western values in the construction of the identity of Hong Kong citizens.

⁴⁸ Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department 2006: Table 139.

The change of political orientation within the secondary school system entailed a reconstruction of the relationship between western influences and Chinese traditions in relation to the construction of students' identity in contemporary Hong Kong. In terms of students' ethnicity, an emphasis on attachment feelings towards the mainland is now prioritised over western values such as human rights and personal freedom. However, western values such as Christianity remain influential in the promotion of social norms, given the fact that such values do not challenge the national identity of students after reunification. For instance, the establishment of the one-man-and-one-woman marriage system in 1971 was one result of efforts made by the feminist movement and local women's organisations throughout the 1970s. The ideology and practices of the one-man-and-one-woman relationship are still deeply rooted in the marriage system dominant within 21st century Hong Kong society.

The example above illustrates how the reclamation of a pure local identity after 1997 is not what is at stake in a study of 'Chineseness' in Hong Kong, as Yaowei Zhu testifies. In fact, Berry also argues that the understanding of 'Chineseness' should exceed "both territorial and linguistic definitions."⁴⁹ It seems that neither western values nor Chinese traditions could fully capture the formation of the local identity of Hong Kong citizens after the 1966 and 1967 riots. Zhu argues that the attempt to restore or rediscover a pure local identity post-1997, based on the reference to Chinese traditions, is insufficiently attentive to the transformations that have been brought about by global capitalism.⁵⁰ This is because the former colonial government itself used Chinese traditions to soothe and pacify political upheavals and to detach its citizens from developments in mainland China. It was by no means the case that

⁴⁹ Berry 2008: 2.

⁵⁰ Zhu 2005: 318.

Chinese traditions were used without modification to achieve this political end of constructing a previously non-existent 'Hongkongese' national identity during the period of colonial rule.

In fact, the returned Hong Kong may serve as an exemplar of Chineseness not because the colonial city disassociated from Chinese culture in order to produce a Hong Kong identity, but because it has been producing and reshaping Chineseness since the early colonial era.⁵¹

In a similar vein, Man-Lun Ng encourages us to consider the issues of continuity versus change within culture in relation to understanding the cultural context of contemporary Hong Kong.⁵² As mentioned above, women have experienced a lot of changes since the rise of feminist movement in the 1970s, and a large number of them flowed into the labour market following the industrialisation of Hong Kong. The concern of local feminists with the situation of women in Hong Kong focused interminably on whether they were 'westernised' or very traditional and Chinese 'inside'.⁵³ For me, the discussion was pointless in so far as it assumed there were fundamental meanings attaching to both the westernised and the traditional Chinese characteristics of women, and awaiting discovery. This assumption only ignores the fact that Hong Kong culture has been transformed due both to the open-door policy of the former colonial government and to the influences of globalisation on the

⁵¹ Lo 2005: 3.

⁵² Ng and Ma 2004: 489-502.

⁵³ Fan et al 1995: 158-166; Yip 1997: 307-340.

development of the capitalist market locally. As a result, it may now be hard to distinguish western and Han-Chinese cultures in contemporary Hong Kong.

The discussion of the nature of women may have no implications for girl studies in Hong Kong simply because local gender studies assume women as a unitary identity. Although there is an increased visibility of girls and young women in contemporary Hong Kong, I argue that the study of girls in the city faces conceptual problems similar to those confronted by studies of their western counterparts. The reason that girls have been caught in the conflict between adolescence and femininity lies in the burial of their experiences within the discussion of teenagers in the various social fields, such as the education sector and the mass media, in contemporary Hong Kong. This phenomenon was particularly apparent during a conference entitled ‘Sexual Information within Mass Media: Prohibition or Not?’, which was held at the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong in August 2000. In the afternoon session, a teenage girl defended her right to know, and her ability to judge what kind of information transmitted in the mass media was appropriate to her. But her statement was interpreted by the audience – including feminist organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) – as a consequence of the detrimental impact of the mass media on the lives of teenagers in general. Indeed, this reflects the standard societal view of the status of girls, which has always been buried under the concept of the teenager or youth, when the ability to reason is emphasised.

The conceptual problems affecting the study of girls in contemporary Hong Kong have not been well addressed. While representations of teenage girls, albeit superficial

ones, may exist in social research studies focused on gender issues⁵⁴ or youth issues,⁵⁵ these studies mainly focus on the situations of women or teenagers generally, so that teenage girls are mentioned only when an age or gender difference becomes relevant to the analysis. In a review study *The Status of Women and Girls in Hong Kong 2006*, there is no individual chapter for girls, who are subsumed under the category of 'youth'.⁵⁶ The chapter on the latter reviews thirty-nine surveys but very little of the research incorporates a gender perspective or focuses specifically on teenage girls. Even though these studies were conducted in a distinctive and independent manner, they give no indication that girlhood as a concept is caught between the definitions of adolescence and femininity, relying instead on representations of the girl as woman-to-be or as the opposite of the boy.

Research related to girls in Hong Kong is limited to certain areas that may have an impact on their future life as women. For example, where images are presented of women as a commodity for the pleasure of men, or in restricted roles (such as wife and mother). In addition, in an edited volume entitled *A Profile of Hong Kong Women*, which aims to present a general picture of women in Hong Kong, the only chapter relevant to girls' life concerns education, portraying secondary and tertiary education in Hong Kong in terms of sex difference.⁵⁷ However, the representation of sex difference in education opportunities implies a prediction concerning the employability and division of labour between sexes in the future. The implementation

⁵⁴ For instance, Choi 2004; Post 2004; Tang et al 1995.

⁵⁵ For instance, Chan and Cheung 1998; Equal Opportunities Commission 2000; Family Planning Association of Hong Kong 2000a; Family Planning Association of Hong Kong 2000b; Fan et al 1995; Lam 1997; Ho and Tsang 2002.

⁵⁶ The research project is funded by The Women's Foundation and published in 2006.

⁵⁷ Choi 2003: 41-66.

of sex education in schools is intended to ensure the employability of girls in the future through the regulation of their bodies in their teenage years.

The girl as an attractive harbinger of social change in the context of contemporary Hong Kong is endowed with what McRobbie calls 'capacity'.⁵⁸ The call for the protection of girls was based on the assumption that they lacked sufficient strength or power to avoid being harmed by external influences, such as family dysfunction or the exploitation by the capitalist system during the industrialisation of Hong Kong. As a result, girls were allowed to enter into the education sector following to the introduction of free, universal and compulsory primary school education in 1971, so as to protect them from exploitation in the capitalist system. Although the introduction of the policy itself was not tailor-made for teenage girls in particular, they were beneficiaries of the policy and it was a significant moment when they entered into, and at the same time became regulated by, the public education system. Before the introduction of the policy, the opportunities for teenage girls to obtain an education were rare – parents would be more likely to send male offspring to schools if resources were available. The government therefore sought to offer equal education opportunities to girls in order that they might come to compete with boys in the capitalist marketplace.

If we accept that a complex relation between preparation for the labour market and the production of subjectivity is central to the process of schooling, then we must also recognise that a significant part of achieving high performance must be carried out at

⁵⁸ McRobbie argues that 'education and employment play this role of re-designating young women as subjects of capacity who will refrain from challenging existing gender hierarchies as they come forward to occupy a position of visibility' (McRobbie 2009: 72).

the emotional level⁵⁹ – it becomes the personal responsibility of girls if they fail in their studies. If society expects girls to perform well in their academic studies, it also expects them not to be too sexual while they are still at school. Sexuality in this regard is viewed as a distraction from proper study and a successful school career. However, what makes the situation with girls controversial and problematic is that the education system does not expect them to perform better than boys at school. The intelligence of girls, in terms of their better performance in the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system, was problematised in terms of representing a threat to the continuing education of boys.

This logic echoed the findings of Orenstein (1994) that cultural stereotypes of dependence and independence remain very much alive in the lives of girls and boys. The idea that girls are not supposed to do better academically than boys implies that the capitalist market values the future contribution of boys higher than that of girls. Governed by the assumption that girls should be dependent on men, such as the father at present and a husband in the future, female sexuality is seen as passive, and female satisfaction as deriving from giving pleasure to a man, or from receiving his protection. This also explains why the sexuality of girls (as manifest in teen pregnancy or ‘compensated dating’, an act which the police liken to prostitution) has struck an intensive nerve in society and contributed to a moral panic. Teen pregnancy is problematised not only because it reduces the quality or availability of manpower for the capitalist market. More importantly, the issues surrounding the sexuality of girls seem to be related to more than their ignorance of contraception, which undermines their independence and autonomy.

⁵⁹ Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001: 180.

The educational opportunities granted to girls failed to train them as moral subjects, even though a moral framework was strongly emphasised in the social and personal curriculum, particularly in sex education, in the Hong Kong secondary school system. There seemed to be a gap between the perception of what should have been taught in curriculum and how the girls should behave in their daily lives. The filmic representation of girls as involved in rebellious phase or a struggle for emancipation from their parents – overemphasised in the made-for-teens romance films, for instance – makes for another challenge to female sexuality or the discourse on femininity, in terms of the social expectations concerning the behaviour of teenage girls. Girls come to be described as a problem when the scripts for femininity, cast in terms of a set of images of ‘the good girl’ projected in society, are increasingly used to judge and define the actual behaviour of girls.

In an attempt to understand the complexity of the girl as a concept in contemporary Hong Kong, Anita Harris (2004) argues that having an awareness of the changing socio-cultural context, which implies a constructive or discursive determination of the girl, does not mean that it is impossible to make general statements about young women as a group. In her book *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2004), Harris tries to recognise and make central the diversity evident in the socio-economic and cultural contexts of young women’s lives. For her, treating girls as a group is not to fall into the logic of the biological development theory of the girl. As she argues, to treat young women as a group does not imply in any sense that they share enduring, inherent characteristics. Since the girl is a constructive concept, from

a research perspective, it will continuously be used both symbolically and materially as a category to try to make sense of girls' lives.⁶⁰

Within this framework, Driscoll argues that the girl as a concept should not be perceived as having transcultural and transhistorical significance. Rather it needs to be understood as a crucial marker of cultural specificity and social change. In other words, the history of the emergence of feminine adolescence should intersect with the emergence of new forms of cultural production in a particular place. Anita Harris argues that the category of 'girl' itself "has been shaped by norms about race, class and ability that have prioritised the white, middle class and non-disabled, and pathologised and/or criminalised the majority outside this category of privilege."⁶¹ On the other hand, with regard to this 'Anglocentric' construction of the girl, Griffin argues that "the focus on representations of girlhood in First World contexts allows one to look at the process of ethnocentrism as it is played out in the constitution of girlhood in the developing world."⁶²

Following this logic, the 'Anglocentric' model of the girl in contemporary cultures is inevitably constituted in contrast to 'traditional' girlhood, or the condition of girls and young women living in 'traditional' cultures, such as Third World contexts. At first glance, this logic not only poses something of a challenge to the unsettled boundary between girls and young women in 'western' and 'non-western' societies. More importantly, it undermines the fact that 'non-western' women – for example young Asian women in western countries such as Britain – may locate themselves not so

⁶⁰ Harris 2004a: 192.

⁶¹ Harris 2004b: xx.

⁶² Griffin 2004: 31.

much between two cultures as within and in relation to two (or more) cultures simultaneously, and do not necessarily see White and non-White cultures as so distinct and starkly opposed.⁶³

An awareness of the 'Anglocentric' logic of the concept of the girl in western culture, as well as of the implications of this logic for the concept of the girl in non-western context, is extraordinarily useful and important for the study of the concept of the girl in contemporary Hong Kong. This is because it reminds us that this logic may not be completely suitable for understanding the situation of girls in Hong Kong. The coexistence of tradition and modernisation in Hong Kong reveal it to be not only a global city in terms of its economy, but also a Chinese society that still retains many non-western features and values, however deep the influence of western cultures may have been during colonial rule. In the case of Hong Kong then, account must be taken of the influences of both western and Han-Chinese cultures when the meaning of girlhood becomes the focus for examination, even if it is not always easy to distinguish these cultures in the contemporary city.

⁶³ Griffin 2004: 32.

Chapter One

How the Girl is Constructed in the 'Personal and Social Education' Curriculum

By 1971, for the first time in the history of Hong Kong, locally born citizens outnumbered immigrants. This demographic shift would, in time, transform the way Hong Kong people saw themselves. In very general terms, it would give rise to a new, modern, self-determining identity of the 'Hongkongese'. This new identity was fostered by the colonial administration as way of containing the political turbulence witnessed in the previous decade, which had seen major riots erupting in 1966 and 1967.⁶⁴ As the colonial government confronted this shift in the composition of the island's population, it decided as a matter of policy that the new generation of Hong Kong citizens would be less disruptive, in spite of the presence of the colonial government, if they could think of the island as their home. To build this sense of civic belonging, a series of educational reforms were launched.⁶⁵ As stated in the Introduction to *Secondary Education in Hong Kong Over the Next Decade* (1974),

⁶⁴ The 1966-1967 riots were initiated by young men brought up in Hong Kong who were unhappy with the Star Ferry Company's decision to raise its fares by five cents. The government chose to believe that the problem was created by a lack of communication between the people and the Star Ferry Company (Young 1994: 139). However, there was another side to the story which was heard by the Enquiry Commission set up to investigate the cause of the riots. Rather than a direct response to the rise in fares, the riots were seen to be symptomatic of a degree of purposelessness and frustration among the Colony's young people, who were in most cases deprived of opportunities either to go elsewhere or to find satisfying vocations in Hong Kong itself (Hong Kong 1967: 169-175). The education reforms were in part a response to this latter analysis and their purpose was to instil in Hong Kong's youth a sense of direction and the feeling that there was a future for them in the colony.

⁶⁵ To further enhance the sense of civic belonging the Secretariat for Chinese Affairs was renamed the Secretariat for Home Affairs. Moreover, the term 'colony' was gradually replaced by 'territory' in public discourse. Wong 1998: 27-28.

The White Paper on Education Policy, published in April 1965, stated that the final aim of any educational policy must be to provide every child with the best education which he or she is capable of absorbing, at a cost which the parents and the community can afford. The interim goal, of providing free primary education for all who desire it, was accepted by the Government, although it was recognized that it could not be achieved immediately. Free primary education was subsequently introduced in all Government and aided primary schools [with the exception of the Junior English Schools and a minority of subsidized schools] in 1971, by which time sufficient places had become available for every child in the primary age group.⁶⁶

One of the most significant of these reforms introduced by the colonial government was the Education Ordinance 1971, which came into operation on 30 September (CAP 279 of Hong Kong Legislation). This Ordinance empowered the Director of Education to order parents to send their children to school where it appeared to him that parents were withholding them from school without a reasonable excuse.⁶⁷ Although the Ordinance was not particularly aimed at girls, it nevertheless had the effect of dramatically increasing their levels of attendance at school.⁶⁸ Legislation was also introduced to make it illegal for anyone to work without completing junior

⁶⁶ The Government Printer 1974: 1.

⁶⁷ Sweeting 2004: 261.

⁶⁸ According to the statistics from the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, the number of girls and boys enrolled in primary schools was 48,245 and 72,311 respectively in 1950. These figures increased sharply to 312,144 and 349,813 respectively in 1967. The number of students enrolled in secondary schools rose from 9,243 in 1950 to 92,665 in 1967 for girls and 17,255 in 1950 to 127,137 in 1967 for boys (Census and Statistics Department 1969: 184). Girls did not outnumber boys in this stage of education development. However, the school attendance rate of females aged 12-16 is higher than that of males of the same age group between 1991 and 2006 (Census and Statistics Department 2008: 55).

secondary school education. This had a similarly strong effect on the school attendance level of girls.⁶⁹

The government document *Secondary Education in Hong Kong Over the Next Decade*, published in 1974, made explicit the civic role education was expected to play in the future. It specified that the purpose of education is to equip students with the appropriate technical and social skills required for their entry into the labour market: “This programme [the expansion of secondary school places] should go far to provide for the children of Hong Kong the standards of education which they need if they are to be properly equipped to fend for themselves and serve their fellows in the competitive world of the next decade.”⁷⁰ Students would be groomed as future citizens through the implementation of a ‘whole-person development’ approach in schools, which was designed to ensure that all schools provided a balanced curriculum to address individual students’ learning needs. Before the implementation of this ‘whole-person development’ approach, schools were able to construct their own curricula, with the result that there were significant variations between schools both in terms of what was offered and how it was taught. The new Ordinance standardised education across Hong Kong and put in place pedagogic priorities that continue to set the agenda for teaching and learning for compulsory schooling today.

While the new Ordinance provided girls with a much greater chance of receiving education than had hitherto been the case, it also had the effect of incorporating them into the regulatory framework of the school system. During the rule of the former British colonial government, Hong Kong’s education system had followed “a

⁶⁹ Sweeting 2004: 307-308.

⁷⁰ The Government Printer 1974: 2.

depoliticised, decontextualised and abstract academic curriculum.”⁷¹ One of the characteristics of this ‘abstract academic curriculum’ was to make no reference to national sentiments in schools and to shift the emphasis on to academic achievement in public examinations. As a result, the education system of Hong Kong is “characterised by certification, selection and credentialism. Access to well paid employment is provided by education qualification. A hidden curriculum is that education is for earning but not for learning.”⁷² In order to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market, students are constantly exhorted to work hard under the pressure of the examination-driven education system.⁷³ As the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide*, prepared by the Curriculum Development Council in 2002, illustrates, parents value school education as a means of access to success in society for their children.⁷⁴ One feasible means of measuring the achievement of students, not surprisingly, is examination. The existence of examinations, in turn, as Sweeting (1993) argues, has provided the government with practical control over the curricula of secondary education. The intense workload of home assignments and school tests, as well as the various school and public examinations, has thus manipulated the life patterns of students ensuring a high degree of concentration on their studies, but denying them time to explore other aspects of life appropriate to their age. This also implies that curriculum design, and in particular the content that is to be taught in schools, will have a tremendous impact on the life of students.

⁷¹ Luk 2001: 72.

⁷² Luk 2001: 74.

⁷³ Hong Kong has a long history of examinations set and administered within the territory. Cambridge Local Examinations were introduced in 1886 and replaced by Oxford Examinations in 1889. However, in 1937 a genuinely local Hong Kong school certificate examination was established by the government’s Education Department. In 1977, the government established a separate Hong Kong Examination Authority (HKEA) to take over this role. In this respect, Hong Kong may be seen to have developed some autonomy well ahead of the general pattern (Bray 1997: 14-15).

⁷⁴ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 7.

The response to the greater educational opportunities for girls was ambivalent because, while education was presented as a means for them to make their own way in society and not have to follow the frequently misogynistic prescriptions of family and tradition, this opportunity came at the price of having those very same misogynistic prescriptions of family and tradition reinforced by the school system.⁷⁵ Particularly important in this regard was the curriculum stream known as ‘Personal and Social Education’, which has two interlocking dimensions, both bearing on the development of individual identity: sex education and civic education.⁷⁶ However, in their design of the curriculum, schools are usually more concerned with the interests and opinions of parents than with the real needs of students. For instance, although the framework of sex education aims at serving the needs of students, they are not invited to participate in the construction of the framework at the policy-making level. Instead, parents and many other external influences play a significant role in the development of the Hong Kong schools and curriculum. In the *Teachers’ Manual of Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* it is clearly stated that responsible teachers should have a thorough understanding of the individual school’s background, including the ethical viewpoints of its sponsoring body and of the majority of parents. As a result, although the activity plan of the sex education program in schools is said to be tailor-made for the needs of the students, priority has been given to the approval of teachers and parents for materials that discussed the moral aspects concerning sexuality in the sex education classes.⁷⁷ While teachers will explain the purposes and the subject areas of

⁷⁵ Research clearly shows the positive effects of education attainment to girls in terms of employment and indeed ‘life’ opportunities. Among other things, it increases the time that is socially acceptable for girls to remain unmarried, which in turn postpones childbirth, enabling women to give more attention to their careers than was previously possible (see for example, Choi 2003 and 2004).

⁷⁶ This term first appeared officially in the junior secondary school curriculum when the Education Department merged the cross-curricular themes, such as sex education and civic education, into the same category in 1996.

⁷⁷ The Curriculum Development Council 1997c: 9.

the course to students, they are, nonetheless, more sensitive to the need to avoid any controversies that may arise with the parents, such as over the use of pictures of sexual intercourse, the teaching of contraceptive methods, whether abortion is appropriate, or homosexuality.⁷⁸

Besides the parents, many external influences and ideas from the national community and from abroad also play a role in the development of the Hong Kong schools and curriculum. As stated in the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide: Building on Strengths (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)*, it is necessary for Hong Kong to take these various factors into account when developing the most appropriate school curriculum for its own context.⁷⁹ Under this framework, the scope of the curriculum may not necessarily be tailor-made according to the needs of students. Indeed the students tend to be passively assigned to roles and responsibilities as members in the family, the society, and the nation.⁸⁰ Sex education and civic education were minimal in the core curriculum before the reunification with mainland China. This is because sex education was narrowed down to involve only some very basic concepts of human biology, such as the biological development of individuals, while civic education was practically non-existent during the British colonial rule. The new, post-reunification curriculum explicitly positions sex education as a complement to civic education with the clear message that the regulation of one's own body is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of society, and is therefore the duty of every citizen:

Sex is part of our inborn selves, and because of it, we are given the ability to reproduce. Sexual love between a man and a woman

⁷⁸ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 5.

⁷⁹ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 3.

⁸⁰ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 4.

provides channels to express our inner selves. A healthy sex relationship provides a basis for an integral and secured family. In turn, because it is the basic unit in a societal environment, a healthy and integral family underpins a stable, prosperous society.⁸¹

Sex, in the eyes of the school authorities, is an inherited characteristic that we cannot change. Biological sex therefore will determine the characteristics of individuals in the process of growing up:

Because of our different sexes, we have different reproductive systems. In the process of growing up, our reproductive system would exercise its functions and make us grow into individuals with adult male or female characteristics. This primary sexual characteristic is inborn, and is different from other bodily characteristics that are subject to the influence of environmental factors.⁸²

It is because of the biological characteristics of sex that schools regard students as being in transition between childhood and adulthood. While the overall purpose of education did not change when Hong Kong was reunified with the mainland (it retained its dual aim of training young people for the workforce and grooming them as citizens), its ideological premise changed quite significantly.

⁸¹ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: ii.

⁸² The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 34.

This ideological shift was made manifest by the increased importance of civic education and in particular the introduction of the topic 'The Development of Modern China' into personal and social education. The abstract sense of Chineseness as apolitical ethnicity, which prevailed under the colonial administration, was replaced by a concrete sense of Chineseness as historical and political destiny. Personal identity formation, which had previously only been thought about in terms of personal responsibility – responsibility to self, with regard to personal sexual behaviour, and responsibility to society, through the performance of good citizenship – was thus transformed into an overtly political issue. Whereas the colonial government strove to achieve a sense of belonging to a place that citizens could not claim as their own (because it belonged to a foreign colonial power), now the government wanted its people to see themselves as part of a larger tradition that was greater and more enduring than anything so transient as government. Ethnicity and Chineseness were pushed into the foreground in a way that the colonial government would never have dared, for fear of creating a groundswell of ethnic-national opposition. Even more interestingly, though, from the perspective of this dissertation, this shift in emphasis resulted in an education protocol which emphasised national identity over personal identity.

The emphasis on national identity over personal identity places girls as women-to-be in a very difficult situation. The increased attachment to the mainland implies a greater opportunity for students to work across the border in the future. To fully execute the responsibility assigned to national identity, girls should be prepared to work on the mainland if the chance to do so is forthcoming. This is also seen as the responsibility of a committed citizen because education is about training students for

the workforce. However, the possibility of girls working across the border brings with it a potential threat to the stability of the family and so of society. This is because in order for girls to take on their expected personal identity, as well as their national identity, the education sector requires them to maintain the stability of society through the support of a properly functioning family. The ideal form of the family projected in the teaching materials is a united family. According to the *Learning Resource Pack on Integrated Humanities (S4-5): Core Module I – Personal Development*, family is narrowly defined as (1) two adults of the opposite sex living together; (2) a division of labour between the two persons; (3) the two persons having a sexual relationship, sharing material resources, and involved in each other's social lives.⁸³ (The implication of the expected gender role of girls as women-to-be will be discussed further in a later section.)

This shift in the political orientation of personal and social education was and is by no means unproblematic. The difficulty it presents can be seen in the semantic problem it precipitated: official discourse ceased to refer to 'Hong Kong Chinese' (or the 'Hongkongese of China') and instead spoke of 'Chinese in Hong Kong'. This is problematic because it opens up a wide social gap between the post-handover generation and their parents. While the native born regard Hong Kong as their home, their parents, who in a large number of cases came to Hong Kong as refugees from mainland China in the 1970s, often view the island as a transient place of refuge or at best a second home. So while they live in Hong Kong, they continue to see themselves as for all intents and purposes Chinese. The generation born in Hong Kong since 1970s, in contrast, tend to view themselves as Hongkongese not

⁸³ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 140.

Chinese.⁸⁴ In other words, the assumption made in the post-reunification education reforms – namely that Hong Kong people know they are ‘Chinese’ – is politically motivated, not sociologically well-founded. The Chinese heritage promoted by the former colonial government, such as the abstract sense of Chinese traditions and the superficial knowledge of the development of contemporary China, is of uncertain value and significance to the later generation because they tend to recognise themselves as ‘Hongkongese’, even though they do not ignore the fact that their ethnicity is ‘Chinese’ in a larger context. For this reason, I will argue that any account of the everyday life of girls in Hong Kong must factor in this conflict between the pre-existing Hong Kong identity and the imposed Chinese identity.

This conflict between a pre-existing identity and a new one imposed in the education sector becomes apparent in nostalgic views of parenthood, represented in the mis-communication between father and daughter in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. The problematic of father-daughter relationship shown in the films reveals the clash of tradition and modernity in contemporary Hong Kong society, but it also illustrates the cinema’s attempt to question the traditional Chinese way of nurturing or communicating with children or teenagers in contemporary society. The solution to the mis-communication between father and daughter is not easy, as the problem itself is very complicated (as is shown in the films): Even though a father may be willing to take on a caring role in the family, his daughter may not know how to appreciate the effort the father has made. This is not to say that if the father is inattentive to the feelings or needs of the daughter, it will definitely lead to her departure (see Chapter Three). However, in the education discourse, the problem is

⁸⁴ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 123.

presented as being a result of the non-existence of civic education during British colonial rule, the kind of education which would serve as social cement for national identity in order to foster unity and commonality among the residents in Hong Kong.⁸⁵

Following the handover, the civic education guidelines were revised to incorporate the Chinese 'nationalist' dimension excluded by the British. By 'national' here I mean simply awareness of Chinese sovereignty and its relation to ethnic identity. But as the following extract from an Education Department document makes clear, this nationalist dimension was conceived as an identity formation to be embraced at a personal level.⁸⁶

In the case of Hong Kong, the civic learner needs to know the cultural and political identity of Hong Kong as a Chinese community, as a British colony for a certain period, and as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region [the HKSAR] of China from July 1997. At a time of political transition, we need our citizens to actively adopt a new national identity and to be participative and contributive to bring about smooth transitions, to sustain prosperity and stability and to further improve the Hong Kong society.⁸⁷

In this chapter, I will examine the effect on girls of this 'identity war' between the kind of Chinese identity the new civic education guidelines require and the pre-existing Hong Kong identity embodied in the values of the pre-1970s generation. As

⁸⁵ Tse 2004: 57.

⁸⁶ Luk 2001: 70.

⁸⁷ Education Department/Curriculum Development Council 1996: 21.

mentioned previously, external influences had complicated the process of developing the Hong Kong educational system and curriculum, as well as the sense of Hong Kong Chinese among students. Although most policies implemented by the government were short-lived, this does not mean that they had no impact on changes in values.⁸⁸ One prominent example is the debate on the remarkable ability of Hong Kong Chinese in general “to move in and out of the Chinese and Western traditions according to pragmatic or cost-benefit considerations rather than whether they think the ideas are true or not”.⁸⁹ The hidden question of this debate is whether there are any constant conflicts in reconciling the western values implicated in the education system and the traditional values held by parents and employers.

The values of the pre-1970s generation are revealed in the made-for-teens romance films in terms of the aspirations of parents that their offspring contribute to society (which is a key conflict between parents and teenagers). In a highly capitalised and competitive labour market, society in general believes that high educational qualification is one of the essential means, even if it is not a guaranteed one, for securing a job in Hong Kong. Such an expectation prevails in society, forcing parents to provide their offspring with a rich education. In fact, the pressure for teenagers to study hard has only intensified because they now have to compete with the labour force of the whole of mainland China. The introduction of the development of modern China as a topic in personal and social education has become a ‘scene’ where this ‘identity war’ takes place; I will therefore focus my analysis on its curriculum. In particular, I will look at the teaching and learning resource packs that were distributed to schools following reunification in 1997. They are a useful focus point because they

⁸⁸ Cheng 1997: 182.

⁸⁹ Luk 2001: 69.

make readily apparent the political nature of the revisions made to the civic education guidelines.⁹⁰ As Luk argues, “the subsequent revision of the civic and sex education guidelines are all reactions to specific problems or needs of the educational sense at the time.”⁹¹ How do girls negotiate this demand that personal identity align itself with national identity?

The learning resource packs for civic education include:

- (1) Learning Resource Pack on Integrated Humanities (S4-5): Core Module I – Personal Development (2004) (hereafter Module I – Personal Development);
 - (2) Learning Resource Pack on Integrated Humanities (S4-5): Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society (2004) (hereafter Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society)
- (1) & (2) are part of the Integrated Humanities education (name of civic education for S4-5 school curriculum)⁹²
- (3) Basic Education Curriculum Guide: Building on Strengths (Primary 1 – Secondary 3) (2002) (hereafter Basic Education Curriculum Guide) – which is part of the junior secondary curriculum.

⁹⁰ For example, the purpose of the establishment of the curriculum development committee is to examine syllabuses with a view to making them more relevant to the needs of pupils in a changing and more demanding society (Hong Kong Government 1974: 9).

⁹¹ Luk 1997: 6.

⁹² Integrated Humanities education consists of four areas, namely Personal Development, Characteristics of Hong Kong Society, Modern China, and Globalisation. All areas in the Integrated Humanities program serve (more or less directly) the purpose of cultivating Chinese national consciousness.

The pre-existing Hong Kong identity was predominant in personal and social education before the handover

Before the reunification with the mainland, the 'whole-person development' approach was supported by the emphasis on traditional Chinese values in personal and social education. According to the *Education Commission Report No. 7* (1997), "[t]raditional Chinese values towards a whole-person education of a child include moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic developments. ... Our society needs committed citizens and needs to develop fully the potential of its students."⁹³ The teaching of Chinese values in personal and social education was used by the former colonial government to serve two ends: On the one hand, it was a means for the government to build friendly relationships with Chinese communities who had to accept the rule of a non-Chinese political entity in Hong Kong; on the other hand, it was also a means for the government to distance its citizens from any nationalist attachment to mainland China. In short, the Hong Kong people were encouraged to preserve their Chinese values by way of consolation and symbolic compensation for their loss of sovereignty. They were encouraged to be Chinese in every way, except in the political or nationalist sense.

The introduction of traditional Chinese culture into the personal and social education syllabus of the secondary school education curriculum during colonial rule led to a blurring of the identity of students. Through the teaching of Chinese traditions, which felt remote to students, it constructed an abstract sense of Chineseness among them, which was identified neither with the recent development of mainland China, nor with

⁹³ Education Commission 1997: 8.

the Hong Kong landscape, in terms of justifying or legitimating the rule of the colonial government. The Chinese traditions were used in the abstract as a means to contain the political consciousness of the Hong Kong people. In other words, the teaching of traditional Chinese culture in the school curriculum was not intended as an enlightened policy, but as a measure designed to distance the local Chinese from contemporary Chinese reality, i.e., from the PRC. By the time the *Education Commission Report No. 7* was published in 1997, to prepare for the ensuing political transition, the relationship between Hong Kong citizens and the PRC was absent in the whole-person development discourse. The shared values of Hong Kong society were built upon the self-awareness of its people in distinguishing themselves from those living in mainland China. The lack of coverage of the recent history of mainland China in the secondary school curriculum, for example, showed the intention of the colonial government to keep its citizens detached from the mainland.

During the period between 1945 and 1984, the curriculum content was depoliticised and decontextualised. The usage of the word depoliticisation here is not intended to suggest that the education system is in no way related to politics. On the contrary, schooling in Hong Kong was clearly a political tool for the former colonial government, who used it to regulate and form its subjects – the students. By depoliticisation, then, I mean the way the content of the curriculum was carefully constructed (one might even say sanitised) in order to alienate students from the political issues of Hong Kong and their relation to developments in mainland China during colonial rule. Civic education, which serves as a “social cement of national identity to foster unity and commonalities” among the residents in Hong Kong, was

basically non-existent under the colonial British rule.⁹⁴ In an anonymous secondary school teacher's words, quoted in *Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society*, "in school ... under the British ... we didn't study anything about national identity, citizenship, civics. That's why Hong Kong people are rootless."⁹⁵

It is likely that students in pre-unification Hong Kong identified themselves as ethnic Chinese, but did not relate in terms of their personal identity to contemporary China. And even their sense of Chineseness in an ethnic sense was subject to the qualification that they were Hong Kong Chinese, which was always regarded as being subtly different from the Chinese of mainland China. The teaching guidelines for personal, social and humanities education all tended to support this position. But it was not only through education that this separate identity of the Hong Kong Chinese was fostered. The intention of the former colonial government to keep its citizens away from any form of political identification or alignment with mainland China would not have worked effectively and efficiently without the colonial government's efforts to transform Hong Kong into a (hyper-)modern 'world' city. The curriculum was and still is used in a conscious effort to create a new 'imagined community' (in Benedict Anderson's sense) of Hong Kong. As Tam argues:

Generations of Hong Kong Chinese pupils grew up, learning from the Chinese culture subjects to identify themselves as Chinese but relating Chineseness to neither contemporary China nor the local Hong Kong landscape. It was a Chinese identity in the abstract. ... in this way, Hong Kong's schoolchildren grew up with a conception of Hong Kong

⁹⁴ Tse 2004: 57.

⁹⁵ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 30.

society that was very much at the periphery of its dual centres of China and Britain, at a time when that society itself was emerging as the capital of the Chinese diaspora and a major centre of the Chinese-speaking world.⁹⁶

Hong Kong is an imagined political community in more ways than one. It is imagined in Anderson's sense, but it is also imagined in precisely the sense Anderson did not intend, namely as the product of an imaginary identification with a cultural identity not of its own making. One could stretch this point further by adding that the very idea of Chinese identity (as with most if not all cultural identities) is a fictional or 'invented' construct, in Hobsbawm's sense of being an invented tradition. As stated in *Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society* (2004), secondary schools generally acknowledge a gradual rise in Hong Kong identity and local consciousness among Hong Kong people since the late 1960s.⁹⁷ After the 1966 and 1967 riots, both the colonial government and the Hong Kong community gave full play to 'local consciousness' and the idea that 'Hong Kong was our home', advocating the Hong Kong spirit of 'helping one another' and encouraging people to co-operate to build a prosperous society. One famous old Hong Kong film which addresses this spirit of 'helping one another' is *The House of 72 Tenants* (produced by the Shaw Brothers and directed by Chu Yuan, 1973), a landmark film in Hong Kong cinema history because it changed the previously negative perception of Cantonese language films. The idea behind the film's episodic plot, it seems, is to give the viewer a slice of life, a portrait, however exaggerated, of what life is like for lower-class Hongkongese as they struggle to make it in an unforgiving work-a-day world. However bad the

⁹⁶ Tam 2002: 119.

⁹⁷ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 112-113.

situation, the film spins things in a positive light by showing how a tight-knit community can survive by putting their faith in each other even in the worst of times.

The creation and dissemination of a specific and strategically elaborated set of values by the HKSAR government through its civic education curriculum, together with the ready-made image of a new or modern way of life promoted by city developers, were instrumental in the formation of a changed sense of identity and local consciousness among Hong Kong people. At that time, the development of Hong Kong, in social, cultural and economic terms, had been isolated from and to a large degree unaffected by the social and cultural changes on mainland China. The efforts of the colonial government and the local community to promote local consciousness filled the vacuum created by this isolation and helped the generation born in the 1970s to gradually develop a sense of belonging to the territory. Obviously, too, this identity came at the price of continued isolation from the social and cultural changes occurring on mainland China.⁹⁸

As stated clearly in *Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society*, scholars generally agreed that there had been a gradual rise in the Hong Kong people's sense of identity and local consciousness after the 1967 riots. Under the leadership of Governor Sir MacLehose, the British-Hong Kong government began responding to local social needs. A series of social policies was introduced, including a ten-year housing scheme, free and universal education, and the development of new towns. The government also offered cultural programs, such as the Hong Kong Festival and Film Festival, to enrich community life. These efforts promoted local consciousness,

⁹⁸ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 112-113.

and, together with rapid economic development, helped the generation born in the 1970s to gradually develop a sense of belonging to the territory. There was a feeling that 'Hong Kong is our home' and that we were 'Hongkongese'.

Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society also quotes the views of Sze Man-hung and Lau Siu-kai, famous scholars in Hong Kong, to support the distinctiveness of Hong Kong Chinese. Sze Man-hung argues that the experience of colonial rule has produced certain characteristics in the lifestyle and values of the Hong Kong people. A unique set of values and way of life, formed under the rule of the British-Hong Kong government, was instrumental in the formation of a sense of identity and local consciousness. In addition, in his article, "'Hongkongese' and 'Chinese': The Identity of Hong Kong Chinese 1985-1995", Lau Siu-kai makes reference to several factors which affected the formation of identity among Hong Kong people before the territory's return to Chinese rule. To name but a few:

1. Since 1949 there had been a barrier between Hong Kong and the mainland, preventing the free movement of people. Hong Kong Chinese became isolated and unaffected by the social and cultural changes on the mainland.
2. Development in Hong Kong differed from that in the mainland: Hong Kong practiced a capitalist system while the mainland implemented a socialist system. The gap in economic development between the two societies was critical in the formation of identity of Hong Kong people.
3. Hong Kong rapidly transformed itself into an active member of the international economy and underwent a considerable degree of westernisation.

The mainland, on the other hand, was an introverted and closed society before the era of opening and reform.

4. The emphasis on the rule of law and human rights by the British-Hong Kong government was very different from the experience on the mainland.
5. The dialect of the Hong Kong Chinese is Cantonese, which became the foundation for the eventual formation of a distinctive popular culture. This special local culture is highly a significant factor in moulding the identity of Hong Kong Chinese.⁹⁹

Anderson argues that in the formation of an imagined political community individuals are assumed to have some shared characteristics that tie them together as a community, even though they may never know, meet or hear from each other personally.¹⁰⁰ 'Imagined', however, is not synonymous with 'unreal' because any collectivity always has an imaginary, fictive or invented element. In the case of the development of local consciousness in Hong Kong during British rule, the colonial government tried to generate shared values and experiences among its citizens in two ways: through its education programs and through the concrete and very tangible transformation of the city. The effects of both these strategies are visible in the formation of the contemporary Hong Kong girl, who is cosmopolitan in her outlook and practices as a direct result of both her built environment and her education. The effects of the environment, though important, are beyond the scope of this thesis, so I will concentrate here on how changes in the post-reunification curriculum contributed to the formation of a new people (as Deleuze and Guattari put it) suited to the new

⁹⁹ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 112-113.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson 1989: 15.

space the city developers have constructed at such a frantic pace over the past three decades.

Prioritising a national identity over a felt Hong Kong identity in the new civic education guidelines

As we have noted, there was a change of political orientation within the education sector following reunification in 1997. This change was not part of the agreed arrangement between the former colonial government and the PRC for shaping the future of post-handover Hong Kong. Importantly, the change was initiated by the HKSAR government not the PRC. Its goal in making these changes, which I will discuss in more detail in what follows, is to maintain the stability and diversity incorporated in the Basic Law, which specified that Hong Kong's economic and social systems would not change for 50 years after 1997.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the price that the education system had to pay for this was the politicisation of the curriculum: the HKSAR wanted to preserve the Hong Kong identity that had begun to take shape under the British and at the same time bring the region into closer alignment with the parent state of the PRC. It had to strike a balance between promoting Hongkongese as a kind of separate Chinese identity and remaining consistent with the pan-Chinese identity insisted on by the PRC.

The HKSAR government's strategy was to continue and extend the curriculum introduced by the British. Prior to 1982 – that is, before the negotiations between British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping on the

¹⁰¹ Morris, Kan and Morris 2000: 244.

Hong Kong question in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing – the only examination subjects in secondary forms 4 and 5 that encouraged political consciousness or strengthened awareness of Chinese culture were economic and public affairs (EPA), economics, history, social studies, Chinese language and Chinese history. After 1984, when The Joint Declaration of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on the Question of Hong Kong (the Sino-British Joint Declaration) was signed, the topics focusing on political and cultural matters within existing subjects both increased markedly and set in motion a trend that would continue up until the end of British rule in Hong Kong.¹⁰² Perhaps surprisingly, following the handover in 1997 the HKSAR government did not immediately embark on a radical course of decolonisation in an attempt to excise vestiges of the colonial past. Rather, it tried to deal constructively with the dual identity inherited from the British (i.e., ethnic Chinese and Hongkongese) and resist the temptation to appease mainland China by eradicating British influence. To maintain the stability of society, under the new sovereign arrangement, the HKSAR government had to accommodate a range of divergent and contradictory ideological trajectories – capitalism and socialism, individualism and nationalism, as well as western and Chinese cultures – in its new curriculum.¹⁰³ The main consequence of the change was, nevertheless, to prioritise national identity over personal identity as students are now told explicitly to align themselves with mainland China.

Instead of training students to be apolitical but ‘productive’ subjects, which was the strategy of the former colonial government, the HKSAR government required

¹⁰² Bary 1992: 333.

¹⁰³ Luk 2001: 75.

students to 'identify' with a ('mythical') motherland in the form of mainland China. This change altered the orientation of the education policy from the colonial period quite substantially. It not only provided a sense of what was desirable for the formation of a new consciousness allied to the goals and aspirations of the PRC, but, more importantly, by promoting of a sense of Chineseness in general and assuming the growth of the attachment feeling to the mainland after reunification, it effectively buried the personal identity of students in Hong Kong beneath their new national identity. Obviously, this identity did not disappear in reality, but in terms of the curriculum it became a 'lost object', and its absence was keenly felt by students.

Local consciousness had begun to develop at the end of the 1960s and blossomed in the next two decades. According to the description in the teaching materials, local consciousness referred to the collective experiences of a particular group of people who had forged a common lifestyle.¹⁰⁴ Such local consciousness was particularly strong among the post-war generation, who had born and grown up in Hong Kong and forged a distinctive lifestyle through the intentionally infra-structural development of the formal colonial government. The growth of local consciousness also gave rise to a different perspective on the development of Hong Kong. The contrast was particularly sharp among different generations. For instance, *Core Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society* quoted from the journal of Anna Wu, the former chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong, as an example to illustrate the contrast:

¹⁰⁴ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 118.

My parents view Hong Kong from a different perspective. They came here as refugees from Shanghai in 1949 ... They always view Hong Kong as a transient place ... They still have a house in their home village on the mainland. They will never relinquish the house, although they have never returned to the village. At the back of their minds, the mainland – that particular village – is their ultimate home ... I am the second generation of Hong Kong, was born and brought up here. I consider Hong Kong as my home ... the fruit of prosperity created by the diligence of people who came to Hong Kong in former years is now harvested and enjoyed by our generation ... There is a wide gap in the relationship with the mainland between our generation and our parents. I've never considered myself a Chinese and like me, many people regard themselves as Hongkongese ... We have a sense of belonging to Hong Kong and we think we are Hongkongese. We also hope to participate in the government. We grew up here and are Hong Kong's second generation.¹⁰⁵

This contrast also appears in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema when the mis-communication between father and daughter arises. One example would be the film *Papa Loves You*, in which a father blames the environment of Hong Kong for turning his daughter into a 'bad girl'. He also blames himself for not having taken his daughter back to his hometown, Nanjing, which he supposes would have provided a better nurturing environment (see Chapter Three). In a similar vein, the contrasting

¹⁰⁵ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 123.

views of mainland China among parents and the current generation has provoked a debate on the difference between ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ and ‘Chinese in Hong Kong’ in relation to the construction of the identity of Hong Kong people, particularly among the post-war generation in the post-colonial period. The contrast, nonetheless, was derived from a feeling for and knowledge of China. The Learning Resource Pack introduced in 2004 is built on the assumption that Hong Kong people will feel embarrassed by the inherited distinction between ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ and ‘Chinese in Hong Kong’. The Learning Resource Pack quotes a speech by a spokesman for the Hong Kong Federation of Students to illustrate this point:

[A]lmost all of our members are Hong Kong-born Chinese, and to be Hong Kong-born Chinese and not ‘real’ Chinese was an embarrassment to them. [As a result,] reunification is the only way to solve the problem.¹⁰⁶

Elsewhere in the Resource Pack, one finds the following reinforcement of this point:

In respect of identity, some believe that we should not make too much of the distinction between ‘Hongkongese’ and ‘Chinese’. Lau Tin-chi, an experienced media professional, said that Hong Kong is part of China. Geographically and historically, calling oneself ‘Hongkongese’ simply means ‘a person living in a place called Hong Kong’, just like those who live in Panyu calling themselves ‘Panyu people’. Chow Ba-chun believes that being

¹⁰⁶ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 155.

‘Hongkongese in China’ means being ‘Chinese in Hong Kong’; it is a new identity. He believes that only when all the Chinese among Hong Kong’s permanent residents have established their new identity can Hong Kong society reach the maximum degree of consensus, and only then can our economic and political transition be successful.¹⁰⁷

The change of the name from ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ (or ‘Hongkongese of China’) to ‘Chinese in Hong Kong’ is not merely a matter of bureaucratic nomenclature; it has significant cultural and political implications for the people of Hong Kong in the post-handover period. The concept of being ‘Chinese’ is transformed from representing an abstract attachment to ethnic Chinese cultural values to expressing a concrete sense of attachment to mainland China. As explicitly stated in the Learning Resource Pack:

The return of Hong Kong to China since 1997 calls for a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the motherland. There is a need to strengthen the sense of national identity among young people. It is imperative to enhance their interests in and concern for the development of today’s China through involving them in different learning experiences and life-wide learning. Instead of imposing national sentiments on them, we must provide more opportunities for young people to develop their sense of belonging to China.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 142.

¹⁰⁸ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 3.

The decision of the HKSAR government to introduce the topic of modern China into the syllabus reflected a clear change in the government's priorities away from an ideology of personal identity towards a prioritisation of national identity. The Learning Resource Pack does not accommodate the two conflicting forces – Hongkongese and mainland Chinese – that are operative in Hong Kong today. Nor does it provide clear answers for students on how to deal with the conflicts between their personal identity as Hongkongese and national identity as Chinese. What is explicit is that the sense of and feeling for mainland China has become the foremost influential element in the 'identity wars' in schools in the post-handover period. Due to the increased emphasis on the prosperous economic development of mainland China in the Learning Resource Pack, the temptation to embrace a mainland national identity framework has increased:

Apart from economic factors, political and cultural factors also influence the identity of Hong Kong people. British colonial rule for over a century is a result of history and not a decision of Hong Kong people. Seeing themselves as 'Hongkongese' and not 'Chinese' was inevitable. After the reunification, Hong Kong becomes a special administrative region and implements 'one country, two systems' and 'Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong'. The primary identity of Hong Kong people is Chinese and the secondary identity is as residents of the HKSAR.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 166.

The contrast between the secondary school curriculum during colonial rule and its revision after reunification makes explicit the fact that the education sector acts as mediator for the state apparatus of the HKSAR government. The measures that have been adopted by the HKSAR government to promote political attachment to mainland China – such as the emphasis on patriotism in all spheres of the education program, exchange activities between students from Hong Kong and mainland China, and, even more overtly, flag hoisting and the singing of the national anthem in schools – are closely related to the development of students' national identity, in which their personal identity as Hongkongese is buried. That is to say, both the privileging of the individual at the expense of the collective that was central to the colonial ruler's strategy of damping-down nationalist sentiments, and the Hong Kong separatism that went hand in hand with that strategy, are written out of the new curriculum and replaced by a collectivist, pan-Chinese vision more consistent with the ideological position of the PRC.

This shift in attention away from the personal identity developed under colonial rule to the new emphasis on national identity following reunification brings out the conflicts between Chinese traditions and western ideologies that had already been taking shape during the colonial period. In terms of the development of personal identity, these conflicts can be illustrated with reference to the implementation of the medium of instruction policy in 1998. *Core module I – Personal Development* had clearly cited the debate on the medium of instruction, and had highlighted the value of language – English and Chinese – for Hong Kong society in the postcolonial era. In fact, this example is also helpful in the discussion of self-image and the influence of labelling within Hong Kong society:

After implementing the policy of using Chinese as the medium of instruction in 1998, the Education Department contracted the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct research to track the academic results of 100 secondary schools. The research indicates that students in secondary schools with Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI) performed much better than students at secondary schools with English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in subjects such as science and social studies. However, if given a chance to choose, many students of CMI would still prefer EMI schools. It is also found that students of CMI schools generally have poorer self-images than those of EMI schools. Contrarily, students of EMI schools perform much better and are proud of their performance in English Language.¹¹⁰

In capitalist societies like Hong Kong, the market concept of value, in which the emphasis is on exchange value rather than use value, leads to a similar concept of value with regard to other people and the self. A person experiencing themselves as a commodity sees their own value in terms of exchange value. So, in the modern era, people began to evaluate themselves in material or monetary terms. They saw themselves in terms of income, wealth and property rather than in terms of integrity, morality, or relations with family and friends. Individuals came to believe that since this was the way they were being evaluated by others, they should evaluate others in the same way too. Gradually, people lost sight of values other than those self-interest

¹¹⁰ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 16.

and the acquisition of material goods. As a result, they began to evaluate interpersonal relationships in the same manner, be they between friends or spouses.¹¹¹ In Hong Kong, the official teaching materials therefore remind teachers to guide students into thinking about how they view themselves. The emphasis on exchange rather than use value is one of the sources of conflict between father and daughter in contemporary Hong Kong. (For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter Three.)

For the development of national identity, the hidden assumption of patriotism, as the teaching materials explain, lies in an affirmation of the superiority of the state and the nation over personal freedom and human rights, which were imported during the colonial rule. Nonetheless, at least in appearance, freedom and human rights are still upheld strongly in Hong Kong society, and the values implicit in these concepts have been used in mobilising local social movements. However, the education sector adopts an approach aimed at reducing the conflict between Chinese traditions and western ideologies, an approach similar to that adopted prior to reunification in that the education sector did not recognise the problem of the generational difference between students and previous generations. The Learning Resource Pack contends that the contrasting representations of identity and the different embeddedness of values across the generations are the result of differential feelings for and knowledge of mainland China.

One side of the argument proposed in the Resource Pack suggests that the younger generation has only a superficial knowledge of their country, while the older generation, who experienced political and social upheaval in mainland China several

¹¹¹ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 34-35.

decades ago, holds a negative view. The latter view may not be seen in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. By contrast, the relationship between China, Hong Kong and the coloniser is one of the major themes in transnational films tackling the cultural representation of Hong Kong (see Chapter Three). Another side of the Resource Pack's argument suggests that the proportion of Hong Kong people who identify themselves as 'Chinese' in respect of both nationality and ethnicity will gradually rise. Their feelings towards the state, towards nationalism and patriotism, will grow stronger. As stated in *Module II – Characteristics of Hong Kong Society*: "with successful economic development in mainland China and a growing knowledge of mainland China among the generation born in the 1970s and afterwards in Hong Kong, the feeling of being 'Chinese in Hong Kong' will be enhanced among students."¹¹² This explains why knowledge of mainland China has been incorporated in the secondary school curriculum, such as the development of the *Learning Resource Pack on Integrated Humanities (S4-5)* in 2004.

However, both sides of the argument concerning the formation of national identity among the current young generation in Hong Kong tend to assume that their perception of mainland China is only a political construct and can therefore be altered to suit the political needs of the present situation. The education sector believes that the incorporation of Chinese elements in the syllabus will inevitably lead students to 're-imagine' their relationship with the mainland.¹¹³ The hidden assumption of the passage in the Learning Resource Pack is that Hong Kong people do have patriotic feelings and unthinkingly assign a Chinese identity to their own selves. As a result, if Hong Kong people are not patriotic enough this is blamed on their superficial

¹¹² The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 142.

¹¹³ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 165-166.

knowledge of mainland China, particularly on the part of those who were born in Hong Kong:

Many Hong Kong people are very patriotic and never doubt their Chinese identity. However, those who were born in Hong Kong have only a superficial sense of China. Of course, they know they are Chinese, but their sense of the country is very weak. Under a century of colonial rule, several generations were never given any education in this regard. In addition, their parents had experience of the Cultural Revolution. They moved to Hong Kong and pass on their psychological scar to the new generation. It will take time for the younger generation to experience nationalistic and patriotic feelings.¹¹⁴

The fact that students self-identified as Hongkongese during colonial rule, and that the program now is to substitute that personal identity for a national Chinese identity – in part by introducing the topic of the development of modern China into the personal and social education curriculum – supports my argument that the assumption made in the post-reunification education reforms that Hong Kong people know they are ‘Chinese’ is politically motivated, not sociologically well-founded. In addition, supplanting a felt Hong Kong identity with a national identity again may have the effect of hiding the generational difference between students and earlier generations in the wider context. The difference between students and previous generations remains nonetheless the cause of familial conflict, in particular the

¹¹⁴ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004b: 150.

conflict between fathers and daughters. The post-reunification reforms indeed had a very clear objective of facilitating a smooth transition, for which ensuring the prosperity and stability of contemporary Hong Kong was paramount.

In the name of stability: the ‘whole-person development’ approach is linked to national identity after the reunification with mainland China

In the name of maintaining the stability of society, the education sector positions sex education as a complement to civic education. As a consequence, in sex education programs students are advised to regulate their sexuality in biological and social terms so as to fulfil the role of a committed and responsible citizen at present and in the future. Based on the assumption of the progressive development of sexuality of teenagers, the very purpose of education under the capitalist labour market is to prepare students for the sex/gender division of labour in domestic and workplace sites. Theoretically, sex education is designed to conform to the supposed stages of sexual development of students. Take the coverage of sexual habits and behaviour in the sex education guidelines as an example: Infants are expected to conform to social norms in the pre-education stage; children are expected to deal with sexual impulses and desires in the primary and early secondary education stages; and students are expected to be responsible about sex in the upper secondary education level.¹¹⁵ At the outset, the assumption of the progressive development of sexuality of students within different age groups, and the ideology of the female role in society in particular, is consistent with the purpose of education under the capitalist system in contemporary Hong Kong society: i.e., the maintenance of family stability and harmony for the

¹¹⁵ *Ming Pao Daily*, 4 October 1997.

purpose of ensuring the sustainable development of the economy and society (this, at least, is one prominent agenda advocated by the HKSAR government and by other non-government organisations). As a result, any erotic connotation, which has nothing to do with the reproduction of individuals, is excluded from the curriculum in sex education, and in education in general.

The maintenance of family stability so as to sustain economic development and social harmony is also a concern of the education sector, where the goal is to develop students' potential contribution to society in the future. As mentioned in the statement of aims, the purpose of education, in general, is to train students to become responsible adults and committed citizens. While the 'whole-personal development' approach has been adopted in personal, social and humanities education, as well as in sex education, the guidelines for the behaviour of teenagers, not surprisingly, have been narrowed down to the issue of preparing teenagers for adulthood. The teaching materials, therefore, briefly list eleven developmental tasks for teenagers in *Core Module I – Personal Development*:

1. Adolescents undergo rapid and profound physical changes, and so they must adjust to a new physical sense of self.
2. Adolescents experience a sudden increase in their ability to think and understand abstractions. They must adjust to new intellectual abilities.
3. Adolescents in high school are expected to prepare themselves for adult roles and responsibilities and for further education. Thus, they must adjust to increased cognitive demands at school.

4. It is also necessary for teenagers to enhance their language ability in order to express themselves to take in more complicated concepts and handle difficult tasks.
5. Adolescents are beginning to recognise their uniqueness and separation from parents. They have to develop a sense of personal identity.
6. As part of the process of establishing a personal identity, they must also begin to establish adult vocational goals; they have to ask themselves what they want to do when they grow up.
7. Adolescents must establish emotional and psychological independence from their parents.
8. It is necessary for adolescents to develop a stable and productive relationship with their peers. To be able to make friends and have an accepting peer group is a major factor in determining how well the adolescent will grow in other areas of social and psychological development.
9. They need to learn to manage their sexual drives and sex roles.
10. They need to build up a value system for themselves.
11. They need to develop impulse control and behavioural maturity.¹¹⁶

Simply put, students are taught to prepare themselves for adult roles and responsibilities. When the values taught in the curriculum compete with those propounded by other agencies, schools are to take responsibility for helping students acquire a discriminating attitude with respect to such influences.¹¹⁷ The development of personal and social education therefore also serves the purpose of rescuing students

¹¹⁶ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 27-28.

¹¹⁷ Education and Manpower Branch 1993: 20.

from bad influences outside the school, such as personal and social problems that may hinder the development of their capacity. This aim is made clear in the *School Education in Hong Kong: a statement of aims*, in which the school is said to act as gatekeeper protecting students from the harmful effects of the external environments. The guidelines for personal and social education, on the other hand, claim that it is precisely these external environments, such as the changing values in the social system (e.g. violence in the media, early sex, suicide, career opportunities),¹¹⁸ that affect the capacities and self-esteem of students.

In order to help students resist such influences, personal and social education, supported by the framework of ‘whole-person development’, focuses on the development of positive values and attitudes to life. The emphasis on such values and attitudes reintroduces the importance of teaching Chinese traditions to students, in particular in sex education, for the sake of maintaining the morality of students. These values and attitudes include responsibility, commitment, respect for others, and perseverance¹¹⁹ in the short-term phase (2001-2006) of the curriculum reform, according to the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide: Building on Strengths (Primary 1 – Secondary 3)* published in 2002. The education sector believes that these values

¹¹⁸ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 2.

¹¹⁹ Perseverance, which is considered strength of the Chinese people, is an important quality that students are encouraged to embrace to help them face life’s challenges and cope with adversities. An associated value is resilience, the ability to recover from difficulties and downturns (The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 2).

and attitudes can be fostered through Moral and Civil Education¹²⁰ (one of the Four Key Tasks), such as sex education, and also across Key Learning Areas in appropriate themes,¹²¹ including Personal, Social and Humanities Education (PSHE). These priority values and attitudes are proposed with due consideration given to students' personal and social development and to changes in both the local and global context, with a view to preparing students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.¹²²

Chinese traditions were emphasised before the reunification with mainland China, when they were used to develop a felt Hong Kong identity among students. However, after reunification, the meaning of Chinese values was reinterpreted due to the change of political environment and reorientation of the education sector. The meaning of Chinese traditions within the whole logic of personal and social education is linked to the attachment to the mainland in the context of Chinese nationality and morality after the reunification. The close correlation between the well-being of students and the development of their national identity is indeed stated clearly in the revised civic

¹²⁰ For instance, some themes of Moral and Civil Education for Secondary 1-3 are: Personal development and healthy living (such as entering puberty, using pocket money, selecting reading materials, managing emotions, facing the media, worshipping idols, surfing the Internet, dressing up, managing personal finance, handling sexual harassment, hurting oneself/committing suicide, facing serious illness/death); family life (such as showing love and concern for family members, getting along with grandparents/other elderly members of the family, negotiating for self-independence from parents, doing housework, moving house, helping younger siblings with homework, handling family disputes, family members being unemployed, parents getting divorced, facing illness/death of family members; family violence); school life (such as adapting to new life in secondary school, handling problems in studies, making choices among different school activities, participating in election of class association, taking lunch in school, attending tutorial lessons, holding responsible posts, handling crises happening to schoolmates); social life (such as making new friends, respecting different opinions and cultures, going out with friends of the opposite sex, showing concern and helping classmates/friends, handling undesirable peer pressures, handling problems in peer relationships, camping, being in love/lovelorn, participating in religious activities, attending funerals); life in the community (such as respecting the elderly, helping neighbours/the needy in society, participating in voluntary work, participating in community activities, facing temptations and undesirable societal influences, participating in the National flag hoisting ceremony, understanding and showing concern for major events in the mainland, discussing current issues affecting the local national/international community, expressing opinions on issues of social injustice and environmental issues, visiting the mainland/overseas, supporting improvement projects on education and livelihood in the mainland) (The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 31-34).

¹²¹ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 11.

¹²² The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 2.

education guidelines published in 1996. The idea is reinforced in the *Basic Education Curriculum Guide*:

In order to meet the challenge of the 21st century, as well as to respond to the change of sovereignty, students are also expected to show concern for their well-being; understand their national identity and be committed to contributing to the nation and society.¹²³

As mentioned earlier, the definition of sex should not be limited to the biological facts of life and human reproduction but should include inculcated human values. These values, not surprisingly, are constructed by the cultural and social environments in which the teenagers live. The socio-cultural aspect of sex education, in this sense, should be viewed as dealing with the sum of the cultural and social influences that affect our thoughts and actions concerning sex. As *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* illustrates, these influences come from our cultural environment, the social institutions in which we are brought up, the interpersonal networks in which we find the mass media, the legislation, and ourselves currently in force. Simply put, such influences can be both historical (e.g. traditional community beliefs) and contemporary (e.g. popular role models).¹²⁴ Since heterosexual norms are still dominant in contemporary Hong Kong society, the visibility of sex/gender in the teaching materials remains highly regulated within an ideology of familial heterosexuality. Teenage girls are constructed as biological receptacles and

¹²³ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 4.

¹²⁴ Education Department/The Curriculum Development Council 1997a: 11.

heterosexual marriage is authorised over other practices of sexuality.¹²⁵ The sex education curriculum not only denies teenage girls the space in which to understand boys in non-reproductive and non-heterosexual ways, it also fails to help teenage girls to develop positive self-images, conceptions of their roles in society and attitudes towards their bodies and their sexualities.¹²⁶ The nature of sex education in Hong Kong is, according to Man Lun Ng (1998), Professor of Psychiatry at Hong Kong University,

heavily skewed toward moral indoctrination, emotion, self-images, interpersonal and family relationships. Sexual anatomy and physiology, sexual behavior and psychology and sexual medicine were limited to the very basic and there was nothing on controversial issues like sexual variation, prostitution and pornography.¹²⁷

Within this logic, students in schools are taught to perform roles and responsibilities as members of the family, the society and the nation.¹²⁸ The logic of prioritising the state and nation over personal freedom and individual human rights, as well as national identity over personal identity, is manifested through the emphasis on the function of the family. Students are expected to learn how to gain personal fulfilment, well-being and adjustment through a greater awareness of two complementary factors: their growing sexuality and their need to develop interpersonal responsibility in

¹²⁵ Breakwell and Millward 1997: 29-41.

¹²⁶ See, for examples, Diorio and Munro 2000: 347-365; Harrison and Hillier 1999: 279-288; Harrison 2000: 5-19; *Ming Pao Daily*, 1 March 2000; Mosher 1979: 224-234; Thomson and Scott 1992; Tolman 2000: 70-79; Tolman 2002.

¹²⁷ Ng 1998: 32-35.

¹²⁸ The Curriculum Development Council 2002: 4.

school sex education.¹²⁹ Responsible behaviour, such as making responsible decisions concerning sex (which implies discouraging students from sexual experiences in their teenage years, or prior to marriage), is the main theme in maintaining the morality of students in the sex education guidelines on the secondary school curriculum. The promotion of sex education in Hong Kong through the framework of morality in turn supports the ultimate educational aim of maintaining the stability of a society.¹³⁰ As shown in the Learning Resource Pack, those in control of the education sector believe that one way to ensure the stability and prosperity of the state and the nation is by maintaining the proper functioning of family system. According to the *Core Module I – Personal Development*:

the family is a social setting in which children are born and nurtured. Though not all couples want to have children, the family is still there to guarantee the care needed for children to grow and develop. The family is thus the ground of support for the growth of the children.¹³¹

In the attempt to maintain the proper functioning of the family, the effort to avoid any erotic connotations in sex education in schools only reinforces the assumption that students, and particularly females, are asexual beings¹³² (similar to the discussion of

¹²⁹ Education Department/Curriculum Development Council 1997a: 4.

¹³⁰ Public sex education in Hong Kong started in the 1950s, predominantly with the work by the government-sponsored Family Planning Association of Hong Kong. In 1971, the Education Department issued a memorandum to all schools, advising them to include sex education topics in some formal subjects while a concise list of suggestions on what should be taught to secondary schools was also made. It took the Education Department fifteen years to issue another advisory notice: the Guidelines on Sex Education in Secondary Schools was published in 1986 with more detailed recommendations on sex education topics, resources and references. The guidelines were revised again in 1997.

¹³¹ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 140.

¹³² Kaeser, DiSalvo and Moglia 2000: 277-285.

the abstinence approach in sex education in English societies such as the United Kingdom).¹³³ This logic is in conflict with the revised guidelines on sex education published in 1997, which explicitly acknowledge the fact that students are also sexual subjects. The whole logic of schooling, in terms of the context in which sex education and personal and social education are implemented, assumes that education can influence the behaviour of students. As a result, the attempt is made to contain and control knowledge of sex and the consequences of engaging in sexual behaviour by indoctrinating students with a specific vision of marriage and family life.¹³⁴

Sexuality vs. ethnicity: the conflict between the individual desire of girls and national goals in personal and social education

Emphasis on the reductionist relationship between gender and sexuality has an overwhelming impact on the self-understanding of teenage girls. In the education sector at present, gender identity and biological sex are not treated as mutually reinforcing and it is the latter which overwhelms the former. For example, the bodily changes at puberty have long been seen as an essential component in sex education programs because pubertal development is defined as purposefully reproductive. The designation of heterosexual desire and reproductivity as the natural outcome of puberty thus provide an apparently natural foundation for the heterosexist conception of sexuality and a gendered understanding of the body.¹³⁵ Students are recognised as sexual subjects on paper, but acknowledgement of their actual sexuality is deferred through the emphasis on marriage and reproduction in the discourse of sex/gender.

¹³³ See, for examples, Berne and Huberman 2000: 189-199; Kirby 2002: 51-57; Lewis and Knijn 2003: 113-132.

¹³⁴ Billy, Brewster and Grady 1994: 387-404; Donovan 1998: 188-193; *Ming Pao Daily*, 17 January 1997.

¹³⁵ Diorio and Munro 2000: 347-365.

This enables developmental sex education to justify avoiding any discussion of eroticism and sexual activity on the grounds that such information is irrelevant to students who have not yet developed to the appropriate stage.¹³⁶ In other words, the schooling process shapes the gender identities of teenage girls to ensure that they conform to the heterosexual norm for the purpose of marriage (and reproduction) in the future. Within this framework, sex education, like the education system more generally, serves the purpose of regulating students in accordance with the stability of society as a whole. According to Ian Buchanan, 'sex is content to gender's form':

The power of gender as an expressed resides in the fact that it does not matter if one chooses not to identify oneself as either 'man' or 'woman', those attributes will still impact on your existence because they are the form for which your body is the content. The apparent facticity of body ... [is] always already caught in the pincers of cultural determinations, so that one can never say 'sex' is ungendered; and yet, 'sex' (as a set of bodily facts) clearly does function as a kind of bedrock or presupposition for gender that gives it a relative autonomy.¹³⁷

However, this logic does not resolve the question of how sex and gender might be considered separately, given the condition – according to the sex education discourse in Hong Kong schools – that the biological explanation of sex is to be treated as privileged in accounting for the gender identity of students. The concepts of sexuality and identity have become interchangeable with each other for the construction of the

¹³⁶ Baldwin and Bauer 1994: 162-171; Bearman and Bruckner 2001; Carter 2001: 213-249; Lupton and Tulloch 1996; McKay, Pietrusiak and Holowaty 1998: 139-145.

¹³⁷ Buchanan 2004: 8.

concept of the girl. On the one hand, teenage girls are subsumed under the concept of being students within a national framework. On the other hand, their sense of being students is itself overlooked given the overwhelming focus of the educational discourse on restricted goals to do with becoming an adult. In neither case is the concept of gender ever recognised as being central to the construction of the concept of the girl. On the contrary, within the education discourse as a whole, only the concept of sex is persuasive. The conditions under which gender and sex might be interplayed do not exist; becoming an adult tends to be the inescapable and sole path open to students in the secondary school context in Hong Kong, a path that necessarily restricts the parameters of becoming among students. Teenage girls in particular are only allowed to develop as women and wives according to the kind of heterosexual familial relationship authorised in the discourse of sex education, as well as in personal and social education.

In this section, the analysis is based mainly on the teaching materials contained in *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools* and *Implementing Sex Education Through the Junior Secondary Science Curriculum*, which are the major reference sources for teachers of sex education in secondary schools. As is stated clearly in *Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools*, the definition of sex education has evolved over the last thirty years: it is no longer restricted to a narrow treatment of the facts, attitudes and skills related to reproductive physiology, marriage and family, it also now includes an understanding of our own selves and of our relationships with others. In other words, sex education in school has gone beyond simply teaching the biological facts of life and human reproduction and now seeks to inculcate human values.¹³⁸ However, the

¹³⁸ Education Department/The Curriculum Development Council 1997a: 3.

whole framework of sex education, as well as the development of teenagers, has become bound up with a family-oriented approach. In consequence, although sex education is not supposed to moralise or indoctrinate, it must include introducing students to a set of values that are generally regarded as conducive to a healthy sex life, such as care, trust, honesty, equality, human dignity, integrity, respect, commitment and responsibility.¹³⁹ A well-balanced sex education program, therefore, ought to aim at helping students to (1) acquire accurate and comprehensive knowledge about sexuality and the consequences of sexual activity; (2) explore their own attitudes towards sex, marriage and the family, and establish better decision-making and communication skills, and (3) establish a consistent system of positive values and responsible behaviour.¹⁴⁰

Developed within a family-oriented framework, schools are supposed to adopt the approach of treating sex not as a curse or an evil but as one of life's natural and most fulfilling experiences. Schools, therefore, are encouraged to regard sex as an expression of love in human relationships and to foster the development of such an attitude in schools.¹⁴¹ According to the explanation given in *Implementing Sex Education Through the Junior Secondary Science Curriculum*, "in the process of growing up, our reproduction system will exercise its functions and make us grow into individuals with adult male or female characteristics."¹⁴² In this regard, the teaching material restricts the meaning of gender to sex in biological sense. It is

¹³⁹ Education Department/The Curriculum Development Council 1997a: 12.

¹⁴⁰ The objectives of sex education in the secondary school system curriculum are also stated clearly in *Implementing Sex Education Through the Junior Secondary Science Curriculum*. They include: (1) to equip the students with accurate sex knowledge; (2) to help the students cope with changes and anxieties during puberty; (3) to help the students establish positive attitudes and values towards sex; and (4) to help the students make informed choices through objective judgement on questions related to sex (The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: iii).

¹⁴¹ Education Department/The Curriculum Development Council 1997a: 7-8.

¹⁴² The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 34.

because of the biological characteristics of sex that students are situated in a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. *Core Module I – Personal Development* includes a definition of adolescence addressed to students. Adolescence is a stage in which a person transforms from being a child into becoming an adult: “The development of the body makes them more and more close to adults, and therefore they have a dual identity of being an adult and an adolescent.”¹⁴³ In this transitional period, the development of the body has a great influence on the gender identities of students because they are required to establish a sex-role identity.¹⁴⁴ Although the students are at an age where feelings of confusion over their identities are natural, the school restricts the construction of their subjectivities to the development of the body, according to biological sex. As a result, the education sector tends to restrict the development of students to a heterosexual relationship framework so as to support the stability of the family in the future.

The heterosexual relationship framework highlights ‘life-long commitment’ as the core value of the family. Together with the support of the morality framework, sex is presented as a natural and fulfilling life experience, the purpose of which, according to the sex education guidelines, is to emphasise the social responsibility of giving life (a civic rather than species duty) to the next generation. Whatever does not contribute to maintaining the stability of society in this way is therefore excluded in sex education. For example, the 1986 guidelines did not cover the themes of sexual pleasure or female desire, and the recommendations given in the 1997 version showed no improvement in this respect. As Ho and Tsang comment, the later set of guidelines show “a strong bias towards teaching teenagers socially accepted morality while

¹⁴³ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 57.

¹⁴⁴ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 57.

aspects of human sexuality were largely confined by discourses on emotional well being and human relationships.”¹⁴⁵ The logic of sex education in the context of the ‘whole-person development’ is apparently to help students establish a positive view of marriage: “we are born with our sexual roles and only the union of two sexes can give birth to a new life.”¹⁴⁶ Since students, in the eyes of adults, are not ready for marriage, they are expected to find out about sex through school sex education classes, instead of by dating or through intimate relationships.¹⁴⁷ The guidelines also suggest that students need to learn about love, which is presented as an adult activity rather than a feature of adolescence.

Controversies over the moral aspects of sexuality have also been referenced in other subjects on the school curriculum. For instance, in a discussion of the tension between role expectations and individual preferences, *Core Module I – Personal Development* uses the following examples. Firstly, it cites extra-marital sex and gay marriage as examples to illustrate the growing tendency for people to challenge the established social order. While the former challenges the role expectations of married couples, the latter challenges the role expectations of gender. It then cites a passage from the Professional Code Banning Teacher-Student Romance, for students to discuss in class:

The Code Committee working under the Council on Professional Conduct in Education will table the revised edition of the Professional Code for Hong Kong Educators by March or April. A new article will be added to the Code to advise teachers not to initiate romantic relationships with students. Since the Council has

¹⁴⁵ Ho and Tsang 2002: 65.

¹⁴⁶ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 116.

¹⁴⁷ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 2.

no legal authority, it can only “advise” teachers to follow the guidelines. Whether teachers who violate the code should be punished will be left with the Head of the Education Department.

The reason why the Council has to revise the present Code and add articles to restrict romantic relationships between teachers and students is that the problem has been getting serious in recent years. Teachers have committed suicide or been jailed because of their love affairs with students. The Council therefore decided to revise the code. According to the Council, complaints against teacher-student romantic ties show an overall upward tendency. It fluctuated from 12 cases in 1994 to a lower level of 10 in 1996, and then to a high of 25 in 1998, which was a record high.¹⁴⁸

It is obvious that the Code Committee is opposed to romantic relationships between teachers and students. The main reason they give for this, however, is the great pressure that teachers have to face if they engage in love affairs with students. The feelings and views of students themselves are not considered in this passage. The occurrence of such controversial issues in the teaching materials is rare, though not uncommon. This particular passage, however, stresses only the responsibility of teachers, who will be punished if they fail to meet their responsibilities. The role of students in the love affairs is not mentioned. Although the emphasis is on the punishment of teachers, I doubt the purpose of the passage is merely to remind teachers to behave themselves but not students. If this is the case, then what are the

¹⁴⁸ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 130.

implications for the role expectations of teachers and students in schools? What relationship between teachers and students is in fact assumed in the passage? And what are the implications for understanding the subjectivities of teenage girls in schools?

In terms of the subject formation of teenagers, the passage quoted above implies that any teenage sexual activity, such as dating or sexual fantasy, be constructed as a transition between childhood and adulthood.¹⁴⁹ The discourse of dating, for instance, is, on the one hand, constructed as a social activity through which teenagers may learn about themselves – how they behave and what sort of people they are in the presence of the opposite sex. In so doing, they may be less likely to encounter unnecessary doubts about the other sex, and may become more familiar with the circumstances in which their behaviour is or is not acceptable to others. In this respect, dating may be a casual form of social activity, like going to the movies with friends, going on a picnic or a party, etc., and imply no promise of marriage. Yet on the other hand, it may also hint at the choice of a future partner – and so imply possible marriage – in the adult world. This is because, as *Implementing Sex Education Through the Junior Secondary Science Curriculum* indicates, there is a presumption that dating may progress to courtship, and courtship to marriage.¹⁵⁰

As *Core Module I: Personal Development* states, “love is the building block of all personal relationships, particularly the family; family is the basic unit in a societal environment, a healthy and integral family underpins a stable, prosperous society.” A healthy sex relationship, therefore, provides “a basis for an integral and secured

¹⁴⁹ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 68.

¹⁵⁰ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 96.

family.”¹⁵¹ “The family is the building block of personality. If love rots, people rot, so does society.”¹⁵² Students are therefore expected to fall in love or have intimate relationships only when they reach adulthood, as only adults are presumed to know how to act responsibly in love and intimate relationships, and thus fulfil the role of ‘committed citizen’ for the maintenance of the stability of family, as well as the nation and society. However, elsewhere, *Core Module 1 – Personal Development* also refers to this inclination in a different way. It mentions that since love or intimate relationships are very risky, students should be taught the meaning of love before putting it to the test: “Building a loving relationship is like building anything else: if you do not train before you build, the house will collapse. And if there are people living in the building, it kills. Love can kill.”¹⁵³

Since the assumption that sex/gender relations between female and male are characterised by subordination and domination is still predominant in contemporary Hong Kong society, this logic not only restricts women to family roles and reproductive responsibilities, it also discourages teenage girls from engaging in romantic heterosexual relationships until they reach adulthood. To this end, the education discourse rules out the element of love and regards dating purely as a kind of social activity, serving the purpose of developing friendships among teenagers.

In other words, since love is confined to heterosexual relationships and is a learnt activity, teenage girls are still at the stage of learning, having not-yet-become sexual adult women. It is in this context that school-based sex education, representing as it does the confluence of sex, age and schooling, takes on particular significance as “a

¹⁵¹ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: ii.

¹⁵² The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 138.

¹⁵³ The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 138.

site of governmentality”:¹⁵⁴ the age relationships within schools are subject to relations of power in which adult judgments are decisive, whether through the authority of the individual teacher or through the school and its institutional supports. The meaning given to dating among students does not therefore lie in the quality of the social interaction it involves but in its relevance to the gender politics of society. For instance, as noted above, *Implementing Sex Education Through the Junior Secondary Science Curriculum* defines dating for two different purposes: in the context of romance, as an essential first step towards love and marriage; in the context of friendship, it simply refers to a casual form of social activity and carries no promise of marriage.¹⁵⁵ In sex education discourse, schools attempt to confine dating to the context of friendship for the purpose of enhancing students’ understanding of themselves and their relationships with the opposite sex.¹⁵⁶ The guidelines deliberately stress that

to like a friend of the opposite sex does not necessarily mean falling in love with him/her. Friends of the opposite sex sharing similar interests may become best friends but they need not develop into lovers.¹⁵⁷

If the meaning attached to the act of dating is dependent upon the cultural environment, and thus does not necessarily confine students to the familial and

¹⁵⁴ For the information of the implementation of sex education in other places, see, for examples, Haywood 1996: 121-130; Monk 2001: 271-291; Redman 1996: 175-182; Whatley 1992: 78-84.

¹⁵⁵ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 96.

¹⁵⁶ Five functions are attributed to dating as a social activity: (1) students get together for recreational activities; (2) as a sign of social acceptance for one’s social role; (3) eliminating barriers between the two sexes by providing a chance for interpersonal relationships between male and female; (4) developing a self-image through the reaction of the other sex; and (5) helping students to know what kind of qualities one looks for in a future partner (The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 96).

¹⁵⁷ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 101.

heterosexual framework, is there then a possibility that students might escape from gender oppression in the political sense? I raise this question because love, which is the alternative to biology, is sometimes held to be oppressive to women by some schools of radical feminism. For instance, Firestone (1970) suggests that 'love' is "the pivot of women's oppression."¹⁵⁸ She argues that the concept of love is a kind of ideological cover-up or disguise for the relations of power that prevail in heterosexual relationships. In this sense, the emotion of love, as experienced by women and men alike, serves to disguise the actual political meaning of sex by placing it in the context of a confusing and misleading set of expectations. However, students are discouraged from experiencing love / romance while they are at school. In this regard, they may be unlikely to enter into the kind of gender relations that are determinate for adults:

There is a tendency to define young women as victims, as passive targets of male power, but because most young women do not experience themselves in this way the effect is to alienate them from ideas which might otherwise offer support and understanding and to further isolate them in their struggle to achieve autonomy.¹⁵⁹

Students are expected to become adults according to the inherited characteristics of sex presumed in the sex education guidelines. However, biological determination of sex is not sufficient for the concept of the girl. As was discussed in the Introduction, Driscoll argues that the constructivist and discursive meaning of the girl should be taken into consideration. By a similar token, Pisters, Jackson, as well as White, Bondurant and Travis, also show a positive attitude to the constructivist meaning of

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Eisenstein 1987: 40.

¹⁵⁹ Thomson and Scott 1992: 41

adolescence. For Pisters,

the concept of the lived body is situated in a network of specific and historical discourses about the body: the ‘imaginary body’. It is not a question of either/or but of a simultaneous understanding of the biological and the imaginary and historical body: ... “masculine” and “feminine” correspond at the level of the imaginary body to “male” and “female” at the level of biology ... does not imply a fixed essence to “masculine” and “feminine” but rather a historical specificity’. It is important to see that historical specificity is not regarded as a determining factor (as in constructionist feminism, which also found inspiration in Foucault), but as a set of conditions for certain ideas about the body to be actualised.¹⁶⁰

White et al. argue that attention should be paid not to the causal role of biological phenomena but rather to the socially constructed meanings given to the subject formation of students in society.¹⁶¹ Jackson (1996), on the other hand, argues that the onset of adolescence is heralded by the physical changes of puberty. However, these physical changes are not in themselves determinate for the development of sexuality. Instead, it is the meaning that is attached to them. These physical changes serve, in effect, as signals to others, indicating that students may be defined as potentially sexual/gendered actors and will be expected to learn the scripts that govern adult sexual/gendered behaviour.

¹⁶⁰ Pisters 2003: 116.

¹⁶¹ White, Bondurant and Travis 2000: 26.

Pisters, Jackson, as well as White, Bondurant and Travis support the idea that it is overly simplistic just to correlate the biological explanation of sex to imaginary and historical explanations. From both the sex education guidelines and those for personal and social education, we can see that gender is acknowledged only so as to maintain the responsible roles of students in the family system. This does not mean that gender is undifferentiated from biological sex in relation to the subject formation of students in schools. The purpose of the education discourse is to maintain a stable family system and a prosperous society, in terms of the emphasis on the future reproductive function of individuals. Neither the sex education guidelines nor the personal and social education ones acknowledge that masculinity and femininity, in terms of behaviour, must be inserted into great dualism machines for the construction of the concept of the girl, even though the whole framework is bound to a heterosexual relationship. Although it is preoccupied with the teenage girl becoming a woman in the future, the education discourse does not exclude the possibility that students may be able to experience pure friendship within same sex or opposite sex relationships. As mentioned previously, the discourse views 'dating' as a social activity for making friends and increasing self-understanding. Here I would argue that since the teenage girl is not yet a woman, she might be the perfect figure to reveal possibilities of becoming that do not conform to a heterosexual framework.

But is this really the case? As discussed previously, even though students have not yet reached the stage of entering into marriage and reproduction, they have already been trained to do so once they enter into adulthood. This also applies to the discourse of girls' magazines such as *CosmoGIRL!* However, the difference is that no alternative

way of living is offered to students in the education discourse, in particular in the discourses of sex, personal and social education. What is offered in the prevailing education sector is a temporary transitional space for those who are not-yet adults. However, based on the progressive development of sexuality framework, the presumption that teenage girls will, on becoming adults, take up their appropriate gender roles according to the social norms of contemporary Hong Kong limits the developmental path for girls.

The sex education guidelines tend to define the range of legitimate sexual options and depict sexuality as an 'adult' activity with grave consequences for students who 'play with fire'.¹⁶² The biological explanation of sex disregards the personal desire and sexuality of girls. On the one hand, the biological explanation denies young women the space to understand their sexual development in non-reproductive and non-heterosexual ways.¹⁶³ On the other hand, the adulthood-childhood dichotomy fails to acknowledge the conflict of students as sexual beings. In other words, the inscription of the concept of the girl in the education discourse, in terms of the sex, personal and social education guidelines, is bound to the societal norm, i.e., the heterosexual familial context. This does not mean that sex determines gender for the concept of the girl in the education discourse. It means only that as a composition of socially and politically determined forces, the development of the guidelines in the secondary school curriculum has largely ignored the masculinity or femininity of students in the development of their gender identities. Students are taught to confine themselves to marriage and reproduction once they reach adulthood, and this is presented as the inescapable path for every student, regardless of gender or sex.

¹⁶² For similar discussion, see, for example, Sears 1992: 7-33.

¹⁶³ Diorio and Munro 2000: 347-365.

Instead of providing accurate information to students, sex education in schools and the relevant teaching materials tends to portray sex and family planning as a public concern with far-reaching consequences for the future of the nation and society. As a result, sex education has had to expand and generalise the discourse on sexuality and gender to include wider issues such as family values, while simultaneously disseminating absolute moral principles and values such as self-restraint, obedience, commitment, duty, responsibility and patriarchal gender roles.¹⁶⁴ It is in this context that students, as members of contemporary Hong Kong society in the post-handover period, can contribute to the stability of nation and society. Teenage students who are sexually active, on the other hand, may cause family breakdown, because their behaviour is regarded as unfounded according to the social norm. A healthy sex relationship, therefore, provides “a basis for an integral and secured family.” A poorly founded sexual relationship, in contrast, “would cause a family to disintegrate, and family disintegrations lead to social instability.”¹⁶⁵ Personal behaviour is thus explicitly linked to national goals, that is, the maintenance of societal stability and the proper functioning of a family system of contemporary Hong Kong society. As a result, it is repeated constantly that students should make responsible choices and act accordingly in relation to their sexual behaviour. According to the guidelines, “a responsible sex life is the cornerstone of enduring love and a happy family”: only sex in a marital relationship “is not taboo – it is natural and pleasurable, and should not give rise to any sense of sin or guilt.”¹⁶⁶ Limiting the purpose of sex to reproduction within the family context conforms to the assumption that the girl is not yet a sexual being; or at least, is not supposed to be.

¹⁶⁴ Cavaglion 2000: 286-293.

¹⁶⁵ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: ii.

¹⁶⁶ The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 113, 116 and 158.

The biological explanation of sex prevalent in schools depends upon a general resistance to non-traditional gender roles among students and to alternative patterns of domestic relationship.¹⁶⁷ The sex education guidelines suggest that both boys and girls have a responsibility in matters of sex, because both contribute to the reproduction process. However, the issue of virginity always rests with girls and as such the public discourse tends to assume that contraceptive measures are girls' responsibility. In public discussions of the consequences of sexual behaviour, the responsibility of teenage boys is emphasised far less, which creates the impression that the regulation of sexual behaviour among students mainly restricts the future development of girls rather than boys. It indicates that the education sector is not very sensitive to the gender difference between girls and boys and naturalises the gender role identities of girls and boys based on their biological sexes.

The fact that the girl is deemed not yet to be a sexual being does not mean that in practice she will not be sexually active. It just means that the education sector is trying to turn a blind eye to this issue, even though this is ridiculous given that the revised guidelines on sex education of 1997 already explicitly recognised the fact that many students are nowadays sexually active. As Kehily argues, the practice of sex education which focuses on the reproductive capacities of young women only reinforces the idea that the function of sex is solely to reproduce. This approach to sex education places being female within the asymmetric power relations inscribed in heterosexual practice, where female sexuality is often regarded as potentially

¹⁶⁷ Monk 2000: 187.

dangerous (for example in terms of the potential for producing an unwanted baby).¹⁶⁸

The correlation between sex education and the stability of society may pave the way for training students to become responsible and committed citizens, but the meaning of the latter is strictly correlated to the stage of becoming 'adult' and assumes that teenage girls to take up women's roles because of their 'women's bodies'.

The idea that reproduction is the sole purpose of sex clearly limits other possible ways of thinking about sex. In an influential article on female sexuality, Fine argues that the discourse which narrowly restricts sex education to the topic of sexual intercourse may undermine other discourses of sexuality, such as those on desire, that emphasise the existence and importance of other positive aspects of sexuality in sex education.¹⁶⁹ Such limited forms of sex education position girls in relation to dominant and resistant ideas about sex through the educational, legislative and familial reproduction of normative social values centred on sexual identities. This explains why the issue of homosexuality issue is either absent or treated as problematic in the sex education discourse in contemporary Hong Kong society.

The dichotomy of good versus bad women, which is still very influential in contemporary Hong Kong, is also closely correlated to the discourse of sexuality in the reproductive sense.¹⁷⁰ When women are produced as docile bodies and the sexual being of women is constantly associated with danger, vulnerability and inferiority, the same logic will also be applied to teenage girls. This is based on the assumption made by theories of development that girlhood is a predictable stage on the way to a state of

¹⁶⁸ Kehily 2005: 94.

¹⁶⁹ Fine 1988: 29-53.

¹⁷⁰ See for examples, Chan and Cheung 1998: 805-821; Ho and Tsang 2002: 61-73; Tang and Tang 2001: 181-196.

increased maturity and stable identity, that is, to becoming the 'right kind of woman' in the future. As a result, teenage girls are not only expected to safeguard their own bodies by the avoidance of any sexual activity, but are also expected to sacrifice pleasure for fear of being negatively evaluated. The good girl/bad girl dichotomy therefore perpetuates the ideal of innocence as a component of femininity. This component, nonetheless, still has to be performed by women and girls. In other words, the relationship between the conceptions of girlhood and womanhood is naturalised along the logic of biological development.

With their focus on biological sex, the sex education guidelines fail both to deal with the fact of sexual pleasure and to account for gender stereotypes as cultural constructions.¹⁷¹ They also fail to take account of the extent to which heterosexuality is an institution rather than a natural preference. As Weedon argues, the focus on biological sex limits the ability to interrogate the historically specific characteristics of heterosexuality and to enquire into its patriarchal nature.¹⁷² According to Millett, roles assigned on the basis of biological sex are a form of oppression, which restrict the scope for development among teenage girls:

patriarchy took place by means of the engineering of consent among women themselves to accept their secondary status by the process of sex-role stereotyping. From early childhood, women were trained to accept a system which divided society into male and female spheres,

¹⁷¹ Middleton 1987: 77.

¹⁷² Weedon 1999: 39-45.

with appropriate roles for each, and which allocated public power exclusively to the male sphere.¹⁷³

School, in short, becomes what Middleton calls 'a site for the reproduction of patriarchy',¹⁷⁴ operating within a gender/sexuality dynamics which ensures the production of wider social division and perpetuates ideological constructions of normalised femininity and masculinity.¹⁷⁵ According to the Association for the Advancement of Feminism and Equal Opportunities Commission, school imposes a gendered experience in relation to levels of education attainment and fields of study, interactions between students and teachers, participation in extra-curricular activities, and students' appearance.¹⁷⁶ In addition, the (former) chairperson of Equal Opportunities Commission, Ms. Anna Wu, also suggests that the gender stereotypes prevailing in society will affect the choices students make in their field of study and eventual career.¹⁷⁷ In other words, not only do gender stereotypes prevail in society, but schools also reinforce and are affected by these stereotypical gender norms.

Within the heterosexual relationship framework, the girl can only play the role of daughter. As discussed in the Introduction, Driscoll argues that the role of daughter seems to be an inevitable feature of theorising girlhood.¹⁷⁸ The interpretation of the core value of life-long commitment in the family has been highlighted in the relevant teaching materials, in which both Chinese traditions and western values are mentioned. In terms of the western meaning of family, it is consistent with the form mentioned in

¹⁷³ Eisenstein 1987: 36.

¹⁷⁴ Middleton 1987: 85.

¹⁷⁵ Pruitt, McNamara and Colwell 2000: 413-416; Thomson 1997: 257-271; Wright and Cullen 2001: 328-333.

¹⁷⁶ Association for the Advancement of Feminism 1993: 35-57; Equal Opportunities Commission 2000.

¹⁷⁷ *Apple Daily*, 16 April 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Driscoll 2002: 107.

the Marriage Ordinance in Hong Kong. Within the Chinese traditions, in which ideas from the famous Confucian scholar Mencius are referenced, the role of daughter is not emphasised so much. Mencius is mentioned in a passage from the Learning Resource Pack which states that each individual has to fulfil their duties in accordance with the five interpersonal relationships basic to society: love between father and son; rightful duty between ruler and subject; distinction between husband and wife; proper order between the old and the young; and good faith between friends.¹⁷⁹ The central theme supporting these five interpersonal relationships is harmony. The only female role that appears in the five is that of the wife. In fact, the female will gain power in a household only when they fully become ‘mother’ by giving birth to a son rather than a daughter. The lack of attention given to the role of daughter in the Chinese traditions also means that the status of teenage girls is not explicitly discussed in the relevant teaching materials. The girl as a concept is therefore unavoidably correlated to the concept of becoming a woman, which is treated only as a different stage of being to that of girlhood. Similarly to the education sector, made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema also emphasise the importance of family for the construction of the personal identity of teenagers. However, the cinema has adopted a micro-perspective in revealing the construction of the gender identity of teenage girls via an identification with the role of father (see Chapter Three).

Simply put, the explicit orientation of personal and social education towards the family restricts its vision to preparing students for adulthood. Students are expected to become adults in line with the inherited characteristics of sex assumed in the sex education guidelines. This approach effectively ignores the transitional stage that the

¹⁷⁹ Mencius 5.4, quoted in The Education and Manpower Bureau 2004a: 200.

students are situated in and limits the possibilities inherent in being teenaged to a process of becoming-adult. For instance, *Core Module I – Personal Development* insists that students in high school “are expected to prepare themselves for adult roles and responsibilities and for further education.” Their teenage years are thus treated as something they have to get over. Their present situation as students is overlooked in the education discourse and the status of teenage girls is doubly neglected.

Conclusion

The concept of the girl in Hong Kong society stands at a crossroads due to the shifting concepts of ethnicity / Chineseness in the post-handover period. The sex education guidelines claim that students can explore what they want to know about sex through their classes without needing to find out by dating or becoming involved in intimate relationships.¹⁸⁰ However, within this family-oriented framework the concept of the girl is deprived of the space necessary for its full development. The way in which students are educated to become adult is orientated towards the preservation of the heterosexual family system, in which the concept of gender is confined to the concept of sex. This takes place within a framework of nationality that attempts to restore feelings of attachment to mainland China but which fails to provide any reflective space in which students might develop differently from the social norms of contemporary Hong Kong society. What is liberating, perhaps, is the extent to which the discourse on friendship tries to bury the potentially "oppressive" element of love between two parties in the school environment. However, this aspect is not dominant in across the education discourse as a whole. As a result, teenage girls in schools are

¹⁸⁰ The Curriculum Development of Institute Education Department 2002: 2.

in general limited to the process of becoming adult and lose their own age-specific identities.

The guidelines under discussion further assume that sexual difference is the foundation for differences of character or personality, rooted in bodily structure and sex chromosomes in cells. In this respect, a person's gender and sexual characteristics are taken to be inherited characteristics that would not be affected by environmental factors.¹⁸¹ Gender, in the teaching materials, is not correlated to, for example, physical activity, body shape, character or personal interest.¹⁸² This view is, however, contradicted in the Chinese-language version of the magazine *CosmoGIRL!*, which, with its suggestion that its readers might become the 'brave new girls' of the new century, implies that an individual's personality can be altered.¹⁸³ This also suggests the possibility of a different discursive understanding of identity and sexuality, and of how masculinity and femininity may be read as clusters of specific affects resulting from a multiplicity of conditions relevant to the construction of the concept of the girl in contemporary Hong Kong. The influential criticism of Michelle Fine concerning the 'missing discourse of (female) desire' – namely that sex education materials address the topic of adolescent boys' sexual desires, but fail to recognise girls' and young women's sexual feelings – is not applicable to the sex education discourse in Hong Kong, if only because that discourse fails to address the sexual feelings of either boys or girls. However, the experiences of teenage girls, often focused on the importance of same-sex friendships, are not completely absent in the sex/romance discourse. They form, in fact, one of the major themes in teenage lifestyle magazines such as *CosmoGIRL!*.

¹⁸¹ The Curriculum Development of Institute Education Department 2002: 31.

¹⁸² The Curriculum Development Institute of Education Department 2002: 33.

¹⁸³ This is the slogan of *CosmoGIRL!* from issue 25 onwards.

Chapter Two

How the Girl is Constructed in *CosmoGIRL!* (Chinese-language version)

This chapter focuses on the construction of the concept of the girl in teenage lifestyle magazines in contemporary Hong Kong. In particular, it focuses on the Chinese-language version of *CosmoGIRL!* (hereafter, *CosmoGIRL!*). The perspective of this chapter is global inasmuch as one of my aims is to chart the way in which *CosmoGIRL!* simultaneously adapted to the local Hong Kong market and brought with it international trends. *CosmoGIRL!* is in this sense a highly useful optic in which to view the transformation of the concept of the girl – who she is and who she is becoming – over the past decade. When it was launched in 2001, the editorial board of *CosmoGIRL!* were explicit about the magazine's intention to create an alternative approach for girls in Hong Kong to find their own ways of living.¹⁸⁴ The approach adopted by the magazine is distinct from, and in some senses in opposition to, the approach offered by the education sector because the magazine deals with a range of sensitive issues and topics (particularly with regards to sex) not covered in the regular curriculum. It is this alternative trajectory that I particularly want to chart in this chapter because, as I will argue, it offers an alternative in appearance only.

The construction of the images of teenage girls in *CosmoGIRL!* is age specific. It provides a 'space' for teenage girls to be girls and not feel under pressure to perform

¹⁸⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Hihi', February 2003 and July 2003; editor's response to the reader in 'Speak Up' (*CosmoGIRL!*, 'Speak Up', March 2002: 14.

(in Butler's sense) as women because they have not yet come of age.¹⁸⁵ The magazine creates and nurtures the idea of a moment in life when, as a girl, one is 'in between', and it privileges this moment for itself rather than as a rapid passage towards another stage of development. But although it offers the image of the freedom to be a girl, it is not an unlimited form of freedom. For instance, what Stevi Jackson calls 'compulsory heterosexuality' is still very much present in the magazine. This rather narrow view of sexuality is at odds with the magazine's image of itself as a beacon of free thinking for young women, yet a closer examination reveals that this is far from being an atypical glitch. As I will show, the magazine's politics are in many ways aligned with the socially established parameters of conventional femininity in society. It may appear to contradict the discourse of the education sector, but this is superficial. The emphasis of the magazine on a complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes, in which the magazine argues that girls and boys indeed are 'made for each other', sometimes at the expense of girls' power and the importance of solidarity among girls, leaves the concept of the girl in a deadlock situation. It is the aim of this chapter to interrogate this deadlock.

Why CosmoGIRL!?

In Hong Kong today there are a variety of magazines on the market aimed at girls in their leisure times. The commonest types, which can be seen frequently in newspaper stalls, convenient stores and supermarkets, cover subjects such as travel (e.g. *New Holiday*), celebrity news (such as *Yes!*, *TVB*, *Rapid Weekly*, *East Touch*), current affairs (such as *Ming Pao Weekly*, *Next Magazine*) and fashion and beauty (such as

¹⁸⁵ Butler 1993: 238; Butler 1999; Butler 2004: 44-45.

With, Mina, Vivi, Marie Claire, UNA: The Power of Femininity, Oggi, Elle, Harpers Bazaar, Cosmopolitan, Jessica, Fashion and Beauty, Amy, Tea magazine and *CosmoGIRL!*). Among the various genres, fashion and beauty occupies the largest section of the market, and includes diverse choices tailored to different personal styles and tastes.

Obviously the types of magazines on offer are not necessarily or particularly for girls only. They are also suitable for people of different age groups, at different education levels and with different cultural backgrounds. Since these types of magazines are information-oriented and the information itself is short-lived – as with current affairs, celebrity and travel information – they are useful resources for scholars interested in the study of media ecology, media ethics, cultural studies and youth studies.¹⁸⁶ In fact, the analyses conducted in such studies are not limited to the content of the magazines but expand to consider how people use the information in their everyday lives or how this information influences their perceptions of the image and development of a particular cultural landscape. However, these studies seldom adopt a gender perspective, often simply because the information involved – such as that do with current affairs and travel – is fact-based and not gender-specific.

Gender and cultural studies tend to pay more attention to fashion and beauty magazines as the focus of research. This is because they are also regarded as women's magazines and thus the representation of the images of women in these magazines will record the changes in gender perception and the performativity of women. In

¹⁸⁶ Some examples would be Margaret Robertson and Michael Williams, *Young People, Leisure and Places* (2004); Shi-xu, Manfred Kienpointner, Jan Servaes, *Read the Cultural Other: Forms of otherness in the discourses of Hong Kong's decolonisation* (2005); and Joseph M. Chan and Francis L. F. Lee, *Media and Politics in Post-handover Hong Kong* (2008).

cultural studies research, and particularly in the study of magazines, conceptions of gender and definitions of femininity are the hottest issues many scholars focus on. Gender construction in women's magazines is one of the key concerns of cultural and gender studies. The examination of the production of different forms of femininity such as teenage girlhood, womanhood, wifehood and motherhood, always forms a thematic core of these studies – what popular culture teaches a female at different stages of their life about their expected role, and how they should respond.

For instance, Yang (1999) focuses her analysis on the relationship between the changing forms of femininity in Taiwan and the political economy of the magazine industry, that is, the changing practices of magazines in transforming the industry's 'imagined' readers from patriotic and domestic housewives into public and international consumers. In particular, her focus is on the relationships among gender identity, consumption, nation-formation and globalisation. Her research looks into how the changing conception of readership shapes women's magazines' textual practices, from an emphasis on defining femininity as private to femininity as public. It also explores how this changing gender identity enables women to participate in the process of globalisation with respect to their role as workers and consumers. However, the changing identity of women from private housewives to public workers and consumers cannot help liberate them from normative sexual practices when the nation-building project is kept at the top of the agenda, such as in the discussion of Taiwan's population control policies.

The studies of Kruckemeyer (2003), Schrum (2000) and Aronson (1996), on the other hand, focus on the construction of a new discourse of girlhood through the

communication between readers and magazine editors. Kruckemeyer (2003) and Schrum (2000) examine how proper 'girling' served as a major battleground in the struggle to define gender, race, class and sexuality in girls' magazines. They argue that the messages contained within girls' magazines not only become a cultural text establishing appropriate or inappropriate standards of girlhood that girls must accept or reject but also provide girls with internal opportunities for negotiating such standards, particularly through letters to the editor and other codified sites allowing for a reader response. While girls challenge parents, schools, adult advisors and even peers over when and how to interact with these cultural symbols, they nevertheless accept social messages about femininity, heterosexuality and beauty. In a similar vein, Aronson (1996) argues that dialogue among communities of women readers and writers in American women's magazines also positions women's words in a uniquely productive way. As a result, the free play of competing discourses cooperating on the pages of magazines innovates new gender discourse over time.

In the same way as with the examination of gender construction in women's or girls' magazines, the examination of how media representations reflect gender stereotypes seems to be another common theme of research topic. For instance, Chi (1999) adopts a content analysis and cross-cultural study approach to examine the different gender roles of women and men as represented in magazine advertisements in the United States and Taiwan. She argues that magazine advertisements in the United States and Taiwan both portrayed males mainly in working roles and females mainly in non-working roles not only in 1988 but also in 1998. Chi's finding is indeed not surprising at all, since similar results can be observed quite frequently in other studies, including those focusing on the role of men. The studies of Potvin (2001) and Gottschall (2008)

show that changes in the forms of masculinity and the meanings of fatherhood do nothing to affect the dominant position of elite white male. In fact, even in the domestic sphere, mothers are often instructed by specific male ‘experts’ who guide them in their roles. The rigid gender role differentiation between women and men persists in various cultures and the images represented in magazines consistently portray men in superior roles.

The setting of the images in magazines and the use of cultural values associated with a place also contribute to the formation of an individual’s gender and cultural identity. As just mentioned, rigid gender-role identities may be informed by the places men and women perform their roles – men in a work setting, women in non-work setting. By the same token, in a study of the blurring of cultural identity in a contestation between the global and local, Maynard (2001) argues that the formation of Japanese cultural identity within the teenage group of magazine readers depends on a match between person and place. In his analysis of the iconography of teen magazines (such as *Fineboys*, *Hot Dog Press*, and *Popeye* for male teens and *Pee Wee*, *Seventeen*, and *Puchi Seven* for female teens), he finds that people are by and large placed in settings that correspond to their nationhood. In this context he argues that the way to preserve the cultural identity of Japanese teens in a cultural text is to present images of Japanese teens separately from those of non-Japanese teens. Even though non-Japanese teens are included within the world of Japanese advertising, they are kept apart from the images of Japanese teens.

Hsu’s study (2002), on the other hand, shows how advertising messages and expressions are highly consistent with the conceptual and cultural value orientations

of each single country. In his analysis of advertisements in eight magazines from Taiwan and eight from the United States, he finds that the Taiwanese advertisements significantly emphasise cultural values such as family integrity, harmony with others, interdependence, nature, popularity and tradition, whereas advertisements in the US magazines significantly emphasise the cultural values of adventure, enjoyment, independence, quality, safety, sex, technology, uniqueness and wealth. The advertising appeals and expressions in the Taiwanese advertisements tend to be more collectivistic and in harmony with nature, whereas the US advertisements utilise more individualistic values and emphasise mastery over nature.

Some scholars concentrate on the relationship between the representation of images in magazines and the reception of readers. For instance, Frederick (2000) focuses her analyses on three women's magazines circulated in Japan: *Women's Public Review*, an intellectual commercial magazine focusing on women's issues; *Housewife's Friend*, a popular magazine focusing on domestic arts and entertaining fiction; and *Women's Arts*, which is run by a group of leftist women activists. In arguing that the different materials represented in these magazines have a great effect on their readers, Frederick is not simply suggesting that the ideology of each publication will affect the actual behaviour of its audience. More accurately, since the producers and readers are all supposed to be women, Frederick argues the production and consumption of these magazines have come to be gendered as feminine. This is because, as she argues, the accessibility of materials and the reception of both producers and readers are mutually reinforcing to each other. As a result, she tries to address the question of whether or not consumption can be a form of resistance.

Scholars in the field of gender and cultural studies who focus on gender ideology construction in women's magazines – such as Janice Winship, Kathryn McMahon and Angela McRobbie – argue that a compulsory heterosexuality framework is still very much present in women's magazines in the western world, even though the explicit subject matter has changed along with the development of the global market. For instance, the shift away from the theme of marriage in magazines of the 1960s through to the 1980s and towards the concept of the self in magazines from the 1990s onwards. Such marked thematic changes in the world of women's magazines and teenage lifestyle magazines illustrates the shift in the conceptions of gender in the construction of the female self in contemporary societies. Britt (2003) and Bowen (2002) nonetheless argue that there remains a close relationship between the hegemony of the heterosexuality framework and the stereotypic images of girls and women in magazines. Britt argues that the kind of derogatory stereotypic images used in the early part of the twentieth century (such as those of dark complexioned, sexless characters) have given way to more contemporary image of blackness, in which African-American females are commonly depicted as sensual beings with light skin and long, straight hair. While Bowen argues that images of heterosexual couples and American gender stereotypes of work-a-day life are still very much present in tourism magazine advertising.

The conflict between the traditional role of women and what it meant to be a modern woman, wife and mother in the early twentieth century is well illustrated in Liggett's (2006) study, which focuses on Campbell Soup advertising campaigns in women's consumer magazines. Liggett argues that even though, in the adverts, the traditional role for women is safeguarded in the name of the protection of home life, the

campaigns also provide an opening for women to take part in the construction of American culture and history. For instance, women are encouraged to tackle significant national issues such as purifying the food supply, lowering the infant mortality rate, promoting temperance, maintaining the home front during war and supporting suffrage. These events play an important role in the construction of idealised images of the new women in the discourse of consumerism in contemporary societies.

This chapter analyses *CosmoGIRL!* since its launch in Hong Kong in September 2001. The reason for choosing this particular magazine for analysis is three-fold: (1) *CosmoGIRL!* is one of the most popular magazines among a small selection that focuses on the discussion and representation of teenage girls in the post-handover period of Hong Kong. (2) *CosmoGIRL!* is one of the few magazines that can still survive in the teen market, which went through a severe economic hardship period in Hong Kong post-reunification. (3) Although the editorial board of *CosmoGIRL!* has good intentions towards upholding the spirit and ideology of *CosmoGIRL!*, as originated and circulated in the English-speaking world, the magazine is repackaged with additional content suitable for readers living in a Chinese context. The examination of *CosmoGIRL!* therefore provides us with a vivid cultural text illustrating how images of teenage girls, as distinct from images of adult women, are locally constructed and rendered identifiable to people in Hong Kong. I shall now explore each of these three reasons in a little more detail:

(1) because it is targeted at teenage girls

There are a lot of magazines in Hong Kong which classify themselves as particularly suitable for women to read. Some of these are imported directly from overseas, which means they are written in the language of the countries from which they originate: for example with magazines from Japan, such as *With* and *Mina*. Some originate from overseas but are translated into Chinese, such as *Vivi*, *Marie Claire*, *UNA: The Power of Femininity*, *Oggi*, *Elle*, *Harpers Bazaar*, and *Cosmopolitan*. There are also some home-grown in Hong Kong, such as *Jessica*, *Fashion and Beauty*, and *Amy*. But seldom are any of these magazines particularly targeted at teenage girls. They usually aim at women who work and/or have experience of motherhood. The fashions worn by the models pictured in these magazines are, in general, more mature – either white-collar working ladies / businesswomen looks or smart housewife / mother looks. In some of these magazines, those targeted at women higher up the social ladder in Hong Kong, the brand names advertised and recommended are very classy. We cannot rule out the possibility that some teenage girls may be able to afford to buy such products and that they learn how to perceive themselves from these magazines. However, teenage girls do not learn how to be ‘teenage girls’ from these publications. It is in this regard that *TEA magazine* and *CosmoGIRL!* position themselves as magazines specifically for teenage girls. While the slogan of *TEA magazine* is “Stylish Journal for Independent girls”, the slogan of *CosmoGIRL!* is “a cool new magazine for girls”¹⁸⁷ and “We are Brave New Girls!”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ This slogan appeared on the cover of *CosmoGIRL!* from September 2001 and August 2003.

¹⁸⁸ This slogan appeared on the cover from September 2003 onwards.

I focus on CosmoGIRL! for my analysis both because of the accessibility of its back issues in the public libraries of Hong Kong and for the magazine's emphasis on a two-way communication between editors and readers. As Kruckemeyer (2003) and Aronson (1996) argue, the communication between editors and readers is one effective means for girls to accept, reject or negotiate over ideals of girlhood represented in the magazines. The reason for not considering *TEA magazine* is not simply the difficulty of obtaining copies in the libraries of Hong Kong.¹⁸⁹ More importantly, *TEA magazine* adopts a one-way communication method – the magazine plays the role of providing information on market trends to its readers. Except with regard to fashion trends, there is no provision of channels for readers to express their opinions. Nor are there any sections or columns for the editorial board of the magazine to give advice to its readers on how to be teenage girls in Hong Kong. I would suggest that this emphasis on fashion trends, lacking any further explanation of how such trends are particularly relevant for teenage girls, couldn't by itself account for the construction of images of teenage girls within a particular cultural landscape.

(2) because it survived in the teen market despite the period of economic hardship

At the time CosmoGIRL! was launched in Hong Kong, people in the city were experiencing a great uncertainty and their self-confidence was fragile after the reunification with mainland China in 1997. This is not to say that the reunification itself was the cause of uncertainty among the Hong Kong people. It was coincidental that Hong Kong experienced a severe economic downturn due to deterioration in the global economic situation (another indication that Hong Kong is a global city). The

¹⁸⁹ Using 'TEA magazine' as the key words for searching by title through the online university catalogue suggests that the magazine is not kept in either the reference or circulation sections of the nine universities in Hong Kong. It is only available in Hong Kong Public Libraries on a request basis.

influence of economic recession on teenagers in Hong Kong is particularly apparent because it intensifies social conditions that may affect the competitiveness of teenagers. For instance, simply attaining a good education is no longer such a useful tool when it comes to finding a decent job in the future. A lot of teenagers have difficulty in finding a good job in Hong Kong nowadays because of the education requirements for teenagers to remain employable in a highly competitive labour market. The encouraging attitude of the editorial board of *CosmoGIRL!* therefore acts as a timely stimulant to teenagers whose confidence is at risk in Hong Kong. The survival of the magazine during the economic recession implies that its ideologies were being supported in the teen market.

The launch of *CosmoGIRL!* with its advocacy of “‘bold, daring and confident’ teenage girls” responded to the hard times in Hong Kong and helped make the magazine itself one of the most popular in the teen market during that particular period.¹⁹⁰ An examination of the images of teenage girls presented in the magazine may therefore help us to understand the expectations contemporary Hong Kong society has for its teenage girls. Indeed, the intention of the magazine to encourage dependent, fragile and spoiled young girls to become bold, daring and confident girls was stated clearly in its ‘Speak Up’ column. In addition, the magazine’s extensive discussion of gender relationships between boys and girls also makes it attractive to the teen market, regardless of the gender of its readers.¹⁹¹ The way the magazine structures gender therefore gives us some insight into the images of teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong that are widely recognised given the circulation of the magazine.

¹⁹⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* May 2002: 20, August 2002: 22, December 2002: 20, June 2003: 12, and July 2003: 18.

¹⁹¹ Comment from the readers in the ‘Speak Up’ column, *CosmoGIRL!* June 2002: 18, August 2003: 16.

Figure 2.0. Slogan of CosmoGIRL!



(3) because the launch of the magazine itself gives us some insights into the conflicts between globalisation and localisation in contemporary Hong Kong

Even though the content of *CosmoGIRL!* is not directly copied from the English edition, there may be a worry that the ideologies of *CosmoGIRL!* are constructed under the shadow of its English counterpart. This concern has also been raised in the 'Speak Up' column of the magazine. In general, readers have a positive attitude to the ideologies of the magazine, even though it originates in the United States: 'if the content of *CosmoGIRL!* becomes very different from the English-language version, the spirit of *CosmoGIRL!* will no longer exist'.¹⁹² However, we must examine how the magazine's content is constructed under the forces of localisation and globalisation in the Hong Kong cultural context. The examination of *CosmoGIRL!* will help us to address the questions of: (1) whether any universal structures are implicated in experience; (2) how the magazine posits Hong Kong culture in a conflicting sense; and (3) whether there is any pure form of Chineseness (and fixed concept of gender) in the construction of the concept of the girl in contemporary Hong Kong.

The construction of the identity of Hong Kong people has always involved reference to the 'China' factor, whether during the colonial rule of the British government from 1842 onwards or after the reunification with the mainland in 1997. This observation is most apparent in the secondary education sector, as has been discussed in Chapter One. However, in the case of the mass media, and in particular of an imported teenage lifestyle magazine such as *CosmoGIRL!*, the factor of 'China' is not a referent point

¹⁹² *CosmoGIRL!* December 2001: 14.

for the construction of the concept of the girl. The opening up of the local capitalist market to investment, resources and information flow from places all over the world since colonial rule has provided a fertile context for the transplantation of magazines that originate outside Hong Kong.

Under the influence of globalisation, it is no longer easy to assume that a culture is a static unity. As mentioned in the Introduction, Zhu argues that Hong Kong culture did not have a self-sustained culture before the arrival of colonial rule.¹⁹³ As a result, Zhu argues that the search for the locality (or the purity of Chineseness) of Hong Kong culture is always undermined by ambivalence and hybridity. Having developed as a global city since the establishment of colonial rule, the Hong Kong identity or consciousness has been transformed from time to time. There is no pure Chinese tradition reconstructed in the locality of Hong Kong culture. The post-colonial culture of Hong Kong under the influence of globalisation involves a kind of cultural translation (in Bhabha's sense). If Zhu is right in spelling this out, then it will be interesting to discover the extent to which this logic is also applicable in the analysis of a media representation – in particular in an analysis of the concept of the girl and the construction of the self in the teen-oriented magazine.

Layout of the magazine

As it has been mentioned, *CosmoGIRL!* originates in the United States, but its concept of how a girl should look and behave has been repackaged with new content in the

¹⁹³ Zhu 2002: 117.

Chinese-language version so as to be accommodated in a Hong Kong context.¹⁹⁴

Examining the text of the magazine will therefore help us to understand how gender operates in the construction of the girl in relation to girlhood versus womanhood, as well as femininity versus youthfulness and the clash between globalisation and localisation. As Jameson argues, “there is no such thing as globalisation.”¹⁹⁵ This is because the globalisation process always goes hand in hand with a localisation process. It is based on this assumption that the content of *CosmoGIRL!* is differentiated from the English-language one according to its ‘national situation’.

Rather than being a direct translation from the English-language version, *CosmoGIRL!* actually incorporates many ‘Hong Kong’ elements in the magazine, such as using famous local teen idols on the cover of the magazine, spotting local teenage girls on the streets, and discussing social phenomena in relation to the daily lives and practices of teenagers in Hong Kong. Exceptions include some of the stories shared in the ‘My story’ column which are not set in Hong Kong. These are the stories of girls in other countries all over the world. However, no indication is given whether they have been copied directly from the English-language version and translated into Chinese. In addition, many non-Asian teenage girls appear in the magazine as fashion models, against backgrounds in the natural environment. Again, we cannot tell whether the pictures have already been used in the English-language version. In other words, apart from the title of the magazine, it would be hard to make a direct connection between the content of *CosmoGIRL!* as circulated in Hong Kong and that of the English-language version circulated in elsewhere – except for the fact that the two magazines

¹⁹⁴ Editors of the magazine listen to readers’ suggestions in the column ‘Speak Up’ (*CosmoGIRL!* May 2002: 20 and October 2002: 18) and try to adapt the magazine accordingly, on condition that the suggestions do not contravene the position *CosmoGIRL!* reflects in its slogans ‘A cool new magazine for girls’ and ‘We are brave new girls’.

¹⁹⁵ Jameson 1998: 54.

share a common characteristic in both being aimed at girls and including content overwhelmingly devoted to beauty-fashion trends and entertainment tips.

The concern of the editorial board of the magazine is to maintain and universalise the ideology, tradition and style of the magazine wherever it is published. This is acknowledged in the editorial board section on the first page. Although we cannot be certain that the pictures and articles in *CosmoGIRL!* are directly copied from the English-language edition, many readers of the magazine believe that they are, given the fact that the editorial board makes this acknowledgement apparently clear to its readers. This confirmation makes the ideology of the magazine into an issue and provokes reactions from its readers. For instance, in the early stages of its launch, some readers wrote to the 'Speak Up' column to complain that the magazine relied too much on the content of the English-language version. (Mainly because a lot of non-Asian models appeared in the magazine, though again there was no clue that they were directly copied from the English-language version.) As a result, they were concerned that *CosmoGIRL!* would probably fail to resonate with the interests and perspectives of teenage girls in Hong Kong. Some readers then suggested that the editors to add more articles related to the Hong Kong context and more relevant to the lives of girls in a Chinese context.¹⁹⁶ It was not until the magazine had been in circulation in Hong Kong for nearly three years that readers started to respond positively to the coverage and content of the magazine. In later years, they even comment that *CosmoGIRL!* is richer and better than the English-language version

¹⁹⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Speak Up', October 2001: 12, November 2001: 10, January 2002: 14, February 2002: 16, September 2002: 22, September 2003: 24.

because the magazine has improved its content in line with the suggestions of its readers.¹⁹⁷

Maynard (2001) argues in his study that ensuring a match between place and person in magazines is a useful tactic in aiding the preservation of teenagers' self-identity in any contestation between the global and local. His argument can be used to explain why the appearance of non-Asian models in the fashion and beauty columns of *CosmoGIRL!* might not have succeeded in universalising the ideology, tradition and style of the magazine when it was first published in Hong Kong. A close examination of the text of *CosmoGIRL!* reveals that the images of non-Asian models always appear separately from those of Asian models, including idols in Asian teen market, ordinary girls in the street, and fashion models with Asian looks. Since we hardly find a mismatch between person and place in the images of girls in the magazine, it is possible to argue that the construction of the Asian girl in contemporary Hong Kong remains firmly anchored in its own space, even though there is what superficially may seem to be a blurring of identity given the representation of both Asian faces and non-Asian faces in the same issue of the magazine.

The magazine tries to differentiate itself to the English-language version in a number of ways. The layouts of the English-language and Chinese-language versions have many differences in terms of the coverage, emphasis and gesture in representation and so on. Most obviously, as mentioned, the magazine puts images of the most popular idols in the teen market in Asia on its covers. Many of them were born and have grown up in Hong Kong. Even though some of the 'Asian faces' were not born in

¹⁹⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Speak Up', February 2004: 14, March 2005: 20.

Hong Kong, and most likely come from Taiwan, they are very popular in the Hong Kong entertainment industry. This illustrates that the responses of readers to the magazine are significant for the localising process of the magazine. It also leads to the questions of how the images contained in the magazine are supposed to be accepted by readers and in turn can be used to shape their subjective development, and how their choice to read the magazine intersects with the formative local experience and sense of cultural belonging common to teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong society.

Angela McRobbie argues in her article '*Jackie Magazine: Romantic Individualism and the Teenage Girl*' that the "magazine, like those other forms of the media – the press, TV, film, radio – was viewed as a system of messages and a bearer of a certain ideology that dealt with the construction of teenage femininity."¹⁹⁸ However, she is quite aware of the fact that each of these different media apparatuses is relatively autonomous in the process of the social formation of teenage femininity. Each apparatus, therefore, should be recognised for the particular set of values that its readers or audiences are giving consent to.¹⁹⁹ Based on this premise, McRobbie argues that a magazine such as *Jackie* should be respected for its powerful ideological presence, and as such demands an analysis carried out apart from the uses its audiences make of it.²⁰⁰ By the same token, when McMahon (1990) speaks of power relations being coded within the text of *Cosmopolitan*, she does not assume any direct, one-to-one correspondence with lived experience. Rather, she argues that the text itself functions as fantasy. There is no mirror image reflection of the representation of

¹⁹⁸ McRobbie 2000: 71.

¹⁹⁹ McRobbie 2000: 68.

²⁰⁰ McRobbie 1992: 86-87.

fantasy with actual behaviour.²⁰¹ In CosmoGIRL!, likewise, fantasy is in operation in its appreciation of the characteristics of teenage girls in the present form, as distinct from the obsession of the education system with their becoming women in the future.

The purpose of studying magazines is not to try to uncover the truth behind the ideology that is constructed by every single magazine. As McRobbie argues in another article – ‘*More!* New sexualities in girls’ and women’s magazines’, in which she shifts her analysis to another magazine *More!* – magazines are simply forms of discourse. They are commercial sites that have a tremendous investment in the construction of what it is to be a girl in contemporary society. Studying magazines therefore allows us to look at ways in which the ideology of the magazines serves the purpose of ensuring a smooth reproduction of the existing relations of institutional power in society. As McRobbie puts it, the teenage lifestyle magazine is “a source of advice and a site of information exchange, [it] sells its own necessity by emphasising the unavoidable, all-important difficulty of unguided feminine adolescence and the untrained adolescent feminine body.”²⁰²

CosmoGIRL! in general covers seven subject areas: (1) ‘Viva Life’²⁰³; (2) ‘All About Guys’²⁰⁴; (3) ‘Fashion Diva’²⁰⁵; (4) ‘Beauty Queen’²⁰⁶; (5) ‘Health Kick’; (6) ‘Inner Girl’; and (7) ‘Our Usuals’ (see Table 2.1). Among the seven subject areas, ‘Inner Girl’ and ‘Our Usuals’ are the most frequently discussed subject areas in

²⁰¹ McMahan 1990: 385.

²⁰² McRobbie 1997: 192-193.

²⁰³ Renamed as CG! LIFE from January 2005 onwards.

²⁰⁴ Renamed as CG! GUYS from January 2005 onwards.

²⁰⁵ Renamed as CG! FASHION in the issue of January 2005 and reappeared from September 2005 onwards.

²⁰⁶ Renamed as CG! BEAUTY in the issue of January 2005 and reappeared from September 2005 onwards.

Table 2.1. The main subject areas of *CosmoGIRL!* and its distribution

Subject areas	Frequently Seen Columns	Percentage Share
OUR USUALS	Astro Love Chart CG fun CG shop CG shopaholic CG VIP Hi! Hi! Horoscope Ouch Speak Up	20.27%
INNER GIRL	Be Happy Cash CosmoGIRL loves Girl Talk Great life is... How to deal Issues Life Chat Life Tips Make it Happen / Work Report Missy Cosmo / Miss CG Moving Up My Favorite My Journal My story My Trip Relax Secret Talk Smart girl guide Witchy Magic	18.52%
BEAUTY QUEEN (CG beauty issue 41, 49-)	Beauty Help Beauty News Beauty Story Gotta Have It Hair Makeup Bag Try This	14.50%

Table 2.1: The main subject areas of *CosmoGIRL!* and its distribution (Con't)

Subject areas	Frequently Seen Columns	Percentage Share
FASHION DIVA (CG fashion, Issue 41, 49-)	Fashion Help Fashion Quiz Fashion Talk How to Wear I Love These / Get These Most Wanted	11.69%
VIVA LIFE (CG life issue 41-)	Brave New Girl Cash Celeb Fun Pics CG Calendar CG Fun CG Loves Give me a break Hang Out New Star Ouch Tech-know	11.62%
ALL ABOUT GUYS (CG guys issue 41-)	Ask him/Guy Decoder/Ask Joven He Tells You His View & Her View Love Gear Love Handbook Love Me Not	10.55%
HEALTH KICK	Body Care Healthy u / Health Move your body / Fitness Sex Q & A What's up doc? / Ask doctor	6.91%

* Columns in the above table are displayed in alphabetic order, which are not the same as the layout of the table of contents in the *CosmoGIRL!*

CosmoGIRL!. On average, 'Inner Girl' and 'Our Usuals' shares individually one-fifth of the coverage, 18.52% and 20.27% respectively. The 'Inner Girl' area has undoubtedly been used by the magazine to position itself in the teen market. As a magazine for girls, CosmoGIRL! aims at encouraging and equipping readers with the characteristics of being 'bold, daring and confident'. That is – being confident enough to accept one's own strengths and weaknesses; daring to challenge oneself, admitting one's mistakes and facing up to difficulties; and being bold enough to achieve one's own dreams.²⁰⁷

Highlights extracted from these seven subject areas are placed above the usual layout on the Contents page. Usually, the highlights concern beauty and fashion trends, leisure activities and shopping guides, as well as those topics that best reveal the position of the magazine in the teen market. McMahon (1990) argues that cover articles are selected on the basis that they reflect not only the editors' notions of what may draw a reader in, but also the way in which the editors wish to pitch the ideological focus of the magazine and thus represent its promise.²⁰⁸ If McMahon is right on this point, then the positioning and strategy of CosmoGIRL! in the teen market of Hong Kong can be identified in at least four dimensions. They are:

- (a) Girls' Power, such as 'being good company to yourself'²⁰⁹, 'getting rid of bad habits'²¹⁰, 'OK to be a bitch'²¹¹, 'detox your inner girl'²¹²;

²⁰⁷ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2001: 90-91.

²⁰⁸ McMahon 1990: 384.

²⁰⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* January 2002: 110.

²¹⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* January 2002: 108.

²¹¹ *CosmoGIRL!* May 2004: 132.

²¹² *CosmoGIRL!* July 2005: 142.

- (b) Love and Romance, such as ‘skills to attract boys in dating’²¹³, ‘boyfriend training book’²¹⁴, ‘detoxify love handbook for girls’²¹⁵, ‘are you my dream girl?’²¹⁶, ‘are we the perfect match?’²¹⁷, ‘finding your Mr. Right’²¹⁸;
- (c) Career/Success/Money, such as ‘outstanding career guide’²¹⁹, ‘Money, I love it’²²⁰, ‘Be a Miss pretty Budget’²²¹, ‘How to start your first business’²²², ‘get your dream job’²²³, ‘winning tips for job interviews’²²⁴; and
- (d) Sensitive Issues, particularly in relation to sex, such as ‘Are you ready for sex’²²⁵, ‘Sex is like a basketball match’²²⁶, ‘sexy boy bible’²²⁷, ‘I fell in love with a girl’²²⁸, ‘OH! I am pregnant’²²⁹, ‘Teacher, do you love me?’²³⁰, ‘body care: complete condom guide’²³¹.

These four dimensions are exemplary of the perceived stance of the magazine, and mark a distinct difference between the education sector and the magazine in the construction of the concept of the girl in post-handover Hong Kong society. The difference is particularly apparent given that sensitive issues are seldom mentioned in school sex education. However, there is an exception. The dimension of Career/Success/Money is covered in both the education sector and the magazine, but

²¹³ *CosmoGIRL!* February 2002: 122.

²¹⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Boyfriend training book’, May 2003.

²¹⁵ *CosmoGIRL!* November 2003: 134.

²¹⁶ *CosmoGIRL!* February 2005: 150.

²¹⁷ *CosmoGIRL!* March 2005: 136.

²¹⁸ *CosmoGIRL!* May 2005: 104.

²¹⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* March 2002: 132.

²²⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* April 2002: 122.

²²¹ *CosmoGIRL!* October 2002: 70.

²²² *CosmoGIRL!* October 2002: 147.

²²³ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Get your dream job!’, June 2003.

²²⁴ *CosmoGIRL!* June 2005: 166.

²²⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Special Report: Are you ready for sex?’, December 2002.

²²⁶ *CosmoGIRL!* December 2002: 88.

²²⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘CG! Special: Sexy Boy Bible’, February 2003.

²²⁸ *CosmoGIRL!* March 2003: 130.

²²⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* January 2004: 114.

²³⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* October 2004: 146.

²³¹ *CosmoGIRL!* August 2005: 122.

with different purposes. While the education sector focuses on developing the potential capacity of girls, the magazine tries to provide girls with more options in the present. The dimension of Career/Success/Money is worth introducing to teenage girls because, as Carol Weston (1992) argues, it is this dimension that gives a woman her material options: “she can be single and self-sufficient; she can be part of a two-career couple; she can support herself and her children if her-husband-the-good-provider dies or gets fired or files for divorce; or she can leave him if he becomes abusive or unfaithful or if she feels she’d be happier without him.”²³² The editorial board’s purpose in discussing Career/Success/Money in a girls’ magazine is not only to help equip teenage girls with the skills necessary to compete in the capitalist market but also to widen their options in life. This marks a difference between the education sector and the magazine in that they have different expectations regarding the role of girls in the family. The education sector tries to uphold the proper functioning of family with the expectation that girls will fulfil their duties as committed citizens. The magazine, by contrast, offers another perspective to its readers, which suggests that girls are not expected to remain at home, nor are they expected to confine themselves to marriage. These are not their only options as teenage girls or adult women.

The position adopted by CosmoGIRL! is consistent with the *Cosmopolitan* brand of ‘women’s liberation’ that McRobbie has identified in her analysis of the field of magazines in the western world in the 1970s. According to her observations, the western magazines at this time showed no interest in the improvement in women’s position in society. Although from the mid-1980s onwards the field shifted towards seeking improvements for the individual, gesturing towards better careers and

²³² Weston 1992: 234.

financial independence for women, their concern was restricted to the already established parameters of conventional femininity in society.²³³ The fact that *CosmoGIRL!* also embraces the same parameters explains why the arguments of the magazine are sometimes self-contradictory. For instance, the discussion of the dimension of Career/Success/Money is not consistent with the tone of the magazine's discussion of 'Love and Romance'. The dimension of 'Love and Romance' also seems to contravene the dimension of 'Girls' Power'.

Even though the dimension of 'Love and Romance' is discussed frequently in the magazine, this does not necessarily mean that it encourages its readers to experience romance/love. In fact, the opposite is the case. It is quite obvious that the magazine does not expect teenage girls to be living for romance. It tells its readers that romance should not form a major part of teenage girls' lives: "Your boyfriend should not intrude into your life."²³⁴ "You should focus on the present and separate the ideas of romance and marriage when you are young. Otherwise, you will scare your boyfriend."²³⁵ This is because, so the magazine argues, if girls are too focused on romance, it simply means that they do not have confidence in themselves and are afraid of feeling alone.²³⁶ The status of teenage girls therefore should not be made dependent on whether they are in a relationship or not.²³⁷ The magazine argues that girls do not need the title 'Mrs' for their self-identification in contemporary Hong Kong society.²³⁸ The magazine tries to foster an attitude among its readers of treating

²³³ McRobbie 1997: 190-191.

²³⁴ *CosmoGIRL!* March 2003: 126.

²³⁵ *CosmoGIRL!* February 2004: 128.

²³⁶ *CosmoGIRL!* January 2002: 37; July 2004: 120.

²³⁷ *CosmoGIRL!* October 2004: 144.

²³⁸ *CosmoGIRL!* March 2005: 108.

romance as simply a matter of making new friends.²³⁹ “‘Dating’ is a very simple activity for making new friends. You should know what you want to achieve from the activity and not follow others’ footprints blindly.”²⁴⁰ As a way of communication, girls should treat romance as a small part of their lives and be able to decide when and whether to experience it or not.²⁴¹ Teenage girls are therefore advised not to devalue themselves for having had no dating experiences at their age.

The magazine does not encourage its readers to magnify the importance of romance in their lives. However, this does not mean the magazine is totally supportive of the idea that girls should live on their own terms, since at the same time it tries to convince its readers that girls should care for the feelings of others. This paves the way for the importance of the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes that the editorial board tries to set up in the text of the magazine. When conflict arises between that complementary framework and solidarity among girls (the importance of girls’ power), it is the latter that is supposed to back down. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to conduct a closer examination of how the logics behind the two approaches are developed in the magazine, how they contradict each other and how the contradiction is settled so as to conform to the ideology of the magazine, that is, to turn girls into ‘bold, daring, and confident’ individuals.

²³⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Love Handbook’, October 2001: 33; ‘Guy Decoder’, January 2003: 102, February 2003: 96, April 2003: 102, July 2003: 106, January 2004: 92, May 2004: 112, November 2004: 120; ‘Inner Girl’, March 2003: 126.

²⁴⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Love Handbook’, October 2001: 33.

²⁴¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, September 2003: 94, October 2003: 106, April 2004: 112; ‘Special Issue’, December 2002: 88.

Images of teenage girls in CosmoGIRL! – an overall impression

CosmoGIRL! constructs gender difference based on the assumption of gender complementarity – the idea that women and men are ‘made for each other’. The magazine tells its readers that romance among teenagers should not carry any connotation of marriage. It also tells its readers that girls should not date boys who are unavailable, in the sense of already being in a relationship or engaged to other girls.²⁴² This is because, so the magazine argues, girls who fall in love with unavailable boys are doomed: “A responsible man should not have an extra-marital affair. It is miserable and impossible to love a person who is married, no matter whether it be a man or a woman.”²⁴³ The magazine does not explain to its readers why such girls are doomed, assuming this is something that does not need to be explained. It simply tells its readers that girls who do not make moves on boys who have girlfriends are acting responsibly.²⁴⁴ Mac An Ghail (1994) argues that the hegemonic nature of heterosexuality may be established by the refusal of heterosexuals to acknowledge ‘heterosexuality’ as such, treating it simply as ‘normality’. As a result, he suggests that we uncover how heterosexuality has remained hegemonic through othering different non-essentialist sexual identities such as homosexuality.²⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Epstein and Johnson also argue that it is the “silence and presumption of heterosexuality encoded as such in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life that it is regarded as ‘heterosexism’.”²⁴⁶ Since CosmoGIRL! does not challenge the normality of the heterosexuality framework, girls cannot construct the self without referencing ‘others’ such as boys. I argue, therefore, that the deadlock

²⁴² *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘All About Guys’, October 2005; ‘Guy Decoder’, June 2004 and March 2005.

²⁴³ *CosmoGIRL!* August 2003: 105.

²⁴⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, February 2003.

²⁴⁵ Mac An Ghail 1994: 152-176.

²⁴⁶ Epstein and Johnson 1994: 210

situation that teenage girls are now facing is the result of such unquestioning attitudes towards heterosexuality which shape the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes. As a result, no other channel is provided for girls not to see themselves as the object of masculine desires, even though girls are instructed not to act simply to please others but to maintain their self-esteem.

The presumed nature of heterosexism is manifested through the unquestioning attitude of the magazine towards the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes. Jackson argues that “[g]ender is linked to the inevitability of heterosexuality, portraying differences between women and men as ultimately reducible to the reproductive imperative: the need to find a mate.”²⁴⁷ Even though the need to pass on our genes to the next generation is never specified or inherent in the heterosexual discourse of the magazine, its assumption of the complementary framework has already disguised the possibilities of seeing sexuality in different ways. What is fundamental to heterosexuality – to what sustains it, in Diana Fuss’s words, “as an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system” – is gender hierarchy. Its ‘inside’ workings are not simply about guarding against the homosexual other, but about maintaining male domination – and these two sides of heterosexuality are inextricably intertwined.²⁴⁸ It is in this context that some radical feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon, view heterosexuality as essentially violent and coercive. The ‘violence’ and ‘coercion’ of heterosexuality can be perceived in terms of the defence of the hegemonic construction of male desire under the complementary relationship framework when, in the magazine, the feminine desire of girls is most often mediated by the possibility of romance in the future.

²⁴⁷ Jackson 2005: 15.

²⁴⁸ Jackson 2005: 23.

The influence of heterosexuality occurs not only in the romance/sex context but also in the context of friendship. In the context of romance, girls are told to show commitment in their relationships and thus the magazine is opposed to any two-timing behaviour.²⁴⁹ “If your boyfriend is two-timing, he is not a responsible person.”²⁵⁰ “If your boyfriend finds another girl, it is time for you to reconsider the relationship between you and him. If it is not what you want to see, you have to end it as soon as possible.”²⁵¹ However, the magazine justifies the wrongdoing of two-timing behaviour from a boy’s perspective, arguing that boys will open themselves up and give their hearts to girls only when they feel the love and sense of security from girls.²⁵² As a result, teenage girls are instructed to be cautious in dealing with opposite-sex friends.²⁵³ For instance, girls are told not to flirt with their boyfriends’ friends or other boys when they are already in a relationship.²⁵⁴ This, so the magazine argues, is because boys are innately childish and naïve and so may not be able to bear girlfriends being very close to other members of the opposite sex. The concept of responsibility (with the hidden assumption of possession) is therefore the key to the maintenance of the complementary framework as set out in the magazine.

In the context of friendship, girls are advised to maintain their social lives with boys even if they are in a relationship.²⁵⁵ On the one hand, the magazine advises its readers

²⁴⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, April 2002; February 2003; March 2004; April 2004; September 2004; December 2004 and December 2005; ‘Special Issue’, February 2004; ‘Love Feature’, August 2003; ‘All About Guys’, December 2003; ‘His View & Her View’, April 2005; September 2005; November 2005 and December 2005.

²⁵⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, April 2002: 99.

²⁵¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, April 2004: 113.

²⁵² *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘All About Guys’, October 2005; ‘Guy Decoder’, October 2004; ‘His View & Her View’, September 2005.

²⁵³ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Love Feature’, July 2004.

²⁵⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, July 2005.

²⁵⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Love Feature’, July 2004.

that girls should know how to flirt because it is an act of communication. However, the art of flirting does not drive girls into nonconformity with the social norms of contemporary Hong Kong society. This is because it does not mean that girls can flirt freely without being stigmatised. Carol Weston argued in her book *Girl Talk* (1992) “flirting without being a flirt is an art. If you flirt with every guy in sight, girls will resent you and guys won’t take you seriously. But if you never flirt, the guy you’re wild about may consider you one of the crowd forever.” In other words, Weston argues that “flirting is simply an informal way to let him know you enjoy his company, without you going out on a limb.”²⁵⁶ In the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, girls are expected to show their confidence in front of others through the act of flirting. However, it does not mean that girls can have any intimate behaviour with boys, such as hugging, kissing, or staying overnight in the boy’s place.²⁵⁷

The magazine points out that different expectations towards sex among different genders are prevalent in society. Indeed, the magazine tends not to deny the reasonableness of these different expectations in relation to teenage girls and boys. This is mainly because it tends to have no intention of opposing the accepted moral judgement on sexual behaviour among teenagers in society. The rigidity involved in the construction of ideal gender types can also be seen in men’s magazines. Gottschall (2008) argues that although masculinity and fatherhood are anchored in time and place, the images represented in the magazines retain a commitment to the proper lifestyle and consumer tastes. As a result, although many of the more traditional markers of masculinity may be no less important in men’s lives, such as the increased representation of images of men in contexts separated from the world of work, men

²⁵⁶ Weston 1992: 85.

²⁵⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘All About Guys’, July 2004; ‘Guy Decoder’, September 2003; ‘Love Gear’, November 2004.

are portrayed as conforming to another type of rigid ideal – being young, white, able-bodied and engaged in leisure. By the same token, although *CosmoGIRL!* provides a temporary space for girls to act like a bitch and delay conforming to the social expectation of becoming a woman, they are nevertheless told not to infringe the moral standards of contemporary Hong Kong.

As I will discuss further in the following section, the distinction between good girl and bad girl becomes blurred when the trait of ‘bitchiness’ among teenage girls is promoted in the magazine. The magazine does not specify that it is only good girls who are not encouraged to have premarital sex, for the expectation is made of teenage girls in general. Moral judgments on the sexual behaviour of girls simply refer to extreme behaviour such as engaging in one-night stands or causal sex with strangers.²⁵⁸

A distinction should be made between moral judgments on sexual behaviour and advice on the preventive measures girls should take to protect their bodies. For instance, the magazine encourages girls to carry condoms in their bags, which is still not a common practice in Hong Kong society, based on the research findings of a survey conducted by the magazine in 2004. According to the survey, only a quarter of the female respondents thought that they should keep a condom in their bags.²⁵⁹ This advice, nonetheless, contradicts the notion of ‘sexual reputation’ proposed by Mary Jane Kehily, who argues that a girl carrying condoms risks being placed in the category of ‘slag’ as someone who is looking for sex and available.²⁶⁰ In this regard, the magazine tries to reconstruct the norm in its own terms – its ideal image of girls

²⁵⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Special Issue’, December 2002; ‘Secret Talk’, May 2004.

²⁵⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Special Issue’, February 2004.

²⁶⁰ Kehily 2005: 92.

may not conform to the common practices of Hong Kong society, but the characteristics the magazine assigns to this ideal image nevertheless lend support to the society's basic moral assumptions.

Gender is often articulated through a 'heterosexual matrix' in which heterosexuality is presupposed in the expression of 'real forms of masculinity and femininity'. In Jackson's words, the boundaries of gender division and normative heterosexuality, where gender and sexuality constantly intersect, are mutually reinforced.²⁶¹ The behaviour of girls and boys is therefore policed by the boundaries of heterosexuality alongside the boundaries of 'proper' masculinity or femininity. Indeed, it is not new to hear that girls tend to accept social messages about femininity and heterosexuality as represented in magazines. For instance, girls are socialised to restrain from expressing their sexual feelings far more than are boys. The construction of the proper boundaries of masculinity and femininity is also apparent in *CosmoGIRL!*. As the magazine illustrates, society will allow boys to talk about sex in the public domain and views this as normal masculine behaviour, but girls are expected to be silent on these topics or their behaviour will be regarded as improper and promiscuous. Moreover, for boys to be turned on by a sexy idol is regarded as acceptable, whereas girls fancying a handsome idol is not.²⁶² The findings of *CosmoGIRL!* are also supported by Schrum (2000) and Yang (1999) who argue in their studies that the sexual practices of girls and women are regulated in magazines so as to conform to mainstream norms of femininity, romance and marriage. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler describes the relationship between gender and the behaviour of individuals nicely:

²⁶¹ Jackson 2005: 29.

²⁶² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'What Is Supdoc', September 2002; 'Secret Talk', May 2003 and June 2003.

Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine takes place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes... To conflate the definition of gender with its normative expression is inadvertently to reconsolidate the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized.²⁶³

If girls do not perform the social body properly, they will have to pay the price for their behaviour, which is similar to the situation with women. McClelland and Fine (2008) argue that for a woman to avoid the cost of becoming a social body – one that is required to be clean, obedient, and law abiding – the only alternative they have is to remain within or feign virginal status. This is because, as they explain, “bodies that fall outside of this definition are suspect as dirty, marginal, and problematic. ... (Women) [h]eld responsible for bodies are considered disobedient and problematic, they are punished for sexual desire and excess at every turn. Desire for young women too quickly metastasizes into danger.”²⁶⁴ In the case of girls, Johnson (1993) argues that girls are not only advised by the popular media advice columns not to seek to attain the status of marriage at too early an age, but are also warned not to become involved emotionally during their teenage years and not to be active sexually. As a result, detailed instructions are always provided in these publications about the limits they should place on how much physical and social contact they have with the opposite sex.²⁶⁵ This is because, as Lees (1993) suggests, girls will invite accusations of ‘sluttishness’ if they go around looking scruffy. In this regard, Lees argues, girls

²⁶³ Butler 2004: 44-45.

²⁶⁴ McClelland and Fine 2008: 91.

²⁶⁵ Johnson 1993: 135-136.

cannot behave like typical adolescents – moodily, recklessly, selfishly rebellious – without infringing the dictates of femininity.²⁶⁶ It is also in this context that the editorial board of CosmoGIRL! advises girls to restrain their behaviour towards boys if they are not in a relationship. This is not simply because excessive behaviour on the part of girls would invite derogatory labels but, most importantly, because it might embarrass the boys and hurt their egos.

Girls are thus assigned the role of regulating their behaviour in ways appropriate for young women. The failure of girls to perform this role will result in them being named ‘slags’ or ‘drags’ for their sexual availability. Kehily (2005) confines this experience of young women to the notion of sexual reputation. She argues that young women who do not draw the line incur a reputation as ‘the other kinda girl’, the sexually promiscuous and much denigrated female figure whose lack of adherence to conventional morality serves as a ‘cautionary tale’ reminding young women to be ever vigilant in the maintenance of their reputation.²⁶⁷ However, Lees argues further that even when girls conform to models of correct femininity this cannot help them escape criticism altogether, nor it is a solution for them to construct their own selves:

Girls tread a very narrow line: they mustn't end up being called a slag, but equally they don't want to be thought unapproachable, sexually cold – a tight bitch. Research has shown, for example, that women who conform to cultural stereotypes of female passivity, conformity, lower achievement motivation and vulnerability are likely to be defined as psychologically unhealthy. Women who reject such

²⁶⁶ Lees: 1993: 16.

²⁶⁷ Kehily 2005: 92.

stereotypes are also likely to be labelled deviant or, if successful in their careers, to be considered 'masculine'.²⁶⁸

Models of correct femininity represented in CosmoGIRL! cannot help girls to escape from the dilemma of being called a 'slag' if they are too proactive in approaching boys or 'a tight bitch' if they are over-protective of their bodies and make the boys feel they are unapproachable. Simply put, the construction of the teenage self in the magazine fails to recognise the contradictions inherent in adolescent female identity. In the analysis of Lees (1993) of the study of Erikson, whose model of behaviour is entirely male, Lees argues that Erikson sees the concept of identity formation as central to adolescent development. However, Erikson's model makes no distinction between the ways girls and boys face this task. No attention is given to the way female identity rests to such an extent on sexual status and reputation. Lees argues that gaining an identity as a young girl involves forming an identity – a firm sense of self – in opposition to the depiction of girls as sex objects, and to the characterisation of women as no more than sexual beings.²⁶⁹ A similar argument has also been made by Michelle Fine with her 'affirmative discourse of desire for adolescent girls' – in this affirmative approach, Fine argues that the identity formation of girls "must recognise, reveal, and then reject the good girl / bad girl categories as patriarchal strategies that keep girls and women from the power of their own bodies and their bonds with one another. It should center on all girls' entitlement to their sexuality, rather than focus solely on the threat of lost status and respect or diminished safety."²⁷⁰ The over-emphasis of CosmoGIRL! on the maintenance of the moral

²⁶⁸ Lees 1993: 16.

²⁶⁹ Lees 1993: 17.

²⁷⁰ Tolman and Higgins 1996: 221.

standards of contemporary Hong Kong society only reinforces the heterosexuality framework in the construction of the self of the girl in the magazine.

In *CosmoGIRL!*, the values of girls and boys are very much influenced and bound by the concepts of biological and psychological differences between female and male. The editorial board tells its readers frankly if a little disingenuously that girls and boys are totally different from each other and that they speak different languages. They argue that the difference between the sexes leads to an exciting and funny world.²⁷¹ This approach is indeed nothing new, and it persists in the second wave of Anglo-American feminism, which counteracts the gender-sameness approach of first-wave feminism. McRobbie (2000) notes a similar approach in her analysis of *Jackie* magazine, which asserts the absolute and natural separation of sex roles – boys can be footballers, pop stars, even juvenile delinquents, but girls can only be feminine.²⁷² McRobbie argues that the purpose of such magazines in mapping out all these differences between the sexes is to exude romantic possibilities. As a consequence, solidarity between girls is fundamentally by-passed by the hidden assumption that the separate and distinct roles of male and female are a pretext for pursuing a common interest of both sexes, namely, the devotion to romance. It is in this context that the magazine is blind to the possibility of other forms of sexuality and treats romance as the girls' reply to male sexuality. Girls' sexuality is understood and experienced not in terms of a physical need, but in terms of romantic attachment.

The gender difference ideology perpetuated by magazines such as *CosmoGIRL!* and *Jackie* not surprisingly hinders the performativity of gender. When Judith Butler first

²⁷¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', January 2003: 102; *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', January 2005: 103.

²⁷² McRobbie 2000: 91-92.

introduces the concept of performativity of gender in one of her most influential books, *Gender Trouble* (1993), she simply argues that gender is a construction with no necessary relationship to particular bodies or sexualities. Gender therefore should be interpreted as an effect of a discourse: the conditions for the emergence of a subject neither require a 'subject' before the constitution of a subject, nor the foreclosure of agency by making the subject the product and puppet of socio-cultural processes. The non-connection between body / sexuality and gender has been further elaborated in another of Butler's influential books, *Bodies That Matter*, in which she insists that gender is not ephemeral voluntaristic performance:

although forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a non-causal and non-reductive connection between gender and sexuality is nevertheless crucial to maintain.²⁷³

Butler argues that gender is not a noun but proves to be performative, that is, constitutes the identity it is purported to be. Gender in this regard is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. She therefore argues that iterability of performativity is a theory of agency without an agent. McRobbie elaborates on Butler's performativity approach and argues that being called a girl from the inception of existence is one way in which the girl becomes transitively girl'd over time.²⁷⁴ The performativity of gender in *CosmoGIRL!* is set in this context of the inception of existence. The magazine does not fundamentally challenge the different roles of girls and boys in the construction of gender identity, but reiterates the power of discourse to grant sexed bodies a kind of

²⁷³ Butler 1993: 238.

²⁷⁴ McRobbie 2005:84-89.

licence to live. To a certain extent, the magazine's emphasis on gender difference does not challenge to the approach of gender sameness of the first-wave feminism. The development of the gender differences between girls and boys in the magazine is a pretext for the argument that girls should emulate the behaviour of others, boys in particular, so that girls can get along harmoniously with boys.²⁷⁵ Indeed, it is this kind of advocacy of emulating a male standard that contributes to a deficiency of first-wave feminism in the movement for gender equality. Although the magazine argues that the best way for teenage girls to live happily and confidently is for them to enhance their understanding of the behaviour of boys, it is simply a pretext for romantic possibilities. The hidden logic behind the argument of the magazine is that it is girls rather than boys who can and should modify their behaviour and respond to the acts of boys accordingly so that they will be appreciated by them. It is on this basis that the performativity of gender is mentioned. The difference between the orientation of the magazine and that of the first-wave feminist, however, is that the magazine avoids a biological deterministic approach and shifts to a cultural performance perspective for the construction of the images of teenage girls in the magazine.²⁷⁶

The assumptions concerning different genders made by the magazine lead it to develop a set of characteristics for teenage girls that support its own ideology. However, the editorial board of the magazine play a trick with the gender characteristics in their development of an ideal image of the girl. Teenage girls should not only be able to be feminine but should also be able to perform in ways that are generally denied girls within the conventional gender assumption ideology. For

²⁷⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Life is Great', July 2005: 124.

²⁷⁶ Weiss 1999: 51.

instance, the magazine argues that it is wrong to think that girls are born passive. Girls are expected to be active and extroverted because they are sensitive and good at expressing their own feelings.²⁷⁷ Being sensitive and good at expressing one's feelings are the 'feminine' characteristics the magazine expects girls to uphold, while the characteristic of 'being passive' is one that the magazine rules out, advising girls to be 'active' and 'extroverted', which are conventionally masculine characteristics. By the same token, the magazine argues that girls are expected to be as direct and straightforward as boys, because girls are presumed to have no focus.²⁷⁸ However, the trick is applied only in the case of girls not boys. As a result, the magazine tries to suggest that teenage girls should have a commitment to changing the ideology prevalent in every social discourse that has impeded them from becoming 'brave new girls'. The magazine hopes that the changes triggered off by teenage girls can lead them to happy and confident lives, as well as to living with others on the basis of equality.²⁷⁹ Based on the argument that the personalities of girls can be malleable, the magazine succeeds in persuading its readers that images of teenage girls are matter of gender performance.

²⁷⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', December 2003: 106.

²⁷⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', December 2003: 108; 'Love Gear', May 2004: 106; 'All About Guys', April 2005: 124.

²⁷⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', October 2004: 144.

Performativity of gender: the selling strategies and market position of *CosmoGIRL!*

The significance of 'Chinese faces' for the role of gender performativity

It seems that idols are frequently featured on magazine covers in the teen market. The Chinese-language and English-language versions of *CosmoGIRL!* are no exceptions. The different uses made of images of such idols, in terms of how the relationship between idols and readers is constructed by the magazine design and layout, may help us to differentiate the selling strategies and market positions of magazines as they target readers of different tastes and different cultural backgrounds. In the English-language online version of *CosmoGIRL!*, we can see that celebrity is one of the central themes of the magazine and idols are used as a point of reference for readers to generate their criticism on a variety of subject matters in different sections such as beauty, fashion and entertainment. In *CosmoGIRL!*, however, the coverage of the relationship between celebrity and these subject matters is relatively small.

When entertainment information is included the headlines of *CosmoGIRL!*, the content is generally descriptive of the places and shops in Hong Kong that the magazine recommends to its readers for fun. Indeed, the entertainment guide to Hong Kong is one of the most popular topics, besides the fashion and beauty trends, to appear on the magazine's cover. Examples include 'Summer 50 fun/free in Hong Kong' (Issue 12), '50 Hot Spots for Xmas' (Issue 16), '50 Cutie Shops Guide' (Issue 23), 'Christmas Pretty and Fun Guide' (Issue 28), and 'Summer Outdoor Activities Guide' (Issue 48). Through the promotion of fun places in Hong Kong, the magazine

not only aims to arouse the consumer desires of its readers in their leisure time but also enhances the favourable feeling of its readers towards Hong Kong. When idols from the entertainment industry are put on the cover, their names are mentioned with a description in a few words. The cover image is accompanied by a short interview, usually a couple of pages, in the content of the magazine, in which the teen idols will share their thoughts, memories and some of their daily life experience with readers. It is, however, unlikely that the magazine will advise its readers to copy the behaviour and lifestyles of the idols featured on its covers. The use of idols therefore serves the purpose of creating a fantasy for readers, which in turn enhances their loyalty to the magazine.

In addition to these uses, the magazine also features teen idols on its covers to develop a sharing approach in transmitting messages to its readers. The gender of the idols forms part of the strategy of the magazine in constructing its ideologies. On the covers of the first fifty-two issues, twenty-four of them feature pictures of females. (Twelve female idols appear on the magazine cover across the 52 issues; five of them appeared more than once, amounting to 17 times in total, with the remaining seven appearing just once.) Sixteen covers feature pictures of males. (Twelve male idols appear across the 52 issues; three more than once, seven times in total.) The remaining twelve covers feature group pictures. In these, six of them show girls' groups (Twins [five times] and 2R [once]), three show boys' groups (Shine [two times] and F4 [once]), and three show mixed-sex groupings, featuring the leading actors and actresses from films launched in Hong Kong cinema at the time.

Simply put, the purpose of featuring male idols with tempting captions on the cover is to arouse ‘romantic’ / ‘love’ fantasies in its readers. The images usually go along with captions such as ‘The Lover Roy’ (Issue 3), ‘Edison: Sex is...’ (Issue 16), ‘F4 Loves U’ (Issue 18), ‘吳彥祖 (Daniel Wu) Your Dream Man’ (Issue 24), ‘古巨基 (Leo Ku) Love plus’ (issue 35), ‘Jay’s deepest affection’ (Issue 39), ‘Alex Super Boyfriend’ (Issue 42), ‘陳柏霖 (Wilson Chan) My lovely answers’ (Issue 44), and ‘Ron’s Amazing Love’ (Issue 47) (see Figure 2.1). The images of male idols sometimes appear with captions that objectify readers under a male gaze, such as ‘Eason is gazing at you’ (Issue 10) (see Figure 2.2). However, the magazine does not employ the same approach used for male idols when it attempts to construct an aspirational relationship between idols and readers by using female idols on the cover.

When female idols are invited onto the cover, the captions accompanying their names usually serve the purpose of consolidating ‘girl power’ and emphasising solidarity among girls. Captions such as ‘CosmoGIRL 楊千樺 (Miriam Yeung)’ (Issue 1), ‘Pretty Power 容祖兒 (Joey Yung)’ (Issue 9), ‘Gigi Loves You’ (Issue 13), ‘Brave New Sammi’ (Issue 27), ‘林嘉欣 (Karena Lam) Inside Out Beauty’ (Issue 31), ‘Joey My Very First Time’ (Issue 32), ‘Gigi I love U, Girls!’ (Issue 33), ‘2R’s secret’ (Issue 34), ‘Miriam My all time favorite’ (Issue 36), ‘Isabella Cutie Power’ (Issue 37), ‘Fiona’s Fantasia’ (Issue 38), ‘“Twins” Those flowery memories’ (Issue 40), ‘Miriam’s New Year Revision’ (Issue 41), ‘Fiona Too Young!!!’ (Issue 45), ‘Fortune Niki’ (Issue 48), ‘Twins Face the Future’ (Issue 49), ‘Joey Give my heart a break’ (Issue 50), and ‘Miriam Share The Heart/Love (in a sign)’ (Issue 52), are used so as to consolidate the same-sex friendship among girls (see Figure 2.3). The romantic life of girl idols is sometimes hinted at in the captions, such as ‘Joey’s Best boyfriend’ (Issue

Figure 2.1. Male idol cover that aims at arousing the 'love' fantasy of its reader



Figure 2.2. Male idol cover that objectifies readers under the male perspective



Figure 2.3. Cover with female idol which highlights the solidarity among girls



Figure 2.4. Cover with female idol with romance/love captions



19), 'Jade Kwan Love' (Issue 22), and '林嘉欣 (Karena Lam) Modern love life' (Issue 43) (Figure 2.4).

The magazine uses the different genders of the idols to construct not only its marketing strategies but also the ideologies that it intends to develop and represent in relation to contemporary Hong Kong. The gender of the idols – the use of male idols to create a fantasy in its (female) readers and female idols to emphasise the solidarity among girls – is articulated through a 'heterosexual matrix'. In this way, it helps to naturalise the already established parameters of conventional femininity in society and safeguard the societal norm of 'heterosexuality'.²⁸⁰

The significance of the 'face' in developing marketing strategies and ideologies in contemporary Hong Kong may be supported by an argument made by Thomas Frank in his book *The Conquest of Cool* (1997). Frank concentrates on youthful faces to construct "a portrait of the revolution that its readers were sure to recognise from its resemblance to the counterculture" in advertisements.²⁸¹ Frank argues that little progress was made in promoting a rebellious attitude towards society before such use was made of youthful faces, even though advertisers had done everything they could to incorporate the new attitudes of young people into their advertisements. This example illustrates how the 'face' is used to generate identification with people who are seen to share similar attitudes. Advertisements lacking that potential for identification will hardly convince the young people in society. In Thomas Frank's view, 'youthful faces' are associated with a rebellious attitude towards society and thus have resonance with young people. By the same token, through the use of

²⁸⁰ Best 2005: 199.

²⁸¹ Frank 1997: 110-111.

'Chinese faces' in *CosmoGIRL!*, the editorial board of the magazine helps its readers to become more familiar with the cultural context of Hong Kong. The adoption of 'Chinese faces' with different genders on the other hand reinforces the heterosexual matrix of contemporary Hong Kong society.

The use of 'Chinese faces' to consolidate the ideologies of the magazine can also be revealed through its use of the faces of 'ordinary' girls in Hong Kong. For instance, the editors make good use of the readers in inviting them to perform as *CosmoGIRL* (CG girl) 'models of the month' to demonstrate the 'bold, daring and confident' nature of teenage girls in Hong Kong.²⁸² In a newly added section, the editorial board interviews these CG girls, who are all 'local' Hong Kong faces, and asks them to interpret the meaning of the slogan 'bold, daring and confident'. The CG girls' explanations are, of course, consistent with the interpretations of the magazine itself. In this way, the meaning of the characteristics that support an ideal image of teenage girls is standardised, revealing little or no discrepancy with the interpretations developed by editors across the whole magazine.

The magazine argues that "a brave new girl should have self-recognition and confidence – accept who you are."²⁸³ An ideal model for teenage girls should therefore know what she wants to be and be persistent in achieving her goals.²⁸⁴ According to the interpretation given by readers aged between 15 and 20 in the column 'Life Chat' in the first issue of the magazine, the slogan 'get what you want' (自己話事) refers to "making your own decision without consulting parents" on

²⁸² *CosmoGIRL!*, response of the editor to the reader in 'Speak Up' (September 2003: 24).

²⁸³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Gear', December 2003: 82; 'Love Feature', December 2004: 172.

²⁸⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', March 2002: 130; 'Life is Great', November 2005: 126; 'Inner Girl', January 2004: 108; 'Love Feature', December 2004: 172; 'Love Gear', May 2005: 132; 'How To Deal', November 2002: 126.

condition that the decision should “not be harmful to others” and girls should “have thought twice.” It also refers to girls who can “live independently and freely.”²⁸⁵ The readers’ interpretations are indeed consistent with the views the magazine is advocating. It is also not uncommon for the editors to publish letters from readers to support the arguments of the magazine in other aspects. Although there is no way to verify the authenticity of the letters, McMahan argues that the letters themselves are useful in creating a profile of the Cosmopolitan ‘girl’.²⁸⁶ The adoption of a first-person account in the narratives helps the magazine to gain the trust of its readers. This is because, as Karen Casey and Carol Weston argue in their books *Girl to Girl: Finding Our Voices* (2000) and *GIRLTALK: All the stuff your sister never told you* (1992) respectively, the narrative itself shows the understanding the editors have of the feelings and situations of their readers.

Beauty and fashion features show ‘girlie’ images in general, but not tailored particularly for Hong Kong

As a teenage lifestyle magazine, CosmoGIRL! not only utilises ‘Chinese faces’ on its covers and in its stories but also relays a large amount of information about ‘beauty-fashion’ trends to establish its market position in a global market. The construction of the images of teenage girls in the magazine is supported at first glance by the elements of fashion and ‘faces’. Hudson (1984) argues that “the magazine is aimed not just at a gender-specific readership but also at an age-specific readership so it is as concerned to appeal to the teenager as to the girl.”²⁸⁷ ‘Fashion’ and ‘faces’ are therefore significant constructs for the gender-specific and age-specific readership of

²⁸⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Life Chat’, September 2001: 98.

²⁸⁶ McMahan 1990: 391.

²⁸⁷ Hudson 1984: 50.

CosmoGIRL!. However, I will argue that while ‘beauty-fashion’ plays a significant role in the identification of CosmoGIRL! as a girls’ magazine, it is not as significant as the adoption of ‘Chinese faces’ is for encouraging readers to see the magazine as representative of being a girl in contemporary Hong Kong.

Almost every magazine has some intention of promoting consumer desire in its readers, and CosmoGIRL! is of no exception. The editors try to introduce the trendy products of the season to their readers, no matter which idols and what captions are used on the cover. However, the magazine can hardly claim that its fashion recommendations are specifically tailored to teenage girls in Hong Kong. This is because its recommendations are invariably for well-announced products sold in thousands of chain stores in a global market. Their description is therefore rather general, so as to be suitable for that market. As a result, the same beauty-fashion trends will also be addressed in other magazines circulated elsewhere under the influences of globalisation.

The articles on ‘Fashion’ and ‘Beauty’ have covered a wide range, including sports wear,²⁸⁸ sweaters,²⁸⁹ tees,²⁹⁰ denim,²⁹¹ one-pieces,²⁹² pants,²⁹³ checkers,²⁹⁴ skirts,²⁹⁵

²⁸⁸ *CosmoGIRL!* November 2001: 106, June 2002: 92, September 2002: 42, October 2002: 38, January 2003: 88, February 2003: 76, June 2003: 36, August 2003: 86, October 2003: 34, May 2004: 44, November 2004: 108, December 2004: 122.

²⁸⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* November 2001: 106, January 2002: 98, February 2003: 30.

²⁹⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2001: 124, February 2002: 38, April 2002: 86, June 2003: 36, April 2005: 50, May 2005: 26, July 2005: 42.

²⁹¹ *CosmoGIRL!* January 2002: 50, November 2003: 50, March 2005: 26.

²⁹² *CosmoGIRL!* April 2002: 86, May 2002: 38, June 2004: 38, March 2005: 26, May 2005: 28.

²⁹³ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2001: 48, October 2002: 28, January 2003: 38, June 2003: 44, February 2004: 42.

²⁹⁴ *CosmoGIRL!* June 2002: 40, December 2002: 78, February 2005: 90.

²⁹⁵ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2002: 42; May 2003: 44; June 2004: 44; December 2004: 34; May 2005: 42.

college style wear,²⁹⁶ knit wear²⁹⁷ and sneakers²⁹⁸ with animal, dotted, floral prints, stripes and/or patterns,²⁹⁹ as well as clothes in a variety of bright and sharp colours.³⁰⁰

In order to arouse the fantasies and consumer desires of its readers, the magazine will often feature pictures of non-Asian models, dressed beautifully and cavorting happily in a natural environment such as a forest or riverside. The setting of these pictures may be non-familiar to readers, and the images used are not the same as those used for the promotion of 'girl power', which, as Griffin argues, 'has/had a style ... that involved lots of makeup and glitter and wearing tight clothes'. In other words, Griffin identifies the style of Girl Power represented in magazines in the west as "excluding for any girl who feels at all self-conscious about the sex and shape of her body, which is likely to be a majority of young women."³⁰¹ The beauty-fashion trends and ways of presenting girl's clothes in *CosmoGIRL!* can also be seen frequently in other teen magazines, such as *TEA magazine* (circulated in Hong Kong) and the English-language online version of *CosmoGIRL!* (circulated elsewhere in the world). Girls in contemporary Hong Kong can therefore easily cross-reference beauty-fashion trends elsewhere in order to construct images of their own.

The ways of dressing recommended in the magazine are not culturally specific enough for the construction of images of teenage girls in Hong Kong. The use of 'Asian faces', on the other hand, strategically convinces readers that the images represented in the magazine play a role in constructing the image of teenage girls in a

²⁹⁶ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2002: 42, January 2003: 46, September 2004: 42, September 2005: 58.

²⁹⁷ *CosmoGIRL!* December 2002: 40, January 2004: 40, December 2004: 42.

²⁹⁸ *CosmoGIRL!* February 2003: 18, October 2003: 34.

²⁹⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* November 2001: 38 & 45, December 2001: 60, February 2002: 38, March 2002: 40, May 2003: 44, December 2002: 40, April 2003: 44, June 2003: 24, August 2003: 42, April 2004: 46, December 2004: 42, February 2005: 50, March 2005: 50, April 2005: 62, December 2005: 70.

³⁰⁰ *CosmoGIRL!* May 2002: 44, May 2003: 34, July 2003: 22, 24 and 34.

³⁰¹ Griffin 2004: 34.

Chinese community that includes Hong Kong. The circulation of beauty-fashion trends in Hong Kong not only contributes to the consumer desire of readers, and thus to the capital flows in a global market, but also simultaneously standardises the 'girlie' images within the exchange and transmission of such images between cities in a global market. The strategy of stimulating consumer desire is of course not limited to teenage lifestyle magazines. Potvin (2001), who focuses on representations of the male body in Canada's *Mayfair* magazine, argues that images of alterity, and specifically of the black male body, are used by the magazine not as a means to foster inclusivity, but rather to further highlight and legitimise the elite white male position. However, the wordings used in the descriptions and beauty-fashion advice in every magazine will vary depending on the kind of fantasy world its editors intend to promote and the different cultural backgrounds of the magazine's target audience. For instance, while CosmoGIRL! emphasises a fancy 'princess lifestyle', the online English-language version focuses more on a 'celeb styles'.

Distinguishing images of teenage girls from those of adult women through 'fashion'

Driscoll argues that girls' magazines constitute girls as both the viewed (desired) object and the viewing subject. On the one hand, female idols who are trendy, fashionable and have good skin complexion are the viewed (desired) objects of readers, on the other hand those idols are not inaccessible to readers. As has been discussed previously, CosmoGIRL! uses female idols on the cover to promote solidarity among girls. The magazine does this in two ways. First it provides a space for readers to find out more about their female idols (even though it does not involve a direct chat between readers and idols). The magazine includes a section in which

female idols share their interests, hobbies and everyday lives with the readers. This is the first means the magazine uses to build up a solidarity framework for girls. The second means involves advising readers on how they might look as great and charming as their female idols. The magazine therefore offers opportunities for readers to turn themselves into viewing subjects by recommending a variety of beauty and fashion products for the season.

In order to stimulate in its readers a sense of how to dress well, the magazine develops a particular class culture which is obviously not a working class one. In attempting to nurture such an aspirational readership, the magazine promotes a dress code that may not be affordable to all its readers. For instance, many readers have expressed in 'Speak Up' column that the fashion suggested by the magazine is a bit expensive and unaffordable for 'not so rich' secondary school girls.³⁰² The promotion of good dress sense then becomes simply a tactic by which the magazine exploits the purchasing power of its readers. This argument is supported by the increasing presence of advertisements in the magazine over the years since its establishment in 2001. Among the various kinds of advertisement, cosmetics with mid-range prices, such as Biotherm and Lancôme, occupy more than half the space. Obviously the magazine relies on advertisements for revenue, and cosmetics are one of the most popular products among teenage girls, and in general among females, in Hong Kong. As a teenage lifestyle magazine, it is therefore not at all surprising that the advertisement of cosmetics has a majority share (overall 58.43% across 52 issues) (see Figure 2.5).

³⁰² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Speak Up', November 2001: 10, January 2002: 14, June 2002: 18, July 2002: 18, November 2003: 20, March 2004: 16, June 2005: 18.

Figure 2.5. Share of advertisements (and their type) among the first fifty-two issues of *CosmoGIRL!*

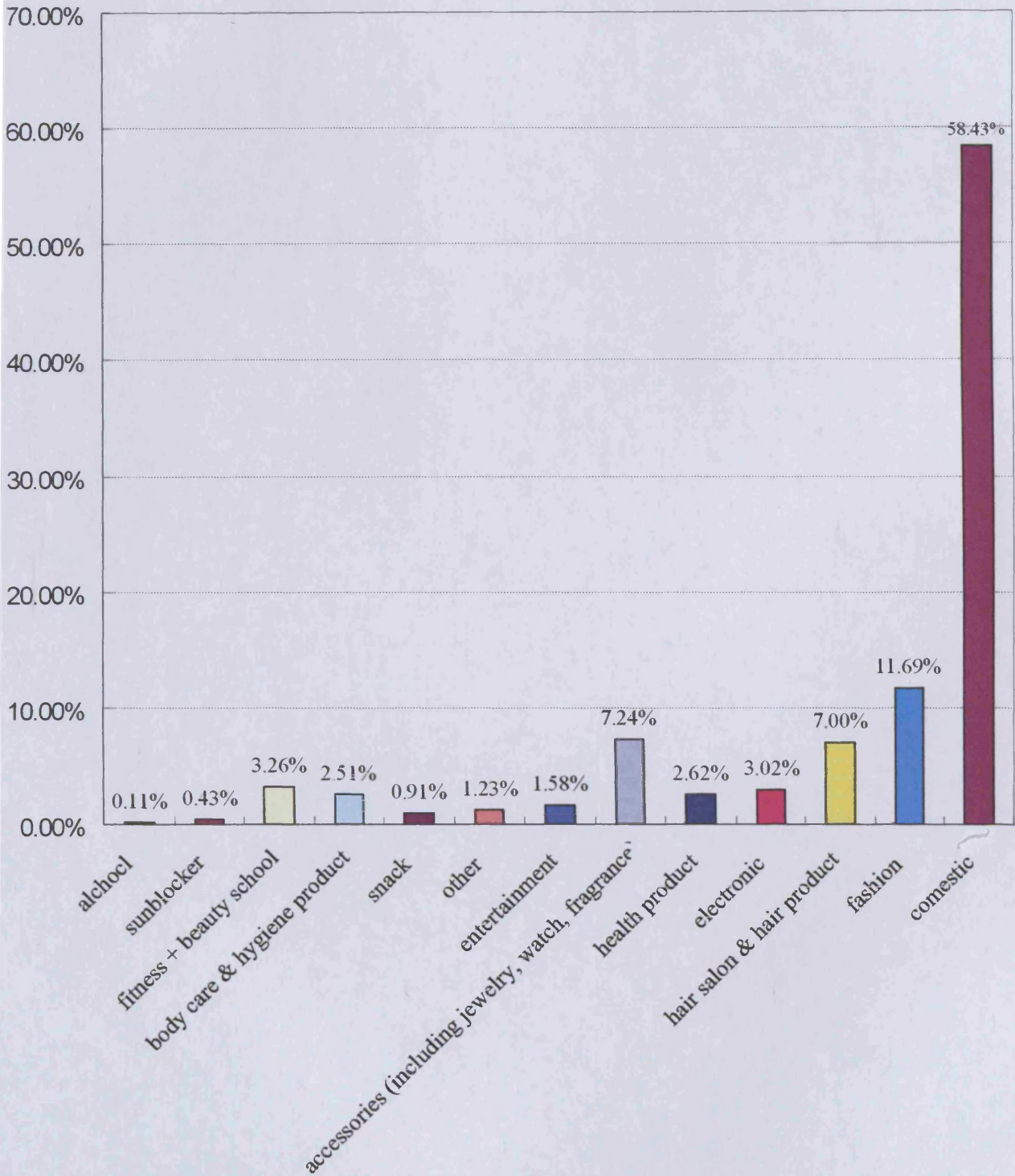


Figure 2.6. Examples of 'subjective' descriptions in 'fashion' trends for girls



Left: Use the words 'romantic' and 'think outside the box' to describe girls in 'Lace & Crochet'



Right: Use the words 'romantic' and 'vivacious' to describe girls in 'Ruffles & Frills'



Left: Use the words 'boyish' to describe girls in 'dungaree dress'



Right: Use the words 'charming' and 'smart' to describe girls who wear 'colourful' coats

In presenting a variety of fashion items to its readers, the magazine inserts a lot of subjective terms into its descriptions. These include: 'romantic', 'child woman', 'girlie', 'cutie', 'Hawaii look', 'girlish', 'boyish', 'glamorous', 'vivid', 'sweetie', 'sparkling', 'amazing', 'happy' and 'princess', for the images of teenage girls (see Figure 2.6). The magazine uses such descriptions as a means to create a fantasy world – full of happiness and princess lifestyles – for its readers. The creation of a middle-class girlish outlook among teenage girls is different to the societal expectation projected onto women in the adult world. Subjective descriptions such as 'romantic girly', 'child woman' or 'sparkling princess' are widely seen in the magazine. It even describes some ways of dressing as 'glam, sweet, boyish'.³⁰³ The words 'girly' and 'child woman' direct the expectations of society towards the dress code among teenage girls. The images of the teenage girl as a 'child woman', not yet fully developed as 'woman' according to the standards of the adult world, opens up a space for the reconstruction of the images of brave new girls who are allowed to dress 'boyishly' (but with invisible makeup). The magazine tries to present images of such girls as a-sexual and non-feminine because, so the magazine argues, the purpose of invisible makeup is simply to make girls look healthy not sexy.

The image of the girl in *CosmoGIRL!* is different from that in the English-language online version. *CosmoGIRL!* never uses the term 'sexy' in its creation of images of teenage girls. Even for festive occasions such as the Christmas party, the graduation party or Valentine's Day, the magazine only advises its readers to dress 'glamorously' not 'sexily'. Besides the term 'sexy', the terms 'mysterious', 'wild', and 'electric' are never used in *CosmoGIRL!* even though they are massively used in the English-

³⁰³ *CosmoGIRL!* September 2002: 42, December 2005: 70.

language version.³⁰⁴ In addition, the subtitles of the topics covered in the English-language online version are full of sexual appeals such as “3 first-date fashion tips that will guarantee you a good-night kiss.”³⁰⁵ While the English-language version tends to sexualise the everyday life of teenage girls, *CosmoGIRL!* is less explicit on this score. Indeed, such differences in appeal and expression tend to be deep-rooted in the cultural representations in magazines. Some cross-cultural research on advertising content, such as that conducted by Hsu (2002) and Chi (1999), has already proved this point. There seems to be a rigid difference between images of women in the west, such as in the US, and in the east, such as in Taiwan, in terms of sexual appeals and expressions. Their findings indicate that cultural values of adventure and sex are more significantly utilised in magazines in the United States. More women in the United States than in Taiwan wear seductive clothes.

There is no unique way in which girlhood is represented in the magazines. While *CosmoGIRL!* tries to create an aspirational readership, it does at the same time try to provide practical and affordable beauty advice to its readers. For instance, the skin care products promoted in its advertisements are seldom included or mentioned in its beauty-fashion column. The discrepancy between the expensive products seen in advertisements and lower cost items featured in the beauty-fashion column clearly shows that the magazine not only intends to develop a middle-class girlie image for its readers but also tries to enlarge its readership to include different classes in contemporary Hong Kong. This further supports the market positioning of the magazine in not denying the importance of cosmetics to teenage girls given the fact

³⁰⁴ Descriptions were extracted from the online section entitled ‘my prom style’ in the English-language version of *CosmoGIRL!* <<http://www.mypromstyle.com>> [assessed 16 October 2009].

³⁰⁵ Schickner, Lindsey. ‘First Impressions: 3 first-date fashion tips that will guarantee you a good-night kiss’, *CosmoGIRL!* <<http://www.cosmogirl.com/fashion/style-notebook/first-impressions>> [accessed 16 October 2009].

that they can contribute to a natural and healthy look. 'Naturalness' does not mean there should be no man-made decoration and reconditioning in the appearance of girls. In order to introduce its readers into the world of feminine consumption, the magazine simultaneously recognises the limited budgets of many of its readers. Its approach is similar to the logic used in *Jackie* magazine, which targets girls who "are not earning a salary and therefore cannot possibly afford to keep up with high fashion, or even buy a new mascara every other week."³⁰⁶ The desire of CosmoGIRL! to push up revenue through advertisements but at the same time to make recommendations to suit the actual needs of teenage girls only makes its fantasy context more multifaceted.

The construction of 'Bold, Daring and Confident' girls: to be a 'bitch' or to live in compromise

Although the magazine aims to boost the consumer desires of its readers in the capitalist market, at the same time it reminds its readers of the need to be a smart shopper. The magazine emphasises that it is important for teenage girls to become a quick and accurate shopper and not to follow the market trend blindly. In this regard, it seems that the magazine is not aiming to make use of the characteristics of a female consumer identified by Griffin in her analysis: "[o]n the one hand, women are positioned as ideal consumers, since femininity is seen as particularly well suited to the practices of consumption, that is, shopping. On the other hand, consumption is tied to notions of desire, and especially wanting material goods and services that one does not 'need' in a strictly material sense."³⁰⁷ Although CosmoGIRL! relies on advertisements for revenue, it explicitly asks its readers to be cautious about the

³⁰⁶ McRobbie 1981: 123.

³⁰⁷ Griffin 2004: 35.

standard advertising trick of associating shopping with success and happiness and socialising the body as imperfect.³⁰⁸ In fact, this trick has been frequently used by different media in contemporary Hong Kong society. The magazine's intention not to fool its readers in this way is another trick it uses to construct the image of its readers as being capable of an independent way of thinking. The magazine tells its readers to accept the imperfections of their bodies as an explicit way of demonstrating that independence of thought by not following to the trends set in the mass media. In this way the magazine tries to convince its readers that the biological body is not the most important feature in the teenage girl's construction of her self-image: "the value of oneself should not be built on the body shape, such as the size of breast, but on career, study or other talents."³⁰⁹

As was discussed in the Introduction, Driscoll suggests that there are two main types of images of girls in teenage lifestyle magazines: the partial and the situational. The partial image fragments the girl's body focusing on the possible (im)perfection of that formal component of her body, while the situational explains how this perfectible body should be used. In the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, the editorial board mixes the two types of images so as to promote the ideology of the magazine. On the one hand, the magazine encourages its readers to admit to bodily imperfection and to live with it, on the other hand it welcomes those readers who seek help from experts for any issues in relation to physical imperfections. The magazine includes a column called 'Health Kick' which contains a number of sub-columns such as 'Healthy U', 'What's up doc', 'Sex Tips' and 'Move Ur Body' to help readers solve problems in relation to health and puberty. In fact, emphasis on the subject area of health is common to many

³⁰⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Life is Great', November 2003: 112, January 2004: 100, March 2005: 120; 'Inner Girl', September 2004: 112.

³⁰⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Special Issue', January 2003: 94.

teenage lifestyle magazines, and CosmoGIRL! is no exception. However, the magazine does not treat all the problems that appear in its pages as real problems for teenage girls. The editors explain that not all of the issues the readers report are genuinely problematic, arguing that some problems that seem to bother readers a lot, such as pimples and breast size, are natural in the biological development of teenage girls.

The advice the magazine gives to its readers to live with bodily imperfection further enables the magazine to promote its ideology. On the one hand, it rationalises the difference between the sexes as something that is biologically natural; on the other hand it takes bodily imperfection as a motive for girls to initiate changes for a better life. For instance, it introduces a lot of beauty products designed to cover up imperfect skin complexion. That girls are told to live with imperfections does not mean they cannot do anything to make an improvement to their lives. Although they may have imperfect bodies, it does not mean they will fail to have a happy life. The magazine encourages girls to do something to improve their situation, such as working on improving skin complexion. By the same token, the magazine argues that girls can create a happy life through the self-improvement of their souls. This emphasis on the importance of 'soul' over that of 'appearance' for being a 'brave new girl' in contemporary society supports the assumption of the magazine that gender is performative (in Butler's sense) and that girls can make a change on their own terms.

One interpretation of 'soul' according to the magazine relates to the characteristics or personalities of teenage girls. The tendency of such magazines to ask their readers to change their personalities is not a new thing. For instance, McRobbie argues that

personality itself forms an important organising category in *Jackie* magazine: “Each week there is some concern with ‘your’ personality, how to know it, change it or understand those of your friends, boyfriends and families.”³¹⁰ In addition, Johnson argues in her study of magazines from the 1950s and early 1960s in Australia that changing the personalities of girls relies on presenting of their bodies and selves in appropriate form: “Feature articles and advertisements kept girls well-informed about the latest techniques and technologies invented just for them to assist in the presentation of their bodies in appropriate form. Training their inner selves was just as important as the transformation of the body, and again techniques of presentation were all important. ... skilful makeup and clever dressing are not enough. Personality and the way it is expressed through speech, manners and general behaviour are equally important.”³¹¹ This approach is indeed similar to that adopted in *CosmoGIRL!*. On the one hand, there are a large number of fashion and cosmetics advertisements in the magazine to keep readers informed the latest trends. On the other hand, the magazine keeps reminding its readers not to over-concentrate on their appearance because inner beauty is more important to the everyday life of teenage girls.

This emphasis on the importance of ‘soul’ over ‘appearance’ for being a ‘brave new girl’ in contemporary society distinguishes sex and gender as two different elements in the construction of the images of girls. The *CosmoGIRL!* editors do not deny the importance of appearance, they simply emphasise the importance of girls resisting social pressure with respect to physical attributes: “You have to build an image that you feel comfortable with and is suitable to your personality.”³¹² In so doing, the editors shift the emphasis onto the ‘inner beauty’ of girls, and argue that it is a waste

³¹⁰ McRobbie 2000: 84.

³¹¹ Johnson 1993: 124.

³¹² *CosmoGIRL!* January 2005: 128.

of time for girls to dedicate too much attention to physical appearance.³¹³ Since the two sets of elements do not form a causal relationship in the construction of the images of girls – in other words, since it is not impossible for the two elements to co-exist – this allows the magazine to put more effort into promoting inner beauty to its readers without denying the fact that appearance is also a contributing factor to their self-image.

To further develop the meaning of inner beauty, the magazine tells its readers that girls should have a good temper and manners, and take a positive attitude in every aspect of their lives, including study, family, relationships, friendship and health. The beauty of girls' souls is rated more highly compared to the element of appearance because soul beauty will lead girls to a healthy and longer life.³¹⁴ “If you want to become a beautiful girl, you have to love yourself and accept yourself, including your defects.”³¹⁵ The magazine states explicitly that its readers are friends of *CosmoGIRL!* in the front page of the editorial: “for those who love themselves, want to gain confidence and happiness, they are friends of *CosmoGIRL!*.”³¹⁶ The friendship between the magazine and its readers is also supported by the positive responses expressed by the latter to the importance of inner beauty in the ‘Speak Up’ column.³¹⁷

With the slogan ‘Bold, Daring and Confident’, the magazine packages its ideology for its readers by promoting an image of the confident and happy life of girls who live in

³¹³ *CosmoGIRL!* August 2002: 120.

³¹⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘All About Guys’, February 2004: 128; ‘Life is Great’, February 2004: 112, April 2004: 118, June 2004: 114, August 2004: 106, March 2005: 120, June 2005: 148, July 2005: 124, August 2005: 130, October 2005: 130; ‘Inner Girl’, January 2004: 110, February 2004: 130, October 2004: 144, February 2005: 146-147; ‘Life Tips’, November 2004: 128.

³¹⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Speak Up’, June 2002: 10.

³¹⁶ *CosmoGIRL!* May 2002: 20, September 2002: 22.

³¹⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Speak Up’, June 2002: 18, August 2002: 22, October 2002: 12, September 2003: 22, March 2004: 16, April 2004: 20, May 2004: 16, September 2004: 16, October 2004: 18, January 2005: 12, April 2005: 20, May 2005: 20, June 2005: 18, October 2005: 24, November 2005: 16.

a cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong. Although the magazine argues that girls can change their personalities so as to become 'brave new girls', it does not ask them to change their personalities for the purpose of pleasing others. In contrast, girls are told to change their personalities for the sole purpose of pleasing their big Other, that is, their own self-esteem. The idea of asking girls to please themselves not others is indeed very provocative. This is because, as Lees argues, the implication of not 'placing girls in relation to others in the process of their development is not to define woman 'as the object of man's desire'.³¹⁸ Lees is right to point out that the girl's construction of self is situated in the problematic of how to make girls stay away from the path of the dependence of childhood to the independence of adult life on the one hand; and how to gain girls some freedom in a society where caring and dependency are seen as attributes of femininity on the other hand. The dilemma girls are placed in puts *CosmoGIRL!* in a difficult position in promoting its idea of 'being brave new girls' while living with the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes. The magazine tries to avoid placing girls in the position of 'otherness' in the development of the self. However, it cannot dispense with the idea that both genders are complementary to each other. (The implications of this complementary framework for the construction of the self of the girl will be discussed later.)

CosmoGIRL! argues that the characteristics of being 'Bold, Daring and Confident' are not innate to either gender but can be achieved by 'loving oneself' and 'loving life', that is, accepting, appreciating and respecting oneself.³¹⁹ The intention of the editorial board of the magazine in emphasising the importance of girls pleasing

³¹⁸ Lees: 1993: 6 & 16.

³¹⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Life is Great', February 2005: 126, July 2005: 124; 'All About Guys', March 2002: 130.

themselves is to encourage girls to dare to voice their own feelings to others.³²⁰ When the principles, feelings or intelligence of girls are attacked, they are still told to be proud of their good points and insist on defending them. This is because girls have to decide on their own what kind of person they want to be. There is no need for them to be concerned about how others think about them.³²¹ In other words, when girls are told to be themselves, they are being told to understand their deep inner selves and be sensitive to and frank about their own emotions.³²²

The magazine argues that teenage girls who respect their inner selves will be able to meet the challenges of daily living: “This is your life, right now. It doesn’t wait for you to get back on your feet.”³²³ The magazine also claims that girls will lose their self-identity and be unhappy when they are living in compromise.³²⁴ It seems that the ability of girls to stick to their own principles is something that they should be proud of, and that makes the concept of the girl distinctive from that of the adult women.³²⁵ Indeed, some adult female writers who try to share the experiences of their teenage lives with their younger readers, such as Karen Casey in her book *Girl to Girl*, unconsciously divide a world into two spheres – an adult world and a teenage world. They tend to rationalise the behaviour in the adult world: “adults have to compromise all the time if they want to make progress at work or in their relationships.”³²⁶ The arguments of CosmoGIRL! – that girls have to respect their inner selves and should not live in compromise – encourage teenage girls to react differently because they

³²⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, October 2004: 124; ‘Be Happy’, December 2005: 136; ‘Inner Girl’, September 2005: 136.

³²¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Life Coach’, February 2003: 130.

³²² *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Life is Great’, July 2004: 106, October 2004: 132, November 2005: 126; ‘Inner Girl’, December 2003: 108.

³²³ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Be Happy’, November 2005: 129.

³²⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Inner Girl’, March 2003: 128.

³²⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Speak Up’, December 2001: 14, February 2002: 16, July 2003: 18, August 2003: 22.

³²⁶ Casey 2000: January 9.

have not yet come-of-age to conform to the rules in an adult world. The magazine therefore tries to create an essential base for girls to live in their present condition and conduct themselves with the characteristics of boldness, daring and confidence.

This emphasis on girls living in the present distinguishes the concept of the girl from that of the woman because the magazine explicitly tells its readers that it is not necessary for girls to be concerned about a later stage of life, that is, to become 'women'. As the magazine explains, the development of teenage girls does not necessarily and uniquely lead to the path of marriage and motherhood. This explains why these topics are seldom covered in the magazine. Even though some readers write to the magazine to seek advice on issues in relation to marriage, the editors respond in a way that suggests such topics are not yet supposed to be the concern of teenage girls due to their age. The approach of *CosmoGIRL!* here contradicts that of *Jackie* magazine, however. In McRobbie's analysis of *Jackie* in the 1980s, she finds that girls' dissatisfaction with the present was responded to in terms of looking forward to the next stage in life. As a result, *Jackie* at that time simply invited its girl readers to join a closed sorority of shared feminine values that actively excluded other possible values.³²⁷ In a similar vein, Tinkler (1995), in surveying popular magazines for girls growing up in England in 1920-1950, also finds that the 'entrance' of girls into relationships with the opposite sex was considered a prelude to marriage and motherhood.

I would suggest that the ways in which images of girls are represented in teenage lifestyle magazines may vary in small details but the bigger picture of the girl will

³²⁷ McRobbie 1992: 83-84.

change and develop along with global market trends. McRobbie argues that the layout and contents of *Jackie* in the early 1960s remained almost the same from year to year, such that the magazine “comes to serve as a kind of symbolic landmark against which quite literally generations of girls can chart their adolescent biographies.”³²⁸ “But because these meanings are so commonplace, because we, the readers are so used, already, to equating adolescence with problems, romance, and a whole string of insecurities, we lose track of them as constructs and as only one of a possible range of meanings.”³²⁹ However, in her analysis of the old and new versions of *Jackie* magazine, McRobbie argues in another article that

the practices and rituals of femininity which were once carried out in order to attract boys and to secure a future based on being a wife and mother are now done on behalf of the self. The old competitive relationships between girls, which were such a standard feature in *Jackie* and which often involved battling it out over a boy, have also disappeared to be replaced by the less sexually specific idea of having fun with friends. Even the old idea of the (frequently untrustworthy) best friends, seems to have been replaced by the importance of having friends of both sexes.³³⁰

Similar to the direction of *Jackie* magazine, *CosmoGIRL!*, as a new twenty-first century product in the teen market, also focuses on the self. It tries to convince its readers to live in their present condition happily and to make use of this period of time to explore other possible values, such as how ‘to be a bitch’ and to respect their inner

³²⁸ McRobbie 1981: 113.

³²⁹ McRobbie 1981: 115.

³³⁰ McRobbie 1992: 183.

selves. It is in this context that the magazine highlights the importance of girl power to its readers.

We can see that CosmoGIRL! does not pass through the discourse of the old competitive relationships between girls completely, nor is there a notable decline of romance in its coverage. I do not mean that the magazine suggests that the lives of girls should be devoted to the pursuit of romance. Obviously the opposite is the case. I only mean that gender ideologies in magazines are not represented in a clear-cut way nowadays. For instance, the emphasis on the possibility of hostile relationships between girls and the necessity of having a complementary relationship with boys contravenes the magazine's advocacy of girl power. On the one hand, the magazine tries to convince its readers that girls should live at their own pace and thus should not be in a hurry to get involved in any long-term romance, on the other hand it advises girls to respect themselves by respecting boys, even though they are not yet in a romantic relationship. Johnson makes a precise remark regarding the dilemma faced by girls in the construction of the self:

[T]he competing definitions of girlhood and growing all shared the assumption that the young woman would find in herself both the need for the freedom to make a self and the desire to renounce that freedom in her attaining maturity.³³¹

³³¹ Johnson 1993: 153.

Simply put, *CosmoGIRL!* does not think girls need the kind of identification to be had from a romantic relationship for the construction of the self.³³² This is not to say that girls should not commit in a relationship, if they are in one.³³³ (The romantic relationship between girls and boys will be discussed in more detail in the next section.) The magazine simply argues that it is unwise for girls to close down all the possibilities of living at their age. Nor should they think that they could change the actual behaviour of boys to fulfil their desires in a relationship. This is because the lives of teenagers are full of uncertainty and it will thus be very likely that girls' expectations about the type of mate they want to spend the rest of their lives with will change over time.³³⁴ As a result, the magazine reminds its readers that the criteria for finding a boyfriend should not be the same as that for finding a husband.³³⁵ If a relationship does not work out, girls are advised to end it and move on. In this context the magazine suggests that girls would do better not to fantasise too much about a long-lasting relationship and to question whether they are ready to make any such commitment at their stage of life. This is because such a commitment, as the magazine argues, is associated with a series of responsibilities including taking care of a family in the future, which may limit the personal goals appropriate for teenage girls.

In order to convince its readers that girls at their age are not yet ready for a romantic relationship, the magazine continually seeks to clarify the difference between love and infatuation.³³⁶ This tactic is, indeed, quite similar to the tactic adopted in the

³³² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', August 2005.

³³³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', May 2004.

³³⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', July 2004 and May 2005.

³³⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', May 2003 and December 2004.

³³⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', January 2003, February 2003, March 2003, May 2003 and April 2004; 'Love Handbook', March 2002; 'Special Issue', November 2003 and October 2004.

secondary school education discourse. Simply put, the magazine argues that “infatuation/like is a kind of feeling and love is a kind of belief.”³³⁷ While infatuation refers to “the sense of feeling, being irrational, wanting pleasure in advance, being inconsiderate, being unable to accept defects, being suspicious and being possessive, real love on the other hand needs to take responsibility among the two parties.”³³⁸ Attraction, which is associated with infatuation, is therefore not the same as appreciation and respect, which are the elements of love.³³⁹ The magazine, like the secondary school discourse, therefore simply treats the concept of romance as a means of communication and a kind of social activity among teenagers. This gesture in turn helps to set up a temporary site of resistance to a heterosexual ideology in which heterosexual males are supposed to control and subordinate females.

The distinction between ‘love’ and ‘like’ that the magazine justifies differentiates the meanings of personal desire and collective/family interest in the teen romance context. McMahon argues that the tactic of treating romance purely at a personal level – that is, reducing the social dynamics, conflicts and contradictions of individual psychology or projection – has been traditionally employed by the *Cosmopolitan* magazines more generally.³⁴⁰ It seems that again *CosmoGIRL!* is no exception to this rule. As McMahon argues, “it is the repeated invocation of romance that works to obscure the normative dimensions of heterosexuality while also stabilising and naturalizing them. Largely relegated to the realm of feeling, romance is thought to be private, intimate, and above all else, outside the contested terrain of politics; in this way, it conceals the

³³⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘His View & Her View’, October 2005.

³³⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘His View & Her View’, September 2005.

³³⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, June 2002, November 2003 and October 2005; ‘Love Feature’, October 2004.

³⁴⁰ McMahon 1990: 384.

very political workings of domination it serves.”³⁴¹ Since romance in a teenage context in *CosmoGIRL!* is regarded as ‘infatuation’, which refers to ‘the sense of feeling’ discussed previously, the magazine applies a similar tactic to justify the normative dimensions of heterosexuality in contemporary Hong Kong society.

As the magazine further argues, love should not be justified by the amount of time spent chatting and meeting with each other but by whether or not boys have included girls in their long-term plans.³⁴² This is because, according to the magazine, love should comprise the elements of being committed to a relationship, being mature and rational in one’s own behaviour, being patient in understanding each other, being able to care for each other unconditionally, being able to accept the defects and appreciating the strengths of each other, being able to trust each other and being non-possessive. This account of love is nonetheless similar to the interpretation Firestone gives of the phenomenon of love in a heterosexual relationship. According to her, the phenomenon of ‘love’ involves a kind of ideological cover-up or disguise of the relations of power that prevail in heterosexual relationships. She therefore argues that the emotion of love, as experienced by women and men alike, serves to disguise the actual political meaning of sex by placing it within the context of a confusing and misleading set of expectations.³⁴³ From this perspective, the distinction between love and like (and sex) in the magazine may therefore provide some space for girls to distance themselves from this set of expectations.

³⁴¹ Best 2005: 195.

³⁴² *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, June 2003, March 2004 and June 2005.

³⁴³ Breakwell and Millward 1997: 29-41.

The meaning of romance in the magazine is presented as less likely to be a matter of genuine feeling and as less serious or important than marriage.³⁴⁴ Based on the distinction between love and infatuation, the magazine argues that girls have not yet come-of-age to know the meaning of love.³⁴⁵ This approach is indeed not something new in the world of girls' magazines. Johnson argues that "the categories of adolescence and teenagerhood played a key role in this advice, claiming the necessity of waiting, of preparation, and of a proper period of growing up before young women declared themselves ready for marriage and began a period of serious dating."³⁴⁶ This statement is particularly valid when it comes to the issue of teacher-student romance, in relation to which the moral ground taken by *CosmoGIRL!* is more obvious.³⁴⁷ This is because girls are supposed to be overly influenced by fantasy and (unrealistic) imagination when in a romantic context.³⁴⁸ Since a teacher-student romance is in reality characterised by an imbalance in power relations between adult and girl, the latter may not be of the right age to handle a relationship with somebody who is older and more mature.³⁴⁹ It is also in this context that the status of the girl as not-yet an adult is reaffirmed. Since teenage girls are not-yet adults, they are presumed not to understand the meaning of love because they are not yet ready to make the required commitment in their lives. It is this chain-like logic that pushes girls into ignoring their development in later life and trying to live in the present as contentedly as possible.

³⁴⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', December 2004; 'Love Handbook', November 2001; 'Inner Girl', March 2003.

³⁴⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', June 2003.

³⁴⁶ Johnson 1993: 135.

³⁴⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', May 2003, June 2003, June 2004 and July 2004.

³⁴⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', December 2002, February 2003, April 2003, July 2003, October 2003, March 2004, April 2004, June 2004, July 2004 and September 2005; 'Special Issue', October 2004.

³⁴⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', November 2004 and March 2005.

Unlike in the context of the 1950s and early 1960s in the west, the primary task of girls and young women in teenage lifestyle magazines today is no longer that of learning to how to make their bodies and selves take the appropriate feminine form so as to prepare for the moment when they will meet the man they will marry, the potential dreamed-about lover. As Johnson argues, the central preoccupation of girls in the 1950s and early 1960s “was always depicted as meeting, attracting and catching the man that would make them the loved individual. Instructions about how to prepare oneself for this moment in one’s life provided one of the major themes of popular feature articles for the teenage girl.”³⁵⁰ The connotations nonetheless have been changed slightly nowadays. This is not to say that girls do not need a relationship – even CosmoGIRL!, which encourages its readers to be ‘bold, daring and confident’, girls, would not dare to say that girls do not need to be in a relationship. It just says that romance should form only a small part of their lives in contemporary Hong Kong society. More importantly, they are not expected to spend all their lives preparing for the meeting with their dream-lover. Girls nowadays, as CosmoGIRL! tries to show to its readers, are expected to equip themselves for their own sakes. The hidden agenda of the magazine, nonetheless, is that well-equipped girls will attract boys at any time. It is therefore quite common for many teenage lifestyle magazines and girl books, such as Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl* (1963) to urge girls to enjoy and prolong their single statuses for some time, even though the possibility of girls preparing for a long romantic relationship or for marriage is not ruled out.

The concept of individualism – in terms of girls respecting their inner selves and living in the present condition – is manifested in terms of ‘bitchiness’. The magazine

³⁵⁰ Johnson 1993: 135.

closely associates the attitudes and the acts of girls who voice opinions with the concept of 'bitchiness'. Being a bitch, according to *CosmoGIRL!*, is a natural attitude of girls nowadays.³⁵¹ Being a bitch, moreover, is for girls who dare to be 'bad girls' and who may act destructively against the norms of society and in particular against the unfair treatment of, and expectations that are placed on, teenage girls.³⁵² This non-conformist attitude of girls (not women) is conditionally promoted by the magazine. My instant response to this is to ask what kind of unfair treatment and expectations the magazine has in mind, such as limit the behaviour of teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong society. *CosmoGIRL!* does not elaborate on this point explicitly. However, through its construction of gender ideology and advice on relationships with boys, the magazine clearly illustrates to its readers what girls should resist and what they support maintain in different situations.

The magazine strongly emphasises to its readers that it is not a problem for teenage girls to be a bitch.³⁵³ It argues that a girl may be considered a bitch if she has a strong attitude to life and is tough enough to face any difficulties that may occur in her life.³⁵⁴ To be a tough girl is indeed another side of the same coin the magazine uses to legitimate 'being a bitch' in contemporary Hong Kong society. This is because through the concepts of bitchiness and toughness the magazine requires teenage girls to accept, respect and appreciate own selves and live on their own terms. Similar to the image the magazine projects of a bitch, tough girls should also be presumed to be persistent in the way they choose to be. As a result, the magazine tells its readers that girls not only need to be able to get over failure by learning from their mistakes, they

³⁵¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl' April 2003: 118; 'Love Handbook', October 2001: 33.

³⁵² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', March 2003: 128.

³⁵³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', May 2004.

³⁵⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', October 2004.

also need to challenge their own limits and should never feel regret over what they have done. The space created by the magazine is important for girls to rethink how they should perceive themselves. As Bowen (2002) and Britt (2003) argue, the pictures represented in magazines can become a site of resistance, in which female readers can project themselves into an advertisement or the message of an article and turn an available, passive object into an active, escaping subject. In the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, it provides its female readers with a site of resistance to the conventional conformist images of women in society.

Simply put, the magazine tries to create an image of teenage girls who are capable of facing up to difficulties and problems. In a series of articles published in the column 'Be Happy', the central theme is to encourage teenage girls to face and solve problems on their own terms.³⁵⁵ In fact, the emphasis on girls maintaining a tough attitude is widely covered in different columns under the subject area of 'Inner Girl'.³⁵⁶ Girls having a tough character seems to be one of the most important elements in girl power. This point can be illustrated by a special feature on girl power in Issue 3 of the magazine. In this issue, the editorial board makes it very explicit to its readers that teenage girls nowadays have to demonstrate an ability to face any kind of challenge so as to prove that they are strong, outstanding and determined girls.³⁵⁷ However, the construction of the image of teenage girls who are tough and daring enough to initiate changes to improve their lives is based on the assumption the magazine has made with regard to boys – who by contrast are presented as being in a vulnerable position because they are the victims in the socialisation process of society. In other words, the magazine argues that boys should be forgiven since they are

³⁵⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Be Happy', May 2005, June 2005, July 2005 and August 2005.

³⁵⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', May 2005.

³⁵⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Life Chat', November 2001.

incapable of handling emotional issues and girls therefore should take the initiative in handling such issues. However, this contrast between the toughness of girls and the vulnerability of boys only reinforces the gender differences between girls and boys in terms of biology and modes of thinking that has been set up by the magazine.

Another characteristic the magazine assigns to the image of tough girls is that of shouldering responsibility for changing their present condition in ways that may not be tolerated within the customary gender ideology or accepted by boys who are male chauvinists. The tricky point, however, is that the magazine raises no doubts about the assumption that boys are male chauvinist, and considers boys rather than girls to be the main victims of a particular socialisation process in various institutions such as school and family.³⁵⁸ As a result, the magazine does not expect boys to be able to change their minds easily because, in general, they are also thought to be naïve, childish and not mature enough to get beyond their crudely masculine thought processes.³⁵⁹

Such assumptions about gender differences between the sexes are not something new in gender and cultural studies. Many writers such as Sue Sharpe have already pointed out how the different characteristics attributed to boys and girls are implicitly endorsed: “Little girls are good, sweet, quiet and thoroughly angelic, and they like helping mother in the home. Boys are not expected to behave like this and are seldom involved with anything very domestic.”³⁶⁰ However, through the analysis of recent advertisements for products aimed at girls, many girl-culture academics and writers

³⁵⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, Issues October 2001 and December 2001; ‘Love handbook’, November 2001.

³⁵⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, January 2003.

³⁶⁰ Sharpe 1976: 93.

such as Harris and Dobson have argued that selling young femininity in terms of weakness and submissiveness no longer works in contemporary society. On the contrary, empowerment and consumption are instead closely linked through associations made between products for young women and their being confident, strong, assertive leaders and role models.³⁶¹

Aware of this cultural shift, the magazine does present gender as performativity to its readers, but only with respect to girls not boys. Girls have to shoulder the responsibility for initiating changes because this is the only way for them to make their lives better and happier, given the assumption that they will get no help from boys or from contemporary Hong Kong society more generally. Since the betterment of girls is thus a girls' issue, they have to take initiative and do something for themselves, such as be persistent in not conforming to social norms and expectations. This approach is consistent with feminist thinking, beginning with Liberal Feminism in the United States and the United Kingdom, in which women are responsible for taking care of women's issues, such as reproduction, for the betterment of women's lives.

The solidarity of girls' power

The magazine tells its readers that (same-sex) friendship is a crucial element in enabling girls to lead a happy life. The editors of different columns of the magazine – such as 'Be Happy', 'Girl Talk', 'Great Life Is', 'My Journal', 'My Story' and 'My Trip' – ceaselessly address the importance of girls consolidating closer female

³⁶¹ Dobson 2008: 126.

friendships by telling their same-sex friends the details of their lives on a regular basis.³⁶² This is because, as the magazine argues, such friends can not only help girls avoid depression but also can provide them with support and comfort through difficult times.³⁶³ Indeed, the concept of ‘girl power’, as Griffin argues, “appeared to promise an all-female world of fun, sassiness, and dressing up to please your (girl) self.” It “appeared to endorse and value female friendships, even over and above the pressure to get (and bother about) boyfriends.”³⁶⁴ Griffin also addresses the fundamental meaning of ‘girl power’, which takes it “as self-evident that girls and women are ‘equal’ to boys and men, and should be treated as such, eliding this into the assumption that girls and women are already equal to boys and men.”³⁶⁵

In the first place, it seems that the concept of ‘girl power’ in the magazine personalises the life of girls in contemporary Hong Kong society and thus underplays the influence of social factors in the construction of the self of girls. This is because, as Griffin argues, girls or women are not encouraged to challenge boys/men or any form of patriarchal system in an overtly politicised way. This logic may be useful in understanding the relationship, as expressed in *CosmoGIRL!*, between the solidarity among girls and the importance of them retaining a ‘singlehood’ attitude to their lives. The magazine provides two interpretations of the concept of singlehood for its readers. On the one hand it means being alone – that is, girls should not become involved in a romantic relationship or have any thoughts about getting married at their age. The magazine makes it very clear to its readers that there is no association between a girl’s single status and the possibility that she may feel lonely. Girls are therefore strongly

³⁶² *CosmoGIRL!* June 2002: 120.

³⁶³ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Life Is Great’, May 2004: 118, April 2005: 134; ‘Girl Talk’, May 2003: 117.

³⁶⁴ Griffin 2004: 33.

³⁶⁵ Griffin 2004: 33.

advised to be happy and enjoy their time spent being single/alone.³⁶⁶ On the other hand, the magazine argues that singlehood is simply a kind of lifestyle and attitude girls should take towards their lives. And in fact this has nothing to do with the social status of girls – that is, whether they are single or in a relationship, all girls should live with this attitude.³⁶⁷ When girls are told to remain single, it simply means that they should keep their own life pattern. This is the appropriate attitude for ‘brave new girls’ in contemporary Hong Kong society. However, there is no implication that the magazine is asking girls to stay away from boys.

Female solidarity is questioned

The framework of the complementary relationship between the opposite sexes is a potential threat to the solidarity among girls. Although the magazine repeatedly promotes the importance of girl power for its readers, it is overshadowed by the complementary framework in society. The most prominent example is the magazine’s attempt to introduce the phenomenon of ‘frenemy’ to its readers in its first issue. (Figure 2.7.) In the column ‘How to deal’, in which the editors give advice to readers on handling any problems they encounter in the everyday life, the editorial board explicitly tells its readers that the phenomenon of ‘frenemy’ is common, serious and unavoidable among teenage girls.³⁶⁸ In order to handle the issue in a proper way, the magazine cautiously reminds its readers that girls should not share everything with

³⁶⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Inner Girl’, May 2005: 162, September 2005: 136; ‘Love Gear’, March 2005: 108; ‘Guy Decoder’, September 2002: 110.

³⁶⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Life Chat’, December 2001: 94.

³⁶⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘How To Deal’, September 2001: 88.

same-sex friends, in particular in relation to (heterosexual) romance and career.³⁶⁹

This is because, so the magazine wants its readers to believe, girls will compete intensively with each other in both fields. This reminder is at odds with other positions adopted by the magazine, not least because it fails to mention that similar confrontations will arise between girls and boys.

The magazine does not expect girls to be very intimate with each other for the development of solidarity. Coverage on any intimate behaviour in a same-sex friendship between girls, such as kissing, or sleeping over, is absent from the magazine. The only acknowledged scenario in which a girl may kiss another person is in a romantic context, referring strictly to a heterosexual relationship. Since the magazine only tries to explore the question of 'choice' within heterosexuality but never drives its readers to think in a deeper way about whether heterosexuality itself may be chosen, it treats the heterosexual relationship between girls and boys as something taken for granted. The heterosexual relationship framework increases the tension between teenage girls because the conflicts among them tend to be irresolvable or unavoidable if boys are involved as a source of conflict.

As was mentioned in Introduction, Driscoll argues that mainstream girls' magazines assume heterosexuality as the norm and therefore equate the development of gender identity with sexual identity – to become a woman is to become heterosexual. As a result, although the images in magazines have expanded the traditional role for women to the public sphere, Liggett (2006) and Walker (2007) argue that this has taken place on condition that the status quo of society is safeguarded, that is, in a

³⁶⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Girl Talk', February 2002: 103; 'Guy Decoder', May 2002: 108, May 2004: 112; 'Life is Great', May 2005: 148; 'Inner Girl', November 2003: 138; 'Life Tips', June 2003: 114; 'Love Feature', March 2004: 112; 'Moving Up', September 2005: 123.

manner not detrimental to home life or the authoritarian status of men. In the case of CosmoGIRL!, although the magazine provides a temporary space for female readers to construct themselves as girls rather than women, it does not help to reproduce a normative image of the girl. According to Driscoll, girl readers looking at the girls in a girls' magazine are expected to respond favourably to its framing discourse and reinforce its model of what she refers to as subject-object gendering. By the same token, CosmoGIRL! constitutes girls as both viewed (desired) object and viewing subject. However, the proposed two ends, as Driscoll suggests, serve the same purpose of constructing the role of girls as being one of pleasing the Other, that is, boys, and making their own self-esteem dependent upon playing that role. As a result, there is no imagery in the magazine that would encourage girls to desire other girls. The images simply help girl readers to look at each other as desirable for boys. In the logic of Diana Fuss, the 'spectatorial' object of girls' magazines is not an object of desire but a point of identification. The failure of girls to identify with each other is based on the assumption that the gaze is necessarily heterosexual in the sense that it affirms the Subject against a feminised object.

Within the complementary framework constructed by the magazine, the solidarity of same-sex friendship among girls is always in question. In an extreme scenario, McRobbie argues that female solidarity, or even just female friendship, has no real presence in the world of teenage lifestyle magazines, such as in the case of *Jackie*. McRobbie argues that, for such magazines, the quickest and easiest way for girls to achieve self-respect is to escape the atmosphere of female company and find a boyfriend. As a result, the girl's individualistic outlook "must be retained in case she has to fight to keep him. This is, therefore, a double-edged kind of individualism since,

in relation to her boyfriend, she is expected to leave individuality behind on the doorstep.”³⁷⁰ In the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, the whole aim of the magazine to construct teenage girls as ‘brave new girls’ indirectly suggests the possibility of teenage girls engaging in a romantic relationship in the future. The magazine includes a lot of different columns – such as ‘Ask him/Guy Decoder/Ask Joven’, ‘He Tells You’, ‘His View & Her View’, ‘Love Gear’, ‘Love Handbook’ and ‘Love Me Not’ – which draw its readers into discussions on the relationship between girls and boys. Kehily argues that the topics treated in the magazines not only provide a site for readers to discuss the issues but also give them the impression that heterosexuality can be learned, desired and manipulated.³⁷¹ Involvement in a romantic relationship, no matter whether at present or in the future, seems to be an indivisible part of teenage girls’ lives, even though the magazine at the same time argues that it should form only a small part. As a result, the magazine both explicitly and implicitly includes a lot of discussion about how girls should prepare for this small part of lives.

Such questions about the solidarity among girls, as well as about preparation for a romantic relationship, can also be found in other cultural texts for girls. For instance, Sue Sharpe argues that in girls’ comics there is little solidarity between girls and collective action is rare. “The opposite sex on the other hand is featured in differing degrees. Men and boys feature quite prominently in girls’ comics, often as close relatives, figures of authority, or as unscrupulous villains, but seldom as simple friends.”³⁷² Sharpe’s analysis helps us to understand the rationale for the positions adopted by *CosmoGIRL!*. Even though the magazine tells its readers girls should not

³⁷⁰ McRobbie 1992: 131.

³⁷¹ Kehily 2005: 98.

³⁷² Sharpe 1976: 99.

Figure 2.8. Potential for romance



(Extract from Issue 1)



(Extract from Issue 2)

(Extract from Issue 3)



(Extract from Issue 9)

(Extract from Issue 11)



(Extract from Issue 29)

(Extract from Issue 32)

compromise under any circumstances, including in a relationship, it does not mean that girls should not be ready for a romance to happen in any time.³⁷³ When it does happen, girls are expected to make certain concessions so as to live with their boyfriends harmoniously. The ultimate reason for girls to equip themselves, as the magazine argues, is so as to be prepared for an unexpected romance at any time. This is because a romance may start when girls are least expecting it. And when the potential for romance in the future is expected, conflicts among girls should also be expected to arise. (Figure 2.8.)

A complementary relationship between girls and boys

Aapola et al. argue that friendship among girls is “the most important social sphere of heterosexuality” that structures female subjectivities concerning femininity.³⁷⁴ However, in the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, when the two sets of relationships – that is, friendships among girls and relationships between girls and boys, whether or not romantic – are in conflict, a harmonious relationship among girls is most likely to be questioned in the first place. The magazine tells its readers that it is hard, if not impossible, for teenage girls to have a harmonious relationship with their same-sex friends. However, it tries to convince its readers of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with boys at all times. Since friendship among girls always complements a heterosexual relationship, it rationalises the impossibility of portraying a lesbian sexuality in the magazine. A complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes, nonetheless, does not rule out the possibility that girls and boys will enter into a relationship in the future. As Christian-Smith argues, “[w]hile

³⁷³ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Guy Decoder’, February 2003 and February 2004.

³⁷⁴ Aapola et al. 2005: 147.

there are aspects of romance that elevate the individual, it is also an experience through which girls negotiate the parameters of their power and authority. Romance ultimately involves the construction of feminine identity in terms of others, with boys in the powerful position of giving girls' lives meaning."³⁷⁵

The magazine makes it very clear to its readers that homosexuality is normal and thus should be accepted and respected by society.³⁷⁶ However, in terms of the kind of discussion about homosexuality allowed in the magazine, readers are lured into the thought that homosexuality is more of a social issue than a concern of individuals. As a result, there is no room for its readers to discuss the question of whether heterosexuality itself can be chosen, or not. Nor can *CosmoGIRL!* ask a question like "what makes a woman heterosexual?" (in the way it can ask "what makes a woman lesbian?")³⁷⁷ Since heterosexuality is still the norm in the world of girls' magazines, even though the idea of lesbian desire may also be acknowledged, it is impossible for magazines to disclose other forms of sexuality to their readers. McRobbie makes a clear statement on this matter:

The whole cultural field of the magazines takes heterosexual desire as constituting a framework of normality. There is no explicit information about the fine details of lesbian sex, no position of the fortnight for lesbian lovers. This point then marks the limits of permissible

³⁷⁵ Christian-Smith 1988: 92.

³⁷⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', October 2004: 122; 'Life Tips', September 2001: 130; 'Special Issue', March 2003: 130.

³⁷⁷ Winship 1987: 117-118.

sexualities within the field of the magazines. Lesbianism remains, for younger readers, a social issue rather than a sexual desire.³⁷⁸

CosmoGIRL!'s advocacy of the complementary framework and of the possibility of girls and boys having a romance in the future, not surprisingly, upholds the prevailing heterosexist ideology where male and female sexualities have been normalised and naturalised. Although the magazine maintains that gender is a performativity and thus lays down the possibility of girls changing their personalities for a better life, it seems to place gender and sexuality in an essentialist and linear relationship, in which the latter is subsumed within the former. As a result, it successfully constructs the phenomenon of 'frenemy' as an unavoidable conflict between girls and the issue of homosexuality is largely absent in its coverage.

In an extreme circumstance, the emphasis on heterosexuality not only "marks the limits of permissible sexualities within the field of the magazines", but also intensifies a hostile relationship between girls. As just mentioned, CosmoGIRL! introduced the phenomenon of 'frenemy' to its readers, not only in its first issue but continued in Issue 2 as a special topic. There is an apparent difference in terms of the approaches the magazine suggests for dealing with same-sex and opposite-sex friendships. While the magazine tells its readers 'frenemy' is a common phenomenon, it reminds them that it is a childish behaviour for girls to play separately with boys.³⁷⁹ As the magazine explains, girls are not expected to treat boys in hostile ways nor should they be afraid of boys because girls are presumed to have a strong desire to be attached to

³⁷⁸ McRobbie 1997: 202.

³⁷⁹ *CosmoGIRL!* October 2001: 100.

boys.³⁸⁰ The complementary framework not only acts as an inescapable force ensuring the maintenance of the heterosexuality framework, in which a conflicting relationship among girls is presumed, but also pushes further the assumption that a pure friendship between the sexes can hardly exist.³⁸¹

Griffin argues that research on girls' and women's magazines in the First World has shown that such texts constitute powerful ideological instruments, which naturalise heterosexuality as a normal part of young women's lives.³⁸² *CosmoGIRL!*, which originates in the United States, may share a similar concern. However, if this is also a concern of *CosmoGIRL!*, given the fact that Hong Kong is a global city in the First World, it means that the editorial board of the magazine will not only focus on heterosexual desire as an obligatory part of femininity but also concentrate on the construction of (hetero)sexual desire as a fundamental part of girlhood, especially of prepubescent girlhood. Since the complementary framework is latently reinforced in the magazine, the meaning of 'toughness' and 'bitchiness' of girls becomes arbitrary and is totally subject to the call of boys.³⁸³

The magazine does not ask its readers to believe that girls must be desperate for a romantic relationship, nor does it try to convince them to make a life-long commitment. It simply tells its readers that girls should always concern themselves with the boys' feelings of (even at the cost of surrendering their own feelings sometimes). As has been discussed, girls are advised to remain independent even when they are in a relationship. The magazine reminds its readers that it is important

³⁸⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', May 2004: 130; response of the editor to the reader in the column 'Speak Up' (September 2003: 22); *CosmoGIRL!*, April 2003: 102.

³⁸¹ *CosmoGIRL!* August 2004: 124.

³⁸² Griffin 2004: 36.

³⁸³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Handbook', October 2001: 33.

for girls to allow their boyfriends some privacy, by not intruding into their social lives, because this is the key to maintaining a relationship a bit longer (by not annoying the boyfriend).³⁸⁴

In a romantic context, the magazine repeatedly reminds its readers it is very important for girls to show respect to boyfriends and not to embarrass them. It lists potentially embarrassing acts to be avoided, such as interrupting when boys are out with their friends, and making boys act femininely as this will hamper their self-esteem.³⁸⁵ However, the magazine further argues that it is not enough simply for girls not to embarrass boys; they should also deliberately try to impress their boyfriends or help to boost their egos.³⁸⁶ Such deliberate acts, according to the magazine, should not be considered fake because they are not 'unfaithful' behaviour in a sexual and moral sense. These deliberate acts include girls take an active role in seducing boyfriends and admiring the boy's abilities and behaviour even in relation to trivial things.³⁸⁷ In order to be able to fulfil these tasks, the magazine suggests girls not only need to understand boys thoroughly but also need to change their behaviour to please boys when necessary. The whole complementary framework of the relationship between the sexes as promoted in *CosmoGIRL!* is therefore premised on the assumption that teenage girls should respect boys because this is a way of respecting themselves.³⁸⁸ In this regard, the framework promoted by *CosmoGIRL!* is fundamentally heterosexual

³⁸⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', February 2002 and February 2004; 'Guy Decoder', November 2002 and February 2004; 'Love Feature', July 2004; 'Love Handbook', November 2001.

³⁸⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', February 2004, July 2004, February 2005, June 2005 and September 2005; 'Inner Girl', January 2004.

³⁸⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Handbook', October 2001.

³⁸⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', November 2002; 'He Tells You', December 2003; 'Inner Girl', January 2004; 'All About Guys', February 2005; 'Love Feature', July 2004; 'Love Gear', January 2004.

³⁸⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Special Issue', November 2004; 'Inner Girl', January 2005.

because girls are told always to react and respond according to a male-defined imperative.

Simply put, the magazine identifies two approaches that may be useful for the construction of an ideal image of girls according to a male-defined imperative. One approach is to ask girls to tolerate the 'masculine' behaviour of boys in contemporary society; the other is to ask them to modify their own behaviour so as to please boys (even though girls are told not to be too explicit about such changes). In order to show respect for boys, the magazine suggests that girls let them do the kind of things boys are assumed to be good at, such as heavy lifting work, paying bills, repairing computers, etc.³⁸⁹ The magazine's advice thereby reinforces existing ideas in contemporary Hong Kong society about the appropriate behaviour of boys. Likewise, when the magazine suggests that girls modify their behaviour so as to please boys, it also reinforces the existing ideas about the appropriate behaviour of girls. For instance, the magazine tells its readers that girls should not be possessive, jealous, narrow-minded and dependent because boys do not like these characteristics.³⁹⁰ In this regard it does not deny the possibility that both boys and girls will behave according to existing gender assumptions.

In promoting these two approaches, the magazine tends to place girls in a very contradictory dilemma. On the one hand, the magazine argues that girls should not infringe upon the boys' sphere, but it also reminds girls to be cautious about boys who do not conform to the norms of that sphere, such as boys who accept the girls' payment of a share of the bill or even ask the girl to pay the bills on the first few

³⁸⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', February 2004 and January 2005.

³⁹⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Inner Girl', September 2005; 'Love Gear', January 2004 and May 2005.

dates.³⁹¹ By the same token, the magazine advises girls to get rid of any characteristics boys dislike, while keeping those characteristics boys appreciate, such as being considerate.³⁹² The criterion the magazine takes for the construction of an ideal image of girl seems to be highly dependent on the appreciation of boys. It seems that no matter how girls are advised to behave, they are unable to escape from the masculine perspective within the complementary framework assumed by the magazine.

The most prominent example illustrating this point is the discussion concerning 'toughness', which is one of the most significant characteristics the magazine assigns to its construction of 'brave new girls', telling its readers how important it is for girls to be tough and be proud of their toughness. However, it advises girls to maintain their toughness only when boys appreciate it and are confident in living along with 'tough' girls.³⁹³ This is because toughness in this context will be interpreted positively as suggesting independence, straightforwardness, an ability to take care of one's own appearance and body, and an ability to stand up for oneself in society. As the magazine argues, tough girls will not antagonise their boyfriends because they are supposed to have their own style of living and know how to respect others.³⁹⁴ On the contrary, when the toughness of girls embarrasses boys, the magazine will advise girls not only to get rid of this characteristic – because it is negatively interpreted as 'boyish', 'not tender', 'not attractive', 'troublesome' and 'argumentative' – but also to show the feminine characteristics such as care and tenderness because these characteristics are highly admired by boys.³⁹⁵ As Sharpe argues (though she uses the

³⁹¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', October 2005; 'Love Gear', September 2004.

³⁹² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', June 2004 and July 2005; 'All About Guys', April 2005.

³⁹³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', October 2004; 'Inner Girl', October 2004.

³⁹⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Gear', November 2004.

³⁹⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', July 2002; 'He Tells You', March 2004 and November 2004; 'Life is Great', November 2003; 'All About Guys', July 2002 and November 2005.

example of tomboy girl which implies the same logic), the appreciation of the toughness of teenage girls illustrates how it is a label that can be adopted with pride. However, it also reflects “the wider values of society which devalue feminine against masculine activities.”³⁹⁶ The example of ‘toughness’ in girls therefore illustrates the importance for girls to make a good impression on boys in order to win their hearts, even though the logic of this argument is not explicated in the magazine.³⁹⁷

The magazine expects girls not boys to change any condition that may not be tolerated in the customary gender ideology, and the judgement of boys about the appropriate behaviour of teenage girls within the complementary framework is always apparent in the magazine. Since it is always dependent on the judgement of boys – how to attract, please them and get on with them – it is in this circumstance that the concept of compulsory heterosexuality is introduced and becomes relevance for analysis.³⁹⁸ Its presence, and/or absence, only compounds the double standards applying to different genders, and teenage girls in particular are set up in a double role, that is, expected to act as a force for both the maintenance of and the resistance to the masculine perspective as constructed in the magazine. In a similar vein, Winship also identifies the adoption of this double-roles framework in the English-language version of *Cosmo*, published in Britain, as holding the key to its commercial success. The argument is also applicable to the case of *CosmoGIRL!*: “the discrepancy between its ‘tough’ and ‘tender’ faces has always been one to revel in .” It is the embrace of the contradiction of the gender characteristics of girls that opens up space for the accommodation of ‘pluralism of opinions’.³⁹⁹ In the case of *CosmoGIRL!*, the double

³⁹⁶ Sharpe 1976: 83.

³⁹⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, ‘Inner Girl’, September 2003; ‘Life Tips’, May 2002.

³⁹⁸ Jackson 1999: 142.

³⁹⁹ Winship 1987: 100.

role of teenage girls, in terms of showing to respect both to themselves and to others, is explicit in the romantic context.

Living in compromise in the complementary relationship does not mean girls are encouraged to experience sex

The magazine provides two justifications for the importance of girls knowing how to please boys: (1) it is a good way to boost the self-esteem of girls themselves; and (2) girls have to live harmoniously with boys because they are another natural species living in the world that makes the lives of girls more complete. As a result, it is not uncommon for the magazine to teach its readers how girls flirt.⁴⁰⁰ However, the magazine also tells them that girls should not only never seek to please boys with sex, but also have to protect and be in charge of their bodies in any discourse about sex. This is because, as the magazine argues, boys are unreliable in this respect – they will not reject any sex requests made by girls, and may even provoke such requests.

Since the magazine assumes that the behaviour of boys is a result of hormonal changes (or biological instinct), it strongly advises girls to make their own call. Girls not only should set the limits in matters of sex, but also have to constantly remind the boys of those limits. This is because, as the magazine argues, boys are presumed to be forgetful and incapable of following the limits set by teenage girls.⁴⁰¹ This duty the magazine assigns to girls not boys in any discourse on sex. In a similar vein, society will also expect women rather men to protect their own bodies in a sex discourse, the same assumptions being made about men. For instance, Bacchi argues that women are

⁴⁰⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', August 2003.

⁴⁰¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', May 2005; 'Inner Girl', January 2004.

given the task of taming men because men are seen as uncontrollable and unpredictable. As a result, it is the responsibility of women to reject any unwanted sex proposed by men.⁴⁰²

The magazine keeps reminding its readers of the importance of girls protecting themselves with regard to sex. However, this does not mean that the magazine thinks sex is an evil thing that should not be discussed. Even though the magazine advises its readers that they should not be too keen to have sexual experience, in particular if they are under 16, the editors are still willing to discuss topics in relation to sex with their readers in the public sphere. It is in this context that the magazine distinguishes itself from the secondary school education discourse in its handling of sex issues. This is because schools (and even parents) in the Chinese community context seldom take the initiative in discussing with kids topics in relation to sex.⁴⁰³ (Please refer to the discussion in Chapter One for details.) In contrast, the magazine tells its readers frankly that sex is not a taboo and it is the right of teenagers, regardless of gender, to know about sex.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, the magazine constantly encourages its readers to ask questions about any sex issues they do not understand. The editorial board hopes to enhance the critical thinking of its readers through the open discussion about sex. They also hope that readers will be able to find their own ways of dealing with the issues. It is through the understanding of sex issues that the magazine expects girls to be able to protect their own bodies in the appropriate ways.

The magazine makes it clear to its readers that in contemporary Hong Kong society there is still a limited acceptance of girls having premarital sex. However, it is not

⁴⁰² Bacchi 1990: 202-227; 228-255.

⁴⁰³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', May 2003; 'Speak Up', February 2003 and July 2003.

⁴⁰⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Special Issue', December 2002.

primarily for this reason that the magazine suggests girls avoid sex before marriage. It simply asks its readers not to start having sex if they have any doubts or hesitations about it. As the magazine argues, when girls hesitate, it implies that they are not yet ready and thus having sex will only give them cause for regret. In other words, the magazine does not oppose premarital sex on condition that girls know what they are doing and take responsibility for their own behaviour.⁴⁰⁵ In this way, again, the magazine clearly takes a more lenient approach than does the education sector in commenting on the sexual behaviour of girls. This is not to say that the magazine actively encourages girls to have experience in sex, only that it simply asks them to be cautious in handling the issues. Since the magazine assumes that boys will be reluctant to use condoms, girls are advised to take the initiative and not to feel embarrassed to ask their partners to use a condom. The magazine even advises girls to carry condoms for their own sakes. All the advice the magazine gives to its readers tends to be similarly preventive in its aims.

One effective means for girls to protect their own bodies, as the magazine suggests, is to guard against the possibility of contracting any sexually transmitted disease. The editors emphasise two things that girls should take into consideration before they decide to have sex with boys. The first is to make sure it is safe sex; the second is to make sure it will not lead to an unwanted pregnancy.⁴⁰⁶ However, the most important thing, as the magazine constantly reminds its readers, is for girls to be sure that they have made up their own minds when the decision is made.⁴⁰⁷ It is in this context that the magazine strongly advises girls to take relationships at their own pace and to get

⁴⁰⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', September 2002.

⁴⁰⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', October 2003; 'Inner Girl', November 2003.

⁴⁰⁷ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', December 2003, April 2004 and August 2004, 'Secret Talk', July 2003 and September 2003; 'What is Supdoc', March 2003, May 2003 and June 2003; 'Special Issue', December 2002 and November 2003; 'How To Deal', April 2002.

to know their partners, including their sex history, in order to develop mutual trust before having sex. The magazine does not oppose the idea of a girl having sex on her second date, given the condition that it is based on love and the girl can see the future of the relationship. This logic, nonetheless, contradicts the editorial board's advice that girls should live in the present and that it is too early for them to think in terms of long-lasting relationships.

The magazine strongly advises its readers to stick to the 'no love no sex' principle.⁴⁰⁸ The implication of the principle is two-fold. On the one hand, sex, as the magazine claims, is not simply about desire and ejaculation.⁴⁰⁹ It is not simply about kind of pleasure but also about commitment and responsibility.⁴¹⁰ However, the magazine at the same time argues that teenage girls are not yet sufficiently mature to talk about commitment and responsibility. On the other hand, sex is closely associated with love. It therefore should not be viewed simply as a means to please boys. On the contrary, the magazine advises its readers to treat sex as a means of psychological connection, as well as a kind of communication between girlfriends and boyfriends through their bodies.⁴¹¹ However, at the same time it reminds its readers that girls and boys will be distracted from getting to know each other better if they have had sex too early in their relationship.⁴¹² Either way, it seems that the magazine is not really encouraging girls to experience sex, even though the magazine makes this argument very indirectly and implicitly. Indeed, Maggie Peters, Ernest Chavis and Shannon Ahlfeldt also make similar argument in their book *Death of the Female Gender* (2003). They argue that

⁴⁰⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'All About Guys', February 2004; 'Secret Talk', March 2003 and April 2003.

⁴⁰⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', August 2004.

⁴¹⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Special Issue', December 2002.

⁴¹¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', March 2003 and May 2004; 'Special Issue', December 2002; 'Guy Decoder', September 2002 and November 2004; 'Inner Girl', November 2003.

⁴¹² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', October 2004.

“sex was the cause of Paradise lost.”⁴¹³ They also argue that “the way girls lean over to display their wares is a way to distract boys [from knowing] more about girls.”⁴¹⁴ As a result, they suggest that girls take time to get to know their partners before any intimacy, i.e., sex, enters into the relationship.

This effort of girls to defer sex in their lives paves the way for the role of the image of the ‘tough girl’ to come to play. As discussed previously, the magazine unceasingly reminds its readers that girls need to be responsible for their own behaviour, including decisions about sex. Girls are told to consider thoroughly the consequences of what they are proposing to do before taking any action. More accurately, the magazine advises teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong society to become ‘bad girls’, but the image of the ‘bad girl’ here by no means excludes the responsibility that everyone should bear in relation to sexual behaviour. When CosmoGIRL! argues that teenage girls should dare to become bad girls who resist unfair treatment and expectations, it does so in a very positive tone – bad girls will not be punished for striving to assert their own desires, including refusing to have sex simply to please boys and daring to say no to their boyfriends whenever they feel uneasy about or not ready for sex.

Resisting unfair treatment and expectations in this regard is an admirable approach that teenage girls should certainly learn about. It is also the approach that the editorial board of the magazine ceaselessly advocates for the lives of its readers. Its advocacy of girls who dare to be ‘bad / bitchy’ does not necessarily mean that such ‘bad girls’ are really ‘bad’. On the contrary, it acts indirectly to maintain the stability and proper functioning of family and society, such as by asking girls to be cautious about sex in

⁴¹³ Peters, Chavis and Ahlfeldt 2003: 34.

⁴¹⁴ Peters, Chavis and Ahlfeldt 2003: 18.

order to prevent teenage pregnancy. The advocacy of girls' right to 'say no' in a sex discourse is indeed consistent with the argument of many feminists, such as Janice Radway, that not only girls but also women should continue to take responsibility for applying the brakes to sexual passion.⁴¹⁵ Being a 'bitch' on the other hand also implies striving for goodness on their own, and shouldering the responsibility of initiating changes for a better and happier life independently and individually.

As discussed in Introduction, Walkerdine (1997) argues that in theories of development the teenage girl faces the dilemma of either (1) becoming a natural little woman incapable of reasoning or (2) becoming an unnatural little woman capable of reasoning. In the case of CosmoGIRL!, girls are faced with a similar dilemma: either to be rational and take responsibility for making sexual choices, that is, 'say no to sex', or risk becoming (bad) sexy girls if they fail in their obligation to regulate their own sexual behaviour and that of their partners. Either way, it seems that girls are the ones most responsible for sexual desires. However, what girls are able to do to control both their own and their partners' sexual desires is very limited.⁴¹⁶ The situation of girls placed in this dilemma during adolescence is well described by Tolman and Higgins:

Women's sexuality is frequently suspect in our culture, particularly when it is expressed outside the bounds of monogamous heterosexual marriage. This suspicion is reflected in the dominant cultural accounts of women's sexuality, which posit good, decent, and normal women as passive and threatened sexual objects. When women act as sexual agents, expressing their own sexual desire

⁴¹⁵ Radway 1984: 142.

⁴¹⁶ Tolman and Higgins 1996: 208.

rather than serving as the objects of men's desire, they are often portrayed as threatening, deviant and bad. ... The cultural anxiety precipitated by unbounded female sexuality is perhaps most apparent with regard to adolescent girls. ... The cultural and legal sanctions on teenage girls' sexuality convey a simple message: good girls are not sexual; girls who are sexual are either (1) bad girls, if they have been active, desiring sexual agents or (2) good girls, who have been passively victimised by boys' raging hormones.⁴¹⁷

Tolman and Higgins' account of the problematic nature of girls' adolescence – girls are socialised into cultural stories about being sexual and being women – clearly illustrates the dilemma they face in society. In a similar vein, *CosmoGIRL!* tells its readers that virginity is still an issue for girls in contemporary Hong Kong society. In the column 'He Tells You' – in which boys express their opinions to girls – the magazine tries to show its readers that boys still have some reservations about fully accepting girls who are not virgins as they think that girls should save their virginity for the one they love the most, which implies saving it for marriage, given the fact that sex seems to be common among teenagers in the twenty-first century. Virginity, in addition, is associated with girls remaining 'virus-free' and 'safe' in a relationship.⁴¹⁸ This indicates that the magazine indeed does not encourage girls, especially those under the age of 16, to have sex, including cyber sex.⁴¹⁹ However, the argument put forward by Tolman and Higgins, in which the experience in sex is a means for girls to make the transition into becoming women, is not consistent with the

⁴¹⁷ Tolman and Higgins 1996: 205-206.

⁴¹⁸ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'He Tells You', July 2003; 'Special Issue', February 2004.

⁴¹⁹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', February 2004; 'What is Supdoc', October 2002 and February 2003; 'Special Issue', December 2002.

logic of the magazine. In the first place, the magazine argues that the experience in sex among teenagers symbolises an important stage in their lives.⁴²⁰ This stage, however, is not symbolic of being adult, even though sex is supposed to be an adult activity.⁴²¹ This is because, as the magazine argues, sex itself is a grown up activity, which implies the mutual responsibility of the two parties.⁴²² Once teenage girls experience sex, they are bound by the moral standards of the adult world. However, they are not yet of an age to assume either its rights or responsibilities.

Conclusion

The complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes, in terms of gender difference in biology and modes of thinking, is presumed in *CosmoGIRL!*. To deal with the various conflicts that may arise within this framework, over issues such as sex and romance, the magazine advises that girls should be brave enough to stick to their own principles and do what they think is right.⁴²³ However, there seems to be nothing teenage girls can do to work through this dilemma, besides striving to become 'brave, bolding and confident' girls in society. For instance, while the magazine tells its readers that girls can blame boys for not accepting any changes made by them, nevertheless, the act of blaming boys does not carry any substantial meaning. Girls just have to live with the ways boys behave and engage in self-reflection.

The magazine constantly asks girls to be self-reflective on any occasion when communication problems arise with friends and/or boyfriends, such as at work, in

⁴²⁰ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'What Is Supdoc', May 2003.

⁴²¹ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Secret Talk', September 2003.

⁴²² *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', February 2004.

⁴²³ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Feature', August 2004.

romance, in family and in study.⁴²⁴ The magazine tries to justify this need for self-reflection in two ways. Firstly, reflection is necessary in order to make the kind of compromises needed to perform well in interpersonal relationships, and not exclusively to win the hearts of boys in romance. Second, self-reflection will be needed in order to quit a relationship that is no longer bearable. In that case, girls are told to start a new life again.⁴²⁵ However, self-reflection among teenage girls is sometimes meaningless, because as the magazine reminds its readers boys may not take the behaviour that girls are concerned with as seriously as do the girls.⁴²⁶ In that case, girls can either compromise or end their relationship.

Although *CosmoGIRL!* keeps telling its readers that girls should treat romance as a small part of life, the influence of (potential) romance for the construction of the everyday life of teenage girls is tremendous. Romance is narrowly defined as a distinct heterosexual construct. As a result, even though the magazine downplays the importance of romance to the lives of girls with regard to feminine independence, it does nothing to criticise the idea of feminine acquiescence to romance.⁴²⁷

In the construction of an ideal image of teenage girls, the magazine has conveyed a sense of both resisting and maintaining the gender norms of society. Its advocacy of girls being 'daring, bold and confident' has provided an alternative approach in understanding the relationship between teenage girls and boys, in contrast to the way the subject formation of teenage girls is treated in the education sector, as discussed in

⁴²⁴ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Love Handbook; November 2001; 'Special Issue', November 2004; 'Guy Decoder', Issues November 2003, January 2004, April 2004, May 2004, June 2004, September 2004, October 2004 and November 2005; 'Moving Up', March 2005.

⁴²⁵ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'Guy Decoder', July 2003; 'Love Handbook', October 2001.

⁴²⁶ *CosmoGIRL!*, 'His View & Her View', March 2005.

⁴²⁷ Best 2005: 199.

the previous chapter. However, the alternative approach offered by the magazine is short-lived. This is because of the way it constructs the characteristics of girls within the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes. As a result, the two main ideas represented in the magazine – advocacy of girls’ power and the complementary framework of the relationship between the sexes – are always in conflict with each other. The relationship between the cultural construction of gender and the biological difference in sex is identified at the beginning of this chapter. The tricky point for the magazine is to highlight the important role for teenage girls, which also implies their inescapable responsibility, in resisting the customary norms prevailing in contemporary Hong Kong society. However, given the fact that the gender difference is presumed, the efforts teenage girls have put into the resistance process cannot help them escape the effects of the heterosexuality framework operative in contemporary Hong Kong society, in terms of the assumed complementary relationship between girls and boys and the masculine characteristics of boys.

Analysis of the text of *CosmoGIRL!* shows that the life of sexual / gendered categories and divisions is contradictory, fragmented, shifting and ambivalent in contemporary Hong Kong society. Unlike the education discourse, which offers no room for any reconsideration of the progressive relationship between the subjectivity of teenage girls and of women, the magazine does offer some space for revealing of particular characteristics of teenage girls. However, the space to accommodate the ambivalent relationship between sex and gender in the construction of the self of teenage girls is severely limited. The possibility exists only insofar as teenage girls have not yet entered the romantic context – romance in the ‘adult’ sense which

implies accepting a series of responsibilities and commitments (which go beyond personal desires narrowly conceived). Yet, the space opened up by the magazine has a far-reaching impact on the gender ideology of a society in which the dichotomy between 'good girl' and 'bad girl' has been blurred. The ambiguous and contradictory messages regarding appropriate behaviour among girls nonetheless open up the space for an active response.⁴²⁸ The characteristics of 'bitchiness' and toughness are marked out as elements of an ideal image of teenage girls, distinct from that of women, in contemporary Hong Kong society. In the next chapter, I will discuss further how teenage girls articulate gender ideology in their daily practices through an examination of the made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema from the post-handover period.

⁴²⁸ Middleton 1987: 87.

Chapter Three

How the Girl is Constructed in 'Made-for-teen' Romance Films

Cinema is like a 'magic' mirror at the fairground; it reflects society back to itself, but always in a distorted fashion. It shows a slice of reality, but always from a select point of view. It is thus tempting, but problematic, to draw general conclusions about the state of society on the basis of the films that it either produces or consumes. However, if one follows the practice of psychoanalysis (if not the actual method) and focuses on the distortions themselves, then as Jameson shows in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), and more particularly in *Signatures of the Visible* (1992), even the most obviously fictionalised or fictional accounts of everyday life can be shown to reveal something significant about the way things 'really' are. That, at least, is the gambit of the following chapter, which traces the way the girl in Hong Kong is represented by locally produced cinema. What follows then is not an exercise in film analysis, as such, though clearly it draws on film studies, but rather an attempt to utilise films as sociologically meaningful documents that record, reflect and comment on everyday life. I pay particular attention to what I'm calling the made-for-teens romance genre because it is clearly aimed at girls as consumers. What I aim to show is that the mirror reflection these films offer to Hong Kong girls is ambivalent: on the one hand, it holds out an image of liberation, but on the other hand it polices that freedom and in subtle and not so subtle ways it reinforces the need for the surveillance and control of girls' desire and behaviour.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, representations of teenage girls provide a 'space' for teenage girls to be girls and not feel under pressure to perform (in Butler's sense) as women because they have not yet come of age. This 'space' is articulated differently according to different media. I want to argue here that the freedom offered to girls in the 'space' created by films is even more limited compared to that offered in teenage lifestyle magazines. In particular, I will argue that the form of freedom girls are offered in this locally produced genre of film is limited because of the strict way it enforces the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Under that framework, the representation of girls' lives and opportunities for self-expression are in many ways aligned with the socially established parameters of conventional femininity in society. Compulsory heterosexuality is, as it were, a means of policing the lives of girls, ensuring that they stay well within the boundaries of the traditional demands of femininity that girls put others (particularly family) before themselves and eschew their youthfulness in favour of a 'mature' or 'responsible' outlook. In locally produced cinema, girls who live their lives on their own terms are portrayed in a negative light. Similarly, 'youthfulness' is presented as a weakness or fault that can only be cured by 'growing up'.

As is the case in teenage lifestyle magazines (as we saw in the previous chapter), made-for-teens romance films do not present marriage as the only future for girls. But allowing marriage to be postponed indefinitely creates its own cultural and of course narrative problems. What should a single girl do with her life? How must she act if marriage, which offers the secure destiny of a family, is taken off the agenda? Moreover, how must she act in relation to her own family now that their wishes are no longer her sole concern? In this context, heterosexual romance is presented as an

end in itself, and ultimately as a substitute for their own family, usually portrayed as inattentive or uncaring. If girls in made-for-teen romance films are confined to the heterosexuality framework for the construction of the self it is clearly because allowing them any more freedom to define themselves would be taking things too far. As we saw in the discussion of the new education curriculum, Hong Kong society still places a high premium on personal responsibility, which in the filmic context manifests itself as 'constraint', or to put it another way, sexual continence. As such, audiences seldom see other forms of sexuality such as lesbianism in made-for-teens romance films. Even though other forms of sexuality may be shown in the films, such as *Spacked Out*, it is always constructed under the gaze of heterosexual male. Since romance is represented as girls' reply to male sexuality, girls' sexuality is understood and experienced not in terms of a physical need of the body, but as romantic attachment. Clear examples are Ruo Nam in *2 Young*, Jane in *The Truth About Jane and Sam*, and Yoyo in *My Wife is 18*.

Girls in made-for-teens romance films have their identities constructed according to their relation to others: the two most important relationships are the daughter-father relationship and the girl-boy pairing of heterosexual romance. Almost all girls in this genre of film are seen to be somehow performing the role as a daughter in a family. This is not necessarily unique to Hong Kong since the role of daughter, as Driscoll argues, seems to be an inevitable point of theorising for girlhood relative to patriarchy or maternity. In this respect, the role of daughter is, I will argue, a more significant factor than either appearance or sexuality in the construction of the self of the girl in locally produced cinema: "While not all daughters are called or identify as girls, all girls are daughters in some respect and daughterhood is always inflected by

discourses on girls, even though daughter and girl are not equivalent terms.”⁴²⁹ As a result, the expectation and presence (or absence) of parents inevitably plays a significant part in the construction of the self of the girl in made-for-teens romance films. It is the role of daughter – that is relevant to the family understood as a biologically complementary heterosexual unit – that constructs the imaginary of the girl in the films. However, given the significant role of daughter in the construction of the girl in locally produced cinema, girls inevitably face the dilemma of being deferred as sexual beings under the parental supervision (as was discussed in Chapter One, girls are also deferred as sexual beings in the education sector) or of tempting to romance (as was discussed in Chapter Two, the potential for heterosexual romance in the everyday lives of girls is never denied in magazines).

Why made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema?

When Hong Kong cinema is discussed in cultural studies, the tendency is to focus on the martial-arts genre (*wu da pian*) as the principal representation of Hong Kong identity in transnational cinema. This is understandable as the action choreography of Hong Kong films has been very influential in Hollywood, whereas made-for-teen romance films are highly derivative of Hollywood. As Gateward argues, “[t]he impact of Hong Kong cinema on American media culture goes beyond the screens of the multiplex. Hong Kong action films, in particular the *wu da pian* (martial-arts film), have functioned as a significant component of African American youth culture for the last thirty years, its tropes appropriated into the various aspects that make up hip-hop

⁴²⁹ Driscoll 2002: 107.

subcultures.”⁴³⁰ Due to the popularity of action-film choreography, Needham argues that the martial-arts genre is one of the most popular genres used to highlight the post-colonial concerns around national and cultural identity in transnational cinema.⁴³¹ However, despite the popularity of action-film choreography for the transnational cinema audience, Needham argues that the search for the roots of ‘Chinese’ people in the ‘action genre’ has always “flirted with heavy-handed allegory in articulating a relationship to both China and the colonial government” since the early 1970s.⁴³² ‘Chineseness’ in this genre of Hong Kong cinema is interpreted in the symbolic sense and usually stands in for the struggle of the nostalgic representation or the relationship between mainland China and HKSAR.⁴³³ However, as Berry and Farquhar argues in their book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (2006), the representation of the national in Chinese films should be understood in terms of their different Chinese cinematic traditions:

Chinese films – whether from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, the diaspora, or understood as transnational – cannot be understood without reference to the national, and what are now retrospectively recognized as different Chinese cinematic traditions have played a crucial role in shaping and promulgating various depictions of the national and national identity.⁴³⁴

According to Lu, in anticipation of the reunification with mainland China in 1997, Hong Kong cinema began to develop a new description of identity, ethnicity and

⁴³⁰ Gateward 2009: 52.

⁴³¹ Needham 2006: 65.

⁴³² Needham 2006: 65.

⁴³³ See for examples Needham 2006; Lu 2005; Stringer 2008; Tong 2008 and Yue 2008.

⁴³⁴ Berry and Farquhar 2006: 2.

location about people in diasporic conditions.⁴³⁵ Stringer, Tong and Yue also argue that many films (such as *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994), *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000), and *Boot People* (Ann Hui, 1982)) produced in Hong Kong throughout the 1980s and 1990s also reflect a focus on the overarching single discourse, namely the ‘1997 factor’ as Lu describes it.⁴³⁶ Alongside this future-looking ‘1997 factor’ there was, as both Ackbar Abbas and Eric Kit-wai Ma argue, another dominant cultural trend articulated in Hong Kong’s cinema and that was nostalgia. The memorialising of the past in terms of nostalgia is a key trope in contemporary Hong Kong films. (Examples are the “films of Stanley Kwan (*Rougle/Yin ji kau* (1987) and *Centre Stage/Yuen Ling-yuk* (1992)). Less obvious examples of the trend can be seen in Jackie Chan’s Shanghai-set 1930s gangster film *Mr Canton* and *Lady Rose/Qiji* (1989).”⁴³⁷) Many of these nostalgia films, such as Wong Kar-wai’s *In the Mood for Love*, focus on period minutiae in a tapping in to the memory of an older Hong Kong cinema so as to evoke feelings of loss. (For example, in *In the Mood for Love*, Wong Kar-wai tried to fix and sentimentalise 1960s Hong Kong in terms of nostalgia for lost femininities and diasporic communities.⁴³⁸) For Abbas, nostalgia is one of the defining characteristics of Hong Kong cinema at the end of the twentieth century: the experience of loss in relation to something already gone. His thesis represents one of the most influential arguments for thinking about the cultural dimension of Hong Kong’s post-colonial context in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴³⁹ As such, Needham argues that Hong Kong cinema is in danger of becoming singular and fixed by its anchoring around the ‘1997 factor’.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ Lu 2005: 300.

⁴³⁶ Stringer 2008: 40; Tong 2008: 65; Yue 2008: 145.

⁴³⁷ Needham 2006: 66.

⁴³⁸ Needham 2006: 66.

⁴³⁹ Needham 2006: 66.

⁴⁴⁰ Needham 2006: 66.

This position, although influential, is however far from hegemonic. For example, Xu argues that Hong Kong cinema is not merely a reflection of the city's historically ambivalent identity; it actively contributes to Hong Kong's identity. He then suggests that multiplicity seems to be the most important characteristic of Hong Kong cinema today. As he argues, "The line between Hollywood and Hong Kong seemed further blurred after John Woo, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat, and Jet Li, among others, "invaded" Hollywood in the mid-1990s. The convergence of Hong Kong and Hollywood cinemas in turn reveals the transnational nature of Hollywood, which has always been able to digest outside influences and attract well-trained world filmmakers so as to maximize profit."⁴⁴¹ In a similar vein, Chow argues that the hybridity of the texts in Hong Kong cinema means that the subaltern figure of Hong Kong society itself has spoken.⁴⁴² It speaks on the grounds of being "caught between East and West, between China and Britain, a crown colony with a hybrid culture, and now once again part of (mainland) China under "one government, two systems".⁴⁴³ On this basis Chu argues that Hong Kong is paradoxically imagined both as a distinct community in its own right and as part of mainland China.⁴⁴⁴ It not only raises the question of the local identity of Hong Kong in a global film industry, it also provokes discussion of some critical issues such as Orientalism and post-colonialism in Hong Kong film studies.⁴⁴⁵ As Xu argues, "Hong Kong cinema presents a theoretical conundrum destabilizing the existing categories such as Hollywood, Chinese cinema, or national cinema."⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴¹ Xu 2007: 134.

⁴⁴² Chow 1993: 34-35.

⁴⁴³ Fu and Desser 2000: 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Chu 2003: 63.

⁴⁴⁵ Chu 2005: 312.

⁴⁴⁶ Xu 2007: 133-134.

Xu's most important point, however, is his observation that the argument made by many film critics – that because of the absence of nationhood as a base Hong Kong cinema lacks any authentic cultural identity – overlooks the importance of 'China':

We might fail to see that Hong Kong cinema retains a peculiar relationship with China that can best be described as 'unattached attachment', seemingly distanced but actually related in all areas. China always looms large in Hong Kong's collective identity as well as its cinema during both the colonial period and the post-handover period. Although Hong Kong cinema has managed not to be influenced by mainland China's overt political propaganda, Chinese nationalism has never been absent from it. In other words, Hong Kong cinema in general has distanced itself from communist China, but it remains 'Chinese' in the sense that it is based largely on images of Chinese landscape and Chinese culture.⁴⁴⁷

Chu goes further than Xu and argues that the 'China factor' has been indispensable in to the Hong Kong imaginary since the 1980s. For instance, he argues that there has been a burgeoning interest in the 'father' image of China in Hong Kong films since the 1980s.⁴⁴⁸ Zou (2008), on the other hand, argues that the configuration of masculine and feminine identities is always placed at the centre of the visual imaginary concerning 'post'-colonial Hong Kong so as to constitute its audience in anticipation of the colonial city's traumatic repatriation in 1997. (An example is *A*

⁴⁴⁷ Xu 2007: 134.

⁴⁴⁸ Chu 2005: 312.

Chinese Ghost Story (1997), in which Zou argues that “the cinematic subject’s assumption of female embodiment and obsession with the acquisition of manhood manifest male homoerotic moments in the ‘post’-colonial making of an allegedly ‘straight’ male gaze.”⁴⁴⁹) It is in this context Chu argues that Hong Kong cinema functions like a quasi-national cinema, caught between self-representation, a Chinese motherland and a western coloniser, as the subtitle of her book *Hong Kong Cinema: Coloniser, Motherland, Self* indicates.

The question of the representation of ‘Chineseness’ in Hong Kong cinema, in which the latter is trapped in a triangular relationship of nationalism, transnationalism and self-representation, was a contested area that has caught the attention of scholars in the field of Hong Kong cinema studies since the 1980s. Based on the analysis of films in Taiwan and Hong Kong, Browne argues that

the mutation of cinema’s narrative form, its corresponding representation of society, and its address to the audience indicate the contradictory relations of these regions both to mainland China and to the ongoing processes and consequences of Western-style modernization. The aesthetic forms of these regions are complex, syncretic totalities composed of traditional Chinese social and cultural arrangements overlaid with a social formation of a capitalist order characteristic of ‘advanced’ Western consumer societies. That is, they

⁴⁴⁹ Zou 2008: 56.

link composite cultural identities to contemporary modes of filmic representation.⁴⁵⁰

However, I want to argue that the context in which the debate over the question of the representation of Chineseness of Hong Kong cinema in a globalised film industry is set might not help us to understand the practical and everyday issues addressed in Hong Kong cinema, and effectively leaves Hong Kong as what Abbas calls a “cinematic product.”⁴⁵¹ Many scholars have already argued that to view Hong Kong as a cinematic product will eventually lead to the threat of the disappearance of Hong Kong cinema itself. With reference to the work of Abbas, Xu (2007) argues that the actually inhabited Hong Kong will be overlooked when the focus is simply on the cinematic representation of Hong Kong in the context of the global imagination:

The very reason that Hong Kong exists in the globalised world is its being represented in transnational cinema that continues to reinforce old binarisms to the extent that China or the Orient is forced to remain opaque, representationally impenetrable, and dangerously alluring. As far as the cultural logic of globalisation is concerned, the real, breathing, inhabited Hong Kong would not have existed were it not associated with the glamorous, the mysterious, and the cinematically transient.⁴⁵²

On the issue of the cultural representation of Hong Kong and its cinema poised on the brink of disappearance, Abbas (2006) argues that the cause of the disappearance of

⁴⁵⁰ Browne 1994: 5.

⁴⁵¹ Xu 2007: 136.

⁴⁵² Xu 2007: 136.

Hong Kong as a subject of study does not lie in its being of no interest in cultural studies or cinema studies. On the contrary, it arouses the interest of scholars to study it in the context of a global imagination. But as a result, it can easily come to be represented in a nostalgic way:

[I]t may have found a subject, Hong Kong itself, but Hong Kong as a subject is one that threatens to get easily lost again. This time around the threat will not be that there is no interest in Hong Kong – Hong Kong is today very much on the agenda. The threat will be that Hong Kong as a subject will be presented and represented in terms of some of the old binarisms whose function is to restabilise differences and domesticate change, for example, binarisms like East and West, or tradition and modernity. In other words, the danger now is that Hong Kong will disappear as a subject, not by being ignored but by being represented in the good old ways.⁴⁵³

Abbas' views on the cultural representation of Hong Kong cinema are consistent with the argument of Chu. Leung on the other hand argues that the nostalgic representation of Hong Kong cinema since the 1980s provides a reflective space for the undercurrent of queer desire in cinema, in particular the consideration of bisexuality, in ostensibly 'straight' genres such as action films and comedies.⁴⁵⁴ Both representations of Hong Kong cinema and of bisexuality share the same threat of disappearance because of the lack of space and capacity to reclaim such representations on their own terms. As Leung argues, Hong Kong as a subject cannot be represented without precipitating a

⁴⁵³ Abbas 2006: 80.

⁴⁵⁴ Leung 2009: 154.

crisis in representation itself: “This predicament is intensified during the period of post-colonial transition, when not only Hong Kong’s culture but also its language, lifestyle, political structure, economic function – in short, everything that has come to define Hong Kong – seem poised on the brink of disappearance, not because they will cease to exist, but because it becomes doubtful if they will continue to be intelligible as belonging specifically to Hong Kong.”⁴⁵⁵

Chow (2007) regards the crux of this problematic as a result of the attempt to hook the cultural representation of Hong Kong cinema to Hong Kong’s recent history and political development. As she argues, this type of reading seems to run the risk of foreclosing certain possibilities of analysis that may not be reducible to the demands of conventional geopolitical realism. In his edited book *Chinese Films in Focus II* (2008), Berry also reminds his readers that the understanding of ‘Chineseness’ should exceed “both territorial and linguistic definitions.”⁴⁵⁶ Chow on the other hand reminds us the importance of exploring an alternative view of Hong Kong’s culture (including the cultural representation in Hong Kong cinema) as fluid and porous, instead of placing it repeatedly “in the position of a resistive native (be it in the form of history, population, culture, or something else) with a clearly defined boundary (or specificity) all its own.”⁴⁵⁷ The nostalgic approach is not sufficient for the self-representation of Hong Kong culture because, as Lu argues, it is too focused on the global imagination in forming Hong Kong as a subject for analysis.⁴⁵⁸ As a result, it has overlooked the inhabited Hong Kong in the process of the construction of its cultural identity. On the issue of the role of Hong Kong in the construction and representation of Chinese

⁴⁵⁵ Leung 2009: 161-162.

⁴⁵⁶ Berry 2008: 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Chow 2007: 108.

⁴⁵⁸ Lu 2005: 300.

identity, Lo (2005) highlights the distinctiveness of Hong Kong from China in the making of the Chinese identity. He argues that

If China is traditionally defined as the national being and as the self-evident ground of a national identity or subject, Hong Kong thus functions as a way of ‘becoming-woman,’ not as a complementary being, but as an element of instability that surrounds and re- or dis- organizes the Chinese being.⁴⁵⁹

The inhabited nature of Hong Kong and its representation in Hong Kong cinema nonetheless seems to have been overlooked in the field of cinema studies. For instance, in a comparison of filmic representations in Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinemas, Chiao argues that Taiwanese filmmakers are rather more concerned about everyday reality than are their Hong Kong counterparts, particularly in terms of showing a respect for the people and the soil and being more sensitive to the problems of everyday life.⁴⁶⁰ Chiao’s comment on Hong Kong films, however, is not relevant or applicable to made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema, especially when some these films, such as *Spacked Out*, adopt a neo-realist approach to filmmaking. Unlike the cultural representation of Hong Kong cinema in the context of transnational cinema, the made-for-teens romance films show us another side of Hong Kong – not the sensational world of rapacious consumption and high-tech information but the everyday world of common people. Indeed, almost all made-for-teens romance films targeted at local audiences focus on the everyday lives and experiences of teenagers in contemporary Hong Kong.

⁴⁵⁹ Lo 2005: 80.

⁴⁶⁰ Chiao 1993: 156.

In this chapter, I will illustrate how the concept of the girl has been constructed in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. As mentioned previously, the themes of these films, including the expectation and presence (or absence) of parents, are crucial factors in the construction of the everyday life of teenage girls in Hong Kong. Emphasises on the importance of family in the everyday life of teenage girls, this theme nonetheless speaks for itself in positioning these made-for-teens romance films as an outstanding part of a 'youth film' genre. For a definition of the 'youth film' genre, I refer to Jenkins, who defines the 'teen film' as "one whose main characters are teenaged, whose themes address primarily teen issues, and that is aimed primarily at teen and young adult audience members. The nature of 'youth films' in Hong Kong cinema does not push the boundaries of what young people are supposed to be, do and see. Although youth sub-cultures have been shown in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema, the disruptive drama of youth does not go beyond the purpose of social regulation. I therefore argue that the production of made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema fits the definition made by Jenkins. Since made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema focus on the phenomena of everyday life, this is enough to dissolve the threat of the disappearance of the inhabited Hong Kong, which is represented in the context of transnational cinema in a globalised world. More importantly, the local made-for-teens romance films provide us with a window on to how the everyday life of teenage girls is conducted under strict social supervision.

This clarification of the cultural representation of Hong Kong in transnational cinema and locally produced cinema is by no means intended to construct an alternative

position for made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. The difference between transnational films and made-for-teens romance films perhaps lies in the fact that it is easier for the former genre to raise a huge amount of money in production compared to the latter. As a result, the visual styles of made-for-teens romance films will be restricted. As Abbas argues:

unlike the Chinese cinema, the Hong Kong cinema cannot rely on any form of subsidy. It cannot therefore reject commercialism, which is the sine qua non of its existence. The Hong Kong cinema has to be popular in order to be at all. The effective strategy consists not of finding alternatives to the system, but alternatives within the system. The commercial is not necessarily the junkyard of cinema, just as the noncommercial is not necessarily the guarantee of quality or even of integrity. In any case, a certain impurity in the form of an ambiguity toward commercialism is the rule in Hong Kong cinema.⁴⁶¹

Given the constraint of limited production resources, films made in Hong Kong can, as Abbas argues, only “make use, to the full extent that their budgets allow, of established stars, established genres, and spectacle.”⁴⁶² As a result, “the use of mainstream forms in Hong Kong cinema is not necessarily a sign of intellectual inertia or of pandering to the masses. It is more a sign of the slippery nature of Hong Kong’s cultural space.”⁴⁶³ Consistent with the characteristics of Hong Kong cinema in general, but at different scale of production, made-for-teens romance films all make use to the full extent that their budgets allow of the existing conditions and

⁴⁶¹ Abbas 2006: 76-77.

⁴⁶² Abbas 2006: 75.

⁴⁶³ Abbas 2006: 75.

environment in the filmmaking. The survival of made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema thus relies on their low production costs and their practicality. The relatively low labour costs involved in employing the new generation of stars have eased the financial constraints on the local film industry. These films mainly cast new faces or a new generation of idols who have already established some fame in the local market. In order to make good use of the new faces so as to attract audiences, 'teenage' or 'youthfulness' becomes the selling point of these films.

Driscoll argues that the 'youth film' genre or 'teen genre' usually features the disruptive drama of youth within specific social institutions, such as family or school, and inflects it with youthful romance or sex, for the purpose of social regulation. As a result, she suggests, while youth subcultures in 'youth films' are generally portrayed as creative and rebellious, the teenage world based around school and home is presented as mainstream and conformist in the 'teen genre'. This conformist outlook is rewarded with the expectation of conventionally happy endings.⁴⁶⁴ Made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema can be said to be conformist in this sense. This is because in general no destructive youthful elements are represented in these films. With their special focus on family and teen romance (and sexuality), these films project their good intentions towards improving the lives of teenage girls in the future. They do so by trying to locate the voices of the teenagers through a description of their daily encounters and the interaction between adults and teens. Focusing on the different interpretations of teenage behaviour made by both adults and teens is a common means by which these films bring out their central themes.

⁴⁶⁴ Driscoll 2002: 217.

As was mentioned previously, the made-for-teens romance films focus on the everyday life and seldom can audience see high-tech visual images in these films. The analysis of made-for-teens romance films in this chapter therefore will mainly focus on the representational level of the films. As Berry argues, “the representational level consists of those elements that might be considered to refer directly to a reality (real or imagined) outside the cinema, such as characters, settings, costume and so on. The cinematic level consists of those elements specific to the cinema: cinema angles, editing strategies, and so on”.⁴⁶⁵ The cinematic level of the films will be discussed when they are used for the representational level of the films.

The terrain of subjective experience (in terms of the locus of knowledge and power) in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema is manifested through the adoption of diverse devices for the construction of the phenomena of everyday life. As Chow argues, “the everyday seems to have become something of a privileged convention among some contemporary Chinese filmmakers.” “[T]he everyday – in the form of casual happenings such as chance encounters or in the form of the inorganic, the trivia that make up mundane environments – has surfaced at the turn of the twenty-first century as a viable and forceful vehicle for telling stories on the screen.”⁴⁶⁶ In the case of Hong Kong cinema, the ordinary façade of made-for-teens romance films is maintained mainly by on-location shooting. On-location shooting familiarises audiences with the cultural context of the film at the outset, before any devices are introduced. As Chow notes, “the visual elements, precisely because of their brute recognisability, come across simultaneously as literal, communal, already seen by other people, in ways that recall that pregrammatical intensity, that obligatory

⁴⁶⁵ Berry 1993: 30.

⁴⁶⁶ Chow 2007: 78.

sociality of the everyday we perceive with our senses before it is selected and organised (by a particular auteur) into a particular audiovisual filmic work.”⁴⁶⁷ The representation of the everyday life of teenage girls in made-for-teens romance films is thus the result of the utilisation of multiple subjective shots. As Cheung observes, “the objective effect of documentary realism is mixed freely with the use of subjective shots such as shot/reverse shots and close-ups.”⁴⁶⁸ In the case of made-for-teens romance films, voice-over and flashback are the most commonly used devices besides on-location shooting.

Through the mobilisation of a range of shots and the utilisation of voice-overs, edited subjective shots and close-ups in the construction of the storyline of films, audiences are able to appreciate the characters’ standpoints and inner subjective feelings immediately. These devices not only add a personal and lyrical dimension to the objective narrative and thus provide audience with access to the characters’ inner lives, they also capture a sense of what teenage girls look like in the cultural location of Hong Kong. The cinema in this regard not only participates in coding some attributes as masculine or feminine, but also produces new formations of gender, such as a new formation of girlhood as something both to be looked at and as a mode of being with which the audience may identify thanks to the effects of these diverse devices.⁴⁶⁹ The images of girls in these films are thus never stable nor uncontroversial, insofar as their possible meanings and values are caught up in a continuous, changing and contested process of self-making.⁴⁷⁰ As Jagodzinski reminds us, the concept of the girl “existed in every historical period, but as an object of fantasy youthful bodies

⁴⁶⁷ Chow 2007: 79.

⁴⁶⁸ Cheung 2008: 95.

⁴⁶⁹ Driscoll 2002: 227.

⁴⁷⁰ Hussein 2002: 178.

were shaped by the social Imaginary at a time that itself was never completely 'stable', but fraught with cognitive dissonance, competing ideologies, and conflict."⁴⁷¹ The teenage girl as the site of a powerful 'discursive struggle' (to adapt Stuart Hall's important concept) shifts from the conflict between gender and ethnicity in the education sector and appears to take the form of a conflict between individual desire (gender) and external demand (societal expectation, in particular under the heterosexual male gaze) in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema.

A 'legendary triad assassin' versus a 'sissy father role' – Representation of the expectation of a father to his daughter in *Papa Loves You* (2004)

The whole person development framework of the education sector relies on the assumption that girls live in a properly functioning family system. In other words, the generational difference between students and their previous generations in a larger context is not mentioned in a greater detail in the education sector. Since the gender identity of girls is constructed according to their biological sex, it is hard to say that the education sector is very sensitive to the sexual feelings of girls. The education sector simply presumes that students will follow the footprints of their previous generations and know how to act responsibly in love and intimate relationship when they are transiting from adolescence to adulthood. As a result, students are presumed to act properly according to their gender roles so as to ensure the maintenance of a prosperous and stable society. The expectation of parents to their kids on the other hand is least mentioned in the teaching materials. It is in this regard made-for-teens

⁴⁷¹ Jagodzinski 2004: 20.

romance films in Hong Kong cinema provide audience with a window on to how the everyday life of teenage girls is conducted under strict social supervision.

While the construction of Chineseness in transnational films in the globalised world is always associated with the global imagination of the relationship between China, Hong Kong and the coloniser, the representation of Chineseness in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema on the contrary, is always associated with the presence (or absence) of parental authority in the everyday lives of teenage girls. The expectation of parents to their kids is one of the commonest themes in made-for-teens romance films. In particular, *Papa Loves You* (Herman Yau, 2004) and *2Young* (Derek Yee, 2005) are two of them that worth detailed discussion since the parents in both films are showing their commitment to be good parents. This point is significantly important because although the practice of good parenting is a taken-for-granted social projection to the proper functioning of family system (see Chapter One), how it actually works in the everyday lives of students is least likely to be discussed in detail. Given the selling point of the made-for-teens romance films is youthfulness, the role of parents are usually absent in the films, even though the influence of parents on the everyday lives of teenagers is presumed in these films. As a result, the interaction between parents and daughters in *Papa Loves You* and *2Young* serves as a window to investigate how the daughters actually react on the expectation of their parents in their everyday lives. Indeed, the approaches of parenting in the two films, in particular the conflict between daughters and fathers are very common in social reality of Hong Kong.

If girls need to identify with the role of father, whose is the ultimate source of power / authority in the family system, for the completion of their personal identity development, the process of identification that girls are going through is never a smooth and easy one in the made-for-teens romance films. The father figures in *Papa Loves You* and *2 Young* expect their daughters to have achievement and contribution to society in the future. It is in fact not a high-level expectation in contemporary Hong Kong society since girls nowadays are having equal educational opportunities as boys (see Chapter One). However, the conflict between daughters and fathers arises, as is shown in the films, because the father figures seem to know very little about the everyday life of their daughters. As a result, the failure of the daughters to be identified by their fathers in the first place is the cause of the conflict between the two generations. While the image of Ellen in *Papa Loves You* has shifted from a rebellious girl image to an obedient one in the projection of her father, the subjectivity of Ruo Nam in *2 Young* is overshadowed by the projection of the self-imaginary of the father figure. The objective of this section (and the next section) therefore is to examine how the gaze of the father figures is represented as an important factor for the (re)construction of the personal identity of girls in the films. This section focuses on the representation of the expectation of a father to his daughter in *Papa Loves You*.

In the first part of the film *Papa Loves You*, the rebellious image of Ellen, who is now a Form Five student, is constructed through the imagination of her father, Yam because he is very worried the everyday lives and practices of her daughter. The film begins with a five-minute shot of how Yam runs to Ellen's school to bail her out of trouble with the school headmaster in anytime when he receives phone calls from the

school. Yam is called by her daughter's school because of the misconduct of Ellen in school. Yam is screaming when the phone rings, which brings the effect of intensifying the worry of Yam in his everyday life to audience. Every time when Yam goes to the school, he runs like a card-carrying sissy, which visualises the sissy father role of Yam to audience. Although Yam tries his best to defend Ellen as a very nice and good girl to the male school headmaster, it is dramatic that the camera will shift to the scene of Ellen bullying her classmates in school right after the defence Yam makes. The cinematic level of representation not only makes the defence of Yam unconvincing, it also develops a good father image of Yam to audience. The speechless position of Yam is intensified when the male headmaster spells out the school rule Ellen has broken to him. In order to reinforce the difficult situation of Yam as a sissy father, the camera repeats the whole filmic representation of how the phone rings, Yam runs to the school, defends for his daughter and becomes speechless in front of the headmaster once to audience. Indeed, the worry of a father about his daughter is intensively and constantly shown in the film, such as through the talk between Yam and his friends and a lot of nightmares about his daughter Yam has made while he is waiting for the return of Ellen in the living room. The images of Ellen in the nightmares of Yam, such as being a street prostitute and a theft, visualise the worry of a father to his daughter. The worry of Yam, nonetheless, is constituted by the limited knowledge Yam has concerning the everyday life of Ellen. The visual representation of the worry of Yam not only alerts the audience that Ellen is a bad girl, whose misconduct in school is worth paying attention to, it also gains the sympathy of audiences to the role of father.

Besides the visual representation, the worry of Yam as a father to the behaviour of his daughter in the everyday life also makes clear to audience with the assistance of voice-over of Yam. Tong (2008) argues that as the voice-over is the first thing the audiences hear, the viewer is immediately compromised temporally. In other words, the voice-over is serving the function of shedding insight for the viewer and prefacing what the audiences seeing or experiencing.⁴⁷² Cheung also argues that “hearing the narration of the character is like reading a traveller’s log that provides information, epiphany and expression” to audiences.⁴⁷³ The inner feelings and thoughts of Yam, undoubtedly, are dominant in the storyline via the visual representation and voice-over. The voice-over of Yam and the five-minute shot of the reaction of Yam to the misconduct of Ellen in school therefore not only verbalises platitudes on the perils of parenthood, it also invites audiences to take up the position of a father in justifying the misconduct of Ellen. The expectation of a father to his daughter, that is, to become a useful person for the society, which is verbalised via a series of voice-over after the nightmares Yam has made, on the other hand, becomes justifiable to the audiences.

The privileged position for the role of father as a viewer in the narrative of the everyday life of Ellen is consolidated when the voice of Ellen is absent to the audiences (as well as to Yam) in the first part of the film. There is no one single scene in the first part of the film that the audiences can see Yam and Ellen are communicating with each other. The audiences are sympathetic to the situation of Yam because it is the daughter who does not give chance to her father to communicate with her. According to the voice-over of Yam, Ellen has taken to never

⁴⁷² Tong 2008: 70-71.

⁴⁷³ Cheung 2008: 95.

coming home for dinner and camping out at karaoke clubs since the death of her mother. The difficult situation of Yam as a father figure who needs to perform the mothering role is further developed when Ellen not only shows an indifferent attitude to the care of her father, she also embarrasses her father because of his 'sissy' behaviour when he is taking up his caring role. The card-carrying sissy run of Yam in this regard visualises the emasculation of him, which is a big contrast to the rebellious character of Ellen, and thus precludes the mis-communication between him and Ellen. Ellen refuses to identify with her father in the everyday life of her because she thinks Yam fails to establish an authoritative image of a father, which in turn makes her feel 'losing face' in front of her friends and schoolmates.

The film *Papa Love You* tries to argue that the traditional Chinese way of nurturing or communicating with teenagers since the genuine obstruction problem practically exists between parents and teenagers in contemporary societies. In the very beginning of the film, Yam blames himself for not having taken Ellen back to Nanjing after the death of his wife, which results in the rebellious character of his daughter. He indeed is explicitly blaming the environment of Hong Kong society that ruins the life of his daughter. At first glance, Yam projects his hometown, Nanjing, as an ideal place not only for nurturing his daughter, but also for solving the genuine obstruction problem that he and Ellen are encountering. As I have argued in the education chapter, the change in the political orientation of personal and social education masks the wide social gap between the post-handover generation and their parents. The mis-communication between fathers and daughters is unmasked in the film. However, the importance of the identification of a daughter to the traditional way of nurturing of parents becomes an issue and is raised by the father figure. The nostalgic views of

parenthood of Yam are out-of-dated in the eyes of Ellen and thus Ellen is reluctant to communicate with her father. This explains why Ellen always thinks her father does not understand what she is talking about and takes it as an excuse to stop communicating with him.

The identification of Ellen to her father in the everyday life of her happens when Yam rebuilds his masculinity – he saves a triad leader at a café with his nifty SFX-enhanced reflexes. However, the technique Yam is used to rescue a triad leader is simply the technique he usually uses around the house to catch flower vases before they smash into the floor. The use of the technique in different occasions, which shifts from a private place to a public one, therefore not only provokes a drastic change to the interpretation of the image and behaviour of Yam, it also provides a platform for Yam and Ellen to start knowing each other. This is because, as the film shows, when Yam was saving the triad leader, Ellen's male schoolmates were at the café at that time. By seeing the hands of Yam in action, Ellen's schoolmates mistakenly thinks that Yam was Mo Ye Fei Ying (a legendary triad assassin), who has disappeared for eighteen years after taking out a hundred and eight bad people during a legendary knife fight. The Nifty SFX-enhanced reflexes – the technique Yam uses to catch flower vases before they smash into the floor – are dubbed as the 'Shadow-less Hands' when a new status is given to Yam. After this event, Ellen's schoolmates volunteer to be Yam's disciples. Yam, in turn, welcomes the opportunity for the boys to spy on Ellen for him. The acceptance of this new status of Yam signifies the end to his phobia, which is deeply reflected in his nightmares that his 'sissy' behaviour (the symbol of his overwhelming caring role in the everyday life of Ellen) will lead to the departure of his daughter. This scene also constitutes a bleak of imagination for the

Figure 3.1. Ellen and Yam in *Papa Loves You* (2004)



Figure 3.2. 'Mo Ye Fei Ying' (a legendary triad assassin) in *Papa Loves You* (2004)



audiences to believe that Ellen is willing to identify with her father through the visual representation of she welcoming her father to the everyday life of her. (Figures 3.1 and 3.2.)

The restoration of the new image of Yam is a very important factor to repair the relationship between him and Ellen. Nostalgia, in terms of the legendary triad who took out 108 bad people during a legendary knife fight, in the first place helps Yam to build up a strong image in front of her daughter. This strong image is in great contrast to his 'sissy' behaviour in the everyday life, which ironically constitutes to the miscommunication between him and his daughter. This is because the 'sissy' behaviour of Yam gives Ellen a very bad impression that he cannot help her out when she is in trouble in the everyday life. The coincidence for Yam gaining this new triad identity, not surprisingly, provides him an opportunity to reconnect to the everyday life of Ellen. As a result, the reconnection of Yam to the everyday life of Ellen makes Yam's nostalgic views of parenthood more explicit and visible to the life of Ellen, which in turn provokes Ellen to have a reflection of her life as well as to her role of being a daughter.

The reflection of Ellen to the role of daughter is more significant than the consistent caring attitude of Yam to resolve the genuine obstruction problem that practically exists between parents and teenagers. The reflection of Ellen also provides a chance for her to reconstruct her personal identity construction along the adolescent development – the identification with her father makes Ellen restores her image as a good girl. As the film shows, Ellen no longer skips dinners at home nor does she camp out at karaoke clubs after school when she learnt that her father is a 'legendary

triad assassin'. In order to know more about the story of her father, Ellen takes the initiative to share her life with Yam. An example is Yam and Ellen go to supermarket together. It is the first time the audiences are able to see a harmonious picture of the father and daughter in the film.

As was discussed previously, there is no tendency for made-for-teens romance films to be distinctive of transnational films in the filmmaking, even though the cultural representation of Hong Kong and Chineseness may be varied in the two distinctive genres. For instance, the film *Papa Loves You* also carries some nostalgic representation, a technique that can be seen frequently in transnational cinema, and refers to events in the past in the construction of the story. However, the film has no intention to restore the past through the use of nostalgic representation. It is used as a means to reconnect Ellen and Yam in the everyday life of Ellen and thus restore the good girl image of Ellen. As Chow (2007) argues, nostalgia is most commonly understood as the sentiment of homesickness, which may extend into a tendency to reminisce about old times or to romanticise what happened in the irretrievable past.⁴⁷⁴ However, nostalgia, as Chow explains, "can be found everywhere in contemporary Chinese cinema. The object of nostalgia – that which is remembered and longed for – is, arguably, often in the form of a concrete place, time and event."⁴⁷⁵ In the case of *Papa Loves You*, the object of nostalgia is a legendary triad assassin that has disappeared for eighteen years for no good reasons. The 'sissy father role' of Yam and his new assigned role as a 'legendary triad assassin' therefore provides some space for the audiences to rethink whether or not 'masculinity' of father figures is important for the construction of the personal identity of daughters in their everyday

⁴⁷⁴ Chow 2007: 49.

⁴⁷⁵ Chow 2007: 52.

lives. As the film shows, the father does not need to rebuild his 'masculinity' which is associated with the image of a 'legendary triad assassin' to reconnect to the life of his daughter. This is because the 'sissy' behaviour of the father indeed is quite consistent throughout the film. However, the coincidence for a 'sissy father' to be misunderstood as a 'legendary triad assassin' provides a chance for Yam and Ellen to reconnect with each other and thus makes the daughter identifies with her father in the construction of the self in the film.

Rather than arguing that it is the new triad identity of Yam that leads to the changing attitude of Ellen to her father, it is more appropriate to say that the new identity of Yam is a coincidence to life only. This is because in the name of this new identity, Ellen realises that her father is not born to be 'sissy'. On the contrary, she realises that her father's sissy behaviour is the result of his commitment to take care of her after the death of her mother. Yam even makes use of his image of a sissy father to fix the messy situation his daughter has done. An example is Yam tells the cashier of a supermarket that Ellen is buying the cosmetics for him when Ellen is about to be caught by her intended shoplifting with her classmates. The sissy look of Yam makes his words convincing to the cashier. Later when Ellen runs away from the situation and Yam stops her on the street, she yells at her father and mocks at him for he embarrassing her in front of her classmates. Her father argues back and tells Ellen that it is he who has been embarrassed by his commitment to take care of her, such as being insulted by being called to Ellen's school for her misconduct, buying bra and sanitary napkin for her when she was at puberty. Ellen is unable to utter a word in self-defence so she runs away. It is the first time the audiences are able to visualise the tense relationship between Yam and Ellen. The quarrel between Yam and Ellen

on the street and the attachment of a new triad identity of Yam (which is happened after the scene of the quarrel) therefore intersects with each other to pave the way for the changing attitude of Ellen towards her father. In other words, the close up of the speechless face of Ellen in the quarrel on the street can also be interpreted as the guilt feeling of her to her father. This is because at that point she is actually moved to what her father has done for her since she was a child (before she notices the new identity of her father). It is Ellen who eventually realises the expressive role of Yam as a father and a mother for the development of her that she becomes a good girl again.

Due to the assignation to a new identity, Yam has a chance to lecture his 'nostalgic' views of parenthood to Ellen and his disciples. Nostalgia in this regard has a double role to play in the film, depending on the object of nostalgia it refers to: on the one hand, it represents as a 'legendary triad assassin' who knows 'Shadowless Hands' but has disappeared for eighteen years; on the other hand, it represents as the nostalgic views of parenthood of Yam to his daughter which seems to be out-of-dated in the eyes of a teenage girl who is living in contemporary Hong Kong society. Either way, the representation of nostalgia has been problematised in the everyday life of teenage girls.

An example is a kidnap scene of Ellen in the end of the film, which is caused by the revenge some gang types made on Mo Ye Fei Ying (not Yam). This is because Mo Ye Fei Ying has killed the mother of one of these some gang types in the legendary knife fight. In the last shot of the kidnap scene, it not only shows to the audiences that the revenge is in fact unnecessary, it also destroys the beauty of nostalgia, in terms of the success of a legendary triad assassin who was able to take off 108 people during a

legendary knife fight eighteen years ago. The motive of the revenge of these some gang types and the process of how the danger of Yam and Ellen is resolved is represented with the utilisation of four individual flashbacks:

Flashback (1): It is the memory of the triad leader to the death of his mother. The effect of the flashback is the triad leader intensifies his anger at Mo Ye Fei Ying.

Flashback (2): It is the memory of Yam to the advice the triad leader he has saved gives him, which reminds him to be calm and imaginative, when he and Ellen are in great danger. The effect of the flashback is Yam makes up the story that Mo Ye Fei Ying was impossible to take out 108 people without the help of insiders of the group. The triad leader is in doubt.

Flashback (3): It is the memory of the triad leader to the words of his mother before she died, which reminds him not to trust anyone. The effect of the flashback is it visualises the thinking of the triad leader to audiences whether he should trust Yam.

Flashback (4): It is again the memory of the triad leader to the words of his mother but it is in full version this time, which reminds him not to trust anyone, especially people that are close to him. The effect of the flashback is the triad leader turns around and points to two uncles beside him. He realises that it is the two uncles who killed his mother. Yam is safe at last.

Although the four individual flashbacks in the film *Papa Loves You* do not have a direct connection to each other, they as a whole form the multiplicities in motion that clearly show to audiences the motive of the kidnap and how it has been resolved by a series of corresponding and coincidences. As Chow argues,

[e]ven the most simple flashback does not exactly invite a straightforward restoration of connections; rather, it makes visible what I would call multiplicities in motion (multiplicities in terms of characters, times, actions, and memories) – a specifically filmic process, perhaps, that signals at once the pluralizing and inevitable dividing – as fissuring – of mental and affective circuits.⁴⁷⁶

Through the utilisation of the four individual flashbacks, which are constitutive to each other, the incredibly strong image of Mo Ye Fei Ying broke and a new hero image of Yam (which is consistent to his behaviour in performing his caring role for his daughter) comes into being. The new image of Yam in turn helps him to regain the love and respect of Ellen. The representation of nostalgia nonetheless helps to reconstruct the present, that is, to rebuild of the relationship of father and daughter in the everyday life of girls in contemporary Hong Kong.

As is shown in the beginning of the film, the nostalgic views of parenthood of Yam are abstract to Ellen. However, it is not simply the nostalgic views of parenthood of Yam that the film is going to deny or question but it is the inefficiency of the way of representation of these thoughts that leads to the mis-communication between the

⁴⁷⁶ Chow 2007: 95.

father and daughter. While the audiences can clearly hear the nostalgic views of parenthood of Yam through the voice-overs of Yam, there is no channel for Yam to transmit these thoughts to Ellen in the everyday life of Ellen. Although the function of voice-over is to visualise the thoughts of Yam to the audiences, the use of voice-over implies that there is a lack of channel to visualise the thoughts to the everyday life of Ellen in the filmic representation. The lack of the visual representation of thoughts therefore leads to the consequence of the mis-communication between the two generations. When a new status (a 'legendary triad assassin') is given to Yam, the perception of people surrounding him has changed. As a result, it opens up the imagination of the audiences that the nostalgic views of parenthood of Yam is no longer abstract to Ellen nor is it absent in the visual representation in the everyday life of Ellen.

Invisibility of the voice of girls in the context of teen pregnancy: The role of daughter in *2 Young* (2005)

In opposition to the role of daughter who refuses to identify with her father in the construction of the everyday life of teenage girls in the film *Papa Loves You*, it is the father figure who takes a dominant role in the construction of the identity of his daughter in the film *2 Young*. Due to the arrangement of parents to the life of teenage girls, the issue of the (in)visibility of girls in the filmic representation therefore has been questioned in *2 Young*. For the issue of a visibility of visibility, Chow argues "a visibility that is the condition of possibility for what becomes visible, that may derive a certain intelligibility from the latter but cannot be simply reduced to it."⁴⁷⁷ She then

⁴⁷⁷ Chow 2007: 11.

quotes the work of Deleuze to explain the complexity of the issue of visibility: “Visibilities are not to be confused with elements that are visible or more generally perceptible, such as qualities, things, objects, compounds of objects.” “Visibilities are not forms of objects, nor even forms that would show up under light, but rather forms of luminosity which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer.” “Visibilities are neither the acts of a seeing subject nor the data of a visual meaning.” “Visibilities are not defined by sight but are complexes of actions and passions, actions and reactions, multisensorial complexes, which emerge into the light of day.”⁴⁷⁸ Along the heterosexual matrix – which is revealed particularly in terms of the power relationship between father and daughter – the voices of girls are often invisible in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema, even though the images of girls in these films, such as Ruo Nam in *2 Young*, can be seen frequently on the screen. The agency of girls is distorted to certain extent simply because they to certain extent still live under the supervision of their parents.

The influence of parents to the behaviour of teenagers is one of the common and popular themes in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. If it is the ‘sissy father role’ of Yam in the film *Papa Loves You* that drives her daughter away in the first place, the father image in the film *2 Young* on the contrary is a very strong figure but it also leads to the departure of his daughter. It is in this context I argue that it is not the style of image of a father that matters for the communication between father and daughters. This is because either a sissy father or a strong-minded father will result in their absences in the everyday life of their daughters. Ellen in the film *Papa Loves You* is reluctant to talk to her father in the first place because she does not

⁴⁷⁸ Chow 2007: 11.

think her father understands her. By the same token, it is the reluctance of Ruo Nam's father to consider the feeling of Ruo Nam in the film *2 Young* that he fails to enter into the everyday life of his daughter.

The conflict between Ruo Nam and her father is intensified when she is pregnant at the age of sixteen. The issue of teen pregnancy, in particular how adults handle the consequence of teen pregnancy of teenage girls, reveals the problematic concept of the girl that Hudson (1984) has addressed, namely the conflicts between the cultural notions of femininity and adolescence – the two major concepts that regulate the behaviour as girls. The crux of the problem seems to be the (im)possibility for a teenage girl to reveal her agency in the framework of parental authority. Parents are in opposition to the teen pregnancy of teenage girls because the girl is being sexual, but is not yet a sexual being. However, the justification of the father to his absence during the pregnancy of his daughter on the other hand reinforces the affective role (which is a feminine characteristics in theories of development) of Ruo Nam in the case. (Figure 3.3.)

The English title of the film *2 Young* literally refers to the everyday life of two teenagers. The question is: What is the selling point of the film for the life of two teenagers who are dependent on parents that arouses the interests of audiences? The Chinese title of the film *Zaoshu* (literally, it means 'early-maturing', which refers to precocity or precociousness in English) does reflect the theme of the film more accurately, that is, the issue of teen pregnancy. However, the two teenagers, Ruo Nam and Ka Fu, seem to be unable to organise their everyday lives, particularly in terms of the way to handle teen pregnancy, in the film. The two teenagers are facing a strong

Figure 3.3. Rou Nam and Ka Fu in *2 Young* (2005)



Ka Fu (left) and Rou Nam (right) were camping at the birthday of Rou Nam



Poster of the film

opposition or intervention of parents in the issue of teen pregnancy. This is because the two teenagers are still studying in secondary schools and strongly dependent on the financial support of parents in the everyday life. Specifically, the film represents the teen pregnancy issue in terms of the conflict between the girl's father and the boy's family, in which the voice of Ruo Nam is overlooked in the case.

With regard to the consequence of the pregnancy issue, the adults' responses are very different towards the lives of Ruo Nam and Ka Fu. While Ruo Nam's father strongly opposes to the pregnancy of Ruo Nam and proposes Ruo Nam to have an abortion in the United States, the parents of Ka Fu recommend the marriage between Ruo Nam and Ka Fu as a solution for the teen pregnancy. However, it does not mean that parents of Ruo Nam and Ka Fu are not mad at the issue because the expectation of parents to their children has been strongly ruined in this case. In a Chinese society like Hong Kong, the expectation of parents to their children can usually be seen on the names they assign to their children. Literally speaking, the Chinese name of Ruo Nam means 'to be like a boy' whereas the name of Ka Fu means 'to become a rich family'. Ruo Nam's father is mad at Ruo Nam for her unwanted pregnancy not simply because she cannot perform the function of exchanging values that a daughter is supposed to do in traditional Chinese societies so as to extend the status of the family. (This part will be discussed in the later section.) More importantly, Ruo Nam's father believes that the unwanted pregnancy has ruined the life of her daughter as well as his expectation to her. As the film shows, Ruo Nam's father trains her like a boy and expects her to have the best achievement in the future. This explains why her parents have lined up a rich education for her. Ka Fu's father is furious because his expectation to his son also fails. He realises that Ka Fu is following his footsteps

(did not study hard and was distracted by romance and sex at his teenage) and thus he is afraid of the fact that his son will have limited chance to climb up in the social ladder of society.

The different responses of Ka Fu's parents and Ruo Nam's father imply different gender expectations to boys and girls in society. While Ka Fu's parents hope that the proposal of marriage can save Ka Fu from being sued in court, the response of Ruo Nam's father clearly shows that the pregnancy of his daughter has infringed the benefits of him. Either case, it is apparent that the judgement of parents to the teen pregnancy dominates the whole storyline. Teenagers on the other hand are placed in a relatively helpless situation in handling the pregnancy issue. Ruo Nam and Ka Fu feel helpless simply because it is a general perception in contemporary Hong Kong that teenagers are too young to take the responsibility of being parents (especially when teenagers are still studying and financially dependent on their parents).

When Ruo Nam tells Ka Fu that she is pregnant, the camera shifts to another screen where Ruo Nam and Ka Fu are sitting in a clinic, which is poorly conditioned and dirty, waiting for an illegal abortion. There is no screen shows to the audiences how the decision to seek for an abortion is made. However, audiences are led to understand that an illegal abortion is not chosen for financial reasons. (This is because Ruo Nam comes from a rich family and is able to pay for the fees.) It seems that it is the result of the negative impression of the society towards teen pregnancy that drives them to consider for an illegal abortion in the first place. For instance, the film ends with a court scene when the judge sends Ka Fu for a three-month probation to think thoroughly his responsibility to the baby and to his future family, which symbolises

the high order of the social norms and authority towards the ‘immature’ romance and ‘irresponsible’ sexual behaviour of teenagers in an adult world. The ground for the punishment of Ka Fu is similar to the logic I have mentioned in the education sector – teenagers who are sexually active at their teenage years will cause a family to disintegrate. This is because such behaviour is regarded as exhibiting a poorly founded sexual relationship according to the social norms. Personal behaviour is thus explicitly linked to national goals – the maintenance of societal stability and proper functioning of the family system in contemporary Hong Kong society. Since teen pregnancy will lead to the dysfunction of family and society, Ka Fu inescapably needs to receive punishment for his ‘improper’ behaviour. However, the punishment of Ka Fu only signifies the adults’ expectation towards the responsibility of boys (not girls) in the issue of teen pregnancy.⁴⁷⁹

Ruo Nam can only go for an illegal abortion not a legal one because she is unable to carry out the termination of pregnancy in a hospital or clinic maintained by the Government or declared by the Director of Health (a sign for legal abortion service) without the notice of her parents or guardians. In Hong Kong, under the Offences Against The Person Ordinance (Cap 212, Section 47A), the termination of pregnancy is granted legally only if this involves risk of injury to the pregnant woman’s physical or mental health. In determining whether the continuance of a pregnancy will involve such risk of injury to health, two conditions might take into account for the pregnant woman’s actual or reasonably foreseeable environment: (1) in the case of a woman who is with child before attaining the age of 16; or (2) in the case of a woman who has been the victim of sexual intercourse. Ruo Nam in the film *2 Young* is banned to

⁴⁷⁹ Chan 2006: 161.

obtain legal abortion service partly because she does not fall into the category mentioned in the legislation. She has reached the age of 16 when she initiated a kiss (and had had sex) with Ka Fu.

Although it is not easy for girls to access to legal abortion services, the decision for Ruo Nam and Ka Fu to go for an illegal abortion in the first place illustrates that society does not expect girls to shoulder the responsibility of pregnancy, nor are they entitled to the right to give birth to a baby that an adult woman is presumed to have. Indeed, it is a matter for contestation among feminists and society whether the mothering role is a burden on women that women seek to emancipate or it is a feminine essence that women seek to express.⁴⁸⁰ Society tends to be more tolerant for girls to exercise the abortion right because of their age, despite the fact that both women and girls have the same level of difficulties in accessing to legal abortion services in contemporary Hong Kong. The space given by society for girls to evade social responsibility for childbearing at their age, which is based on the assumption that girls are not yet capable of taking this role, offers some temporary space for teenage girls to live their lives in a way different from the social expectation of being women in society. Another example is Biscuit, Banana and Sissy who have experienced illegal abortion at their age of 12 or 13 in *Spacked Out*, which will be discussed in the next section. However, the fact that girls are not able to access to legal abortion without parental consent on the contrary implies that girls are in lack of autonomy to make decision of their lives.

⁴⁸⁰ Regarding the feminist debate on women's reproductive autonomy (pro-life vs. pro-choice), see for examples, Siegel 1995; Kevin 2005; Shrage 2003; Smyth 2002. The issue is more complicated when this involves the question of whether or not men also have right to choose in the reproduction issue. See for example, Brake 2005.

When Ka Fu's parents tell Ruo Nam's father that Ruo Nam is pregnant, Ruo Nam's father makes the decision for Ruo Nam to go for an abortion in the United States. The offer of Ruo Nam's father to Ruo Nam indeed reinforces the logic that teenage girls are incapable of taking caring responsibility at their age. However, the reason for Ruo Nam to reject the idea of her father is not because she has thought thoroughly whether or not she can handle the situation on her own. Ruo Nam turns down the suggestion of her father simply because she thinks her father has no right to make decision of her life (and her baby). The opposition of Ruo Nam to her father's idea not only intensifies the conflict between daughters and fathers with regard to the appropriate and inappropriate ways of showing care in a father-and-daughter relationship, it also provokes the concern of whether or not a daughter should be entitled to have some respect to live the life on her own term in a Chinese community like Hong Kong.

Ruo Nam's father expresses his care to his daughter through the perfect arrangement of the life of Ruo Nam. As the film shows, Ruo Nam is arranged to learn a series of skills so as to enhance her competitiveness in the labour market in the future. However, Ruo Nam regards the arrangements of her father as uncaring because her father never tries to understand and respect her needs and feelings. Ruo Nam thinks that her father only imposes what he wants on her. The conflict arises between Ruo Nam and her father not only reveals the clash of tradition and modernity in contemporary Hong Kong society, it also illustrates the cinema's attempt to question the traditional Chinese way of nurturing or communicating with teenagers in contemporary society. In Chinese traditions, parents will have a strong commitment in nurturing their kids to become capable people for the society, even at the expense of being mindful of the feelings of their kids. In other words, the concern for the

feelings and needs of a daughter is not supposed to be the responsibility of a father in the nurturing process.

The confession of Ruo Nam's father of his inattentiveness to the needs of his daughter in the court scene in the end of the film nonetheless challenges this traditional way of nurturing, which indeed is still prevailing in contemporary Hong Kong. Communication between fathers and daughters is more important than fathers solely taking up the economic role of the family. The quest for daughters to receive good quality of communication with their fathers leads to the reconsideration of the appropriateness and inappropriateness of the conventional expectation of fatherhood in contemporary societies. The quest for Ruo Nam can also be understood in terms of the advocacy for the equal share of work between husband and wife in family, which was one of the important agendas of the First and Second Wave of feminists in the English world.⁴⁸¹ This 'modern' concept of care and family responsibility of fathers intersects with the Chinese traditions in formulating the mindset of teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong society. Ruo Nam is desperate for a happy family and this aspiration enables her to be extraordinarily strong in challenging the paternal authority, that is her father, in the film. The persistence of Ruo Nam to stick to her own perspective of living (through the act of running away from home so as to escape from the patronising behaviour of the father figure) actualises the self-assertive character of girls in the patriarchal family system.

However, the statement made by the lawyer towards the issue of teen pregnancy in the court sense is misleading in the sense that it is not consistent with how the story

⁴⁸¹ See for examples, Lewis 2002; Halford 2006.

has been presented but even twists the gender characteristics of Ruo Nam. The statement made by the lawyer on the other hand falls into the logic of the social construction of gender. As Leblanc argues, “[t]he goals of the game, the attributes of femininity, are specifically constructed to contrast with those of masculinity. Whereas men ought to be aggressive, women ought to be passive; whereas men ought to be strong and direct, women ought to be subtle, coy, weak, timid, and so on. This part of the game, otherwise called the social construction of gender, not only considers femininity and masculinity as opposites, but as hierarchically related.”⁴⁸² In the court scene of the film, Ruo Nam is presumed to take a passive role in the unwanted pregnancy. However, as the film shows, Ruo Nam actually takes a quite active role: she is drunk, initiates a kiss and later has had sex with Ka Fu and finally makes the decision to have an abortion in her teen romance and pregnancy. Ka Fu, on the contrary, follows the lead of Ruo Nam. The contrast between the behaviour of Ruo Nam and Ka Fu along the flow of appeals itself has already made explicit the sexual desire and feelings of Ruo Nam in the context of romance and sex.

The deduction of the lawyer (and the voices of Ruo Nam’s father and the judge) therefore constitutes the social expectation and the social norm that regulates the proper behaviour of teenagers in social reality. It is an objective fact that Ka Fu, as a teenager, is still studying in a secondary school and relying on his parent in his everyday life. Teenagers are viewed as reckless in the eyes of adults in teen pregnancy not simply because of their age but also because they do not have any planning (such as the consideration for their financial ability to raise a baby, which is a very ‘civilised’ mode of thinking in contemporary Hong Kong society) when they

⁴⁸² Leblanc 1999: 136-137.

decide to give birth to a baby eventually. As a result, it supports the argument in society that teen pregnancy will ruin the life of teenage girls and the baby will not be able to receive sufficient care from teen mothers.

Even though finance / money is not a concern for the decision of an illegal abortion in the first place, it becomes an issue in raising a baby later when Ruo Nam has stopped getting financial support from her father after she turned down the suggestion of her father to go to the United States for a legal abortion and ran away from her home. The change in the living condition of Ruo Nam (the shift from gaining financial support from her rich lawyer father to living on the meagre salary of Ka Fu who can only find elementary work such as construction worker according to his low education qualification) rationalises the opposition of Ruo Nam's father to the teen romance and teen pregnancy. Indeed, the unequal standing of families of Ruo Nam and Ka Fu is the cause of the conflict between Ruo Nam and her father to her romance. The importance of having families of equal standing in the consideration of a romantic relationship invites a thought of the role of teenage girl who is inescapable to be a daughter at any stage of her life in the constitution of this conflict.

When Ruo Nam's father accidentally meets Ka Fu at first at the balcony of his house, he goes straight asking Ka Fu his family background. Ruo Nam's father does not show his disinterest to Ka Fu, nor does he oppose Ruo Nam to be friend of Ka Fu in the first place because he misunderstands Ka Fu is studying in a prestigious single sex secondary school like her daughter's at the beginning of the conversation. As the conversation between Ka Fu and Ruo Nam's father goes on, Ruo Nam's father realises that Ka Fu actually is coming from a working class family and is studying in

a poor status secondary school. As a result, his face and attitude to Ka Fu change and abruptly ends the conversation. The screen then shifts to the conversation between Ruo Nam and her father in Ruo Nam's bedroom. In that conversation, it is the first time that the audiences can hear clearly and explicitly the expectation of Ruo Nam's father to her daughter. Ruo Nam tells her father that she is unhappy because he does not care the needs and feeling of her. She also realises that her father wants to sustain his 'face' by asking her to study well and thus marry to a rich person in the future. The underlying assumption about the purpose of a daughter which is for the extension of the prestige and status of a family by bonding to another family of similar standing in society is thus spelled out to audiences.

The emphasis on the exchange value of a daughter is very common in ancient times. However, it becomes the cause of conflict between Ruo Nam and her father in contemporary Hong Kong. Ruo Nam does not simply oppose the idea of her father to take advantage in a friendship, she also feels uncomfortable when her father disrespects her feeling and right to make friends, in particular friends that are of no value in the eyes of her father. Ruo Nam is told to make friends to those who have values, rather than those who are good in personality (even though Ruo Nam's mother thinks that Ka Fu is a good boy and does not oppose to the romance between her daughter and him). The grievance of Ruo Nam to the uncaring of her father to her needs is transformed to some rebellious behaviour in the eyes of Ruo Nam's father such as playing piano poorly and whipping the keyboard. However, it is the display of the grievance of Ruo Nam to the lack of time of her father to communicate with her that the agency of a daughter that has longer been overlooked in ancient times rebirths in contemporary Hong Kong. The grievance of Ruo Nam, in terms of the act of run

away from home, also provokes the thought of her father to reconsider the appropriate communication way of him to his daughter in the everyday life of teenage girls.

The confession of Ruo Nam's father in the court scene in the end of the film therefore provides a platform to reconsider the meaning of love and the appropriate way of caring in contemporary Hong Kong family. He confesses to the judge that his fury of his daughter's pregnancy pushes her daughter to an even more vulnerable situation. On the contrary, he appreciates the support of Ka Fu to her daughter in the difficult times. He argues that the support of Ka Fu to her daughter is more unconditional and truthful, compared to his, which makes him feel regretful and shameful as a father. This statement of a father is important in the film because it not only shows to the audiences that the father has realised his inattentiveness to the needs of his daughter eventually, is also admits the insufficiency of merely providing material support (the role of father as a breadwinner) in the constitution of a happy and warm family life for his daughter. Indeed, the living condition of Ruo Nam's family and Ka Fu's family provides a big contrast to the meaning of a happy and warm family life in contemporary societies. Although Ruo Nam is living in a very spacious house, she always feels bored and lonely (due to the limited time her parents is able to spend with her). On the contrary, Ka Fu is living in a very crowded and small flat but he is having a happy family life. At one point, the happy family life of Ka Fu is the envy of Ruo Nam. However, the film has no intention to overemphasise the importance of the communicating role of a father and undermines the importance of the role of father as a breadwinner in the family. Otherwise, the film will not show to the audiences that Ruo Nam has verbally admitted the importance of the contribution of her father to the

family – to provide her a stable and conformable living environment – when she and Ka Fu are hiding in an abandon house of Ka Fu’s friend in a remote village.

The subjective experiences of Ruo Nam nonetheless have been buried in the confession of her father at the court scene. Ruo Nam’s father tries to argue that adults should forgive all the mistakes made by teenagers because they cannot really be blamed for their wrongdoings, in terms of not performing responsible behaviour. As was discussed in the education chapter, responsible behaviour, such as making responsible decisions concerning sex (which implies discouraging students from sexual experiences in their teenage years, or prior to marriage), is the main theme in maintaining the morality of students in the sex education guidelines on the secondary school curriculum. Since the issue of teen pregnancy will lead to the instability of society and the improper functioning of the family system, it is regarded as wrongdoing behaviour of teenagers. Because of the understanding of Ruo Nam’s father towards this essential stage of youth to make mistakes at their teenage years, the misunderstanding and conflict between Ruo Nam and her father dissolves.

In other words, the misunderstanding between Ruo Nam and her father dissolves because her father recognises the fact that all youths are reckless at their age. As Pu argues, “the director of the film wants to pass a very clear message to the youth nowadays – parents are strict to their kids not because they did not go through the age of youth before. It is because parents do not want their kids to repeat the wrongdoings of their own.”⁴⁸³ Even though the confession of Ruo Nam’s father brings the inter-generational change into the concern in contemporary Hong Kong, the expression of

⁴⁸³ Pu 2006: 160-161.

the inter-generational change through the mouth of an adult man limits the power of change in the relationship between teenage boys and adult men. As Chan argues, the over-protective tone Ruo Nam's father uses to defend for the wrongdoings of teenagers overshadows the moral judgement of the father figures to teenagers. The defence the father makes for the behaviour of teenagers nonetheless simply leads to the reconstruction of the self-imagination of the father figure.⁴⁸⁴ The voice of Ruo Nam in the whole argument is absent. In the question of performativity, Berry argues that "some spaces for performance are public by virtue of having a greater social visibility and hence a greater power to disseminate widely than others and that access to public performance may be limited or facilitated by social power structures."⁴⁸⁵ Although Berry addresses the issue of performativity particularly in the context of gay life in China, he also argues "this question of access to and regulation of public discourse is relevant in any society."⁴⁸⁶ The visibility of any gender performance is closely associated with its relations to public discourses. Since the representation of the issue of teen pregnancy in the film mainly addresses the responses of Ruo Nam's father and Ka Fu's parents, the chance for Ruo Nam to reveal her expression and feeling is limited.

When Ruo Nam's father tries to justify the wrongdoing of his daughter due to her irrationality, Ruo Nam, nonetheless, is judged for her affective characteristic, that is, to give a chance for Ka Fu to ruin her life. Since Ruo Nam has been constructed as a victim in the unwanted pregnancy according to the logic of the lawyer and judge, there is no place that Ruo Nam needs to be forgiven in the first place because it is not she who stands at the court to be accused of any wrongdoings. As a result, when Ruo

⁴⁸⁴ Chan 2006: 162.

⁴⁸⁵ Berry 2009: 171.

⁴⁸⁶ Berry 2009: 172.

Nam's father attempts to justify the behaviour of her daughter according to the meaning to youth or adolescence, he, nonetheless, traps his daughter to the cultural notions of femininity – that is, to be affective to let the happening of the wrongdoing of Ka Fu. Since Ruo Nam's father displaces his experiences as teenage boy himself to teenagers in general, the justification of the adult men, including the lawyer and Ruo Nam's father, in the film never spells out the perspective of teenage girls towards their experiences in their everyday lives, such as the consequence of pregnancy brings to the lives of teenage girls. This justification also undermines the ability of teenage girls to assert authority over their own behaviour, and to take responsibility for any of their decisions in their everyday lives. Since the justification of adult (men) is made on the basis of their experiences as teenage boys, they are remote from the social world which contemporary teens inhabit, the filmic representation of teen romance and pregnancy cannot escape the fate of being criticised by Chan for the reinforcement of the authoritative role of father figure in the everyday life of teenage girls.⁴⁸⁷

(In)visibility of visibility of the girl: How the parental instruction and desire of a man shapes the life of a girl in *My Wife is 18* (2002)

While it is shown in the education sector that the reductionist relationship between gender and sexuality will have an overwhelming impact on the self-understanding of teenage girls, the relationship between gender and sexual identity of Yoyo in *My Wife is 18* (James Yuen, 2002) is more complicated because Yoyo seems to act responsively to the familial instruction and the desire of a thirty year-old man,

⁴⁸⁷ Chan 2006: 162.

Cheung in her everyday life. At first glance, the film is not consistent to the social expectation towards the role and behaviour of girls in contemporary Hong Kong because, as the film director argues in a film magazine interview, it is least likely that girls in contemporary Hong Kong will accept arranged marriage nowadays.⁴⁸⁸ As a result, the director set the arranged marriage in the United Kingdom with good intentions that audiences will accept this at ease. Except this point, the film *My Wife is 18* demonstrates the complexity, but not uncommon in social reality, of how the girl should act in the romance context. The complexity of the issue lies in the fact that girls have to face great pressure from their family and are subject to the desires of male in constructing their romance lives. The film indeed provides a lot of vivid examples of the social expectation towards the appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of girls prevail in contemporary Hong Kong that girls are hard to turn a blind eye to when they are making decisions to their romance. An example is the controversy of teacher-student romance (which is also mentioned briefly in Chapter One and Chapter Two).

Family is an influential factor to the construction of the sexual identity of a teenage girl in the film *My Wife is 18* because she is assigned to an arranged marriage. In other words, family does not play a role of deferring girls to be sexual beings in this case, as is suggested in the education sector. (Since girls in Hong Kong may not accept arranged marriage, it is also true that family does not play a role of deferring girls to be sexual beings.). However, the role of family is not in an absolute position to dominate the everyday life, as well as the identity construction process of Yoyo. There is still some space for Yoyo to shift between her gender identity as a teenage

⁴⁸⁸ *City Entertainment* 21 November –4 December 2002: 25-26.

girl and her sexuality when romance does not really happen between Yoyo and Cheung. While girls as sexual beings are deferred in the education sector because of the emphasis on marriage and reproduction in the personal and social education curriculum, the experience of sex between Yoyo and Cheung does not make them to become a real couple, even though they are married. Unlike the focus on the biological explanation of sex in the school sex education discourse, which results in the disregard of the personal desire and sexuality of girls, the sexuality of Yoyo, in terms of sexual pleasure, is fully represented in the film.

The interaction between the father and daughter is vividly visualised in the film *2 Young*. Although the image of parent authority in the film *My Wife is 18* only appears for a couple of minutes in the beginning of the film, the influence of parental authority to the construction of the storytelling of the film, as well as to the construction of the gender identity and sexuality of Yoyo in her romance life, is profound. Besides the influence of parental instruction that the arranged marriage is set, the agency of Yoyo in the film is also prescribed as what Driscoll calls ‘the dominant model of sexuality’, in which girls are constituted as an object of masculine desire. As a result, the agency of girls is at some points made invisible because they live according to the instruction of their parents and the desire of boys in the romance context. The everyday life of Yoyo in school and family on the other hand naturalises the look of Yoyo as a teenage girl. The literal meaning of both the Chinese and English titles of the film places the girl as an object for description. When the audiences read the title, they will easily fall into the position of a man who has a wife at her age 18. ‘My Wife’ / ‘Wo Lao Po’ – a wife that belongs to a man – implies that the narrative of the story is taken from a male perspective. In this case, it is from the

perspective of a thirty year-old man named Cheung. The English title of the film *My Wife is 18* indicates plainly that the story is about ‘a man’s wife who is eighteen years old’. The question is: what is the selling point of the film which is about ‘a man’s wife who is eighteen years old’, if an eighteen year-old girl, according to the legal definition in Hong Kong, should no longer be treated like a teenage? The English title of the film is confusing in this regard because it does not show clearly to audiences how the social expectation to a girl is constituted at her age of 18, except the fact that girls at eighteen are still studying in schools.

The Chinese title of the film *Wo Lao Po Ng Gou Cheng* on the contrary provides audiences some space to imagine how the image of girls is constructed with her age. ‘Eighteen years old’ is translated to ‘Ng Gou Cheng’ in Chinese, which literally means ‘not have enough scale’ and in English refers to ‘less than expected’. (The phrase ‘Ng Gou Cheng’ is used in Cantonese, not Mandarin/Standard written Chinese.) However, it is conceptually misleading to translate ‘eighteen years old’ to the term ‘not have enough scale’ because people who are eighteen years old will be granted a full citizenship in Hong Kong. ‘Not have enough scale’ literally is used to refer to the one who has not yet come of age to be an adult. Also, people who are ‘eighteen years old’ are entitled to get married without the needs of consent of parents in contemporary Hong Kong. It is in the context I argue that there should be no problem for an eighteen year-old girl to become a wife, even though she might be a bit young to get married according to the medium age of marriage recorded by the Census and Statistical Department. (Figure 3.4.)

Figure 3.4. Yoyo and Cheung in *My Wife is 18* (2002)



Left: Cheng (left) is a teacher and Yoyo (right) is a student in Yoyo's school
Right: Yoyo tore up the marriage certificate at the stage of the school hall



Poster of the film

The film starts with the scene of an arranged marriage of Yoyo, who is an eighteen year-old Hong Kong student, and Cheung, who is older than Yoyo by 12 years old and is a Chinese graduate student living in the United Kingdom. The arranged marriage is set for fulfilling the desire of Cheung's ninety-three-year old grandmother who wants to see her grandson Cheung get married before she passed on. Cheung therefore agrees to a quick arranged marriage eventually. Yoyo on the other hand agrees to the marriage to satisfy her parents. Cheung and Yoyo have no illusions about any lasting bliss; they intend to be divorced within a year. While the reluctant attitude of Cheung to the arranged marriage in the first place is clearly shown to the audiences, the response of Yoyo is unclear to the audiences. The audiences only know that she makes an agreement to divorce after a year. Cheung and Yoyo accept the arrangement of their parents at last as a way to show their respect to their parents by acting upon according to the will of their parents. It is in this context I argue that the marriage of Yoyo and Cheung is driven by filial piety and not their desires toward each other in the first place. (Since girls in contemporary Hong Kong may not accept arranged marriage nowadays, this way of performing filial piety therefore should be in question).

The audiences are curious to find out how an arranged marriage of Yoyo and Cheung, which is not based on the desires toward each other, that can work out in the end. The expectation of audiences is predictable because a happy ending is always presumed in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. As was mentioned previously, the literal meaning of both the Chinese and English titles of the film places the girl as an object for description. When the audiences read the title, they will easily fall into the position of a man who has a wife at her age 18. 'My Wife' / 'Wo Lao Po' – a wife

that belongs to a man – implies that the narrative of the story is taken from a male perspective. It is also because of the construction of the story from the male perspective that the statement of a wife who ‘does not have enough scale’ is problematised. Yoyo is not ‘qualified’ as a wife because she is not an ideal model according to the male standard. The Chinese phrase ‘not have enough scale’ therefore conveys two meanings for the social image of a ‘teenage girl’, even though Yoyo reaches her age of 18. This contributes to the justification of why an arranged marriage is not supposed to work out in the first place. On the one hand, the twelve years age difference between Yoyo and Cheung makes Yoyo still a girl in the eyes of Cheung; and on the other hand the flat body shape of Yoyo is the target of teasing by her crush Kelvin and his friends.

The arranged marriage is supposed to be one of convenience in which the agency of both Yoyo and Cheung is completely driven by parental instruction. However, Yoyo is still completely in control of her romance life, given the fact that she and Cheung are not really a couple and there is no sexual relationship between them will occur. Also, the fake marriage is planned to end peacefully after a year. As a result, Yoyo still makes herself available to boys when she comes back to Hong Kong after marrying to Cheung in the United Kingdom. Even when Cheung decides to visit Hong Kong to get out of the United Kingdom for a while after the death of his grandmother and stays at Yoyo’s place at her request (because Cheung will pay for the rent of her place), she asks Cheung to help her chase after her crush Kelvin. At the same time, she encourages Cheung to chase after a physical education teacher, Miss Lee, when he becomes a Psychology substitute teacher in her school during his stay in Hong Kong.

The agency of Yoyo, in terms of the freedom she enjoys in her everyday life, is fully revealed in the film when she is not yet serious about love. Although she agrees to the arranged marriage according to the instruction of her parents, she does not abide to the expectation that is imposed on a marriage. At first glance, it seems that Yoyo is in charge of her life. However, the examination on her response to the arranged marriage in the first place invites a second thought of whether or not this teenage girl has executed her autonomy in full extension. Yoyo grants her freedom to live her life on her own term simply because her parents are staying in the United Kingdom, which means that they are not present in the everyday life of Yoyo in Hong Kong. When Yoyo's parents told her to fly to the United Kingdom and accept the arranged marriage, there is no one single scene shown to the audiences that Yoyo is going to oppose to the instruction of her parents.

When she realises that Cheung at first is going to turn down the arrangement of the parents, she persuades him to hold back his idea because she worries that his grandmother might not be able to take it. The argument of Yoyo is convincing to Cheung and thus he changes his mind at last. The film subtly shows to the audiences that Yoyo prioritises the duty of filial piety as a daughter over her actual needs and desires for a marriage. This is because if love were the reason for Yoyo's agreement to the marriage, she would not have encouraged Cheung to chase after Miss Lee in the later stage of the film. However, when she realises that she starts to fall for him through, for example, the close up of her disappointed facial expression when she heard that the headmaster of her school is so supportive to the romance between Cheung and Miss Lee, why does she still push Cheung to Miss Lee? How the filmic

representation helps the audiences to understand this seem-to-be contradictory behaviour of Yoyo?

There is no special filmic representation such as sound effect, voice-overs and flashbacks, which are frequently used in made-for-teens romance films, in *My Wife is 18*. The story of how an arranged marriage turns to a marriage based on love is told plainly. However, the speaking style of Yoyo is worth mentioning in a greater detail so as to help the audiences understand the truth feelings of to Cheung. Yoyo likes to say 'it is a joke' to erase the embarrassment that she might foresee because of her words. She says this phrase to Cheung twice in different circumstances. The first time she says this to Cheung is on the situation that Cheung tells her that he is going to turn down the arrangement of the parents on the street, which was discussed previously. She tells Cheung that her purpose of this trip is to marry him. When Cheung asks her whether or not she is serious, she tells Cheung that it is a joke and thus he relieves. The second time she mentions this phrase is on the situation that she finds out Cheung has a dating appointment with Miss Lee after she has had sex with Cheung. She therefore tells Cheung that it is a joke saying that it is her first time to experience sex. Then she pushes him out of the room and urges him to find Miss Lee.

In the situation of where the two 'jokes' are made, the audiences can see from her behaviour that Yoyo is actually denying her inner subjective feelings to Cheung. For instances, Yoyo is so excited to tell the ground personnel of Hong Kong International Airport that the purpose of her trip is for marriage. In addition, when Cheung is shocked that it is the first time of her to experience sex right after the sex they are having, Yoyo reconfirms with him and requests to try one more time in advance. It is

not until she finds out that Cheung forgets the dating appointment with Miss Lee that she tells him 'her first time of sex' is a joke. However, when she pushes Cheung away to the door, there is a shot in camera that she is crying behind the door. The filmic representation of Yoyo's reactions therefore leads to the imagination of the audiences that Yoyo is using the word 'joke' to cover her true 'thoughts' and 'feeling' to Cheung.

The word 'joke' Yoyo uses to cover her thoughts is convincing to Cheung simply because the said 'jokes' are consistent to the social expectation of society to the proper behaviour of teenage girls, which is verbalised to the audiences through the mouth of Yoyo. In a scene near the end of the film when Cheung confesses to all students on the stage at the school hall that Yoyo is his wife, Yoyo comes to the stages, tears up the marriage certificate and recalls what has been said in society that students should not involve in a romantic relationship while studying, especially in a teacher-student romantic relationship. At first glance, the film shows to the audiences that teenage girls such as Yoyo are living in the struggle between their desires and social expectation of a society in their everyday lives. It is not until Yoyo who sees a note of Cheung on the computer before he goes back to the United Kingdom – stating that "Yoyo, though we couldn't become married couple finally, I still thank you for your love" – that she flies to the United Kingdom and tells Cheung that she wants to be the wife of him. It is the confirmation of Cheung of his desire and love to Yoyo that Yoyo in turn admits Cheung is important to her. The recognition of Cheung seems to be important for Yoyo to rebuild her image as a wife, which is questioned and denied by Cheung along the filmic representation. As was mentioned in the beginning of this section, the story of a wife who is eighteen years old is

problematised because she does 'not have enough scale': on the one hand, the twelve years age difference between Yoyo and Cheung makes Cheung feels that Yoyo is still a girl; and on the other hand the flat body shape of Yoyo seems to be not as attractive as a woman with full figure such as Miss Lee.

Appearance or way of dressing at first glance is a remarkable condition for the construction of the image of girls in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema. The significance of appearance or way of dressing of girls is also emphasised in other forms of media representation, such as the Chinese-language version of *CosmoGIRL!*, in which the editorial board of the magazine cannot not deny the importance of fashion in the construction of subjectivities of teenage girls in magazines. However, the ideal form of appearance or the appropriate way of dressing of girls is always justified from a male perspective in an adult world. Besides school uniforms, teenage girls in made-for-teens romance films usually dress simply and causally when they are not at school. Yoyo's way of dressing is no different to other teenage girls and this does not become a problem for her to attract boys of similar age. In fact, there are always boys queue up outside the school Yoyo is studying in and ask her out for a date in the film. In fact, the appearance or way of dressing of Yoyo does not constitute an obstacle for the communication between her and Cheung when the element of 'love' is not yet added in their interaction.

The changing attitude of Yoyo to Cheung is represented in the way of dressing of Yoyo. The changing attitude of Yoyo to Cheung is the result of the good caring of Cheung when she caught a cold (after breaking up with her crush Kelvin). The way of dressing becomes a concern to Yoyo when Cheung refuses to take her to a dinner

gathering with his secondary schoolmates who are much older than her. As a result, Yoyo shows up in the dinner gathering without the permission of Cheung and dresses like Su Li-zhen in Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000). She is dressing in cheongsam and coiling her hair with a topknot. This filmic representation has a lot of effects to the interpretation of Hong Kong cinema. It is the characteristic of Hong Kong cinema to pick up the gimmick concurrently exists in society or in a film and uses it in the filmic representation of another film. Tong argues that the shot of Yoyo in cheongsam has a multiple displacement effect to the out-of-text interpretation of the film, such as it symbolises the change of teen icons in the teen market in contemporary Hong Kong: on the one hand, Ekin Cheung (Cheung) who is a teen-icon in the 1990s is not as popular as Tong Leung in the film *In the Mood for Love*; and on the other hand Charlene Choi (Yoyo), who is a popular teen idol in the local teen market in the twentieth century, does not rely on appearance for her success.⁴⁸⁹ The displacement effect of the look of Su Ki-zhen of Yoyo therefore leads to the question of how effective it is for the change of appearance of a girl to the change of the perception of being a girl. The contrast between the usual look of Yoyo and her deliberated Su Ki-zhen look provokes the thought of whether or not appearance or way of dressing of girls is a matter for a romantic relationship between a girl and an adult man. However, the way of dressing, such as the dressing of Yoyo at Cheung's dinner gathering with his secondary schoolmates, is not an effective means to narrow the gap, in terms of the age difference, between Yoyo and Cheung.

When cheongsam, as an object of nostalgia, is used in the film *In the Mood for Love*, it is used to restore the image of old Hong Kong and Shanghai to the audiences.

⁴⁸⁹ Tong 2004: 169.

However, when cheongsam is used in the film *My Wife is 18* twice: besides Yoyo is wearing cheongsam at Cheung's dinner gathering; Yoyo imagines the parents of Yoyo and Cheung and Cheung's ninety-three year-old grandmother are wearing cheongsam in the setting of the arranged marriage. The use of cheongsam in the latter symbolises the old-fashioned mind of the parents which is out-of-place in contemporary society. The effect of out of the place in terms of time and place in the former case on the other hand constitutes to the big quarrel between Cheung and Yoyo after the dinner gathering:

Cheung: Like a monkey, learn to be an adult.

Yoyo: I am eighteen.

Cheung: Eighteen. Ridiculous. Look. Like what? A teenager.

Yoyo: You ... Am I not attractive now? (Yoyo takes off her tee)

Cheung: Not a bit of attractiveness at eighteen.

Yoyo: (takes off her bra) How about this? Attractive or not?

Cheung: Not.

Yoyo: (forces him to look at her) Look clearly. Not attractive?

Cheung: Calm down. No. Not even a bit. No. Though we are married couple, and live together, but...(Yoyo kisses him)

(VCD, Side B, 0:20:19)

The image of Yoyo as a teenage girl becomes a problem in the setting of the arranged marriage when Cheung brings the issue of age difference into concern. The issue of age difference sharpens when Yoyo deliberately dresses up and speaks like a mature woman at Cheung's dinner gathering with his secondary school classmates. Zhou

argues that women ceased to be an object for male desire at the price of the negation of their own body in her article about the representation of gender and sexuality in modern Chinese film.⁴⁹⁰ In the case of Yoyo, she is not an object for male desire simply because of her appearance and her flat body. The response of Cheung to the seductive act of Yoyo leads to the question of whether Yoyo is a 'teenage girl' or a 'woman' at her 18 years old. It is not the factor of age in biological terms that constitutes to the identity question of Yoyo. In fact, it is the presumed different ways of dressing between a woman and a teenage girl that leads to this question. Obviously, dressing in cheongsam and coiling her hair with a topknot is not suitable for Yoyo at her age. That is why Cheung tells Yoyo that she 'looks like a monkey'. Later when they go home from the dinner gathering, Yoyo takes off her clothes and asks Cheung whether she is attractive or not. The act of taking off clothes of Yoyo, indeed, is to tear off the effect of dressing up the body of a teenage girl. The distinction between a teenage girl and a woman then shifts to the issue of the body shape of a teenage girl, in which she is in lack of a full-developed figure. It is the projection of 'the lack of something' on the image of a girl that constructs a girl as a girl.⁴⁹¹

According to Lam (2004), the image of 'teenage girl' is the result of the projection of the ideal female image of contemporary Hong Kong society. One of the crucial criteria for the construction of this ideal female image, as Lam argues, is the potentiality of this girl image for the projection of desire of others on her but nevertheless she herself should be deprived of any (sexual) desire to others.⁴⁹² Before the act of having sex, Yoyo is viewed as a teenage girl in the eyes of Cheung. This is because Yoyo does not have any sexual desire to Cheung since they are living under

⁴⁹⁰ Zhou 2009: 130.

⁴⁹¹ Lam 2004: 58.

⁴⁹² Lam 2004: 58.

the same roof during the stay of Cheung in Hong Kong. This explains why Cheung never treats Yoyo as a woman and does not have any intention to ask her any question about women of his research project in the first place. Yoyo destroys this projected ideal female image of a teenage girl when she initiates a kiss to Cheung (because the ideal image of the girl should not have desires to others). However, it is the act of Yoyo who kisses Cheung and they have had sex (behaviour) that the impossibility of working out an arranged marriage, in terms of the age difference between Cheung and Yoyo and the image of Yoyo as a teenage girl not yet as a woman becomes possible at last. The image of Yoyo, who is a wife at her 18, is reconstructed through the sexual desires of both a thirty year-old Cheung and an eighteen year-old Yoyo. Driscoll argues that mainstream girls' magazines assume heterosexuality is the norm and therefore equate the development of gender identity with sexuality – to become woman is to become heterosexual – which consequently reproduce a normative image of the girl (see Chapter Two). However, the logic of the development of gender identity in the case of Yoyo seems to be quite an opposite. It is through the behaviour of sex that the heterosexual desire of Yoyo is actualised and thus her gender identity as a woman is confirmed.

The occurrence of the sex scene, in which Yoyo is taking an initiative in sex in the first place, shows to the audiences the agency as well as the desire of Yoyo to Cheung. It is in this context that the image of Yoyo as a girl shifts to become a woman. However, when Yoyo tells Cheung that it is her first time sex experience, Cheung responds embarrassedly. This is because he thinks it is not good to 'steal' the first time sex experience of a girl and indeed he never imagines that he can still meet a virgin in contemporary Hong Kong. The embarrassed expression on the face of

Cheung is ambivalent and makes the revelation of desire of Cheung to Yoyo unclear to the audiences. The sex between Cheung and Yoyo may simply be the result of the physical reaction of Cheung to the seduction of Yoyo. The responses of Cheung to the series of pushing acts of Yoyo in the seduction make audiences guess that Cheung does not realise whether or not he loves Yoyo. That may explain why Yoyo denies her desire on Cheung by telling him that the first time experience of her in sex is a joke. It is not until Cheng writes her a note for the confirmation of the love element between them that the agency and the desire of Yoyo are reconstructed according to the desire of Cheung. From the process of how the arranged marriage is working out, which is simply according to the parental instructions in the first place and shifts to the revelation of desires of the both parties, the decision making power is not in the hands of Yoyo. This is because Yoyo is simply reacting upon the wills and desires of her parents and Cheung.

Romance as an important element in the identity construction of the teenage girl in *The Truth about Jane and Sam* (1999)

The complementary framework between the opposite sexes, which is explicitly shown in the education and magazine chapters, is not applicable to the situation of Jane in *The Truth about Jane and Sam* (Derek Yee, 1999) in the first place because she is distrustful of men according to her previous experiences in life.⁴⁹³ However, the construction of the storyline of the film denies any other form of sexuality of girls. Similar to the attitude of Ellen in the film of *Papa Loves You*, Jane in the film *The Truth about Jane and Sam* stops communicating with her father after the death of her

⁴⁹³ This is a recommended film of the year by Hong Kong Film Critics Society.

mother. Although Ellen does not spend a lot of time at home and always comes home very late after school, she does not run away from home. However, Jane ran away from family when she was nine (at the age when she saw her mother was committed suicide). She hangs out on the street every night after leaving home. The rebellious behaviour of Jane symbolises her question to the meaning of life – as she tells the audiences, since she cannot choose to live in this world, she can choose how she spends time to this life. At first glance, it is the lack of family care that brings tremendous impact on the everyday life of Jane. This is because Jane blames her father for the death of her mother since her father rejects to shoulder the responsibility of taking good care of the family (such as always having quarrel with his wife when she was still alive, gambling and getting drunk). However, as the construction of the storyline goes on via the technique of voice-overs, the film tries to explain to the audiences that the quality of family life to the everyday life of girls is not as important as the perception of the girls to the functioning of society that affects their behaviour and attitude of teenage girls to their lives. Jane realises this point through the element of (heterosexual) love, that is, the encounter with Sam, which in turn reconstructs the personal identity of Jane, as well as her living pattern in her everyday life.

The film *The Truth about Jane and Sam* is a significant example to illustrate how the everyday lives of girls is affected by heterosexual romance. While the potential for romance is not denied in magazines (see Chapter Two), it seems that romantic interactions in films can leave important impressions on teenagers. As Pardun argues, “romantic interactions in movies – surely not the only important script that movies present, but one that can leave important impressions on an impressionable movie

market: teenagers.”⁴⁹⁴ A lot of made-for-teens romance films focus on romantic interactions (such as Joe Ma’s *First Love Unlimited* (1997) and *Summer Breeze of Love* (2002); and Billy Chung’s *Moments of Love* (2005)) and adopt a male perspective in the narrative of romance. The film *The Truth about Jane and Sam* is no exception to adopt a male perspective in the narrative of the story as it is shown on the name of the film and from the film reviews published in *Hong Kong Film Review* and *City Entertainment*. However, I want to argue this film is worth paying attention to because the employment of the combination of the voice-overs of Jane and Sam in the film brings unexpected gender implication to the construction of the everyday lives of teenage girls, even though the romance lives of teenage girls can still hardly escape from the heterosexual framework. This dimension indeed has been overlooked in the media narrative.

The Truth about Jane and Sam is a Hong Kong film co-produced by Hong Kong’s Film Unlimited and Singapore’s Raintree Pictures. Directed by Hong Kong director Derek Yee, the film stars Singapore actress Fann Wong and Taiwanese male singer Peter Ho Yun-Tung. In order to rationalise the impure Cantonese accent of Fann Wong and Peter Ho in the film, they act as a nineteen year-old intriguing mainland girl, Jane, who lived a wayward, depraved life on the streets of Hong Kong and a twenty-four year-old fresh graduate from Singapore, Sam, who worked as a journalist in Hong Kong to gain wider exposure in life respectively. The film begins with the act of stalling of Sam at Jane, which opens up the window for the audiences to know the everyday life of Jane, and develops into a heart-warming loving story, which is tested under the harsh light of societal comparisons, in the end.

⁴⁹⁴ Pardun 2002: 212.

The meaning of the English and Chinese titles of the film is consistent to represent the theme of the film. While the English title *The Truth about Jane and Sam* literally refers to the narration of the truth by Jane and Sam, truth in this respect is the perspective and perception of Jane and Sam to their everyday life, the Chinese title of the film is *Zhen Xin Hua*, which literally speaking means the talks from the bottom of heart. The literal meaning of 'from the bottom of heart' in Chinese is 'Zhen Xin', which coincidentally is the Chinese name of Jane and Sam respectively. The narrative of the truth about Jane and Sam is conducted by twenty-one voice-overs in the film. If one of the functions of voice-over, as Tong (2008) argues, is to let audiences hear the characters' inner subjective feelings, the purpose of placing twenty-one voice-overs for the construction of the storyline in the film in this regard is to correspond to the theme of the film that has been addressed in the Chinese title of the film, that is, to let audiences hear the talks that are made from the bottom of heart of Jane and Sam.

According to the comment from Benny, "the theme of *The Truth about Jane and Sam* is to reconstruct the problem of youth they encounter in the everyday life through the story of Jane and Sam."⁴⁹⁵ The construction of twenty-one voice-overs throughout the film serves the purpose of telling the storyline to audiences as direct and explicit as possible. The series of voice-overs can also place audiences in a privileged position of knowing in advance the outcome of the narrative. The diverse on-location shootings on the other hand substantially support the twenty-one voice-overs vividly with the representation of the visual images. In other words, the function of voice-over is two-fold: (1) to narrate the happening of diverse scenes and connect the story from one

⁴⁹⁵ Benny 2000: 187.

scene to another, and (2) to explain the deep inside feeling of the characters and thus provide the narrative a perspective. However, Benny argues that although the use of voice-over, which is not uncommon in Hong Kong cinema, makes the narrative concise to audiences, it will take the risk of getting audiences bored through the massive use of verbal narratives.⁴⁹⁶ A similar comment can also be found in a film review posted in *City Entertainment*: “the importance of verbal narrative or textual representation should be limited to the stage of research for the production of the film. If the director has to rely on voice-overs to convince audiences the storyline of the film, audiences would feel it is verbose.”⁴⁹⁷ Since the function of voice-over is perceived as a means for the transmission of messages of the director, the combination of the voice-overs of Jane and Sam however brings unexpected gender implication to the construction of the everyday life of teenage girls. (Figure 3.5.)

The Truth about Jane and Sam starts with the voice-over of Sam. However, his voice is not dominating in the storytelling of the film, such as the voice of a father in *Papa Loves You*, which was discussed previously, or the voice of Biscuit in *Spacked Out*, which will be discussed in the next section. As a result, the argument of Benny saying the use of voice-over in the film ‘patronises’ the storyline of the film, in particular the one-dimensional influence of Sam on Jane in restructuring her worldview in her everyday life, is not absolutely correct.⁴⁹⁸ This is because the voice of Sam is not the sole voice that can be heard in the film. The twenty-one voice-overs are made up of the voices of Jane and Sam and they act like a dialogue between them. It therefore will be least likely to give an impression to the audiences that Sam is imposing his ideas on the behaviour of Jane without hearing the responses of Jane to Sam’s.

⁴⁹⁶ Benny 2000: 187.

⁴⁹⁷ *City Entertainment* 22 July-4 August 1999: 73.

⁴⁹⁸ Benny 2000: 189-190.

Figure 3.5. Jane and Sam in *The Truth about Jane and Sam* (1999)



Jane (left) and Sam (Right)



Poster of the film

Audiences can hear clearly the subjective feeling of Jane in the narrative. In addition, Sam does not place himself in a judgemental position in the narrative. For instance, in the first voice-over of Sam in the beginning of the film, although he is curious about the life of teenagers, which refers to the life of Jane who is on the merge of the society, he does not make judgement on her life. On the contrary, he tries to experience what Jane has tried in her life so as to get the first-person feeling and experience on his own. Some film critics argues that the approach for a boy who comes from a middle-class family to show concern to a girl who comes from a lower-class family is common plot for made-for-teens romance films to represent a humanistic concern of society. The non-judgemental narrative of Sam, nonetheless, brings the issue of the everyday life of teenagers to the concern in an adult world.

Instead of arguing that the voice-overs of Sam are patronising in the construction of the image of Jane in the film, it is more appropriate to argue that the voice-overs of Sam are playing an assistant role in reconstructing the image / personal identity of Jane in her everyday life. The voice-overs of Sam and Jane therefore are representing a different approach or perspective in the narrative. The voice-overs of Sam serve four purposes of (1) describing the characters in the film (such as describing “Jane as a non-greedy girl and she is easy-to-life”) and the living conditions of Jane (such as “she is living in a very poor conditioned place”, “her life is similar to an abandon cat and thus she is hiding herself from the nightlife”); (2) explaining to audiences why he helps Jane (such as “cleaning for her because he wants her to have a warm home but Jane repeats her life routine”); (3) confirming to audiences the words and acts of Jane are trustworthy (such as “he believes she is thinking nothing, which is similar to the

life of his own that he does not know what he wants”, and reconfirms that Jane does not lie) and (4) narrating and connecting the story from one scene to another.

The function of the voice-overs of Jane on the contrary is more unique and sole, that is, to reveal the inner subjective feelings and thought of Jane on her own. Her narrative fully reveals to audiences how she changes her life from distrusting men to having a positive attitude to life in terms of not avoiding life from drugs anymore, finding the meaning of life through employment, and her changing perception to life after encountering with Sam. In the to having a positive attitude to life in terms of not avoiding life from drugs anymore, finding the meaning of life through employment, and her changing perception to life after encountering with Sam. Part of the voice-overs of Jane is conducted in a way of Jane raising a question to her changing behaviours and giving responses to the questions she raised on her own. (For examples, she questions the motives of Sam in helping her and audiences can hear the responses of Sam correspondingly from his voice-overs, she asks herself why she allows Sam touches her face and she tells herself it is because she is in lack of care for a long time, she reflects her feelings to Sam, such as why she initiates a kiss for her first time and she falls for him.) It is in this context I argue that the voice-overs of Jane and Sam – the narrative of the truth about Jane and Sam – serve the same purpose of constructing the image / personal identity of Jane, in which romance plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of her everyday life. However, it does not mean that the role of Sam is complementary to that of Jane. The visual representation of the encounter of Jane and Sam in the everyday lives shows to audiences that Sam indeed has great influences on the positive change of Jane in her everyday life.

Before the encounter with Sam, the image of Jane as a ‘fallen angel’ has been fully revealed from her behaviour.⁴⁹⁹ As a fallen angel, Jane comes from a broken family and she spends her days smoking, taking drugs and booze, loitering at nights and sleeping in the daytime. It is because of the behaviour of Jane as a fallen angel that Sam, as a journalist, is fascinated over her for a cover story. The conversation of Sam and Jane in the beginning of the film, which is part of the cover story making process of Sam, clearly reveals to the audiences the self-description of Jane about her indifferent attitude to her surroundings and to life: Jane “hates living and does not see any meaning in life. Living, to her, is simply an obligation. Since it is an obligation, she escapes in the world of darkness. She loves to get high on drugs. When she is down, she will take more drugs to find solace in another world.” (VCD, Side A, 0:12:59)

When teenage girls fail to gain support and care from the father figures, it is a common plot in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema that girls will be rescued through the care of the opposite sex. This logic paves the way for the development of a heart-warming love story between Jane and Sam. As was discussed previously, the voice-overs of Jane and Sam show to audiences that it is not the voice of Sam that dominates the life of Jane. However, the changing behaviour of Jane, which is guided by the model that Sam provides her for being a properly behaved teenage girl in society, is clearly revealed in the visual representation. The visual representation of the context of romance between Jane and Sam therefore is an important element to the construction of the personal identity of Jane. A romantic relationship with Sam is a driving force for Jane to stay away from darkness, in term

⁴⁹⁹ The term ‘fallen angel’ is mentioned in the interview of Fann Wong and Peter Ho Yun-Tung in *City Entertainment* (*City Entertainment* 8-21 July 1999: 44-45).

of staying out at nights and remedying the relationship with her family. In the interaction between Jane and Sam, Jane is told to find a job and live the life on her own, stay away from drugs, find a goal in life and work towards the goal. Jane eventually follows this logic of thinking – having a job and life goal – and changes herself accordingly because she gets love and care from Sam in turn.

The importance of the element of love in the construction of the life and personal identity of Jane is reinforced when Jane is back to the life as a fallen angel because her love with Sam is tested under the harsh light of societal comparisons. There are two scenes showing the wonders of Sam and Jane to their romantic relationship. The first scene is Sam's colleagues freak Sam out that Jane will ask for a marriage when Jane brings lunch to him in his office after she has had sex with him on her birthday. The scary feeling of Sam is verbalised to the audiences via the voice-over of Sam right after the sex, in which he messily responds to the question of Jane regarding the expectation of Jane to his love.

The second scene is an argument between Jane and Sam on the street after the early leave of Jane in a dinner gathering with Sam's parents. The argument is triggered by the visual representation of Sam who tries to lie about the history of Jane to his parents. The lie of Sam to cover the history of Jane understandable to audiences since there is good chance in reality parents will dislike their sons to get along with 'bad' girls. However, the lie of Sam upsets Jane because he is not certain about the relationship with her. The response of Jane in the argument on the other hand shows to the audiences that she does not think the same way as Sam and Sam's colleagues. Even though Jane has already had sex with Sam, she is frank to Sam's parents that

she does not know if she is considered as a lover of Sam. Having sex in this respect is not associated with marriage in the eyes of Jane, even though Jane is expecting to have a long-lasting relationship with Sam. Sex, to Jane, is only a means to express the feeling of love. As a result, although romance is a significant element in the construction of the image and personal identity of Jane, the meaning of romance should be handled carefully. The argument of Jane and Sam, which is triggered by the different interpretation of romance, invites audiences not to adopt a male narrative of romance in the construction of the image and subjectivity of girls.

After the separation with Sam, Jane starts loitering at nights and even becomes a club girl. The lie Sam told to his parents in front of Jane is significant to foreground for the destruction of the life of Jane. Indeed, it is the only lie that is seen in the film. The lie itself is symbolically important to the construction of the theme of the film. This is because the act of telling lie itself is an unacceptable thing since the theme of the film is to narrate the 'truth' about Jane and Sam from the bottom of heart. The lie of a man and not a woman also constitutes to the imagination of the audiences that words from a male perspective are not convincing. This reminder indeed has been made to the audiences through the mouth of Jane in the beginning of the film when Jane calls out the Chinese name of Sam – Li Xiao Xin, which literally refers to 'You Be Careful' in English.

The act of telling lie of Sam supports the imagination of the audiences that the voice-overs of Jane and Sam are not of equal weighting. The voice-overs of Jane should be more convincing in the construction of the personal identity of the girl. This explains why the voice-overs of Jane simply serve the purpose of revealing the inner

subjective feelings of Jane to the audiences but the voice-overs of Sam are multi-functional. In fact, the intense voice-overs of Jane in the end of the film also illustrate their importance to the revelation of the theme of the film. A series of intense voice-overs of Jane and Sam for the happenings after Sam taking drugs at the end of the film provides audiences with access to the inner subjective feeling of Jane. This is because the two voice-overs conducted by Sam simply serve the purpose of narrating the scenes when Sam was losing his consciousness after taking drug. The voice-overs of Jane, nonetheless, not only reconfirm the love of Sam to her (in which Jane tells the audiences that she is not going to leave Sam), they also indicate the decisiveness of Jane to give herself a chance to start a new life by modifying her perspective and perception to life. The last voice-over, which is conducted by Jane, even plays the role of reinstating the theme of the film to the audiences:

We grow from our experiences. We learn from our mistakes. We have to accept the facts of lies. Hatred will only make one suffer. I don't know how to describe the scene during my check up. Suddenly, I realised this world is ever changing. You can choose to be pessimistic or optimistic. I realised that to change my self, I have to rely on myself. Luckily Sam didn't die because of me. I found out that the sun is not always harsh to the eyes. It depends on how you look at it.

In the last voice-over of Jane, Jane tells the audiences that her hatred to the lie of Sam makes her suffer and nearly ruins her whole life. By accepting the fact of the occurrence of lie in the everyday life, Jane not only forgives Sam, the attitude of her

to forgive people also gives herself a chance to start a new life. In fact, the importance of the role of Sam is on visual than verbal. It is not until Sam finds Jane at a nightclub and abandons his life by taking drugs with her (because Jane does not listen to him) that Jane is rescued from darkness again. On the one hand, the effect of drug taking on Sam is visualised to the audiences and this image of Sam provides Jane a chance to reflect on her own life by viewing the crazy behaviour of Sam after drug. The deep regret of Jane about her past is reflected in one of her voice-overs, in which audiences can hear clearly that Jane is upset by the crazy behaviour of Sam because she sees her life in the past through the visual representation of Sam's behaviour. The importance of love, which is visualised in a scene that Sam and Jane, who is having a new look and a new life, reunite outside the workplace of Jane in the end of the film. However, the importance of love does not lie on the presence of Sam but the perception of Jane. (This aligns to the logic that verbalisation is superior to visualisation in the construction of the image of the girl – "I realised that to change my self, I have to rely on myself.") The reunion of Sam and Jane in the end of the film also symbolises a happy ending that is usually predicable in made-for-teens romance films. The happy ending is the result of the effort Jane puts on the remedy to the relationship with her father and the chance Jane gives herself to have a new life, in terms of having a new job and life goal again. However, the change of the life of Jane is initiated by the influence of heterosexual romance in the everyday life of her.

Heterosexualisation of lesbianism and the reinforcement of heterosexual matrix in the everyday lives of girls in *Spacked Out* (2000)

Since heterosexual romance seems to be an important factor in the construction of the self of the girl, such as Yoyo in *My Wife is 18* and Jane in *The Truth about Jane and Sam*, the representation of non-heterosexual relationship and desire has been - underscored in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong *cinema*. With reference to Butler's concept of heterosexual matrix, Leung argues that "the logic that requires identification and desire to be mutually exclusive, and that it presumes if one identifies as a given gender, one must desire a different gender."⁵⁰⁰ One of the few exceptions that audiences can see the filmic representation of other forms of sexuality in the everyday lives of girls perhaps is in *Spacked Out* (Lawrence Ah Mon, 2000), in which girls as lesbians have been mentioned. It is due to the rare representation of lesbianism in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong *cinema* that the film *Spacked Out* will be selected for the examination of how the representation of lesbianism works in the film. In particular, I will focus on the representation of lesbianism, which is shaped under the strong influence of heterosexuality framework, in the construction of the self of the girls in the film. As Jenkins argues, "[g]iven the ways in which mainstream teen films reflect the heterosexualisation of lesbianism, then, one may wonder if these films have any merit for a lesbian spectatorship, or if these scenes should even bear the name 'lesbian' at all."⁵⁰¹ The reconfirmation of 'heterosexuality' in the construction of the self of girls in *Spacked Out*, such as through the themes of the absence of motherhood and the question on the bonding of

⁵⁰⁰ Leung 2009: 153.

⁵⁰¹ Jenkins 2005: 500.

sisterhood therefore will be examined as side evidences to the heterosexuality framework.

The film *Spacked Out* is about the everyday life of a group of teenage girls who are on the fringe of Hong Kong society. The use of non-professional actresses in the film serves the purpose of reinforcing the 'neo-realistic' nature of the film.⁵⁰² Perhaps it is the purpose of showing the life of teenage girls who are on the fringe of Hong Kong society that the director is dare to show the representation of lesbian relationship as part of the everyday lives of girls. Similar to the device utilised in the film *Papa Loves You*, *Spacked Out* starts with the voice-over of a thirteen year-old teenage girl named Biscuit who expresses her feelings about her unhappy teen romance, the lack of care from her father and her run-away mother, who left her husband, to a phone-in radio programme. Besides this voice-over, Biscuit actually conducts three voice-overs throughout the whole film. Since one of the purposes of voice-over is to let audiences capture the characters' standpoints and inner subjective feelings immediately, audiences can strongly feel the helplessness and loneliness of Biscuit in her everyday life through her verbal narrative. The voice-over of Biscuit in each time serves a similar purpose of exclaiming her self-identity to the audiences through cherishing the memory of her missing mother. In asking the question of where her mother is, Biscuit is at the same time asking herself where she can rely on in her everyday life. In the three-minute confession of Biscuit in the first voice-over, it clearly reveals the loneliness of her because she cannot find any stable and reliable source to seek help from whenever she is in need of in her everyday life. In the second voice over of Biscuit, which is showed in the middle of the film, she asks her best friend not to feel

⁵⁰² *City Entertainment*, 'Special Feature' 20 January-2 February 2000: 52.

pity because she still is able to rely on her parents. This theme is reinforced in the end of the film via the voice over of Biscuit when she asks herself when her mother will come back to her. To cherish the memory of her run-away mother therefore symbolises the road for Biscuit to reconstruct her identity, who feel lost and helpless in her everyday life, and to search for the source of comfort in her life since her mother ran away from home.

The Chinese title of the Film *Spacked Out* is *Wu Ren Jia Shi* (literally speaking, it means 'no one drives'), which can be used to generate two interpretations to the everyday life of teenage girls in the film: on the one hand, the girls in the film, that is Biscuit, Banana, Sissy, Bean-curd are facing a lot of problems with their family at some points – 'No one drive' therefore can be interpreted as girls who are in lack of family care in their everyday lives; on the other hand, it also symbolises the meaning of 'youthfulness'. The girls in the interview of the film magazine tell the readers their interpretation of 'youthfulness': "because we are young, people will forgive our wrongdoings; because we are young, we can give a lot of excuses to justify our behaviour. Youth is no one drives."⁵⁰³ The meaning of the latter interpretation at first glance is similar to the logic make for the critics on the behaviour of Ruo Nam's father to the wrongdoings of teenagers in the film *2 Young*. As was mentioned previously, Chan (2006) argues that the defence the father made for the behaviour of teenagers nonetheless is simply the reconstruction of the self-imagination of the father figure. Even though the film *Spacked Out* constructs a similar theme of the influence of the presence (and absence) of parental care to the everyday lives of girls, it is unconvincing to argue that the representation of youthfulness in *Spacked Out* is

⁵⁰³ *City Entertainment*, 'Film Review' 11-24 May 2000: 64.

the projection of adults' imaginary to the everyday lives of girls. On the contrary, the girls in the film do not conform to the rule in the adult world. However, they cannot do anything to change the situation. As a result, they can only live the lives on their terms. It is the spirit of 'living in the present' that constitutes the meaning of 'youthfulness' ('no one drives') and the everyday lives of girls in the film. (Figure 3.6.)

According to the visual representation in flashbacks, Biscuit has replaced the image of her run-away mother with the image of her best friend Man in the search for reliance in her life. If voice-over can help audiences to understand the inner subjective feeling of Biscuit, the assistance of flashbacks on the other hand visualises the image that Biscuit is longing for in her life. As the film shows, it is the happy time with her best friend Man that gives a lot of comfort to Biscuit in her difficult times in life. While the verbal representation indicates to audiences Biscuit is looking for her mother, the visual representation on the contrary tells audiences that she finds herself deeply attach to her same-sex friend. Moreover, Biscuit recognises that it is not any same-sex friend that she wants to hang around with in her everyday life in the beginning of the film. There are actually six flashbacks visualise the memory of Biscuit to the audiences. The first flashback is the image of Man, which comes along with the first voice-over of Biscuit when she feels deeply alone at home. The second flashback again is the image of Man and it comes up when Biscuit is singing karaoke with her other same-sex friend Banana. The third flashback again is the image of Man and this time it comes up when Biscuit is sitting alone in a library and writing to Man. This flashback comes up while Biscuit is conducting her second voice-over in the middle of the film. The audiences can see and experience from the voice-overs and

Figure 3.6. Biscuit, Bean-curd, Banana and Sissy in *Spacked Out* (2000)



Left: Biscuit (left), Bean-curd (front), Banana (back) and Sissy (Right)

Right: Sissy (left) and Bean-curd (right) are in a lesbian relationship in the film



The everyday life of the girls



flashbacks that Biscuit is still living in the memory of the past – that is, the happy time with her best friend, who is now in institutional care.

In the last flashback, which comes along with the third voice-over of Biscuit, it is a happy image that Biscuit is playing water with her other same-sex friends Banana and Leung Lai Yee. The change in the memorizing figures of Biscuit in the last flashback is significant for audiences to visualise the change of the inner subjective feeling of Biscuit. The presence of her friends in the last flashback signifies and supports to her argument she makes in the third voice-over in which she argues that friendship is very important for her to get through the difficult times in her life. Chow argues that even though flashback does not exactly invite a straightforward restoration of connections, it visualises the filmic process of the plural fissures of mental and affective circuits of the characters.⁵⁰⁴ It is in this context I argue that the change of images in various flashbacks, which record the memory of Biscuit in the construction of the self, are the signals of the progress Biscuit has made for her everyday life after the abortion. Banana is the one who goes through the illegal abortion with Biscuit and Leung Lai Yee is the only girl in the film who not only has a very positive outlook and attitude to her future, she is also growing up in a happy and healthy family. Although Sissy and Bean-curd also go through the illegal abortion with Biscuit, they do not show up in the last flashback because they are in a lesbian relationship with each other but they break up in the end. The positive image of Leung Mei Yee in the last flashback brings the effect to the audiences that girls who were once on the fringe of Hong Kong society are now back to the routine. The image of three heterosexual girls in the last flashback on the other hand implies that the friendship among the girls is pure

⁵⁰⁴ Chow 2007: 95.

and does not involve any erotic desire because they are heterosexual (according to the behaviour they perform in the film).

The girls in the film, such as Banana, Sissy and Biscuit, lost their virginity at their age of twelve or thirteen. However, the sexuality of girls is not conclusive to the construction of the gender identity of the girls in the film. For example, Sissy has had sex with a heterosexual boy and had an illegal abortion when she was twelve but she called herself a lesbian when she is now at her age of fourteen. It is ambivalent to label Sissy as a bisexual neither. This is because, as Leung argues in her article 'Disappearing Faces: Bisexuality and Transvestism in Two Hong Kong Comedies', "the bisexual lovers' imperative is not exactly the same as the feminist one's: it is erotic rather than critical. It does not aim so much to undo the hierarchical power structure of gendered signs as to eroticize their interchangeability."⁵⁰⁵ The performativity of the gender or sexual identity of Sissy, nonetheless, is not erotic at all. If the sexual identity of girls is driven by their desires, Sissy is a lesbian in the name only because there is no one single scene in the film shows to the audiences the possibility to see or imagine the happening of same-sex erotic according to her behaviour. Even though it is a taboo in Hong Kong to represent nudity, as Grossman argues, and therefore audiences can explore female sexuality simply from a psychological point of view, there is still no psychological connection between Sissy and Bean-curd is shown in the film.⁵⁰⁶ As Grossman argues, one of the lesbian practices in connection with sisterhoods is the expression of a distaste of these girls for heterosexual relations.⁵⁰⁷ In this case, it seems that Sissy is not really performing what a lesbian is supposed to behave. As the film shows, Sissy, who dresses sexily,

⁵⁰⁵ Leung 2009: 153.

⁵⁰⁶ Grossman 2009: 147.

⁵⁰⁷ Grossman 2009: 141.

not only attracts the gaze of boys, she also flirts with boys happily while she is in a relationship with Bean-curd.

Banana on the other hand is labelled as a heterosexual girl because her sexual desire with boys is visualised on the screen. However, when the audiences look into the context in which the sexual scene of Banana is set, we cannot exclude the possibility that Banana uses sex as a means to paralyse herself from the inattentive care of her parents in her everyday life. For instance, Banana has had sex with a boy she knows online after an unhappy conversation with her mother. She is unhappy because her mother does not care the everyday life of her. In a similar vein, she steals a golden chain on the neck of a boy while she is crossing the road after an unhappy conversation with her father. She is unhappy because her father shoulders no responsibility to the living of her and her mother. Since the two sceneries appear to audiences in a row, audiences therefore can associate the purpose of Banana to experience sex is similar to that of stealing, in which Banana tries to relieve her grievances to life. In this respect, if audiences try to understand the sexual behaviour of Banana under the logic of male gaze, it will reduce the behaviour of girls to the male viewing position and exclude the possibility that the experiences of girls may not be incorporated into the psychoanalytic discourse of heterosexual relations.

In the eyes of Sissy and Biscuit, Banana has a lot of experiences in sex. While discussions of promiscuity and sexuality is one aspect of the everyday life of girls who are underachievers on the fringe of Hong Kong society, the gender identity of the girls as young girls, in terms of sexual status and reputation, has not been criticised in the film. Nor does the identification of the girls, in particular the bonding

of sisterhood among the girls, in the film have been affected by their sexual status and reputation. For example, it is the share of information between Banana and Sissy with regard to the illegal abortion services in Hong Kong (because they had experiences in sex and illegal abortion) that Biscuit is able to resolve her pregnancy problem at her age of thirteen. It is in this context sexual status and reputation of girls may not be a significant factor, as Lees argues, that distinguish the identity formation between girls and boys in adolescent development as was discussed in Chapter Two. The phenomenon of 'frenemy' mentioned in the magazine chapter, which reminds teenage girls not to share everything with same-sex friends, on the other hand, is not totally suitable to describe the friendships between the girls in *Spacked Out*.

The scene of lesbianism at first glance seems to be set to counter-argue to the gaze of heterosexual male in the film. However, even though there is the presence of a lesbian relationship in the film, that is, the relationship between Sissy and Bean-curd, the relationship between the two girls is not a stable one. Driscoll argues that the failure for girls to identify each other is based on the assumption that the gaze is necessarily heterosexual in the sense that it affirms the Subject against a feminised object. The failure of the lesbian relationship between Sissy and Bean-curd therefore is the result of the existence of the heterosexual gaze that challenges the sexual identity of the two girls. As the film shows, Sissy, who dresses sexily, not only attracts the gaze of boys, she also flirts with boys happily while she is in a relationship with Bean-curd. The existence of boys at first glance may pose a threat to the relationship between Sissy and Bean-curd. However, the existence of boys can be a threat to a lesbian relationship only if the identification of two girls has been heterosexualised. As Jenkins argues, "these scenes do more to encourage women to 'act lesbian' in order to

attract men than they do to promote the viability of an exclusively homosexual lifestyle. In other words, some teen films work cinematically to heterosexualise their representations of lesbianism.”⁵⁰⁸ Simply put, the lesbian representation is trivialised in the film. Instead of arguing that the scenes of the lesbian relationship aim at catering to the desires of same-sex girls, it is more appropriate to say that the type of lesbianism shown in the film aims at catering to the heterosexual male’s lesbian fantasy.

There is no visual representation of the lesbian desire and erotic scenes, such as Sissy and Bean-curd are holding hands, kissing, hugging or having sex, in the film. Audiences know Sissy and Bean-curd are lesbians because they tell their friends (and the audiences) they are. They do not even flirt with each other in front of the audiences. The audiences know they are in a relationship because Sissy always asks Bean-curd to give her presents and Bean-curd will phone her constantly. In other words, the relationship between Sissy and Bean-curd is constructed on the basis of materiality. The material texture of the lesbian relationship represented in the film projected with reference to the usual things that a girl and a boy would do in a heterosexual relationship. In addition, there is no difference between the images of a lesbian girl and a heterosexual girl. The images of Sissy and Banana always attract the gaze of boys and more importantly, they like to flirt with boys. Banana on the other hand is the only girl that her sexual behaviour with boy is visualised (even thought in the distorted manner) in the film. The way of dressing and behaviour of Sissy and Banana therefore provokes the question of whether the film has any merit for a lesbian spectatorship. This question is especially relevant given the male gaze

⁵⁰⁸ Jenkins 2005: 495.

has become cliché used to identify the way that men look at women, as well as boys look at girls in the everyday lives of girls. As a result, there is little space to conceptualise active lesbian relations of looking in the film.

Conclusion

The construction of the image of girls in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema largely relies on the gaze of male, particularly in the relationship between fathers and daughters and in the heterosexual romance context. Although the images of girls can be seen and revealed via a series of visual and verbal representations in the films, they cannot escape from the framework of heterosexual framework in the construction of the self as well as in the arrangement of living in their everyday lives. As a result, although there are plenty of different characters of girls represented in the films and embody a contest area rife with contradictions and negotiations – in which the situation is similar to the representation of gender roles in Chinese films that do not depict a stable universality, as Tan et al argue in their book *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity, and Diaspora* (2009) – the visibility of girls in terms of their relationship to public discourses is often in question.

Generally speaking, teenage girls in the filmic representation are “a liminal position, and the only boundaries which define the teenage years are boundaries of exclusion which define what young people are not, cannot do or cannot be”, given the condition that the subject formation of teenage girls is strongly influenced by parental authority in their everyday lives.⁵⁰⁹ The different interpretations of adults and teens to the

⁵⁰⁹ Quoted in Driscoll 2002: 206.

behaviour of teenage girls in contemporary Hong Kong society not only form the fictive ethnicity of the two distinctive groups of individuals who relate to different cultural embodiments of Hong Kong society, but also constitutes to the societal expectation of the behaviour of teenage girl according to the (male) adult logic of thinking. Through the constitution of the images of teenage girls as what must remember having been, instead of showing what they were, the performativity of gender (the mutual reinforcement of sex and gender), as well as age, constitutes to the subject formation of teenage girls in post-handover period of Hong Kong cinema. As a result, although there may be some space for girl to live in the present, the space is limited because of the strict way it enforces the framework of compulsory heterosexuality.

Conclusion

The Girl in Contemporary Hong Kong and its Research Direction in the Future

Images of girls can easily be seen in various forms of the media in contemporary societies. However, the concept of the girl itself is in lack of clarity due to the fact that there is a tendency in gender studies and cultural studies to treat the notion of the girl as self-evident. The conception of girlhood in this thesis is built upon Driscoll's concept of 'feminine adolescence', which she refers to the non-correlation between the female body and the constitution of femininity. Since the discursive vehicles that *produce* girls are very varied, the concept of the girl in each social field is thus supposed to be a production process in itself. In order to identify what is distinctive about the everyday life of these girls I focus on three areas of experience – sex education in secondary school, made-for-teens romance films and teenage lifestyle magazines – and try to show how the problematics of identity, sexuality and citizenship are inflected by the circumstances of life in Hong Kong. In particular, I highlight the way questions of ethnicity, tradition and religion play a greater part in the everyday life of girls in Hong Kong than they do in the life of the girls considered by Driscoll's study. It is the major claim of this thesis that girl studies as it is presently practised is western-centric and its outlook needs to be broadened to include the non-western world. Hong Kong provides a particularly interesting case study in this regard because although it is a highly westernised 'global' city, it nevertheless retains many non-western features and values. The legacies of British colonial rule are everywhere

to be seen, even though the reunification with mainland China in 1997 has also brought great changes to the city.

The girl in the personal and social education curriculum

In Chapter One, I argue that girls in Hong Kong are now found themselves charged with the requirement that they perform as economically active female citizens in the future because there are greater education opportunities for them since the introduction of free primary education in 1971. While education was presented as a means for them to make their own way in society and not have to follow the frequently misogynistic prescriptions of family and tradition, this opportunity came at the price of having those very same misogynistic prescriptions of family and tradition reinforced by the school system. This is because students tend to be passively assigned to roles and responsibilities as members in the family, the society, and the nation in the personal and social education curriculum. Sexuality of girls in terms of recreational sex and reproductive sex therefore has become the subject of more intense government attention.

Sex, in the eyes of the school authorities, is an inherited characteristic that we cannot change. While the overall purpose of education did not change when Hong Kong was reunified with mainland China in 1997 (it retained its dual aim of training young people for the workforce and grooming them as citizens), its ideological premise changed quite significantly. This ideological shift was made manifest by the increased importance of civic education and in particular the introduction of the topic 'The development of modern China' in personal and social education. The abstract sense of

Chineseness as apolitical ethnicity, which prevailed under the colonial administration, was replaced by a concrete sense of Chineseness as historical and political destiny. The new, post-reunification curriculum explicitly positions sex education as a complement to civic education with the clear message that the regulation of one's own body is necessary to ensure the proper functioning of society, and is therefore the duty of every citizen. In supplanting a felt Hong Kong identity with a national identity, the education sector has hidden the generational difference between students and earlier generations in the wider context. The difference between students and previous generations remains nonetheless the cause of familial conflict, in particular the conflict between fathers and daughters, which indeed is a prominent theme of made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema.

Developed within a family-oriented framework, schools are supposed to adopt the approach of treating sex not as a curse or an evil but as one of life's natural and most fulfilling experiences. Schools, therefore, are encouraged to regard sex as an expression of love in human relationships and to foster the development of such an attitude in schools. The heterosexual relationship framework of family on the other hand highlights 'life-long commitment' as the core value of the family. Since love is confined to heterosexual relationships and is a learnt activity, teenage girls are still at the stage of learning, having not-yet-become sexual adult women. The biological sex highlighted in the personal and social education curriculum in this respect naturalises the process of girlhood to be the right kind of woman in the future.

As a result, becoming an adult tends to be the inescapable and sole path open to students in the secondary school context in Hong Kong. Teenage girls in particular

are only allowed to develop as women and wives according to the kind of heterosexual familial relationship authorised in the discourse of sex education, as well as in personal and social education. The concepts of sexuality and identity have become interchangeable with each other for the construction of the concept of the girl. This path, nonetheless, necessarily restricts the parameters of becoming, regardless of sex as its genderless opposite, among students. Emphasis on the reductionist relationship between gender and sexuality has an overwhelming impact on the self-understanding of teenage girls. The sex education curriculum not only denies teenage girls the space in which to understand boys in non-reproductive and non-heterosexual ways, it also fails to help teenage girls to develop positive self-images, conceptions of their roles in society and attitudes towards their bodies and their sexualities.

The limitation to reveal the present condition of girls lies in the fact that gender identity and biological sex are not treated as mutually reinforcing and it is the latter which overwhelms the former in the education sector. The correlation between sex education and the stability of society may pave the way for training students to become responsible and committed citizens, but the meaning of the latter is strictly correlated to the stage of becoming 'adult' and assumes that teenage girls to take up women's roles because of their 'women's bodies'. It is in this context I argue that the education sector is not very sensitive to the gender difference between girls and boys and naturalises the gender role identities of girls and boys based on their biological sexes.

The girl in CosmoGIRL!

CosmoGIRL! provides a space that is absent in the education sector for the representation of the girl in the present form. In Chapter Two, I therefore argue that the construction of the images of teenage girls in CosmoGIRL! is age-specific, which provides a 'space' for teenage girls to be girls and not feel under pressure to perform (in Butler's sense) as women because they have not yet come of age. But although it offers the image of the freedom to be a girl, it is not an unlimited form of freedom. The magazine's politics are in many ways aligned with the socially established parameters of conventional femininity in society. It seems to contravene the discourse of the education sector (Chapter One), but this is superficial. The emphasis of the magazine on a complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes, sometimes at the expense of girls' power and the importance of solidarity among girls, put the concept of the girl into a deadlock situation.

While I argue in Chapter One that the education sector tries to uphold the proper functioning of family with the expectation of girls doing their duties as a committed citizen, I illustrate that the magazine provides another perspective to its readers that girls are not expected to remain at home, nor are they expected to confine themselves to marriage system in Chapter Two. The arguments of CosmoGIRL! – that girls who have to respect their inner selves and should not live in compromise – somehow encourage teenage girls to react differently because they have not yet come-of-age to conform to the rules in an adult world. The magazine therefore tries to create an essential base for girls to live in their present condition and conduct themselves with the characteristics of boldness, daring and confidence. The magazine tries to convince

its readers to make use of this period of time to explore other possible values, such as how 'to be a bitch' and to respect their inner selves. It is in this context that the magazine highlights the importance of girl power to its readers. The concept of individualism – in terms of girls respecting their inner selves and living in the present condition – is manifested in terms of 'bitchiness'.

The advice the magazine gives to its readers to live with bodily imperfection further enables the magazine to promote its ideology. On the one hand, it rationalises the difference between the sexes as something that is biologically natural; on the other hand it takes bodily imperfection as a motive for girls to initiate changes for a better life. Although they may have imperfect bodies, it does not mean they will fail to have a happy life. By the same token, the magazine argues that girls can create a happy life through the self-improvement of their souls. This emphasis on the importance of 'soul' over that of 'appearance' for being a 'brave new girl' in contemporary society supports the assumption of the magazine that gender is performative (in Butler's sense) and that girls can make a change on their own terms. Although the magazine argues that girls can change their personalities so as to become 'brave new girls', it does not ask them to change their personalities for the purpose of pleasing others but for the sole purpose of pleasing their big Other, that is, their own self-esteem. The idea of asking girls to please themselves not others is indeed very provocative. This is because, as Lees (1993) argues, the implication of not 'placing girls in relation to others in the process of their development is not to define woman 'as the object of man's desire'.⁵¹⁰

⁵¹⁰ Lees: 1993: 6 & 16.

The magazine tells its readers romance should not be a whole part of teenage girls' lives. However, the magazine at the same time tries to convince its readers that girls should care the feelings of others. This paves the way for the importance of the complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes that the editorial board of the magazine tries to set up entirely in the text of the magazine. CosmoGIRL! constructs gender difference based on the idea that women and men are 'made for each other'. There is an apparent difference in terms of the approaches the magazine suggests for dealing with same-sex and opposite-sex friendships. While the magazine tells its readers 'frenemy' is a common phenomenon, it reminds them that it is a childish behaviour for girls to play separately with boys. The complementary framework of the relationship between the opposite sexes not only acts as an inescapable force ensuring the maintenance of the heterosexuality framework, in which a conflicting relationship among girls is presumed, but also pushes further the assumption that a pure friendship between the opposite sexes can hardly exist.

The magazine does not fundamentally challenge the different roles of girls and boys in the construction of gender identity, but reiterates the power of discourse to grant sexed bodies a kind of licence to live. Although the magazine argues that the best way for teenage girls to live happily and confidently is for them to enhance their understanding of the behaviour of boys, it is simply a pretext for romantic possibilities. The hidden logic behind the argument of the magazine is that it is girls rather than boys who can and should modify their behaviour and respond to the acts of boys accordingly. As a result, girls are told not only be able to be feminine but also be able to perform the characteristics that are crossed out for girls along the conventional gender assumption ideology. It is on this premise that the performativity of gender is

mentioned. Simply put, the construction of the self of the girl in the magazine fails to recognise the contradiction of female identity in adolescence. The over-concentration of CosmoGIRL! on the maintenance of the moral standard of contemporary Hong Kong society reinforces the heterosexuality framework in the construction of the self of the girl in the magazine.

The girl in 'made-for-teen' romance films

The 'space' for teenage girls to be girls and not feel under pressure to perform (in Butler's sense) as women because they have not yet come of age is articulated differently according to different media. In Chapter Three, I argue that the freedom offered to girls in the 'space' created by films is even more limited compared to that offered in teenage lifestyle magazines because of the strict way it enforces the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Under that framework, the representation of girls' lives and opportunities for self-expression are in many ways aligned with the socially established parameters of conventional femininity in society. Compulsory heterosexuality is, as it were, a means of policing the lives of girls, ensuring that they stay well within the boundaries of the traditional demands of femininity that girls put others (particularly family) before themselves, and eschew their youthfulness in favour of a 'mature' or 'responsible' outlook. In locally produced cinema, girls who live their lives on their own terms are portrayed in a negative light. Similarly, 'youthfulness' is presented as a weakness or fault that can only be cured by 'growing up'.

Girls in made-for-teens romance films have their identities constructed according to their relation to others: the two most important relationships are the daughter-father relationship (such as Ellen and Yam in *Papa Loves You* and Ruo Nam and her father in *2 Young*) and the girl-boy pairing of heterosexual romance (such as Jane and Sam in *The Truth about Jane and Sam* and Yoyo and Cheung in *My Wife is 18*). Although almost all girls in this genre of films are seen to be somehow performing the role as a daughter in a family, this is not necessarily unique to Hong Kong since the role of daughter, as Driscoll argues, seems to be an inevitable feature of theorising for girlhood relative to patriarchy or maternity. I have already shown in the film chapter that the role of daughter is a more significant factor than either appearance or sexuality, in the construction of the self of the girl in locally produced cinema. As a result, the expectation and presence (or absence) of parents inevitably plays a significant part in the construction of the self of the girl in made-for-teens romance films. It is the role of daughter – that is relevant to the family understood as a biologically complementary heterosexual unit – that constructs the imaginary of the girl in the films.

The education sector tries to hide the generational difference between students and their previous generations in a larger context through the act of overshadowing a felt Hong Kong identity with a national identity (Chapter One). However, the generational difference between students and their previous generations nonetheless is the cause of familial conflict, in particular the conflict between fathers and daughters, and becomes one of the major themes in made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong cinema (Chapter Three). There seemed to be a gap between the perception of what should have been taught in school curriculum and what the girls should have behaved

in their daily life practices. The filmic representation of girls as a phase of rebellion, a struggle for emancipation from parents, which is overemphasised in the made-for-teens romance films in Hong Kong, for instance, is another challenge to female sexuality or discourse on femininity, in terms of the societal expectation to the behaviour of teenage girls, in contemporary Hong Kong.

The problematic of father-daughter relationship shown in the films reveals the clash of tradition and modernity in contemporary Hong Kong society, but it also illustrates the cinema's attempt to question the traditional Chinese way of nurturing or communicating with children or teenagers in contemporary society. The solution to the mis-communication between father and daughter is not easy, as the problem itself is very complicated (as is shown in the films): Even though a father may be willing to take on a caring role in the family, his daughter may not know how to appreciate the effort the father has made. This is not to say that if the father is inattentive to the feelings or needs of the daughter, it will definitely lead to her departure. However, the films will usually have happy endings – daughters will change their rebellious outlooks and become good girls again according to the social expectation of society because they understand the care of their fathers in the end.

The framework of compulsory heterosexuality is represented in terms of the overemphasis on the inevitability and importance of romance in the construction of the self of the girl in the films. As a result, other forms of sexuality are limited in the filmic representation. Even though it may have a chance to represent in the films, it is represented in a heterosexualised way. As a result, like the readers in the magazine

(Chapter Two), the audiences also fail to recognise any other possibilities for the construction of the identity of girls in the films.

Insights

In Introduction, I argue that the study of girls in the city faces conceptual problems similar to those confronted by studies of their western counterparts. The reason that girls have been caught in the conflict between adolescence and femininity lies in the burial of their experiences within the discussion of teenagers in the various social fields, such as the education sector and the mass media, in contemporary Hong Kong. The representation of the girl in three areas of experience, namely sex education in secondary school, made-for-teens romance films and lifestyle magazines, in this thesis shows that girls are in some degree regulated by the heterosexuality framework in the everyday life. However, there is no uniform representation of 'heterosexuality' in society. The form of heterosexuality in each social field of contemporary Hong Kong therefore provokes the thought of how different forms of power relation are set in motion for the construction of the self of the girl. The experiences of girls have been unburied when they do not feel under pressure to perform (in Butler's sense) as women because they have not yet come of age.

As Ian Buchanan puts it, 'the way we organise our daily lives is directly and indirectly inflected by the operations of power'.⁵¹¹ The teenage girl is shaped by the operations of power as they exert themselves through a variety of discursive apparatuses. The rationale for the study of different social fields is not to say that the analysis of power

⁵¹¹ Buchanan 2008: 21.

relations can be reduced to the study of a series of social fields. Technologies of power cannot be localised in a particular type of institution or state apparatus, even when that power has become identified with that technology (as for instance has happened with surveillance and the prison). Since power relations are rooted in the system of social networks, the study of a series of social fields allows me to identify and define different forms of power.⁵¹² Power can be used to re-conceptualise the productive dimension of teenage girl.

Girls in the education sector are projected as women-to-be because it fails to recognise girls' and young women's sexual feelings. The whole personal and social education discourse is shaped by the idea of employability of students in the capitalist market in the future and thus sex is simply viewed for reproduction in a familial context (Chapter One). The magazine on the other hand creates and nurtures an idea of a moment in life when one is 'in between', when one is a girl, and it privileges this moment for itself and not as a rapid passage towards another stage of development. However, given the fact that the magazine adopts a complementary framework between girls and boys without challenging the underlying logic of heterosexuality in society, there is a limited space offered to readers to construct other forms of sexuality. As a result, although the magazine encourages girls to be 'brave, bold and dare', the space offered to girls is short-lived (Chapter Two). Although a harmonious familial relationship is taken for granted in the education sector, it has been questioned in the locally produced cinema. The conflict between daughters and fathers indeed is one of the key filmic representations in made-for-teens romance films. Since the images of girls are largely constructed through their role of daughter, the heterosexual family

⁵¹² Foucault 1986: 224.

context therefore is left without being questioned. As a result, compulsory heterosexuality represents in a more direct manner to police the lives of girls and construct the identity of girls in the films such as in the context of romance (Chapter Three).

As was discussed in Introduction, the conceptual problems affecting the study of girls in contemporary Hong Kong have not been well addressed. I therefore reference to Driscoll's feminine adolescence as a base to construct the conception of girlhood for this thesis. Driscoll argues that the concept of the girl is best understood through the reconsideration of the relationship between the nature of the supposedly essential difference between woman as representation and woman as experience in gender studies and cultural studies. As she argues, "[r]epresentations of girl sexuality are inseparable from girl sexuality as a lived experience."⁵¹³ The importance of the notion of Driscoll lies in the realisation of the effect of the representation of the images of girls in various discourses to the construction of the self of girls in the everyday life. The significance of this thesis lies in the findings of how the form of heterosexuality is varied in different social fields, which provides different space for girls to live in the present. With reference to the logic of Driscoll, it means that this thesis has demonstrated how the construction of the concept of the girl is non-correlated to their biological bodies.

Another significance of this thesis lies in its realisation that the discovery of the non-correlation between the female body and the constitution of femininity is not sufficient to the conception of girlhood. This is because, as this thesis has indicated,

⁵¹³ Driscoll 2002: 144.

the effect of the representation of the images of girls in various discourses to the construction of the self of girls in the everyday life is limited in the context of contemporary Hong Kong. The concept of Hong Kong girls cannot get rid of the shadow of the theories of modern subjectivity, in which the construction of the girl is in opposition to, or defined otherwise than, the mature, independent woman. Although this thesis demonstrates the possibility for girls to live in the present, they cannot escape from not being aligned with the socially established parameters of conventional femininity in society. In other words, the representation of the images of girlhood does not open up spaces for the reconstruction of the images of womanhood, as Driscoll anticipates for the construction of the girl. The concept of Hong Kong girl on the contrary is constructed under the social expectation of the conventional form of femininity, which points to become a conventional image of 'woman' in the later stage of life.

As a result, although it is important for Driscoll to point out the non-correlation of between the female body and the constitution of femininity in the construction of girlhood, a further step seems to be necessarily needed to disconnect the notion of womanhood as a future projection for girlhood in a constant state of becoming – she is becoming a woman, which is a different state of being to that of girlhood; she is becoming sexual, but is not yet a sexual being, hence her sexuality is a 'problem' or a 'concern'; and she is becoming a citizen, though she is not yet of an age to assume either its rights or responsibilities. This thesis has already shown that the concept of the girl is a social and cultural construction according to different form of power in various discourses. However, it is just a start, and is never an end, for the development of girl studies in Hong Kong in the future. In a long run, it not only

needs to strengthen the analytic approaches in the study of girls, which should not narrowly confine the girl in opposition to a woman, it also needs to invent spaces for the representation of the images of girls that are not restricted to a heterosexuality framework, but allow other forms of sexuality exist in constructing the lives of girls in their everyday lives. In other words, it is important to strengthen the power of 'becoming' in the construction of the concept of the girl in gender studies and cultural studies.

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