Women's Participation in
Community-based Grassroots Organizations:
Oppression or Liberation?

by

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Community organizing aims at empowering the grassroots to improve their life and achieve liberation through collective participation. Will this effect be valid for women too? To address the gender question, this study intends to explore the possibility and the construction of women's oppression and liberation in their participation in community organization. The analytical framework of the exploration is based on the perspective of feminist poststructuralism trying to reveal the constitution of power relations and subjectivity within various discourses in three main aspects of group life including involvement in leadership, division of labour and the obtaining of resources. When designing the methodology for the fieldwork, I have adopted a qualitative research approach based on feminist consciousness and employed participant observation and in-depth interview as the data collection methods. In order to have an in-depth analysis of women's experience, one community organization has been selected as a sample case for its potential to learn most about the problem.

The examination found that gender differentiation was sustained in women's participation in the community. The inequality was constructed and reinforced through the bias toward knowledge based on literacy and rational analysis which favoured men, and the interactive legitimizing process of traditional gender roles

during participants' community involvement. Consequently, the unequal gender relations were sustained in the community organizing process. However, the power relations within the group were always dynamic. Women could still improve their resources and increase their self-confidence through active involvement in the community. Therefore, community participation did provide chances for women to seek changes and liberation.

These findings imply that the sensitivity to oppression in all forms, particularly gender inequality, is a must in community organizing. Otherwise, community workers' advocacy of social justice to be achieved through organizing and empowering the grassroots would be a myth. Also, it is necessary to do more research on the construction process of women's oppression and their struggles for liberation in the local context. By going beyond structural determinism, we may be able to challenge gender inequality obscured in our daily life and work towards a more egalitarian world.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

AAF   Association for the Advancement of Feminism

HKCSS   Hong Kong Council of Social Service

HKCW   Hong Kong Council of Women

NGO   Non-governmental Organization

NLCDP   Neighbourhood Level Community Development Project

SWD   Social Welfare Department

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Community work aims at eliminating social inequality. As Paul Waddington (1994) identified, "The heart of community work is in practice at the grassroots." Its mission is to achieve "personal liberation through collective activity of all those who participate in it." Actually, community work, he explained, is "a commitment of the achievement of a dream" which is that:

> through the sharing of experience, the process of learning through action,
>
> the attempt to grapple with problems and meet needs and via collective
>
> and democratic processes of organisation at neighbourhood level, we can
>
> better realise our potential as human beings and contribute to the creation
>
> of a better and fairer world. (Waddington, 1994, p.5)

Bearing this aim in mind, community workers try to facilitate the setting up of community organizations in local communities and mobilize residents to fight for their own rights and interests. Community workers believe that through community organizing, the grassroots can learn how to administrate their living place and thus, being empowered they can improve their life (Chui, 1997, p.145).

Studies showed that community organizations are important for the grassroots to change their life. For example, Yuhui Li (1996) found, in his review of the history, structure and social changes of an urban neighborhood, that community

organizations are important social actors contributing to change and development of a community (p.35). Similarly, David Horton Smith (1997) confirmed that grassroots associations "have a very substantial effect on American society and on the lives of its citizens." He further stated that such effect "is also true in other modern societies, especially other postindustrial societies." In his examination of grassroots associations, Smith concluded that these organizations can "provide women with a chance to exercise leadership and competence (Smith, 1997, pp.282-296)." Therefore, community organizations should be considered as an important and effective tool for the grassroots to fight for social justice.

However, if community participation can help grassroots people to change their situation of being subject to oppression and achieve liberation, will this effect be valid for women too? This question affects women most, not only because they represent the larger numbers in community participation, but also they have close relations with community.

Women are assumed to know best about the community problems. This assumption is formed due to the fact that women are expected to protect their family interest and are not likely to have alternatives like men who are out all day at work separating themselves from the community problems. For women, home is both home and workplace, especially for homemakers, who spend everyday life in the home and in the community, and have to confront the problems, as they have no other choices. As a result, women suffer more from community problems (Wilson,

1977, p.6; Cockburn, 1977; Gallagher, 1977; Fung & Hung, 1995, p.81; Tse & Leung, 1995; Kaufman, 1997). This also explains why community development relies heavily on women for support and resources. Hence, women have close relations with community and cannot escape from it. If community participation cannot help eliminate gender inequality, grassroots women not only will have lesser opportunity for changes, but also may be affected negatively.

If the answer is positive, it will be another important path to challenge gender inequality and achieve an egalitarian society. This is especially significant for grassroots women, as they are usually the common target group in community development projects and have more opportunities than men to use social services (HKCSS, 1991, pp.1-3; Fung & Hung, 1995, p.81). Therefore, whether participation in community organization can be a way for women's liberation is a vital question for them.

However, studies have shown that women's participation for gaining power cannot guarantee their liberation. Rather, women's traditional role may be reinforced during their community participation (Gallagher, 1977; Wilson, 1977; Dominelli, 1990 & 1995; L.C. Leung, 1991, pp.52-3; Tse & Leung, 1995). For instance, women play supporting roles in community organizations, such as secretary, while men serve as chairman. While in social actions, that women do miscellaneous jobs reflects their domestic experiences and they participate less in planning work than men (Cockburn, 1977, p.63; Gallagher, 1977, pp.121-123). Hence, women's traditional role of

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protecting their family interest is repeated. Women's work in the community just reflects and reinforces their subordinate social status and preoccupation with private life (L.C. Leung, 1991, p.53; Dominelli, 1990 & 1995, p.134), and community becomes an extension of family only (Gallagher, 1977; Wilson, 1977; L.C. Leung, 1991, pp.52-53; Tse & Leung, 1995).

On the other hand, some findings viewed women as experiencing liberation when they are involved in the community (Schild, 1997; Hanmer, 1977; Cockburn, 1977). For example, Cynthia Cockburn (1977), in her study on women's involvement in community action, pointed out that when women started to contact others outside the home sharing problems in the community, they would experience liberating change. Thus, community action can serve as "an element of women's liberation" (p.62). Also, Veronica Schild (1997) claimed that women experienced important changes in their participation in community organization. Through their involvement in community action, women learn how to question the rules and norms. So community organizations are spaces for women to "contest relations of power" (p.127).

Even for those women participants who claimed "traditional values", as Judith N. DeSena (1998) found, they can still be "politicized and empowered by the process of community action" because the process itself has already empowered those who participated. In fact, "community life", she stated, "has a major impact on the development and condition of humanity (pp.314-329)." Community actually serves

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as an important arena for women to struggle for change.

But women's struggle for change cannot be reduced to the struggle of grassroots participants in the general sense. Indeed, gender does make a difference in community participation. As Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) identified, the organizational structure and practices of social movement organizations and actors are not gender neutral. Rather, "gender structures produce different social movement experiences for men and women, distinct spheres of action, and distinct activist personalities (p.748)." Gender not only produces different experiences for men and women, but also implies tensions between them. As we have discussed above, men and women taking different roles may result in unequal relations between the genders. So, if we want to understand how women can be liberated through community participation, we need to explore the tensions between genders during the organizing process.

Community organizing has been recognized as an important tool for countering social inequality. Though some studies affirmed women's liberation, others showed that women participating in community organizations might experience reinforcement of oppression. Tensions between genders render the empowerment uncertain. To ensure the work of community participation to be able to achieve social justice, it is urgently necessary to understand how gender inequality can be reinforced or eliminated in the context of the grassroots' participating in community organization. Therefore, this study will try to search for the possibility as well as the

process of women's oppression and liberation in the course of their participation in community action.

Such exploration not only has research implications for women's studies, but also can address the question of expanding opportunities for achieving women's liberation. In addition, revealing women's struggle for change may enhance the understanding of the transformation and possibility of oppression and liberation in the participation process. Thus, the findings will have practical implications for both participants and organizers in their attempts to eliminate social inequality, rebuild community life and human relationships. Moreover, the investigation can address my concern with women's life, especially their situation in community participation.

The following chapters will present the findings of my research work on a community group so that we can have a more in-depth understanding of women's community participation. First, I will outline the context of the research problem in the next chapter. I will try to examine how the concern for women's community participation is discussed in Hong Kong, particularly in the fields of community work, women's movement and researches. Then, in chapter 3, I will further examine different perspectives in the understanding of women's community participation in relation to gender inequality. After that, the framework of analysis for the study will be developed from the implications of the examination. To collect the relevant information for the study, an appropriate research methodology is essential.

Therefore, in chapter 4, I will reveal the decisions made in relation to my research methodology, including the research approach, data collection methods, and the sample selection. From chapter 5 to 7, I will present the findings of the research project. The examination is focused on three important aspects of group life including leadership, the division of labour, and the ways and means of obtaining resources. And finally, in chapter 8, I will try to conclude the findings and discuss what lessons can be learned from the research of gender/power relations in women's community participation.

To start the exploration, we will first review how different fields in Hong Kong are concerned about the issues of gender inequality in community participation.

Chapter 2: Women's Community Participation in Hong Kong

How much concern has been given to the problem of gender inequality in community participation in Hong Kong? In order to have a contextual background for the research problem, this chapter will try to review work in different fields that are closely related to women's community participation. First, I will explore how community work has cared about women's participation in the community. Second, I will examine how the women's movement has advocated women's community participation. And finally, I will turn to look at how research and other studies have contributed to the understanding of gender issues in community participation.

Community Work: Grassroots Participation

Since a large number of women at the grassroots are involved in community activities, investigation of the work of community development is therefore needed, so as to understand women's situation in community participation.

Community work focuses on helping the grassroots to improve their life. The objective of community development, stated in 1995 Five-year Plan for Social Welfare Development, is:

to promote social relationships, to develop a sense of self-reliance, social responsibility and cohesion within the community, and to encourage the participation of individuals in solving community problems and

improving the quality of community life. (SWD, 1998, p.110; quoted by

CDD, 1999, p.326)

The statement clearly points out that community development projects emphasize

grassroots' participation in the community.

In Hong Kong, community work has provided service for more than forty years.

As Joe C.B. Leung (1996) identified, community work was first treated as "a social

welfare responsibility" in 1949 when the Social Welfare Division of the Secretariat

for Chinese Affairs started promoting Kaifong associations. Later in 1958, the Social

Welfare Division became independent and changed its name to the Social Welfare

Department (SWD). But "a more systematic approach" of community work just

began after the establishment of the first community centre in 1960 (C.B. Leung,

1996, pp.129-130). In 1968, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) set

up the Community Development Committee (CDD). In the early 1970s, community

work received more attention (C.B. Leung, 1994, pp.67-68).

Community development service mainly includes community centres and

Neighborhood Level Community Development Projects (NLCDP) (Cheung & Chi,

1996, p.6) (for details please see the Appendix I). However, different kinds of service

provision may use different strategies to help the grassroots to improve their life. So

in this section, we will examine how these different units of community work have

contributed to the elimination of social inequality and gender inequality in particular.

As mentioned above, the set up of community centres marked the start of

community development service. After SWD disbanded the community work units within all government-run community centres in 1985, its group work units in these centres started to provide developmental and supportive groups for specific age or other target groups aiming at strengthening family functions. But those community centres operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) still continue to provide "a mixture of community building and welfare services." Actually, services provided in community centres include "mass activities, and functional, educational and interest groups (C.B. Leung, 1996, pp.130-134)." One of these services is women service which I will discuss later in this section.

Another important type of community work is the development of NLCDP. In the late 1960s, community development projects in public housing estates started. The 1974 Position Paper on Priorities of Community Development in areas of Identified Special Need Requiring Intensive Service encouraged NGOs to implement community development projects in deprived areas (C.B. Leung, 1996, pp.130-131). The first community development project was carried out in Sze Wan Shan from 1975 to 1977 (Yeung, 1992, p.12). Later in 1978, NLCDP became a subventable programme. Thereafter, NLCDP has been extended to serve Mark III-VI public housing estates, rural villages in the New Territories, and old urban areas in mid-1980s (C.B. Leung, 1996, pp.131-134). Until 1992, there were 51 NLCDPs run by 14 NGOs serving about 270,000 residents (C.B. Leung, 1994, p.73). By now, there

are 13 teams out of 36 NLCDPs working in redeveloping public housing estates.[1]

NLCDP emphasizes the organizing of grassroots to solve community problems (C.B. Leung, 1996, p.134). Social workers espousing a radical community work approach believe that through community participation and empowerment action, the grassroots or marginal groups can learn the ways to use available resources effectively, claim back their rights and dignity, and improve their quality of life (Chui, 1997, p.145; Wong, 1997, pp.5-6). In fact, community organizing was the dominant community work method for NLCDP in 1970s (C.B. Leung, 1996, p.130)

Community organizations have been developed and flourished in the '80s. They are taken as an effective tool to change social inequality. On the one hand, they "have great potential to influence policy and form the basis for political change (C.B. Leung, 1986, pp.234-235)." On the other hand, through involving in collective activities of community organizations, the grassroots can develop their power, fight for their rights and consequently raise their consciousness. As Lui Tak-lok (1991) asserted, without community organizations, it would be difficult to articulate community participation as well as for the grassroots to express local power (p.14). Despite their decline in recent years, community organizations have played an important role in the empowerment of the grassroots.

Then, how is women's community participation discussed in community work?

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[1] For details please see HKCSS website: http://www.hkcss.org.hk.

In the organizing of community groups, community workers regard residents or participants as a group of grassroots people having unified interests. They assume that when residents participate in collective actions, community needs can be defined and community problems can be solved accordingly. And finally a sense of belonging can be built up (Chui, 1997, p.145). Indeed, community workers see all participants as the same without considering their differences and power in social relationship such as gender and age.

This neglect can also be traced in evaluation reports of NLCDP. Despite the significant numbers of women participants, reports of these community projects indicated that their work has neither identified women as a group that may have different needs, nor is it aware of the risk of gender inequality that may exist during the organizing process.[2] Instead, women's needs and problems are treated as private issues and it is rejected to relate them to social policy and collective action like public issues (L.C. Leung, 1995, p.11). Actually, radical community workers have never put gender issues as the locus of their organizing work.

Moreover, in the organizing process, community workers always unconsciously reinforce the sex role stereotype. Women always participate in community issues involving family life, child caring or welfare. For example, women are usually involved in actions concerning environmental problems rather than policy analysis.

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[2] For details, please see the evaluation report of NLCDP in Community development resource book 1995-1996.

In addition to involving themselves in 'soft' issues, women do the "soft" work in community organization such as taking records, facilitating recreation. Women are usually responsible for practical work including collecting signatures, preparing materials, and acting as supporters in community actions while men are responsible for planning and take the leading role. As a result, women's participation in these community organizations just reinforces their subordination to the family as well as to traditional social roles (L.C. Leung, 1991; Fung & Hung, 1995; Tse & Leung, 1995).

Later in '90s, in order to gain continuous support from the government, NLCDP shifted its focus to community care which aims at providing care by the community (C.B. Leung, 1994, p.74 & 1996, p.134). In fact, the concept was introduced in the services for the elderly in 1973 and started in 1980s (Wong & Chan, 1994, pp.251-252). Nevertheless, the Information Paper on Community Care and Community Development in 1994 suggested community care as a new target of community development work (HKCSS, 1994).

Theoretically, community care refers to "the provision of help, support and protection to others by lay members of societies acting in everyday domestic and occupational settings." However, in the implementation of community care, community care is provided 'informally' through kinship networks and other community networks such as friends, neighbours, and volunteers, or 'formally' by the statutory social services (Chan, 1991, pp.25-26). Wong Chack-kie (1991) found

in his analysis of community care in Hong Kong that family care is more important than other informal carers such as neighbours. Thus, community care has put the care responsibility on family, while family care is simply the housewife's responsibility (p.34). Also, in Thomas J. Mulvey's (1994) survey of care giving for the mature disabled, elderly and children, the results show that the burden of care giving often falls to close relatives. The provision of care and support actually relies not on the community but on the family. It finds that "community care in Hong Kong is mostly family care, and that generally means care by women" without much help from outside the household (Mulvey, 1994, pp.227-229). So the practice of community care actually reinforces women's traditional role as care-givers.

Despite being conceived of as carers, women are important service receivers in community development service. One of these community programmes is women service. This service flourished in the '80s (Ng & Wong, 1995, pp.54-55). In 1984, the Working Group on Women Service was set up under the Community Development Division of the HKCSS to review and promote women service (HKCSS, 1998, p.5). The 1991 Information Paper on Women Service reports that "65.7% of the 96 Community Development service units, including community centres, NLCDPs, and other Community Development projects" have offered women services. However, these services, regarding women as a community resource, "are constrained by the traditional values on the roles of women in that they are largely confined to the strengthening of women's roles and relationships in the family

(HKCSS, 1991, pp.2-3)."

W. C. Ng and M. F. Wong (1995) criticized social workers in traditional women service to perceive either family or community as a service unit. On the level of 'family as service unit', women are viewed as the main caregiver of family. Family needs, assumed by social workers, are all women's need. So most services provided are aimed at enhancing family function and improving housekeeping skills. For example, activities to help women to enhance harmony of family life, such as child caring activities, couple communication groups, housekeeping groups as well as motherhood and caregiver skills improving, are promoted. As a result, these services have reinforced women's traditional family role unintentionally (Ng & Wong, 1995, pp.55-58; Ng, 1995, p.177).

While on the level of 'community as service unit', women are treated as community members and sources, they are seen as a major medium and resource in implementing social services that help to predict and solve family and community problems. Services are therefore designed to develop women's potential and self-confidence, as well as encourage their participation in community issues to solve community problems and help other community members. Indeed, both levels focus on women's traditional role rather than their own development needs and interests (Ng & Wong, 1995, pp.55-58). Instead of helping women to free themselves from oppression, traditional women services reinforce the gender inequality during service provision.

Nevertheless, women's importance in community participation received recognition in '80s especially under the influence of feminism in the West. The gender blind nature of community work is then challenged. As K. K. Fung and S. L. Hung (1995) criticized, traditional community work reduces community problem to personal inability, so that they only focus on community pathology. On the other hand, radical community work uses pressure group politics to change the social system, but neglects other social divisions such as race, age, and sex. For example, action fighting for housing does not consider women's 'residential right'. In fact, both traditional and radical community work are gender blind (Fung & Hung, 1995; L.C. Leung 1997).

These criticisms of community work, together with the recognition of women's participation, promoted new trend in community work that emphasized gender perspective. The most typical practice of the change was the implementation of women-centred service, which focuses on women's need and self-development.

After having reviewed the existing services for women, the Working Group on Women Service indicated the need for a change in women services and introduced the women-centre approach (Ng & Wong, 1995, p.57). The 1991 Information Paper identified women's difficulties in participating in community affairs and suggested the focus of future women service "should be on the promotion of women's self image and their sense of civic responsibilities and participation in the community." The paper also held that women services should be aimed at raising women's

"awareness of their own needs and potentials", promoting mutual support for them, facilitating their participation in the community, and advocating for gender equality (HKCSS, 1991, p.3).

Actually, in 1980s, NGOs started exploring women-centred service. For example, in 1988, Caritas started the pilot project 'Women Development Project in Shau Kei Wan' to explore the practice of women-centred service. It looked at women as a "functional community"[3] using organization and social action to promote women's participation. Later in 1989, Shau Kei Wan Women Federation was set up that emphasizes women's participation in community services, social affairs and advocacy of women's rights. In 1992, it was renamed as 'Eastern District New Women Federation' and became independent (Yau et al., 1992, p.20; Fung & Hung, 1995, p.85; Tse, 1995, p.101).

Women-centred service tries to add the item of gender on the agenda of community work. However, the strategy adapted by women-centred services is usually the organizing of all-women groups. Women will then lack the chance to encounter the power dynamics between the two genders during participation. And thus, the problems of unequal power relations between men and women in community organizing are obscured.

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[3] I refer to "functional community" as the social relationships sharing the same identity, such as women, to distinguish from the community group organized by the NLCDP, in which participants reside together in the same spatial area.

Community work emphasizes grassroots people participating in the community to improve their life. However, both the authorities and the institutions assume the problems faced by the grassroots are caused by personal inability or misfortune. The objectives and the practices of community work are therefore focused mainly on providing remedial services to the needed, lacking the perspective of empowerment, community organizing, nor gender inequality. Indeed, their work either is gender blind or lacks practices of tackling power relations between genders.

Thus, has the work of the women's movement helped to fill the gap in Hong Kong? In the following section, we will explore how the women's movement has striven to address the problem of gender inequality in community participation.

Women's Movement: Right and Opportunity

Women's participation in the public sphere has been a major concern of the women's movement in Hong Kong.[4] In reviewing its development, Tsang Gar-yin (1995) defined the term 'women's movement' as "the activities of groups, made up largely of women, which are concerned with the disadvantaged position of women in society and who wish to bring about a significant improvement in the situation of women (p.276)."

In describing the development of the women's movement, Tsang divided it into

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[4] For details of the development of the women's movement in Hong Kong, please see discussions by Tsang (1995) and Cheung (1995).

three stages that reflected different focuses and strategies. The first stage of the women's movement was from post-war to mid-70s. The characteristic of this stage was committed individuals who voiced women's concerns. The most significant organization was the Hong Kong Council of Women (HKCW) set up in 1947 fighting discrimination against women. Campaigns at that time included the request for the elimination of concubinage, separate taxation and equal pay for women. But this stage did not have any "permanent organization base and long-term strategy for social transformation" (Tsang, 1995, pp.277-278).

The second stage of women's movement started in 1975 and lasted for about ten years. At that time, the movement, which was greatly influenced by the second wave of feminism in the West, emphasized the voting rights for women. Its focus shifted from "a concern with narrow and explicit issues to other broad-ranging and hidden problems." Activities with different tasks and establishments of various organizations marked the divergence of opinions and strategies at this stage. Campaigns concerning women's rights and improvements such as requesting paid maternity leave, war on rape, against wife abuse flourished as well as the development of a new focus on consciousness raising. The setting up of the Women's Centre and Harmony House reflected that HKCW had turned to "a more grassroots orientation." Moreover, affected by community and student movements of the time, a number of women's groups were established in the 1980s. They tended to embrace social critique and request a radical social transformation (Tsang, 1995,

The third stage was marked by "the proliferation of new groups". The main concern of this stage was "to go local and to reach out to the grassroots." For example, the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) formed in 1984, embraced a socialist feminist perspective advocating for "genuine emancipation for women." Their work includes critiques and reappraisals of "the existing system of gender relations in society." Another group, the Hong Kong Women's Christian Council, formed in 1988, shared a similar orientation. It aimed at rethinking women's role and situation within religious institutions and society at large. It was actively involved in various campaigns for women's rights, associated with grassroots women's organizations." Also, the Hong Kong Women Workers Association, founded in 1989, tried to fight for working women's rights and to develop learning courses so as to equip and develop them. In short, a notable feature of the women's movement in the 1980s was the establishment of several women's groups concerned with specific fields sharing similar concerns including grassroots consciousness raising, campaigns and lobbying, resource development, and co-operation of different organizations (Tsang, 1995, pp.281-282; Cheung, 1995).

Another feature of the women's movement is its close relationship with social services. Indeed, as we have discussed above, feminists criticized existing social services for women and promoted the implementation of the women-centred service. For example, in their study of women's concern groups in Hong Kong, Betty Yau, K.

C. Au and Fanny Cheung (1992) identified that eight out of fifteen women's groups were of service orientation. Five of them concerned gender problems in general and three targeted special groups. The five general groups are the Hong Kong Young Women's Christian Association (which is "the oldest women's organization" established in 1920); the Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club (founded in 1938); Tuen Mun District Women's Association (set up in 1976); Women's Centre; and the Women Development Project in Shau Kei Wan (from 1988 to 1992). The three groups for special clients are Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers (HK) Society (founded in 1981); Harmony House (founded in 1985); and Mother's Choice (founded in 1988). All of them provide social services for women's specific needs and advocate gender equality (Yau et al., 1992, pp.15-20).

The women's movement emphasizes women's participation in the public sphere, however, their promotion of grassroots women participating in community affairs was still underdeveloped.

Actually, the community-based problems encountered by women are not the main concern for most women's organizations. There are only a few organizations which focus on women's participation in the geographical community. Of the women's groups mentioned above, only two of them, Tuen Mun District Women's Association and the Women Development Project in Shau Kei Wan, are locality-based women's groups.

Instead, in the organizing work of the women's movement, women are viewed

as "functional community". The core emphasis of the movement is mainly on women's participation in work and in political issues. They concentrate on the social and political conditions for equal opportunity for women to participate in public sphere rather than concerning women's involvement in community affairs.

Furthermore, women's groups usually use segregating strategies to organize women. As I have pointed out in the previous section, all-women groups lack the opportunity to counter power relations between genders during the organizing process.

Nevertheless, the advocacy by the women's movement for gender equality has raised the awareness of oppression underlying existing systems of the society. The concern for grassroots women's vulnerable situation has urged attention for the improvement of their opportunity towards social participation.

Research and Studies

Both community work and the women's movement are inadequate in the understanding of gender issues in community participation in practice. Then, how have theoretical studies or research filled the gap?

In the study of community organizing, there were evaluation reports of community projects like those of Graham C. P. Riches (1973) and Chan Tat-choi (1978). However, they aimed at evaluating the implementation of services or projects, regarding all participants as a group of clients. They only attempted to measure the

effectiveness of the programmes and projects rather than to understand the gender dynamics in the organizing process. Moreover, other research on community organizations was focused on their characteristics, functions or impacts to participants or society. For example, research from Leung Cho-bun (1990), S. Vasoo (1987) and Wong Yuk-lin (1990) viewed the community organization as the unit of analysis rather than emphasized the personal interactions during the participation process. In short, these studies were not concerned with gender issues in community organizing, let alone having a gender perspective.

Despite the importance and controversial findings of women's community participation, as Janet Lee Scott (1980) pointed out, there was a dearth of research on women's participation in community organizations in Hong Kong. In order to fill the research gap, she conducted an in-depth study of women's participation in the Mutual Aid Committees from 1976 to 1978. Her study was aimed at understanding the contribution of women to these associations and to urban society. She found positive effects and changes in those women participants and concluded that community participation has great potential for women's development (Scott, 1980, p.8). As Scott did not have the chance to observe the process of women's participation in these associations, her study could not highlight the dynamics between the two genders in the course of women's community participation itself. Nevertheless, Her profound insight highlighted the need for further studies of women's participation in community organizations here in Hong Kong.

To explore women's situation when participating in public affairs, the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF) conducted a survey in 1985. It indicated that women's concerns and participation in public affairs were low in general. Factors shaping their participation included education level, economic dependency, limited resources as well as family responsibility. It found that women were restricted by their gender role in the family as well as in society (AAF, 1985). Although the study revealed much important information about pattern and distribution, as well as factors affecting women's participation, it had not searched for women's perceptions, feelings and interpretations of participation, which reflected the mechanisms of changes or constraints in the process. Moreover, its definition of participation was too broad ranging from actions for change to personal concerns without actions. In fact, it focused on social participation in the public sphere rather than specifically in community affairs. So, the survey was insufficient in locating the gender problems in women's community participation. Lastly, since the survey was conducted fourteen years ago, we need up-to-date information if we want to understand women's situation at present.

Despite the new trend of women-centred practice in community work, gender inequality still continues to be neglected in the mixed groups, which are still important to promoting grassroots' participation. On the other hand, the women's movement has focused mainly on women's participation in work rather than in

community affairs. Indeed, both community work and the women's movement do not pay much attention to women's participation in community organization despite the fact that such activities are vital for grassroots women to raise their consciousness, to empower themselves and to develop their networks. In addition, studies and research are insufficient in understanding the complexity of gender issues in community participation, especially as they do not include women's own experience of their participation and of the situations, in particular the interpretations from the perspective of the women members themselves. Therefore, updated, indigenous and in-depth research on women's participation in the community is obviously needed.

This chapter has illustrated how the concern for women's participation in community work has been practiced or discussed inadequately in Hong Kong. In the next chapter, we will turn to examine the theoretical discussions on gender inequality in relation to community participation.

Chapter 3: Women's Oppression and Liberation

If we want to understand women's oppression and liberation in the context of their community participation, we need to know about the conceptualization of gender inequality. Different perspectives have different assumptions and theorization on the question of gender oppression. Therefore, in this chapter, I will try to distinguish these perspectives on gender inequality and discuss how they were manifested in different community development projects.

Four conceptions of gender inequality are closely related to women's participation in the community. First, traditionalists claim that women's subordinated role in the community is necessary for social stability. This view is embraced by traditional community work such as community care. Second, liberal feminists assert that gender inequality is a result of lacking equal opportunity and resources. This assumption is reflected in some women-centred service projects designed to eliminate oppression through personal enhancement. Third, structuralist feminists acknowledge the structural character of women's oppression. This structural feature of gender inequality is also found in those community organizations that are facilitated by radical community workers. Forth, feminist poststructuralists analyze power relations, subjectivity and language to reveal the constitution of gender inequality. After examining how these perspectives have contributed to locating and solving gender inequality, particularly in community participation, I will then discuss

their implications in the search for oppressive and liberating elements in women's participation in community organization.

Traditionalists Reinforce Women's Subordination

In the traditionalists' view, community is not only morally and psychologically, but also legally and historically, prior to the individuals (Fox-Genovese, 1991, p.40). They claim that community, with families as basis and models, is vital for the individual's survival. It provides "warmth, depth and wholeness, a profound cohesion" to its members (Rose & Hanmer, 1975, p.26).

Since community is an important social institution, social stability and harmony is necessary. Social change, according to traditionalists, should be a "natural evolutionary response to imbalance between functions and structure of social roles" (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, p.10). Traditionalists believe society will change slowly through evolution. If women have taken roles that promote stability, they are viewed as functional; but if their actions encourage rapid change, they are regarded as dysfunctional. Traditionalists or functionalists argue that any radical change is a threat to social equilibrium. Thus, social action or movements that attempt to eliminate personal or class oppression, such as feminist movements, in their view, are disruptive forces that would create social disequilibrium (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.4-10).

Instead, traditionalists believe that patriarchy is "a natural evolutionary form of

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social organization." They assert that the hierarchical relationship in community is necessary because it ensures the individual's survival as well as social stability and equilibrium. For example, Auguste Comte, the founder of sociology, in his analysis of France at his time, concluded that patriarchal authority and political dictatorship was essential for "proper societal order and progress." Also Herbert Spencer argued that all parts, which were equal to individuals, functioned to "the benefit of the whole organism", which meant the society. Another functionalist, Talcott Parsons, while describing men as having an "active instrumental role" and women as having the "socioemotional role in the family", held that the rise of distinct roles for men and women was inevitable in an industrialized society. He explained that the social differentiation arised from the isolation of the family in the course of industrialization (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.2-11).

Women, in the patriarchal society, are treated as subordinates. In the functionalist's view, women are inferior biologically and socially. As Comte claimed, women were "constitutionally" inferior to men because, once married, they became subordinated to men. Similarly, Spencer proposed that women should be kept in the domestic sphere and denied the right to compete for occupations with men. Also, traditionalists assume that women taking the role of caregiver is functional to society. For instance, Emile Durkheim, in his examination of the positive nexus between marriage and family, asserted that women fulfilling their traditional role was functional to the family (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.2-5). Traditional

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conservatives like Thomas Fleming even argued for restoring "the subordination of women to men within families and communities" as a restoration of "human nature". Although being the subordinate, according to traditionalists, women can still have advantages such as gaining access to resources sufficient for survival in the community, or even being "empowered by their ascribed position within families" (Fox-Genovese, 1991, pp.40-50).

As family is considered the most fundamental unit of society exemplifying larger social processes, women are then only studied within their familial role (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, p.2). In the traditionalist framework, women's functional role as housekeepers should not be changed. Excessive participation, as Joseph Schumpeter and Robert Dahl put it, was "dangerous and savors of totalitarianism." At the core of their model of democracy, minimal citizen participation was emphasized in order to maintain to social stability (Rose & Hanmer, 1975, p.33). As a result, they rejected any changes of the subordination of gender relation.

The assumption of traditionalists also affects the provision of social services. Although social work seldom rejects women's participation outside the family, some programs actually promote women's traditional role and help to sustain gender inequality. For example, the reinforcement of the gender role is found in community care projects as illustrated in the previous chapter. Community care, theoretically, is the provision of care by the community. But in practice, women are always be the

main caregivers (Fung & Hung, 1995, p.82; Ho, 1994, p.261). The underlying norms of the service are the traditional morals of community and society that it is women's responsibility to maintain the family. As a result, women are kept in the role of caregiver by the blood-tie system (Choi, 1995, p.51). Therefore, community care becomes the exploitative tool of women and fails to address social inequality (Wong, 1991, p.35; Dominelli, 1990, pp.9-10).

Even in the implementation of women's services, which emphasize women's needs, the concept of the traditional gender role is also reflected. As illustrated in chapter 2, in these traditional women services, the service unit targeted is either at the family level or the community level. Women are only seen as the caregivers in the family or as sources for solving community problems. As Ng and Wong (1995) criticized, both levels of service provision neglect women's own development needs and interests. Indeed, these services unintentionally reinforce women's subordination (Ng & Wong, 1995, pp.55-59; Ng, 1995, p.177; Lau, 1997, p.166).

Such social work practices embrace traditionalists' support for social stability. Consequently, they help to maintain gender inequality. As feminists criticize, traditionalists have neglected those social structures that have "allowed and justified exclusion, oppression, and hierarchy" (Weiss, 1995b, p.167). Indeed, they accept power inequalities arising from age and gender and view the family as "a universal, unproblematical, and undifferentiated unit". As a result, "the heterosexual, patriarchal family" is treated as norm and functional rather than as a problem (Weiss,

1995b, pp.173-5).

Liberal Feminists Advocate Personal Enhancement

Discontent with the neglect of social inequality in traditional community work, liberal social workers try to challenge the situation through empowering the powerless. Empowerment is defined as a process through which the oppressed are given "the authority to make decisions and choices" and gain access to "the development of the knowledge and resources necessary to exercise these choices" so as to gain "control over one's life" (Breton, 1994, pp.23-24; Parsloe, 1995, pp.1-2; Zippay, 1995, p.264).

However, the strategy of empowerment adopted in community work in Hong Kong, as P. W. Li and H. Wong (1997) analyzed, was commonly defined as a strategy "to enhance ability and awareness of marginal groups." They pointed out that this dimension of empowerment of the marginal groups was equal to the enhancement of personal abilities only (p.105).

In some provisions of women-centred service, it is attempted to re-emphasize women's specific need through the use of empowerment that is equal to personal enhancement. For example, the Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre aims at empowering women in their future work. Their mission statement clearly identifies that their work is "to assist women to develop their potentials, to improve the rights and status of women and to offer comments to the government concerning women's

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issues and policies." They promise to assist women "from different angles to build up their confidence, independence and competence", so that a woman can be a person of independence, can develop her abilities, make her own choices, have her own time, and protect herself.[5] So personal improvement becomes the main job of their service provision. Another women-centred service provided by Yan Oi Tong community centre also advocates self-enhancement of women. One of their main tasks is to help women to achieve personal growth and self-development.[6] Both service projects promote personal enhancement as the empowerment of women.

Such empowerment approach in social work reflects the belief of liberal feminists' assertion of gender inequality. Liberal feminists insist that women should have "unilateral right to personal autonomy, sexual freedom, and divorce" (Fox-Genovese, 1991, p.40). However, they find that in actual practice, women lack opportunities and resources. Instead of gaining autonomy, women can only play a restrictive role in traditional community. For example, Betty Friedan, a liberal feminist, pointed out in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that women, in their marriage and motherhood, only served as heterosexual housewives for the benefits of society at large (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.17-19).

While assuming that women's oppression is "rooted in individual or group lack of opportunity and education", liberal feminists suggest that the solution for the

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[5] For details of aims and works of the centre please see its website: http://www.womencentre.org.hk/

[6] For further job descriptions please refer to its website: http://www.cc.yanoitong.org.hk/women.html

problem is for women to gain opportunities through the institutions of economics and education. They believe women will succeed if they are admitted equal access to competition. Therefore, liberal feminists are much concerned about women's opportunity of entering into the paid labor market as well as their ability to compete with men. In order to ensure the opportunity of participating in the society, they seek for "secure legislation and court decisions undermining the sexual division of labor" (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.17-30).

Liberal feminists thought that women should not be bound by family, except by free choice. They urge women to break free from the domination of community (Fox-Genovese, 1991, p.41). For example, Friedan maintained that women have to leave the home and join the labor force and public sphere to change the restrictions imposed on them (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, p.19). Therefore, participation outside the family is assumed to be a way to eliminate the oppression of women.

However, liberal feminists' neglect of the importance of community is problematic. On the one hand, community is vital to its members in encompassing "social relationship and networks" (Dominelli, 1995, p.134). It has great potential to challenge anti-democratic power, provides for the human needs of intimacy and security, as well as helps to make sense of our lives (Weiss, 1995a, p.5). On the other hand, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1991) analyzed, community, whilst providing support and identification, could also act as women's domestic confinement. Women may historically share the experience of being oppressed by community. Therefore,

community could be a primary source of women's oppression (Fox-Genovese, 1991, pp.40-41).

Nevertheless, it is impossible for a woman to "split off her outward action from her domestic life and relationships" (Cockburn, 1977, p.69). On the other hand, to omit the analysis of structural influence may limit the understanding of women's oppression and their struggle for change.

Another main problem for liberal feminists is their neglect of structural inequality (Dominelli, 1995, p.134). They assume that if individuals pay efforts and government intervenes, societal barriers can be removed. They ignore "the ways in which societal and institutional discrimination can influence individual choices" and how structural discrimination reproduces gender inequality (Öllenburger & Moore, 1998, p.17). For instance, when women bear most responsibility for domestic work and childcare, they will be "hard pressed to find the time or the energy" to participate actively or take leadership roles (Kaufman, 1997, pp.155-6; Cockburn, 1977; Gallagher, 1977; Wilson, 1977; Tse & Leung, 1995).

Structuralist Feminists Identify Structural Oppression

In locating the root of women's oppression, radical, Marxist and socialist feminists recognize the structural basis of gender inequality. Marxist feminists identify capitalism or class oppression as the primary oppression of which women's subordination is one of the outcomes. To the contrary, radical feminists assert that

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women's oppression is the most fundamental form of inequality. They conceptualize patriarchy as the oppressive social system in which gender inequality is rooted (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998; Fan, 1997).

For socialist feminists, they are not satisfied with some Marxists' class reductionism. Instead, they recognize the important role of both capitalism and patriarchy in producing oppression. They suggest "capitalism joins forces with patriarchy to dominate women's labor and sexuality" (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998, pp.20-23). For instance, in the analysis of the cause of gender inequality, Heidi Hartmann (1981) proposed a dual system, which considers both patriarchy and class to be two interrelated social systems representing two different sets of interest serving as primary oppression. Disagreeing with Hartmann's dual system analysis, Iris Young (1981) suggested that the root of oppression is the integration of capitalism and patriarchy as an unified system to exploit women in a particular way.

Although feminists embracing these perspectives have different conceptions of the cause of oppression, all of them agree on the need to change the oppressive social structure as the solution to gender inequality. This concept affects the implementation of social work.

Radical community workers, aiming at eliminating the exploitation of the poor and emphasizing social justice, regard oppression as an outcome of structural inequality. They believe that when marginal groups participate in community and fight for their rights and dignity through collective action, their quality of life will be

improved (Chui, 1997, p.145; Wong, 1997, pp.5-6). Community organizations, therefore, have a profound influence on the attempts at eliminating structural inequality of the poor.

However, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, gender issues are always neglected in the community organizing work of NLCDP. As community workers consider the grassroots to have a unified interest, they are neither aware of women's specific need, nor of their contribution and involvement in community action. Much worse than that, the sex role stereotype is reinforced during the organizing process.

Realizing the importance of gender structures in social movements, Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker (1998) compared the two approaches – the Alinsky model and the women-centred model - in community organizing in terms of their conceptions of human nature and conflict, power and politics, leadership and the organizing process. Although the study is based on US culture, the findings have an important insight for us to problematize community organizing work. They found that gender inequality exists in the practice of community organizing under the Alinsky model. Community organization using the Alinsky model is skeptical of women being potential organizers. From Alinsky's perspective, the solution for the poor is how to "effectively organiz[e] to make the most of the access." As a result, participation in these organizations mirrors "the male-dominated public sphere structures." They pointed out that gender actually "has shaped the development, strategies, and often the goal or outcome of organizing efforts" (Stall & Stoecker, 1998, pp.735-748).

Michael Kaufman (1997) also identified the differential participation in community organizations. He argued that women's oppression and male domination are presented by the "different possibilities, capacities, and modes of participation" by the two genders. Women's participation in community organizations indeed is an extension of their traditional gender role "as care-givers to children and as the ones responsible for domestic affairs." He further illustrated three dimensions of men's domination in community participation. Firstly, men are valued higher as social leaders than women. Secondly, men are more favoured in the electoral process for leadership. And lastly, men have privileges in having access to skills, prestige and resources. Consequently, with this ideology of "masculine supremacy", men have greater power in the community activities (Kaufman, 1997, pp.152-157).

In explaining how "differential participation" exists in community action, Kaufman located its source "in structures of inequality" and "within the hegemonic definitions of power that exist within patriarchal society." In fact, the root of differential participation "is not inequality between men and women in the narrow sense but the very conception of power that has become hegemonic in patriarchal societies throughout the world." Power, in his view, is referred to as "the capacity of certain humans to control and dominate other humans and control social and natural resources." When men learn the rules of "a given male-dominated society", they in turn create social institutions that contain this notion of power and through which the next generation is shaped. Men and women internalize different values when creating

their gendered self-identities, which finally shapes their uneven capacities in participation. Kaufman argued that both women and men are negatively affected by the differential participation. Only through "a redefinition of power and the development of radically different structures of social power", he claimed, could the problem of differential participation be solved (Kaufman, 1997, pp.152-163).

Kaufman has critically identified the oppressive structure of community organization. But this analysis cannot explain why and how women can change their disadvantageous position and gain liberation through their participatory action.

Ronald Lawson and Stephen E. Barton (1980) provide another analysis on gender difference. When examining the subtle process of leadership patterns in social movements, they found "a societal structure in which institutions favor men and discriminate against women" so that men used to outnumber women in leadership positions within the tenant movement. But they also noticed that most of the established leadership positions had been taken over by women. Lawson and Barton explained that the changing pattern of leadership is due to "a combination of the impact of structural variables, infringing on the movement from without, and sex-role socialization" (Lawson & Barton, pp.237-241).

Having a more positive view than Kaufman on gender difference, Lawson and Barton claimed that women's identity has advantages in community participation. For example, women's socialization for "interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, and supportiveness" helps them to develop "a greater

interpersonal sensitivity" which is vital to community organizing. Also, the view that women have a common culture among themselves makes it easier for them to organize other women (Lawson & Barton, pp.238-240). Nevertheless, structural oppression alone is no longer sufficient to explain how women change their disadvantaged situation through interpersonal relations.

In her study of women's recruitment and participation in a working class, community-based environmental protest organization, Sherry Cable (1992) tried to find out what factors facilitate women's participation, as well as the nature of their participation and its effects. She found that structural availability has an extended effect on the nature of participation and gender role behavior. Structural availability, which concerns social role obligations, "determined initial recruitment and then, through practical necessity, the nature of women's participation" (Cable, 1992, pp.37-47). Cable's findings implied that structural availability could serve both as a barrier to participation and facilitator for recruitment of and commitment to community organizations. But at the same time, she pointed out that women's participation is not fixed by the structural factors. Indeed, community participation, is an ongoing, dynamic process in which women can negotiate their identities and experience changes. Therefore, we cannot simply explain women's liberation or oppression in the course of their participation by structural inequality only.

Feminists espousing structuralist perspectives are infatuated with seeking out the root of oppression. Their attempts at providing a total explanation to gender

inequality is problematic because it embraces a view which is either dichotomous or essentialist (Kerfoot & Knights, 1994, pp.68-69).

They theorize women's subordination as the outcome of the patriarchal social system, resulting in men having the power to control women's sexuality and labor power. And the only solution of eliminating male domination is the overturning of the social structure. Such a dichotomous view reflects the fact that feminists take for granted the source of gender inequality as being male domination. They view power as a property gained through the exclusion of others. The assumption of power as a zero-sum game lead to the result of setting up "a dichotomous relationship" between men and women; between the individual and the society. Since the solution implied is to regain power from the other side, feminists' search for equality becomes inconsistent in its theory and practice (Kerfoot & Knights, 1994, p.70).

Such dichotomous concept of gender inequality ignores the operation of power within web-like relations from which no one can escape. In fact, oppression or liberation emerges and is transformed in the practice of social constitutions. Social practices such as participation in collective action, as Sherry Cable (1992) has already pointed out, are "an ongoing, dynamic process" in which activists experience changes (p.47). Therefore, neglecting the exercise of power within localised, interpersonal relations renders us unable to locate the problem of gender inequality.

Structuralist feminists believe that if the patriarchal structure has been abolished, women can be free from oppression. This argument embraces an essentialist view of

the self. As Kerfoot and Knights (1994) put it, this assertion imposes "a fixity and ahistorical unity to the experience of all women". This is contradictory to feminists' recognition of the historical specificity of women's experience (p.71).

Furthermore, the belief in structural variables determining women's situation is to neglect the importance of subjectivity. In fact, subjects always serve as the agents reinforcing or challenging oppression. Without realizing the search for the possibility of liberation will be diminished. If subjectivity is not taken into consideration, we may not be able to understand why and how women internalize the subordination and why men continue the domination.

Poststructuralist Feminists Deconstruct Power/Gender Relations

Poststructuralist feminists are not satisfied with structuralists' embracing of dualism and essentialism. They try to seek an alternative theory that is able to understand how oppression and liberation emerge and operate in localized daily issues. The questions they ask are shifted from asking "what?" to "how?", from finding the source of gender oppression to deconstructing the power relations involved.

Since the 1970s, poststructuralist feminists have sought to deconstruct the existing "patriarchal power relations", examining how these relations function "both institutionally and individually through the production of patriarchal forms of subjectivity." They have tried to theorize those areas of women's experience and

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oppression and suggest "the postmodern critique of the authority and status of science, truth, history, power, knowledge and subjectivity" (Weedon, 1997, pp.171-172).

Patriarchal, as Chris Weedon (1997) indicated, "refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men." She claimed that feminists should seek a theory to explain not only why but how people oppress each other, and to explain the relationship of individuals with their society. Weedon's conception of feminist poststructuralism is then aimed at understanding "why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men and the mechanisms whereby women and men adopt particular discursive positions as representative of their interests." To do so, the poststructuralist theory focuses on examining power relations, subjectivity, as well as language and discourse (Weedon, 1997, pp.1-3). This analysis offers remarkable insights for exploring women's community participation.

In order to understand how feminist poststructuralism helps with the exploration of gender inequality in community participation, I will try to discuss the details of its core concepts including power, subjectivity and language in the following sections.

Power

For feminist poststructuralism, analyzing power is vital for understanding gender inequality. In her conceptualization of power, Weedon appropriated

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Foucault's work. Though Foucault's work has been criticized as "anti-humanist",

Weedon found his notion of power useful for feminists. She claimed that Foucault

offers feminists "a contextualization of experience and an analysis of its constitution

and ideological power." His way of thinking helps feminists to identify the

complexity of power relations in everyday life (Weedon, 1997, p.121).

Power, as she quoted from Foucault's writing, is defined as:

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they

operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which,

through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or

reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one

another, thus forming a chain or a system; or on the contrary, the

disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and

lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or

institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the

formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault, 1981,

p.92; quoted by Weedon, 1997, p.109)

Power, in Foucault's conception, is different from other perspectives. In his

book *Michel Foucault*, Barry Smart (1985) indicated that Foucault's conception of

power is qualitatively different from other social science approaches. He

distinguished Foucault's questions about power into (1) "how is power exercised; by

what means?" and (2) "what are the effects of the exercise of power?" rather than

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"what is power and where does it come from?" which is usually the focus of other perspectives (p.77).

Therefore, power cannot be simply seen as a possession of the dominant. Rather, power is a strategy. It is relational as it is exercised from a variety of points in the social body and operated in a capillary fashion from below (Smart, 1985, p.77).

In fact, power is "a relationship which inheres in material discursive practices." It is not only a relation inherent in difference between discourses, but also the dynamic between discourses and the subjects. At the same time, power "structures relations between different subjects within or across discourses (Weedon, 1997, pp.110-174)." In brief, power is exercised within discourses.

Moreover, resistance co-exists with power. Foucault argued that "where there is power, there is resistance." He asserted that "every relationship of power implies a potential 'strategy of struggle'" (Smart, 1985, pp.77-134). This conception of power is important for feminists as well as community participation because it implies opportunity for liberation and change for the powerless.

Another important feature in this notion of power is that power is entwined with the production of knowledge. Weedon stated that the legitimizing of a discourse is never definitive. In fact, it is ceaselessly "shaped by the concerns of the moment in which it is produced." And the knowledge sealed in this discourse embodies particular assumptions about meaning. So the production of discourse is a discursive battle over knowledge and power (Weedon, 1997, p.111).

In her critical introduction to Foucault's work, Lois McNay (1994) pointed out that knowledge and power imply each other directly. She used *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* to illustrate how knowledge is bound up with power: "Systems of power bring forth different types of knowledge, which in turn produce material effects in the bodies of social agents that serve to reinforce the original power formation" (McNay, 1994, p.63). Therefore, power relations are constituted correlatively with a field of knowledge. And knowledge at the same time constitutes power relations.

When trying to reveal the exercise of power, Smart reminded us of the need to consider two important reference points. The first is "the discourse of right which has formally delimited and legitimated the exercise of power in the West". And the second is "the effects of truth produced and transmitted by this form of power, which in their turn reproduce forms of power" (Smart, 1985, p.78).

To reveal the relations of power hidden by the discourse of right, Smart indicated five methodological 'precautions' outlined by Foucault involving "the form, level, effect, direction and knowledge 'effect' of power." First, it should analyze the techniques of power that are embodied in local, regional and material institutions because domination associated with power is arising from "manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, (and) functionings". Second, the exercise or practice of power should be focused on "the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes", rather than only on the motivation and interests of individuals or groups. Third, power

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"circulates through the social body" and is exercised through "a net-like organization in which all are caught." In this net, the individual acts as both an effect of power and the element of its articulation. Fourth, the analysis of power has to proceed from a micro-level, so as to reveal the particular histories, techniques, and tactics of power. Fifth, the relationship between knowledge and power should be acknowledged because where knowledge is formed, power will arise accordingly (Smart, 1985, pp.78-80).

This form of analysis of power, Weedon warned, cannot provide the certainty that seemingly has been offered by other perspectives, such as Marxism. As Foucault treated power relations as always-present, his theory did not prescribe what forms power will take in any particular society (Weedon, 1997, p.111).

Nevertheless, the conception of power relations is important for studying community participation. In her examination of the reflexive relationship between communities and identities, Naomi Abrahams (1996) asserted that women's community participation can (re)create community and identity. She held that "women's community participation reveals a great deal about the negotiation of power in families and communities." Abrahams found that "not only is activism informed by women's social location but also their roles are negotiated by that activism." For example, community participation may reinforce traditional notions of motherhood, but the activist mothers may "expand the meaning of motherhood." As a result, they negotiate cultural expectations of mothers and homemakers through

their community participation. Abrahams concluded that "[w]omen's social location and structural factors such as class, age inform their identities and communities but do not determine them." Rather, the participation process "reveals an important dynamic in the operation of power relations through collective identities" (Abrahams, 1996, pp.768-793).

Subjectivity

Another focus of feminist poststructuralism is the notion of subjectivity. Subjectivity refers to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997, p.32).

Weedon held that we must acknowledge "subjective experience" because it is "a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society." She argued that theory should be "able to address women's experience by showing where it comes from and how it relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them" (Weedon, 1997, p.8).

Against humanists presupposing an essence of the individual that is "unique, fixed and coherent", Weedon proposed "a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak." In poststructuralist feminists' view, individual experience "has no inherent essential meaning." When we learn to give meaning to our experience

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and to understand it according to particular discourses, we constitute our consciousness as well as our position. Our subjectivity is in fact "produced historically and [it] change[s] with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them (Weedon, 1997, pp.32-33)."

Moreover, the individual, for feminist poststructuralism, "is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity." An individual's subjectivity, Weedon explained, is constituted within discourse. Every time we speak, the meaning of experience will be open for transformation and reconstitution since we bear different sets of assumptions in the understanding of the world. Therefore, individuals become "the sites of discursive struggle, a struggle which takes place in the consciousness of the individual (Weedon, 1997, pp.32-102)."

Weedon reminded us that to analyze subjectivity as it is constituted and open for change in discursive fields does not mean that material structures can be changed easily by discourses nor that individual subjective enhancement is not important. Rather, we should be aware that discursive practices "are embedded in material power relations" (Weedon, 1997, pp.102-103).

Language/ Discourse

In the analysis of individual experience, social meanings, power and social organization, Weedon identified language as the common factor. Language is "the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed." Within language,

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meaning is constituted but is not guaranteed by its speaker. Indeed, language is "a system always existing in historically specific discourse." In this sense, language is then conceived as "an important site of political struggle." Weedon argued that only by using the concept of discourse, feminist poststructuralism is able "to explain the working of power" and "to analyse the opportunities for resistance to it" (Weedon, 1997, pp.21-40).

In order to analyze the many localized forms of gender power relations operated in a particular area of discursive practice, Weedon appropriated Foucault's work. In his view, discourses "are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them." In brief, discourses, having institutional bases, are "tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations." And these 'force relations' actually are relations of power (Weedon, 1997, pp.105-107).

Actually, discourse is closely related to subjectivity and power. Weedon pointed out that "where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced." Therefore, "the discursive constitution of subjects", be it either compliant or resistant, "is part of a wider social play for power." Power is not only a relation that "inheres in difference", but also "a dynamic of control, compliance and lack of control between discourses and the subjects constituted by discourses." Within discourses, power is exercised "in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual

subjects", as well as constituting "relations between different subjects" (Weedon, 1997, pp.109-110). So discourse is entwined with subjectivity and power.

The importance of discourse in women's participation is also shown in Veronica Schild's (1997) examination of hidden politics in neighbourhood organizations. Influenced by the works of Habermas and Foucault, she focused on "language as a site of domination and on politics as a discourse" by which people determine their roles and goals. She found that to analyze discourses of sexual differences is important in providing the framework to examine how "power hierarchy is made possible in gender relations." She also noticed that women do not participate in community action because of the discovery of "an identical experience, or essence", but "a negotiation of differences and similarities through language." Schild argued that neighborhood organizations are places for women to "contest relations of power" because through the negotiation practiced in participation, they can learn "how to question the routines and norms that govern their everyday lives" and develop "new decision-making and activist capacities" (Schild, 1997, pp.127-138).

Then, how to analyze discourse? In her application of feminist poststructuralism in literary criticism, Weedon claimed that deconstruction "is able to show how discourses achieve their effects rhetorically, and to displace their systems." She justified deconstruction as a useful tool for feminists insofar as it offers a method of decentring the hierarchy, which underpinned various forms of oppression, and of facilitating more progressive theories (Weedon, 1997, pp.159-160).

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As to its implementation in social work, Barbara Fawcett (1998) suggested that the poststructural and postmodern perspectives informed by feminism help to deconstruct the taken-for-granted, as well as those practices embedded in specific historical and social contexts. She maintained that "the association of poststructural and postmodern perspectives with feminism" is able to simultaneously acknowledge "difference and diversity", and emphasize "social divisions and particular manifestations of power" (Fawcett, 1998, pp.268-274).

Certainly, Weedon's perspective of feminist poststructuralism can help to explore gender problems of community participation. In studying participatory planning in Australia, June Lennie (1999) used feminist poststructuralism to deconstruct the gender power relations involved. She explained that this perspective was needed for the study because it treated "language as a site of struggle". Also, the use of deconstruction, Lennie claimed, is important to understand the constraints on women's participation in planning. And she agreed that "Foucault's conception of power" was helpful in understanding "power relations" which were "enacted in participatory planning discourses". She found that "the dominant philosophy" is still rooted in "the objective, value-free scientist or bureaucrat." Therefore, she suggested that a framework of participation and action in planning that "draws on critical feminism, feminist poststructuralism, and emancipatory and action-oriented models of education, participation and community development" is required (Lennie, 1999, pp.100-108).

Weedon suggested that we should have "a primary concern" to understand "the position of individual women in society and the ways in which they are both governed by and resist specific forms of power", that is, women's constitution and struggle "within the broader field of patriarchal power relations" (Weedon, 1997, p.71). She identified that feminism and postmodernism overlap in the challenge to "the universality of metanarratives"; the rediscovery of notions of subjectivity; and in the "decentring of singular centralized notions of power" (Weedon, 1997, pp. 172-174). Therefore, she suggested using feminist poststructuralism to examine how power is exercised and how change is possible. Obviously, this analysis of interrelationship of power, subjectivity and language is useful here for the exploration of women's experiences and struggles in their community participation activities.

Implications for Framework of Analysis

From the above review, we can see that traditionalists aiming to achieve harmony through maintaining the hierarchical society totally neglect social inequality. Their view is incapable of addressing the gender problems existing in women's community involvement. On the other hand, both liberal feminists and structural feminists tried to locate the source of oppression and their search for solutions. Liberal feminists consider individuals lacking equal opportunity to be the cause of oppression and suggest enhancing personal capacity for competency as the solution.

Contrarily, structural feminists identify the structural character of gender inequality and look for structural changes to assure an egalitarian society. However, both assertions are insufficient to address the complexity of gender inequality in everyday life such as why women tolerate such oppression and even help to reinforce it themselves. Indeed, if we can reveal the mechanisms used in the formulation of power relations, we are able to know how oppression is reinforced and liberation is possible. Therefore, we should turn to look at the emergence, the construction and the transformation of gender relations in particular discursive practices.

And here, Weedon's feminist poststructuralism contributed to the analysis of gender relations by no longer seeing it in a narrow sense which ceases at men having power and control over women. Rather, she showed how all individual subjects are involved in relations of power, that both oppression and resistance are possible in the course of their constitution within various discursive practices. This approach is able to provide a more in-depth understanding of women's struggle in everyday life. Hence, it is necessary to adopt a poststructuralist feminist's theory of interrelationship among power, subjectivity and language toward the study of women's participation in community organization.

To deconstruct power relations that women experience in their community participation, several sub-questions are implied. How is power exercised in various discursive practices within women's community participation? How is women's subjectivity constituted in the participation process? And how do women constitute

or negotiate their roles through discourses during their participation? To address these questions, we need to identify what aspects of the practice of participation entail power dynamics in a community organization.

Dynamic interpersonal relations exist in different dimensions of group life, including leadership, division of labour, and the obtaining of resources. First, gender dynamics are inherent in the exercise of leadership in a community organization. As we have illustrated above, Kaufman (1997) identified that gender inequality is reinforced when men obtain and maintain privileges in leadership selection. Actually, the relationship between leaders and group members, as Bert Klandermans (1989) stated in his introduction to leadership and decision making in social movement organizations, "is complicated and often tense (p.217)." The tension exists, according to B. Ann Bettencourt (1996) and may be due to an oppressive leadership style. Indeed, as claimed by Barry Checkoway (1997), the nature of leadership is "an admission of inequality" (p.19). Therefore, leadership is a key arena in the examination of power relations in community organization.

Another dimension of group life that embraces gender dynamics is the division of labour. Many examinations of community participation showed that women are responsible for the "soft" work, which reflects and reinforces their subordinated role in the society that we have already discussed in the previous chapter (Cockburn, 1977; Gallagher, 1977; L.C. Leung, 1991; Fung & Hung, 1995). In fact, the division of labour can reflect the expectations, assumptions, and judgments of group

members' abilities and roles. So, if we examine how jobs are divided among participants and between genders in particular, we may be able to reveal the power dynamics exercised within the group.

The last aspect of community participation needed in our search for power dynamics is access to resources. Since the obtaining of resources is one of the main tasks in community organizing, any "uneven distribution of resources" may cause some participants become more powerful than others (Checkoway, 1997, p.23). In fact, according to Kaufman, when men are advantaged in gaining resources, inequality among group members, particularly between genders, would be strengthened (Kaufman, 1997). Therefore, we need to explore how the obtaining of resources mirrors power/gender relations in the group.

As a whole, in order to search for the possibility of oppression and liberation in women's community participation, I propose that the framework of analysis for this study should target the above-mentioned dimensions of group life as illustrated in figure 1. First, in the dimension of leadership, two areas will be considered. One is the selection of leaders or speakers, and the other is the personal influence and control in group discussions and decision-making processes. Second, in the aspect of the division of labor, the jobs and responsibilities most frequently practiced in community organizing like reporting, analyzing, coordinating, preparing for group actions, care-giving, will be examined. Third, in the area of access to resources, the gaining of information, the building up of networks inside and outside the group, as

well as the training of skills will be explored.

In these three main arenas of group life, I will use the new perspective, feminist poststructuralism, to examine how power/gender relations within the group are constructed and operate through group members and social workers' assumptions, expectations, attitudes, and comments to members of the two genders active in the participation process. I will also focus on the constitution and re-constitution of subjectivity, such as a person's initiative, self-confidence, counter-restrictions, and resistance and struggle for changes in women's practical and political participation. By using this framework, we may be able to understand how oppression and liberation are possible in women's community participation.

In this chapter, we have discussed the conceptualization of gender problems, particularly in community participation. It clearly shows that the use of feminist poststructualism is essential for the study. Having identified the necessary criteria for the framework of analysis, we turn to the design and methodology for the research in the next chapter.

Community Organization Participation

1) Involvement in Leadership Roles

- Leader/speaker
- Influence/ control

2) Division of Labour

- Analytical tasks: reporting/ analyzing etc.
- Practical jobs: coordination/ promotion/ care-giving etc.

3) Access to Resources

- Information
- Networking
- Skills

Power/gender relations:

Group:-

- Assumptions

- Expectations

- Acceptance

- Comments

Subjectivity:

Personal:-

- Initiative

- Restrictions

- Reactions/ Struggles

Initiative

Figure 1. Analytical Framework for the study of Women's Participation in Community Organization

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

In order to address the questions, an appropriate methodology is essential for collecting the relevant information. Research methodology is about how we acquire knowledge including the selection and decision of perspectives, strategies and techniques. The following sections will discuss the decision of the research approach, the employment of research methods, the assurance of credibility, the selection of the sample, as well as the collection of data.

Research Approach

A research approach serves as guidance for the researcher to collect the necessary data to answer the questions she is concerned about. As studying dynamic interaction process in community participation involves women's subjective experiences, it is necessary to adopt a qualitative research approach based on feminist consciousness. It is a research relation that aims at minimizing gender inequality, and building an equal, trusting friendship between researcher and participants (Chan & Leung, 1999). This approach has several advantages. First, a qualitative research is powerful in studying contemporary phenomena within a specific context (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994a; Olesen, 1994). Moreover, in an equal and trusting atmosphere, participants may be more willing to share their experiences, feelings and problems (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.23; Crotty, 1998, p.175; Chan &

Leung, 1999). In brief, this research approach is necessary for the study as it helps to obtain a thick description of women's situations in community participation.

When carrying out feminist research, K.W. Chan and L.C. Leung (1999) reminded researchers to follow four guiding principles. First, the concern of gender is central in this research approach. Researchers should be aware of ways to minimize gender inequality. Second, researchers are required to build up rapport with participants and be sensitive to their feelings. Third, researchers should be aware of the power inequality between them and the participants. Researchers should be reflexive during their investigation. Fourth, researchers should take feminist research as a process of conscientization and empowerment so that participants are enabled to have a more full and in-depth understanding of their experiences and feelings (Chan & Leung, 1999).

Research Methods

Besides choosing a suitable approach, the use of effective methods is crucial to the collection of relevant information. So, I have used case study, which is compatible with the research approach adopted, as the research method. Accordingly, two data collection methods have been employed for this study. They are participant observation and in-depth interviewing..

Case Study

Purposeful sampling can ensure the provision of important information that cannot be obtained from other sources (Maxwell, 1996, p.70). Therefore, for the intensive study of women's participation, I selected one community organization based on its potential for learning most about the problem.

A case study is the "in-depth analysis of one case within its social context (Yin, 1994, p.169)." It is "useful for exploratory, descriptive and, with caution, explanatory purposes", as well as "useful for generating theory and developing concepts (Adler & Clark, 1999, p.169)." Since this research aims at exploring gender issues in community organization participation, the use of the case study methodology is helpful. As Robert E. Stake (1994) identified, from cases we can "learn both propositional & experiential knowledge (p.240)." However, it lacks generalizability as we do not know if the case is unique or typical (Adler & Clark, 1999, p.167). But Yin (1994) reminded us that we should be aware that it is only "generalizable to theoretical propositions", rather than "to populations or universes (p.10)." Indeed, a case study allows thick description and optimizes the understanding of the complexity as well as the context of the phenomenon that is desired for this study.

Participant Observation

In order to study the chosen case thoroughly, I have employed participant observation as the first data collection method. Participant observation, as Adler and Adler (1994) explained, is defined as "the act of noting a phenomenon, often with

instruments, and recording it for scientific or other purposes" (p.378). Also, Barret (1991) commented that it is "an indispensable tool for penetrating beyond what people say – and often believe – about their own culture (p.32)."

The method is most suitable for studying situations and groups. Particularly for some groups, it may not be possible to observe activities and interaction among members without joining in (Langley, 1987, pp.31-33). In fact, by participating to some extent in the internal life of a community, the researcher is able to learn about a society and discover information about behavior, especially behavior that occurs in particular setting, from the insider's point of view (Langley, 1987, p.31; Bailey, 1987, p.239; Barret, 1991, p.28). As a participant, it is easier to understand the underlying rationale and meaning of the person's behavior than an outsider (Langley, 1987, p.33; Maxwell, 1996, p.76).

Another advantage of participant observation is that the researcher can understand the subjects involved more fully. As observation is taken in the natural environment, the researcher can view people "with their hair down" (Walker, 1985, p.6; Bailey, 1987, p.241; Langley, 1987, p.31; Barret, 1991, p.32). For example, members' verbal and nonverbal behaviors that do not conform to the ideal can be revealed through observing their activities in the organization (Barret, 1991, p.32). Sometimes, people are reluctant to express directly their meanings and perspectives about their behaviors in interviews (Maxwell, 1996, p.76). Therefore, through observing the phenomena, the researcher can gain the insight and understanding of

the relationship between personal perception and behavior, as well as the process that led to specific outcomes (Walker, 1985, p.12; Maxwell, 1996, p.64). In addition, the researcher can reveal changes in members when participating in the group over time (Langley, 1987, pp.31-33).

However, participant observation has been criticized for its unreliable and non-generalizable results. Since it relies solely on the observer's "subjective interpretation of situations", researcher bias may occur (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.381; Adler & Clark, 1999, p.298). Aside from this, "demand characteristics" from the observed is also possible. When the observed know or think they are being observed, their behaviour may be affected (Adler & Clark, 1999, pp.299-302). Consequently, its findings may seem to be unreliable. Moreover, as observation only takes place in small-scale settings, its findings are unable to be generalized or made comparable (May, 1997, p.154). Indeed, the findings may be viewed as local, specific or even merely occurring by chance (Adler & Adler, 1994, p.381).

To avoid sole dependency on the observer's interpretation and to achieve a full understanding of participants' experience, the researcher needs to have more interactions with them, allowing clarifications and discussions about their views on particular issues. So, the use of an additional method, such as in-depth interview, may render help to the exploration. And most of all, recognizing the role and influence of researcher in the study is a must.

In-depth Interview

The second data collection method for the study was in-depth interviews, aiming at uncovering women's experiences and perceptions of community participation. Interviewing, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) described, is "the art of asking questions and listening (p.353)." It is a conversation in which the researcher encourages respondents to express in detail and in their own terms their views, attitudes and experiences that are relevant to the research problem (Walker, 1985, p.4; Langley, 1987, p.23).

Basically, all interviews conducted for the study obeyed feminist principles, which require "openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between the interviewer and the subject" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994b, p.353). Only in such relationship, respondents will be more willing to share their feelings and values (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.371).

However, a trust relationship may not be easily built up in a short time. Especially when facing someone newly known, participants may not be able or feel easy to explain their feelings and perceptions clearly and fully in one interview. Instead, they need time to become familiar with the researcher. Therefore, for the study, it was necessary to use multiple interviews with core women members. In fact, only after we had built up a trust relationship, those women participants were more willing to share their more intimate feelings and perceptions with the researcher.

Indeed, in-depth interviews allow the researcher to explore participants'

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perceptions more thoroughly. It is easier for the researcher to control the environment of interviews, especially to ensure privacy. Also, the flexible nature of the interview allows the researcher, while interviewing different respondents, to clarify vagueness, probe detailed views, adjust questions, change direction, uncover new clues, or even open up a new dimension of a problem. If privacy is protected and spontaneity aroused, respondents may express freely and as many details as they want in the interviews (Bailey, 1987, p.174; Langley, 1987, p.24).

However, the interview also has limitations. The validity of the interview is questioned because it relies quite entirely on the researcher's interpretation on the information collected. Also, participants may interpret the questions differently. Thus their accounts are difficult to compare (Adler & Clark, 1999, pp.264-267).

Nonetheless, interactions between researcher and participants, such as clarifying and understanding the complexity of their experience and interpretations of group life, is more valuable for this study than comparable and standardized answers. As Tim May (1997) noted, the focus of interviews is "not on an external reality displayed in the respondent's utterances but on the internal reality constructed as both parties contrive to produce the appearances of a recognisable interview (p.129)." On the other hand, the awareness and achievement of reliability is necessary for research to be convincing.

Credibility

A research needs to ensure "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account." This requirement can be achieved only by the use of triangulation, which involves "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (Maxwell, 1996, pp.75-87). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994a) explained, the employment of multiple methods and sources is to "secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (p.2)."

Therefore, for this study, reliability was carefully considered and ensured by the use of different methods and sources. To do so, the methods of both participant observation and in-depth interview were employed to collect relevant information of women's participation. Moreover, relevant information was collected from different sources. For instance, besides interviewing women members, I also talked with those persons who had significant influence on their participation, such as the male leader and the social workers. A fuller picture of women's situations in community participation could thus be revealed.

Site and Participants

The community group chosen as sample case was organized by an NLCDP team in Cheung Sha Wan Estate. As described in Chapter 2, NLCDPs, which are aimed at providing social welfare services and at empowering local residents to

address their needs, are implemented by NGOs in deprived and transient communities, such as public housing estates that are affected by the Housing Authority's five year comprehensive redevelopment programme.

This public housing estate, having 13 blocks in total, was one of the government's low-cost housing estates taken over by the Housing Authority in 1963.[7] It has a population of about 2,119 households as at August 1999.[8] In 1995, the housing estate was rolled out for the redevelopment scheme in 2001.[9] After the redevelopment plan had been announced, the NLCDP team started their services in 1997. Once settling down in the housing estate, social workers of the team recruited residents to set up the community group aiming at protecting their interests and rights within the removal arrangements and the reconstruction of the community.

Bearing the above tasks, the group had a general meeting every two weeks to discuss relevant community issues. Whenever necessary, the group members would organize various activities, such as mass meetings, collective actions, negotiations with officials, and discussions with councilors, to voice their needs and expectations on the removal arrangements of the housing estate. The group consisted of five to seven male and six female core members.

This group was selected because it met the required criteria. First, the

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[7] For details please refer to the Annual Report of the Housing Authority 1963-64. HK: Govt. Printer.

[8] The data is given by the NLCDP team.

[9] The plan was published in the bimonthly newsletter of the Housing Authority Vol.6, May 1995.

organization chosen must have women members. Second, it should have been operated and would be operated for a certain time period with tasks and activities to be fulfilled during the period of my fieldwork, so that its members would have the chance to participate and gain experiences in participating in the community. Third, the group should provide good chances to reveal gender dynamics in the course of community participation because some women members as well as the male group leader were active in the group activities. Being well suited to these requirements, the above-mentioned group was therefore appropriate to constitute the case for the study.

I have used pseudonyms for all participants described here in order to assure confidentiality. Of the six women members, Ms. Tin, Ms. Pak and Mrs. See were more active than the other three. Ms. Tin, who was over 55, was living alone. She was the most active woman member after having joined the group for more than two years. Moreover, she had joined other community groups, including the elderly group of a political organization and of an elderly centre. Ms. Pak, who was in her forties, had been divorced and was living with her son at the time. She was working on shift in an elderly care centre. She had joined the group for more than three years, but in the later observation period, she became more active and committed to the group. Since then, she had attended more group activities and was more willing to express her opinions. Mrs. See, who had a typical family with grown-up children, had joined the group a year ago when she had wound up her business and become unemployed. She was active in the group until she had been moved to another

housing estate three months before I left the group. That new home was chosen by her husband who decided to move as early as possible. After her move, she was busy working in the market of the new estate to earn money to deal with the expensive rent. Thereafter, she seldom came back for group meetings. One reason was that her husband did not tell her about the calls from social worker, Mr. Bon, reminding her about the date of the group meeting. Rather, he just told the social worker that she was too busy to attend the group meeting.

The other three women members were less active in taking responsibilities in the group. Mrs. Ng, having a typical family, was working in an elderly care centre. She was a new member, having participated for less than six months by the time I left. She had already known Mrs. See before joining the group, as her daughter and Mrs. See's son were classmates. Mrs. Ng seldom expressed her opinions during group meetings. But she was an active member of the mutual-aid committee of her block. Mrs. Au, whose husband was also a group member, moved from the district shortly after I joined the group as did Mrs. Law a few months later. Both women worked and had a typical family, but Mrs. Au did not have any children while Mrs. Law had three grown-up children. They seldom participated in the group actions during office hours but actively gave suggestions at group meetings. In fact, they were more educated than the other women members. Particularly Mrs. Au, who was the youngest female member, had a university degree and had been an editor. She had been expected to write letters for the group and being its speaker in a mass

meeting when she was still living in the community. I have only met her three times in the group. The first time was in the group meeting when I started my observation; the second time was in a negotiation meeting with the Housing Authority when she had left her job because she had to busy herself in arranging the decoration of her new home. The third time I saw her was in a group gathering, where group members visited her new home.

For the male members, first I would like to mention Mr. Man who was perceived as the group leader. He had joined the group three years ago, a bit later than Ms. Pak. Mr. Chiu, who was in his seventies, was the oldest member. The other five male members included some who seldom attended group activities during office hours because of their work commitments. Two of them, Mr. Cheung and Jack, had once been active but had left a long time before I joined the group. Nevertheless, they again participated actively in the group during the later period of my observation, though their involvement was not steady. Mr. Au, whom I have mentioned above, no longer attended group meetings after my observation began. Therefore, I did not regard him as a core member though once he had great influence in the group for his knowledge and strength in analyzing and speaking.

Fieldwork

Since I did not know anyone in the group before the start of my observation, I tried to contact the social worker through my friend, who was an experienced social

worker. At that time, I could only seek the consent of the group through that social worker. After their acceptance was confirmed, I applied to the NGO for an official permission. Having promised the NGO not to violate participants' involvement, I joined the group as an observer-as-participant (for details please see Appendix II).

I had told the group that I was conducting research on women's community participation towards a master's degree and I told them that I would not express personal opinions in group meetings; the group members, except the social workers, treated me as a placement student no matter how I explained that I already had graduated but not majored in social work. To them, all students studying at university are the same, needing to learn and finish homework. In order to help me to do my "homework", they were eager to explain what the group had done and why they did so. In fact, I enjoyed their "teaching" very much.

Whilst starting as an outsider of the group, such participation was not new to me. Indeed, I had previously participated in a community organization, organized by an NLCDP team located in the public housing estate I lived in, before its reconstruction in 1994, for nearly ten years. During my involvement in the community, I saw women participants encountering a lot of restrictions because of family and societal factors. Some had held on and some had left. At that time, these were only seen as common problems in achieving "process goals". The main concern for the group, including me, was still the accomplishment of group tasks assuming it to be the path for the grassroots to achieve social justice. But I was wondering what justice we

would have if the question of personal struggles for liberation by the participants, and by women in particular, was not put into consideration. That is why I have been so concerned with the struggles of grassroots women and why I decided to try and step beyond the structural determinants of gender inequality. Better late than not, I started the fieldwork bearing my personal concern and interest.

The research activities covered a nearly 12-month period from 24 August 1999 to 20 August 2000. There were two phases in my fieldwork period, not rigidly separated but overlapping. The first phase included the participant observation, which started from 24 August, 1999 and ended on 2 July, 2000.[10] During this period, I had taken every chance to attend the group activities so as to understand women's situation in the community organization. In total, I had 55 observation periods, including 20 general meetings and 35 group activities such as negotiations with officials, joint committee meetings, collective actions, mass meetings with residents, as well as group gatherings (for details please see Appendix III).

The second phase included the in-depth interviews. In order to understand women's participation experiences thoroughly, I had invited all women members for in-depth interviews. For the active women members, such as Ms. Tin, Ms. Pak and Mrs. See, I had talked with each of them more than once, from three to six times. In addition, I also interviewed individually those persons who had a crucial influence on

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[10] After verbally being accepted by the group and social workers, I started the observation and sent an application letter to the NGO. The official permission was received in September.

women members, such as the male leader and the two male social workers. In total, I held 18 interviews with all the six female members, the male leader and the two social workers, between November 1999 and August 2000. Each interview took about two to more than three hours. During the interviews, I used mainly open-ended questions as guidelines to probe their interpretations and feelings about their participation in the group. As well, from time to time I had informal conversations with participants, particularly active women members, so as to clarify information about their participation experiences.

To sum up, as I wanted to examine women's participation experiences in detail, I selected the above described community organization as the sample case for the study. In order to achieve credibility, both participant observation and in-depth interview, which were supplementing each other, were employed as data collection methods. For the study, feminist principles were essential towards the building up of an equal and trusting research relationship that helped to obtain relevant information. Therefore, a qualitative research based on feminist consciousness was adopted for the exploration of women's community participation.

After reviewing the conceptual framework and the methodology designed for investigating the gender issues in community participation, we will turn to the findings of the study in the coming chapters.

Chapter 5: Leadership

In the previous chapters, we have discussed the research questions as they arise from the mission of community organizing work. If the grassroots can obtain a more egalitarian position through participating in community organizations, as social workers asserted, would this be valid to women too? In order to understand the possibility for change for grassroots women, I will try to explore the power relations and subjectivity constituted during their community participation. It requires an examination of discursive practices, tactics and values exercised in the activities of the community organization in which they joined.

As illustrated in chapter 3, the framework proposed will look at three important dimensions of group life involved in a community organization including involvement in leadership roles, the division of labour and access to resources. How could gender inequality be constituted in these group activities? And how did women react and reconstitute themselves? These questions will be explored in the following chapters.

First, in this chapter dealing with leadership involvement, I will look at how women's and men's experiences in the selection for and practice of training for leadership or speaker, as well as in their influence and control in the group process were different. In the next chapter about labour division, I will examine how jobs and responsibilities were divided among group members particularly between the two

genders. Lastly, in the chapter concerning access to resources, I will investigate how the women's learning skills and gaining of information as well as their network building were different from the men's.

The findings show that gender differentiation exists in grassroots' community organization. Although women may have chances to achieve liberation through community participation, they will be more likely to experience oppression or even their sense of subordination may be reinforced during the organizing process if gender inequality is neglected. If the possible presence of gender inequality is not attended to, community workers may never be able to achieve their mission of social justice.

Now, let us look at the leadership dimension first. In the analysis of gender differentiation in the leadership activities of the community organization, several questions need to be considered. How was women's involvement in leadership different from that of men? Did the difference imply any gender inequality? And how did women react or struggle? To address these questions, this chapter will focus on two aspects of leadership. One is the selection and performance of leaders or speakers[11] and the other aspect is participants' influence and control in the group process.

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[11] I identify speaker as one kind of leader role since a speaker serves as the representative of the group to speak to the public or negotiate with authorities or other parties.

Leader Selection Bias

In this section, we will look at how gender differentiation was constituted in the selection and performance of leader or speaker. Though women seemed to have more time to commit to the group, they had less opportunity and more restrictions than men to act as leader or speaker. This could be evidenced by the differences which become apparent between men and women in the following aspects: (1) their initiative and confidence in becoming leader or speaker; (2) constraints they encountered in performing the role; (3) acceptance and expectations they experienced; and (4) women's struggles in trying leadership roles.

Initiative

Participants would have more chances to be leaders or speakers if they would take greater initiative in taking up the post. One of the factors affecting their initiative had much to do with their self-confidence. Men and women realised their sense of social beings differently. Men seemed to have more confidence while women were afraid to try the role. Therefore, their chances to be speaker or leader were different.

Men, especially the leader, were more active than women in taking up the job of leader or speaker. Most of the time, when the group needed volunteers to lead or

speak in the group activities, such as protests or mass meetings[12], the male leader would readily agree to take the job. For instance, in one general meeting, the group decided to hold a mass meeting to present the updated information about the removal arrangements. Several topics about the removal arrangements were going to be presented in that mass meeting. When the group was asking the members to take up those topics, Mr. Man, who was seen as the chairman of the group and I would call him the male leader, said he could speak on any topics. So he told other group members to choose topics first and promised to take up the remaining ones (Jan. 03). Maybe men were confident in themselves, allowing them to take the initiative in trying the job of leader or speaker. As a result, they got more chances to assume leadership than women.

Men's initiative helped the group to achieve its tasks. But their eagerness to speak for the group might hinder women's chance to learn leadership tasks at the same time. For example, in the meeting between the group and the housing managers, both Ms. Tin and Ms. Pak wanted to ask questions. However, they did not get the chance because Mr. Man and Mr. On were very eager to demand of the officials improvements to the removal procedures as well as the policies without being interrupted, so that the women members were not in a position to cut in. Although Ms. Tin had tried to voice her questions, the estate housing manager Mr. Chow

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[12] I refer to mass meetings as those open-door meetings arranged by the group in the community to communicate with residents involving activities such as giving information or asking for opinions.

neglected her query and continued to explain the removal policies to Mr. Man. After that, Mr. Chow still ignored Ms. Tin's questions. Besides, Mr. Man continued to ask another question without paying attention to Ms. Tin's questions either. Luckily, Ms. Tin got another chance to raise her questions again after Mr. Man's suggestions had been settled. At that time, Mr. Chow, reminded by Mr. Man, had to give feedback to Ms. Tin (Mar. 29). But women might not always be so brave and lucky to ask questions a second time. They are either neglected by the officials, or ignored by their male partners. Actually, those active male members were not aware of the needs and concerns of women members and thus women's chances of practicing negotiation skills were reduced.

In fact, Mr. Man, the male leader, regarded his taking up of the leadership role as a matter of course. This idea was clearly seen in a group meeting. When social worker Mr. Bon asked Mr. Man to be the chairman of a mass meeting to report the results of the negotiation with the housing managers to residents, Mr. Man just replied, "as usual practice (例牌菜)." He had already been accustomed to being the leader and taken it for granted without question.

Actually, Mr. Man thought it was his responsibility and commitment to be the leader of the group. He said, "Well, I'm tired ... but I still have to follow up those issues." He summarized his role in the group, "Whenever a leader is looked for, it must be me. I can never escape from this role and be a supporter." He thought he was the only one qualified to be the leader among other members because he was so

"active" (積極). He explained, "I look around our group members, I feel I'm braver than anyone of them in speaking in public. So I take up the job ... I do not want others to be unhappy and afraid to participate in the group. I just think, let me take the post. That's why every time it's me to be the chair (Jun. 26)." Mr. Man was of the opinion that taking the leading role was his own obligation. At least, he thought he was better than other group members for the role. So he never showed hesitation to be the leader whenever necessary.

Actually, male members seldom showed their fear for leadership. If male members were asked to be speakers for the group, they would usually take the job without much hesitation. For example, in a group meeting to discuss the need to have a mass meeting in order to motivate residents to join a protest, Mr. Man, the male leader, said he would like to be the chairman of that activity and wanted to have one more partner. Then, social worker Mr. Ku asked another male member Mr. On if he would be available that day and willing to be Mr. Man's partner. Mr. On agreed at once to take the job (Apr. 28). But when the day came, Mr. On told the group that he was sick and was absent from the mass meeting. It might be true that his absence was due to a health problem, but he had already given the people the impression that he had no problem in taking the speaker role. Since men did not show any hesitation or fear to be speaker, they seemed to have greater confidence as well as higher ability. As a result, men were believed to be able to perform the job as leader or speaker.

Men seldom expressed their fear of speaking in public. Social worker Mr. Bon

recalled,

> "Men did not have emotional problems. Usually, when male members
>
> took up the job of speaker, they had already alleged that they were able to
>
> handle those topics assigned. They had confidence in themselves. Even
>
> though they seemed to be nervous during their presentation, they would
>
> not make it known that they had stage fright. Instead, they would explain
>
> that they lack enough practice only (Jun. 28)."

Maybe men are more inclined to suppress their emotions and fear.

Of course, men would confess their fear when they shared it as an experience of

problem solving with others. For instance, Mr. Man sometimes taught other members

how he handled his fear of speaking to public. He said,

> "I dare not to say I'm teaching them. I just want to encourage them that
>
> there's no need to fear. Actually, I was really nervous the first time when
>
> speaking in public. There were so many people there ...It was difficult
>
> for me to control my fear at the beginning ...I was taught by an
>
> experienced leader of another community group, Mr. Lo, to look on the
>
> audience as pots. So later, I can handle the job easily after having
>
> obtained a lot of experience (Jun. 26)."

So men dared to share their feelings of fear after they had successfully solved the

emotional problem by themselves.

On the other hand, nearly all women members asserted that they were not good

at speaking in public. They seemed not to have confidence to act as a leader or speaker like men did and thus they usually did not actively pursue the job of speaker or leader.

For example, when asked if she wanted to try again as speaker, Mrs. See said, "I'm not able to do so. I do not dare to do it. I will be messy ...I was frightened. I spoke with a faltering voice last time (食晒鏍絲) (Feb. 24)." She even chose to sit at the back at the joint meeting[13] so as to avoid being asked to express opinions. However, as Mrs. See had a hearing problem, sometimes she could not follow the discussion. Thus, her fear of speaking affected her participation.

Similarly, Ms. Pak lacked self-confidence when evaluating her ability to be a speaker. She explained, "I cannot do that. My mind is running too slow, I'm not able to feedback immediately ...Anyway, I'm not able to be a speaker. I have no confidence in this regard yet. I have stage fright (Jul. 11)." When Ms. Pak acted as speaker in a mass meeting for the first time, her voice was too soft to be heard. She explained, "I don't have such confidence. So, my voice was weak that night, thinking it would be better not to be heard by the audience ...I'm afraid of presenting the information in a wrong way or not well enough (Apr.20)."

Even Ms. Tin, who was quite active in expressing her feelings and opinions in the group meetings, still thought she was unable to speak in public. For instance,

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[13] I use the term joint meetings to refer to those meetings of the joint committee of several community organizations concerning the renting policy in public housing.

when Ms. Tin was proposed by social worker, Mr. Ku, to try to be the chairman of the group protest, she refused at first. Actually, she dared not take up the job alone. She wanted the male leader Mr. Man to be her partner. However, Mr. Man had to take up the job of being a respondent to the mass media. Social workers then promised Ms. Tin that they would support her from behind (May 15). When Ms Tin delivered the introductory speech to residents, she regretted that she was not good at speaking because she was an illiterate (May 18). Her sense of inferiority was shown clearly when Ms. Tin evaluated her own performance negatively. She commented, "The social workers hadn't prepared the ending for me, so I had to speak it on live ...I think I was very messy in the round up (Jun. 19)." Without social workers' help, women felt they were unable to handle the job all by themselves.

However, social workers sometimes neglected women's fear and did not encourage them to try the leadership work. For instance, at the group meeting, social worker Mr. Ku asked Mrs. Ng if she wanted to try as a speaker in a mass meeting. Mrs. Ng did not confirm at once but asked for more details. She wondered if she needed to prepare one topic only; she remained silent for a while, thinking whether she would try the job or not. However, Mr. Man was not aware of this at the moment and turned to ask Mr. On if he could take up the job. Mr. On immediately agreed. Then the discussion of job assignment seemed to have been settled down at once. But actually no one cared if Mrs. Ng had any interest in trying the job (Mar. 29). Instead of encouraging members, especially women, to try the job of leader or speaker, the

group tended to seek the fastest way to get the work done.

Women members preferred acting as supporters to trying the leading role in group actions and activities. For example, both Ms. Tin and Ms. Pak looked at themselves as supporters (啦啦隊) in the group activities. Mrs. See specified that she, just like other group members, was a supporter to the male leader in meetings with officials. She said, "I'm a follower, and can't take up important responsibilities (跟尾隊, 柴娃娃) (Feb. 24)."

Men's confidence and initiative allowed them to have more chances to try the leadership role. By contrast, women's lack of self-confidence made them afraid to act as leader or speaker. As a result, women had less experience in speaking in public and became more afraid to take up the job, resulting in fewer chances to take up the leading role. When such unequal chances were considered as part of the natural order and being reinforced, gender differentiation emerged and was maintained.

But the problem of confidence did not just occur on a personal level. It involved a societal dimension, in which women have to face more constraints and less acceptance than men. So in the following sections, we will look at what restrictions, acceptances and assumptions women encountered during the selection of leader.

Restrictions

In their attempt at leadership work, women were limited by their lack of self-confidence. Much worse than that, they had to tackle restrictions arising from their

everyday life, particularly from family or work, which men seldom encountered. Moreover, most of them had difficulties in preparing speeches and reading documents because of illiteracy or semi-literacy. Thus, women's opportunity of learning leadership was hindered.

Nearly all women encountered the problem that their family members disliked their active participation in those activities involving protests and public speaking. For example, Mrs. Law, who had self-confidence in group discussions, still faced constraints from her husband. She preferred acting as an attendant helping to clarify information to residents directly to being a speaker at mass meetings. She explained, "I'm so afraid to be on stage." So, she would rather collect signatures than speak at mass meetings. Mrs. Law further explained that her husband was afraid her active involvement in the group would invite troubles. She said, "He was afraid that I would bring troubles to the family. Therefore, I would try not to be so active. I would like to put forward suggestions in the group meetings, acting like a 'hand at the back'. But it's not so convenient for me to be on stage (Jul. 17)." In fact, she had never assumed the post of speaker in group actions. This reflects the fact that women have difficulties in speaking out because of the restrictions imposed by their family.

How did social workers help women to relieve them from the family constraint? Rather than trying to solve the problem of women members' fear in a practical way, social workers taught them ways to address the problem only in an ad-hoc manner. For instance, social worker, Mr. Ku, advised Mrs. Law to tell a lie to prevent her

husband from knowing that she participated in the group protest. He suggested to Mrs. Law that she could tell her husband she had gone to tea with the group (Jan. 19). Social workers did not discuss with Mrs. Law about her fear of standing out. Their keeping quiet on women's subordination reinforced the women's expectation to consider family acceptance prior to their personal interest.

Women could not escape from family pressures even if they were living alone. Ms. Tin's case was a good example. She was the eldest sister, but she did not want her brothers, who were living in other districts, to know she was acting so "radical". Therefore, she refused to be speaker or leader in the group actions, afraid to appear or to be recognized in the mass media. Instead of trying to eliminate such fear, social workers just let Ms. Tin be exempted from those jobs that would get in contact with the mass media. Indeed, social workers had tried again and again to persuade women members to accept that mass meetings and collective actions were effective ways to make a claim, rather than discussing with their fear of standing out in public and being recognised.

However, not all women's attempts at participation were defeated when faced with family restrictions. Mrs. See also encountered pressure from her husband when she participated in the group activities. She said, "My husband said I should not let others know that I am such a busybody (八卦). I don't know why he thinks so. I don't think I'm a busybody. I just have time to give a hand. It should be better to have more people to do the work (Feb. 24)." Though she did not agree with her

husband's comments, she still tried to keep herself away from neighbours when participating in the group actions. Once, when the group led the senior housing manager and other officials to have a walk around the estate to look at environmental problems, Mrs. See was afraid of meeting her neighbours during the walk. However, she was very much concerned about the cleaning problems in her block. So she invited the housing officials to visit it to see how serious the problem was. In order to avoid neighbours, Mrs. See walked down stairs instead of using the lift (Jan. 14). Women's community participation might be hindered by family members' obstruction but they would try in their own ways to resist without risking any conflict.

If women members were working, their time commitments would be very tight. For example, Ms. Pak wanted to have more practice in public speaking. However, she had to work on shift, so that her time available for community participation was not stable. Therefore, she was not in a position to promise to act as a speaker in mass meetings or group actions.

If working women needed to take care of housework, they would have more difficulties in arranging time to participate in community activities than men. For instance, Mrs. Ng seldom had the chance to speak even when she attended mass meetings every time. Not only did she not dare to speak in public, but she could also not punctually come to the meetings, as she needed to prepare the family meal after work. So she always came to the group meetings a bit late and she sometimes had to

leave early if her husband had to work overnight. Indeed, Mrs. Ng thought it was her duty to finish her housework before "coming out" to participate in the community group.

Women were not only restricted by work and family, they also felt inferior because of their lower educational qualification. For example, Ms. Tin could not read out the written statement of the group when serving as the chairman of a group action. She thought that it was because she was an illiterate, so she finally needed Mr. Man to announce the statement for her. At that moment, she just stood by his side smiling in embarrassment (May 18). Their limited education placed women in a disadvantageous position in trying as a leader or speaker, since it still requires one's ability to read or write.

Women had to face a "double" difficulty in trying the leadership role. On the one hand, they had no self-confidence in taking up the job and on the other hand, they had to face various restrictions deriving from family, work as well as low educational qualification. Although facing similar structural constraints, different women responded differently; some avoided taking up leadership while some struggled for more practice. We will discuss their struggles in detail in a following section. So here we note that women's different subjective reactions made their commitment and participation different from one another.

Acceptance

In addition to the disadvantages mentioned above, women had to face unfavourable conditions that are different from those experienced by men. Obviously, men and women encountered different degrees of acceptance in their trying of the job of leader or speaker. The differentiation was shown in group members' attitudes and behaviors such as the assignment of tasks; the expectations of and assumptions about their abilities; as well as in comments about their performance.

First, women were usually seen as inferior to men. Sometimes, they were assigned by men to serve as supporters in the group activities. For example, in the group protest, Ms. Tin was originally appointed as the chairperson. However, during the course of action, she was assigned by Mr. Man to lead the participants in shouting out slogans of dissatisfaction, rather than explain to them the request of the group. As usual, the male leader gave the briefing to residents who joined the group protest, though he originally should have been responsible for communicating with the mass media only (May 18). Consequently, women continued to play a subordinate role in community participation.

Also, in mass meetings or in negotiations with officials, the male leader was usually responsible for the jobs of introducing and presenting the main arguments and for summarizing the discussion. Women could only act as supporters on those occasions. For instance, in a negotiation meeting with officials of the Housing Department, Mr. Man, the male leader, automatically served as the chairperson.

Moreover, he taught other group members, including Ms. Tin, Mrs. See and Ms. Pak, how to support his requests. They unanimously agreed to his suggestion (Feb. 22). The pattern reflected that women had already readily accepted the supportive role.

Second, women's ability of speaking in public was often questioned. Occasionally, they might experience discouragement in their trying to be speaker or leader while men seldom faced such treatment.

Distrust to women's ability was usually subtle and only occurred in slips of the tongue, such as "you still did not understand..." or "you should not remain in such primary stage." Nevertheless, there was one case showing an obvious gender differentiation in leader selection. In a general meeting, the group planned to hold a mass meeting. Group members then discussed the distribution of presenting jobs. Ms. Pak said she wanted to try the job of explaining the main topic about the issue of the different rent rates in the new estate. Momentarily, she faced two or three seconds of silence. Whereas a few minutes earlier, Mrs. See was complimented by social worker, Mr. Ku, after she had actively taken up the job of speaking on the topic about the extended decoration period, which was thought to be a minor issue, the sudden silence became an indicator of hesitation of both the group and the social workers. After the short silence, another social worker, Mr. Bon, even asked her if she really wanted to be the speaker of that topic. Ms. Pak then hesitated and said she was not sure if she would be free that night. Then the male leader, Mr. Man, immediately promised to replace her if she had to be on duty that night. However, in the group

meeting next week, Ms. Pak refused to take the job and explained that she was unable to handle the topic. She asked the male leader Mr. Man to replace her. Social worker, Mr. Ku, encouraged Ms. Pak that Mr. Man as well as all the others would help and support her. Finally, Ms. Pak prepared well and tried to speak for her first time in public (Jan 03 & 10). Certainly, it had become clear that men were trusted and expected to be leaders or speakers, but women's ability to do this job was being doubted.

Nevertheless, women might get the chance to try to play a leadership role in some activities such as meetings with local managers or in meetings in the male leader's absence. For instance, when the senior housing manager Mr. Liu visited the community during office hours, Ms. Tin served as the representative of the group. Together with Mrs. See, Mr. Kwok and Mr. Chan, Ms. Tin led the managers to have a look around the estate, asking for improvements in the environmental aspects, such as cleaning and security. In fact, she was assigned by Mr. Man and Mrs. Law to negotiate with the housing managers on that day. They said that she was available during office hours. This indicated that women gained the opportunity to be leader when the male leader was absent (Jan. 14).

However, even though women dared to try the job of speaker, they were only assigned to handle minor topics, not considered to be the main concerns of the group. For example, Ms. Tin was assigned to report in a mass meeting the exhibition date of model units on the new estate. The important tasks of the group, such as analyzing

problems of the housing policies, were still reliant on men's leadership. In fact, these topics were emphasized by men as well as by the social workers and they were discussed most during the group meetings.

Another gender difference in leadership involvement was the different comments about men's and women's performance. Sometimes, women would evaluate themselves negatively. For instance, in a group meeting, Ms. Tin said that she had learnt a lot from Mr. Man, the male leader, but still, she considered herself an idiot. She explained that she could not speak to the public and needed Mr. Man's help. Other group members, including Mr. Man and the social workers, did not show any disagreement with Ms. Tin's pessimistic view on herself. They just went on with the discussion. Also, Mrs. See thought she had spoken badly at the above mass meeting. During the group evaluation, social workers and other group members said nothing about her negative evaluation. Such dissatisfaction with women's performance was further reinforced when Ms. Tin criticized Mrs. See's performance (Jan. 21). Would this attitude and mentality of the group help to reinforce the belief of women's inability to be leader or speaker?

Even though women had tried the job of speaking and obtained more experience, they still did not have much self-confidence. Ms. Tin disclosed that she felt so scared the first time she spoke at the mass meeting. She could only give a very brief introduction to the matter concerned and passed the microphone quickly to the district councilor Mr. Lee. She explained, "I was so scared at that time that I passed

the microphone to Mr. Lee as quickly as possible ...Many residents did not have faith in us, so it would be better for the councilor to explain the details (Jan. 18)." The feeling of distrust from others made her more pessimistic about her ability. It is thus not easy for women to build up self-confidence in becoming leader or speak. It was not only because they lacked the chance, but they also lacked positive reinforcement that would encourage them to try the job again.

In fact, women had a low self-image. For example, women described themselves negatively as idiot, busybody, being stupid and absent-minded. But men never used these terms to describe themselves. Rather, men viewed themselves in a more positive way. For example, Mr. Man had said he was frightened too in his first time speaking in public, but he could overcome the fear by himself through more practice.

In addition, women had to face criticism from others. For example, in a group meeting, Mr. Man criticized Ms. Tin as too frightened when presenting in a mass meeting. At that mass meeting, Ms. Tin was a bit nervous in speaking but she had delivered the information correctly. However, it seemed that the group was work concerned about her way of expression rather than the effort she had made.

Whilst women's performances were evaluated in a more negative manner, men received better treatment in performance evaluation. For instance, in another mass meeting, Mr. On's performance as a speaker was poor. He spoke too fast and with a special accent that no one could clearly understand. However, Ms. Tin did not

criticize his performance in the group evaluation. She only told me privately that the social workers should remind Mr. On to correct his unclear accent (Jun. 19).

Actually, men often received praise rather than criticism, they were usually praised as good speakers. For example, Ms. Pak said she would rely on Mr. Man to be the leader because he was so good at speaking. Hence, the different comments and evaluations on men and women's performance in serving as leaders or speakers might result in gender differentiation in the group.

Yet, men, young men in particular, were assumed to have no problems with speaking and explaining. Usually workers would not offer help if not required. For instance, in a mass meeting, Jack was expected to have no need of any guidelines in explaining the new arrangement in the removal policy. However, the young man gave a totally wrong information to residents. Social workers then needed once again to explain to the confused audience (Apr. 07). Although Jack had made a big mistake, he did not receive severe criticism. During the group evaluation, Mr. Man and Ms. Tin just laughed at him. Besides treating Jack's mistake as a joke, they all agreed that the topic was too complicated to present clearly to residents. So finally, Jack's absent-minded performance did not face any serious criticism (Apr. 12). In fact, before the presentation, Jack never thought of needing preparation or verifying the information with the social workers. He was quite confident of himself. And social workers also believed he should have no problem in speaking. Actually, Jack was regarded as having great potential by both social workers and other group members.

As Ms. Tin assumed, "I just think young men should be better in handling figures than us, for we have never learnt about counting ...How come he was worse than me (Jul. 04)!" From her point of view, men should have higher ability as they usually have received more education.

Generally, group members believed men had a higher ability to serve as leader. For example, when the group discussed who would be in charge of the coming group action, Jack at once replied, "Of course only Mr. Man can handle the job." Ms. Tin agreed with him. At first, Mr. Man agreed to take up the post. However, social worker, Mr. Ku, preferred Mr. Man to be the respondent to mass media, since no member dared to take up this post. So Mr. Ku assigned Ms. Tin to be the chairperson in that activity, and Mr. Man to be the respondent to mass media (May 15). In fact, men, particularly the male leader, were assumed as the most suitable person to serve as leader or speaker, not only by group members, but also by social workers.

Moreover, when looking for representatives of the group to negotiate with officials or councillors, men would automatically take up the post. For example, in meetings with the Assistant Director of the Housing Department, Mr. Cheng, or councillors, like Mr. Lam and Mr. Lee, the male leader, Mr. Man, acted as the representative of the group as a matter of fact without any need for preliminary group discussion. In addition to being responsible for starting and rounding up the meeting, Mr. Man also tried to negotiate with officials or councillors about requests in the interests of residents. Women participants then served as supporters. In fact, the

group always looked at Mr. Man being the leader in negotiation meetings as "natural".

Men and women had different opportunities to be leader and speaker. Men got more opportunities to take up the role as they were believed to have higher ability and were expected to do the job well. Meanwhile, men internalized this expectation and assumption. Men would then be more initiative in trying to get the job. As a result, men had more experience, and as a result they performed better in leading and speaking. But women had to face more pressures and discouragement in performing the role in addition to lacking self-confidence. As women lacked the experience of speaking in public, it would be more difficult for them to improve their ability. Thus the lack of practice reinforced women's feeling of inferiority. Finally, they no longer dared to try for the job of leader or speaker. This vicious cycle made women have fewer chances than men to act as leader or speaker. It seemed that not only were women deprived of the opportunity to learn to play the role of leadership, but men were equally bound by the expectation that they should be leaders and speakers for the group.

Struggles

As illustrated above, women were restricted in taking up the leader role. Nevertheless, they had tried their own way to learn as much as they could. Their efforts might imply the possibility of changes for women in their community

participation.

Although women lacked self-confidence and thought they were unable to speak in public, most of them would try to seek help instead of giving up once assigned the job. For example, Ms. Tin asked for a "model answer sheet" every time when she needed to speak in mass meetings or in meetings with managers. She would go to the centre before the group action or mass meeting and discuss with social workers how to present the topic assigned. In case she did not have the prepared speech in hand, she would be very nervous. Only after social workers had written down the speech for her, she would be more relaxed. Women were willing to spend more time to prepare for the speaking assignment.

Good preparation would help women to minimize their fear of speaking in public. For example, when Mrs. See had tried to be a speaker to the mass media in a group protest, she said that she was not afraid because she had prepared well. She said, "I do not know how to speak, but they said if I had the speech sheet well prepared, I would not be so scared ...I do not know how to speak, so I have to prepare." The preparation work did help her. She explained, "After I was familiar with the speech, I felt confident then (Feb. 24)." Actually, she had spent nearly two hours in the centre to prepare the speech and recited it twice at home the night before that activity.

Similarly, Ms. Pak had prepared well when she served as a speaker in the mass meeting. She told me that after she had tried the role for the first time, she was

interested in trying the speaking job again. She thought she could perform better if given more practice. She explained, "It's quite interesting ...I agree that I have little improvement. I was totally afraid of speaking, but now I'm able to speak simply a few sentences (Apr. 20)." Though still dissatisfied with her own performance, Ms. Pak confirmed that more practice would help her to build up self-confidence.

More practice did help women to build up confidence. As Ms. Tin said, "I'm familiar with announcing slogans because I have joined similar activities organized by another community group many times before our protest." She also maintained that she did not have the ability to be a leader at the moment, but she was on the way to learning the skills of speaking in public (Apr. 18).

Thus, these struggles might imply the possibility for change in women's participation. On the one hand, women asserted that they were unable to handle the job of leader or speaker, but on the other, they thought they would be able to overcome the difficulty through more preparation and practice. Their assertion of inferiority made social workers pay more attention to helping them to prepare. Through social workers' assistance in writing down and explaining verbally about the main points of the argument, women learnt more speaking skills. In addition, such training experience provided chances for women to interact and to have closer relations with each other and with social workers as well. However, men, who were supposed to have the ability and sufficient information, did not have such opportunity for training and relation building.

As social workers confirmed, they had to spend more time with women than with men in preparing the speech. If women members were assigned the job of speaker, they needed encouragement and support to do so. And usually social workers would give pointers to women and offer help in preparing the work.

Indeed, women never prepared the speech without social workers' help, except for Mrs. Au. Long before I joined the group, she had been one of the speakers in a mass meeting. She prepared her speech independently. She recalled, "Since I get used to writing, I said [to social workers]: 'you just give me the statistics, I will write [the speech] by myself (Aug. 20).'" Mrs. Au was the only female member who did not need any emotional support from social workers. As social worker, Mr. Bon, explained, "Because she is more educated. Her case is similar to Mr. Man's; [I only need to] provide [her] information. [It is] because her education level is not low. She got a university degree. Also she has much experience of meeting different persons. So I did not need to deal with her emotions, but offered technical support only (Jun. 28)." Indeed, Mrs. Au and her husband were seen as important speakers in negotiations with officials for their knowledge and education.

However, receiving more respect did not make Mrs. Au more active in the group. As she was busy in arranging the decoration work of her new home, she withdrew from the group. In order to move into her new home on time, she even had to resign her job at that period. Although receiving more education seems helpful for women to change their status, it does not mean that women can escape easily from

the domestic role. In fact, intervening factors, such as education, make gender inequality more complicated.

Most of the women members, who had lower education, still had to tackle a lot of problems when they tried the job of leadership. They needed social workers' support and help in preparing for the presentations and negotiations. Calling for help from the experienced male leader and social workers might allow women to learn more and improve their skills as well as their confidence. But at the same time, women themselves also reinforced their dependency on men. Women could therefore not escape from the assumption that they were inferior to men. As a result, the reliance on men for improvement in speaking skills reinforced gender differentiation. Could the differentiation be minimized if social workers were willing to make more efforts to help women to perform independently rather than to get the work done efficiently? Would the recognition of various styles of leadership be more helpful for women to get more chances rather than emphasizing only good speaking skills? Would training in or sharing experiences of speaking publicly at general meetings be more practical for women to improve their self-confidence than working by oneself hurriedly before the course of action? Maybe we need to ask why leaders or speakers are expected to speak in a clear, precise and analytical ways?

Control and Influence

Another aspect of leadership is the influence and control in the community

group.   In this section, we will examine how gender bias was constructed during the process of decision making and personal influence in the group. The examination includes: (1) men's and women's initiative in raising suggestions and making decisions; (2) the acceptance of their suggestions and concerns; and (3) how women tackled their subordination and tried to increase their influence.

Initiative

Men and women had different degrees of initiative in making suggestions and decisions. Men had more confidence about their ideas while women had not. Men's confidence helped them to increase influence and control in the group. They then got further privileges in affecting the decision-making of the group.

Actually, the group had taken it for granted that men, particularly the male leader, were responsible for making decisions for the group. For example, in a group meeting, Mr. Man and social worker, Mr. Bon, discussed the priority of questions to be asked when meeting with housing managers. Other group members did not have any chance to join the discussion. They just listened to the decision made by the social workers and the male leader (May 31). Also, Mr. Man would decide for the group what topics should be submitted to the application for discussion items on the agenda of the district board meeting. As men took greater initiative to make suggestions and decisions, they would have more influence.

Sometimes, men discussed and made decisions without any intention of

discussing them with women. For instance, in a group meeting, while Mr. Man and social worker, Mr. Bon, were discussing the future of the community organization, Mr. Kwok agreed with Mr. Man's ideas. But at another corner, Ms. Tin and Mrs. Ng were admiring the latter's handmade imitated jewellery. Later, Mr. Bon and Mr. Man continued the discussion about when the group should ask Mr. Fong, the chair of a political group and a columnist, to write up the problem of different rent rates in the new estate in his column. However, Ms. Tin and Mrs. Ng were still talking enthusiastically about the ornaments without paying attention to the men's discussion (Apr. 12). Indeed, men might go on to discuss their issues of concern without women's involvement. Nevertheless, women's neglect to men's decisions may be a sign of dissatisfaction with men's control over the group meetings. The dynamic underlying this incident imply the possibility of resistance.

Besides, men were confident about their suggestions or decisions. They would tend to insist on their opinions when disagreement with social workers arose. For example, in one group meeting, the male leader, Mr. Man, and the social workers did not compromise on the format of a mass meeting. Mr. Man suggested to the group that residents should be motivated to join their protest through a small scale mass meeting rather than a large one as the social workers hoped. Although Mr. Man could not persuade the social workers to do so, he insisted on trying to hold a small scale mass meeting. Finally, his suggestion was accepted by other group members (Apr. 28). Since men believed their suggestion was the best way to solve problems,

they would try hard to convince others.

As for women, they seldom insisted on the suggestions they brought forward. Rather, they would easily give way and accept rejections or modifications from others. For instance, in the discussion about the future of the joint committee, Mrs. See queried the claim that the committee would become useless and thought it could try the work of educating residents about housing policy. But when Mr. Man asked the group to vote for the dismissal of the joint committee, Mrs. See at once said she would follow the mainstream (Dec. 03). Women dared not stick to their ideas. They would easily change their mind and withdraw their suggestions when facing rejection.

Indeed, women asked for support and recognition from others, especially the male leader and social workers, before giving any opinions or suggestions. For example, Ms. Tin always asked social workers what she should do in her next step. Usually, they would explain to her what strategies would have more advantages, and then Ms. Tin would follow their suggestions.

As men tended to make decisions actively and defend their suggestions, they would have more influence and control in the group than women who dared not raise any suggestions.

Acceptance

In addition to having different degrees of initiative in raising suggestions, men

and women also received different levels of acceptance for their ideas. This difference reflected the different assumptions about and treatment of the two genders. As men's suggestions and decisions were more likely to be accepted by the group, men's influence was thus greater than women's.

Women seldom put forward suggestions, not only because of their lack of confidence, but also because their influence was weaker than that of men. They sometimes encountered rejection and, most of the time, modifications of their suggestions. For example, Mrs. See had experienced rejection and modification when raising suggestions. In the joint committee, when a social worker asked participants what they could do to educate residents, Mrs. See had suggested to talk about how the rent for new flats was decided. But the group did not give any response to her. Even the social worker forgot to include her idea when summarizing the group discussion (Oct. 12). Thereafter, Mrs. See did not raise this point anymore in the group discussion. But she still talked about the idea to me as well as to other residents individually. As well, in a general meeting of the group, Mrs. See had put forward the goals of the mass meeting. However, her idea was criticized by Ms. Tin and then clarified and modified by the social worker, Mr. Bon (Dec. 10). Indeed, women's suggestions faced lots of restrictions and discouragement, even from other women.

Although Ms. Tin was willing to express her opinions, she still had to meet disagreement by others, especially by the male leader and social workers. For

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instance, when the group was selecting which topics should be discussed in a mass meeting, Ms. Tin emphasized that two topics were of equal importance and suggested discussing both at that meeting. These topics concerned the installation of gates and the triple rent penalty to residents who could not move on time. However, immediately after her contribution, social worker, Mr. Ku, drew two ticks on the triple rent penalty policy and one tick only on the gates issue (Jan 03). This indicated that the former topic was considered as more important than the latter one. It reflected how women's opinion was neglected by social workers.

If women's opinions were not welcomed by social workers, they would be to no avail. For example, in one general meeting, social worker, Mr. Bon, expressed his dissatisfaction with Ms. Tin's pessimistic view on holding a mass meeting. He held that he just wanted all residents to participate more happily and fruitfully. Also, he said if the group decided not to do anything, he would accept. But his feedback was made in a very serious manner, he sounded displeased and was without smile. After Mr. Bon had finished his "sharing of feeling", Ms. Tin concluded that she had made him angry. Later on, she did not reject the suggestion of holding a mass meeting anymore during the group discussion (Dec. 10). No one seemed to care about the disrespectful attitude towards women that would jeopardize their participation.

However, the treatment of women's suggestions would be different if confirmed by social workers. For instance, in a group meeting, Mrs. See suggested a solution to tackle the problem of the triple rent policy. Mr. Man disagreed first and others

followed him. Later Mrs. See clarified that her suggestion was about a procedure for applying for a delay of the removal without the triple rent penalty. Mr. Bon, the social worker, found that her idea made sense. He then explained her suggestion again to the group members and asked for their opinions. At that time, all members agreed to the suggestion including Mr. Man (Dec. 17). So, if women's suggestions could get men's or social workers' recognition, their chance of acceptance would be increased.

Even if women's suggestions were practical or stirring, their ideas would be accepted only after elaboration or supported by social workers or men. For example, Mrs. Law suggested a new method to express the opinion of the group on different rent rates. At the beginning, everyone thought it was a joke. But later on, the district councillor, Mr. Lee, analyzed the issue and suggested that it would be a good way to express the dissatisfaction of the group. Then, all group members as well as the social workers unanimously agreed that it might be an effective way to express opinion and were willing to have a try (Jan. 10). Indeed, men's accreditation was important for the acceptance of a woman's suggestion.

And of course, if women suggested something about trivial matters that both social workers and male leader did not want to bother with, their opinions would likely be accepted. For instance, they could decide matters such as color and size of the posters, arrangement of sticking posters, date of mass meetings, and suggestions for sending a Christmas card to thank a helper.

If men and women had different opinions or suggestions, it was usually the men's idea that was accepted by the group. For example, Ms. Pak suggested a method that was different to Mr. Man's to request the selection of new flats to take place in the estate office. But Mr. Man insisted on his solution and it was agreed to by Ms. Tin, Mrs. See and Mrs. Law. So, Ms. Pak had to agree with Man finally (Nov. 05).

On the other hand, men's suggestions carried more weight than those of women in the group. Sometimes men's suggestions were accepted without any discussion, or, in other terms, the male leader received an implicit recognition to make decisions for the group. For instance, Mr. Ma decided not to report the confirmation by the Housing Authority that no shortened pillars problem was found in the newly constructed estate in the mass meeting. Without any discussion on whether to accept his suggestion or not, it was decided that this issue was not to be reported at that mass meeting (Jan. 03).

Usually, men's opinions were agreed to and supported by women. For example, in a group meeting, the male leader Mr. Man suggested contacting Mr. Fong, who was the head of a political group and the host of a radio programme, requesting him to discuss the problem of different rent rates at the new estate in his phone-in programme. Mr. Man at once assigned Ms. Tin to arrange a meeting with Mr. Fong for the group. Though Ms. Tin was a bit confused with the job, she still said, "If 'Sir Man' regarded it as good, then it's good." Other group members such as Mr. Kwok

and Mrs. Ng also accepted Mr. Man's suggestion (Jan. 26). So men's ideas were easily accepted by others without any questions.

Sometimes, men's suggestions would be modified or altered, but usually this was done by the social workers. For example, Mr. Man at first stated that they could do nothing about the different rent rates, but social worker, Mr. Bon, still tried to convince the group and persuade Mr. Man to change his mind. Finally, Mr. Man agreed with Mr. Bon.

Not only were women's suggestions regarded as inferior than men's, but women's needs and concerns were equally treated as minor issues or even neglected. This norm became explicit when the group tackled problems by which women were particularly affected. For example, security problem had never been prioritized in the group discussion, not to mention being considered as the major task. Women members had previously been very much concerned about having the gates at the main entrance of the housing blocks installed earlier. They thought it might help to improve the increasing security problem. They put forward their concern a number of times and actively contributed their opinions and examples. Unluckily, the problem was not so serious to men who went outside the community for work. So the issue was not prioritized or worked out in the group discussion as were other main tasks, such as solving the housing policy problem. Nonetheless, with women members' perseverance rarely seen in the past, the item of installing door-gates finally had been put on the agenda of the meeting with the housing managers. However, the group did

not have any follow up concerning this request, when the estate housing manager delayed his work. Even the women themselves, though still very much concerned about the delay, thought there was no way to solve the problem. They dared not raise the problem again after waiting hopelessly for over four months. Women's concerns had not been seriously discussed and put on the agenda for discussion of the group.

This typical case showed how women's needs were neglected in the group. Moreover, if the problem occurred inside a particular block, it would not be treated as a public issue. Sometimes, men even warned women not to raise such "private" problems at important group meetings, because such matters should be solved at the local or lower level. For example, Mrs. See was much concerned about crime and cleaning problems in her block. She wanted to urge the councillors to follow up on the problem accordingly. However, the male leader Mr. Man and social worker, Mr. Ku, corrected and advised her to contact the estate housing manager to solve such "individual" problems (Jan. 10). It was mostly women who met with these so-called "private" problems in everyday life, as they spent more time in the community than men who worked outside. However, the group tended to target those community problems that would affect all residents as regarded by both men and social workers.

In addition, women's concerns were viewed as not appropriate or not important. For instance, Ms. Tin was concerned about the difficulty and frustration residents would have when choosing among three community groups for joining the protest. However, the male leader just cared about how to arrange the action effectively. Ms.

Tin tried to explain the problem to social workers but she was "corrected" by both social workers and the male leader that she should be concerned about "the right thing", which did not include the feeling of residents (Apr. 28).

Neglect of women's concerns and needs might result in an attitude of not being respectful to them. Women sometimes were not respected. For instance, in a group meeting, while the group was discussing what strategy they should adopt for the group action, Ms. Tin suddenly asked if any reporters would come to the action. Social worker, Mr. Bon, at once stopped her, blaming her for asking "unanswerable questions". He seemed not to have any interest in understanding Ms. Tin's worry. Rather, he only concentrated on persuading the group to take the most effective way of expressing their dissatisfaction (Jan. 19). So, besides facing neglect of their concerns, women encountered disrespectful attitudes in their community participation.

Struggles

Women's concerns were neglected, but they found their own ways to express their needs. For example, Ms. Tin cared very much about the security problems in her community. However, this concern had not been put as an item on the agenda of the group. So Ms. Tin tried to express her concerns to relevant departments such as the Housing Department and the police office when she met them. She kept on communicating with the officials and reporting community problems to them.

Sometimes, even being warned not to raise "individual problems", women still voiced their requests during negotiation meetings between officials and the group. Women would seize every chance to express their concerns rather than waiting for the group to accept their needs as important.

In fact, Ms. Tin felt uncomfortable when her concerns were neglected. She had been stopped by social workers when she suggested that the group should have communications or joint actions with a councillor whom she favoured. Social workers had never spent time explaining to her the problem implied in her suggestion, but they just rejected discussing the matter in the group meetings. So she was not convinced with their rejection. Later, when the group planned to organize a collective action during the housing committee meeting, she tried to not disclose news that she had received from other sources. At that time, the social workers were eager to know the meeting date, but when Ms. Tin got the latest news that was important for social workers towards arranging the group action, she did not tell them. She was happy to see the social workers hurrying and worrying about the arrangement of the group protest (Jun. 19). So, when women faced disrespectful attitudes, it did not mean that they would accept it without frustration. Indeed, if they got the chance, they might fight back.

Generally speaking, men's influence on and control over the group, particularly the male leader's, were greater than those of women's. Nevertheless, women might still have their own way to increase their influence. One an example showed that

women indeed might have an influence on the male leader's decision although it could not explicitly be found in the group meetings. It happened when Mr. Man, the male leader, insisted on not having a meeting with the estate housing manager, thinking that the manager was stubborn and irresponsible. Even social workers could not persuade Mr. Man to change his mind. But after Ms. Tin explained and analyzed the pros and cons of the negotiation meeting, Mr. Man agreed to have a try. The meeting was unbelievably successful with fruitful results and seemed to have improved the relationship between the group and that manager. This was an exceptional case, in which women increased their influence and control through changing the male leader's decision informally.

However, other women members would not have such influence on the male leader. Indeed, social worker, Mr. Ku, and the male leader, Mr. Man, viewed Ms. Tin as having great potentials to be trained as speaker. Also, Ms. Tin was a member of another community organization. She sometimes got information earlier than the social workers and discussed it with the male leader. Thus, she worked closely with Mr. Man, and earned his trust. But other women members, such as Mrs. See and Ms. Pak, did not have such influence on the male leader.

To conclude, men got advantages in leadership not only due to their initiative, but also because they received greater acceptance than women. They were assumed by the group to be better leaders than women. When men showed their confidence in

their abilities, they were encouraged to serve as leaders or speakers. In return, the encouragement strengthened their self-esteem and thus increased their influence and control in the group. However, women encountered negative experiences in this regard. Due to limited opportunity of improving one's literacy and restrictions from family and work, women dared not believe themselves able to perform as leaders or speakers. As a result, they were not trusted to have the suitable ability for leadership by the group. As well, they had lesser influence in decision making. A vicious cycle thus emerged: women had lesser chances, if not being excluded completely, to try and learn to perform leadership.

However, gender inequality in community participation should not be simply identified by who are the leaders and who are the followers. We also need to aware the process as dynamics occurred during the exercise of leadership may provide the possibility of resistance. Moreover, intervening factors, such as education and age, would make gender problems more complicated.

Did gender difference exist in other aspects of group life too? In the next chapter, we will examine the gender/power relations in the division of labour and the assignment of responsibilities.

Chapter 6: Division of Labour

In the previous chapter, we have already revealed how leadership of the group was shaped by gender differentiation. Now we will turn to look at the division of labour among members, another important aspect of community participation, to understand how gender/power relations were constituted.

In the community organization, various jobs and responsibilities required to be taken up by group members. However, work was not divided evenly between men and women. Some jobs were treated as more important than others. For example, analyzing housing policies and strategies, as well as reporting were regarded as the main items on the agenda in the group meetings. These jobs were mostly carried out by men, particularly the male leader. Yet, practical jobs like coordination and care giving were mainly done by women members. Even though both sexes did the same kinds of job, they would be responsible for different tasks or roles. How did this skewed division of jobs and responsibilities embody different assumptions about, expectations of, and treatments of men and women? And how did women struggle and react to these differences?

To answer these questions, I will divide this chapter into two sections. First, we will look at how the main tasks or responsibilities relied on men and how women were excluded from these jobs. Then, we will examine how women were limited to undertake the supporting jobs.

Men were Relied on for Important Tasks

Jobs of analyzing, explaining, and reporting were treated as important work in community organizing. These jobs were mainly for men but not for women. In this section, we will examine how participants' initiative, personal constraints, as well as group acceptance constituted the gender bias in favour of men. In addition, we will look at how women reacted to this bias.

Initiative

Usually, men would actively report results of the group activities or actions during the group meetings. For example, Mr. Man actively reported to the group on meetings with housing managers, negotiations with housing authority members, and the complaint to the Legislative councillor during general meetings. Sometimes, other participants in these activities would add some more details. But generally, the group would just quietly listen to his reporting. Hence, men's initiative increased their opportunity for the job of analyzing and reporting.

In fact, men, particularly the male leader, had the confidence in assuming the job of explaining and analyzing. Self-confidence not only affected one's initiative of trying the work of analyzing and explaining, but also influenced acceptance from others. As men believed their analysis was correct, they would insist on their own ideas and refuse those of the others, even the social worker's analysis if different.

But women did not have such self-confidence. When facing disagreement, women members would change their mind and not dare to insist on their analysis. For instance, when the group was discussing the strategy to be adopted to solve the renting problem, the male leader successfully refused the social worker's suggestion. But women members could not, or, maybe, would not dare to do so. In that discussion, social worker, Mr. Ku, analyzed that there were two possible ways to solve the problem of different rent rates in the newly constructed housing blocks across the two building phases. One was to require the Housing Authority to change the different rent rates into a unified one; the other method was to request the Housing Department to delay the selection date for the new flats so that residents knew the exact rent of the later phase before making their choice. Ms. Tin said she disagreed with the second method because it was problematic. However, Mr. Ku still explained eagerly how the second solution had a higher possibility of success than the first one. Instead of asking what worried Ms. Tin, Mr. Ku just kept on persuading her and the group to use the second solution. The debate was settled only after the male leader firmly refused Mr. Ku's suggestion. The male leader, Mr. Man, analyzed clearly the problem of Mr. Ku's suggestion. As no members showed disagreement to Mr. Man's argument, Mr. Ku, at last, stopped his attempts to persuade the group (Jan 10). In this case, not only group members but also social workers seemed to accept the male leader's explanation. However, no one, including the social workers, bothered to ask about or listen to Ms. Tin's reasons for disagreement. Obviously,

men were confident about their opinions and decisions but women were not. As a result, the man's analysis was easily accepted by the group while woman's was not – it was not even dealt with!

Restrictions

Women's self-confidence may be dampened by their limitation in obtaining and interpreting information that was different to that of men. Their lower education made it difficult for them to handle the written data. They viewed themselves as stupid and unable to understand information such as policies and strategies. For example, Ms. Tin looked upon herself as an idiot when social worker Mr. Bon asked her if she understood the rent exemption policy for removal (Mar 15).

Most women members did not actively ask for details of policies and strategies. Instead of requesting social workers to explain the relevant information, they would rather wait for the news to be told during group meetings. Therefore, women looked more passive than men in their attempts at understanding relevant policies and strategies. But this passive attitude was not due to their lack of commitment. Ms. Tin explained that she could not remember or thoroughly understand the information told by social workers because she could not write it down and keep records. Not only she, but most women members, including Mrs. See and Ms. Pak, emphasized that they had difficulties in reading and writing. As a result, women did not dare to explain or analyze any policies or strategies to the group. Women's initiative and

confidence in taking up the relevant jobs was therefore limited by their personal lack

of resources.

On the other hand, as men could read and write, they could easily understand

the written data such as housing policies and figures. Thus men could remember

detailed information much better than women. Whilst being assumed to have higher

ability, men were usually informed by social workers of the updated news and

information even they did not actively ask for it. This advantage of obtaining and

digesting information made men, particularly the male leader, assume a greater

initiative than women in taking up the job of analyzing and explaining policies and

strategies for the group.

Acceptance

Men also obtained advantages in the acceptance of their reporting results from

negotiations or collective actions in the group meetings. This, in turn, encouraged

men to have greater confidence and initiative to take up the job of reporting and

analyzing.

Since social workers tended to discuss the information of housing policies and

negotiation strategies with men more than with women, the former were believed to

know policies better even they did not. For example, when Ms. Tin told the group

that she found Mr. Man did not fully understand the policy of the rent exemption

period, everyone treated the story as a joke. Nevertheless, Mr. Man confirmed that he

was clear about the policy just until recently. Even social workers thought it unbelievable. Ms. Tin laughed at him when I visited her, "I just think 'Sir Man' should have known that policy well. But he pretended to be smart (Jul. 04)." In fact, if Mr. Man had not called Ms. Tin for clarification of the policy, no one would have known this secret. Everyone assumed, like Ms. Tin, that the male leader should know the official policies involving community participation.

Most of the time, the male leader was asked by the social workers to report the work of negotiations and actions to group members. But women were not trusted to be able to report clearly. For instance, the group had once invited Mr. Fong to have a meeting. He was expected by the group to raise the problem of different rent rates in his column and radio program. In that meeting, the social workers asked Mr. Man to report to Mr. Fong the results of negotiations and actions that the group had taken. As Ms. Tin was the coordinator and a friend of Mr. Fong, she then actively and enthusiastically talked about the details of these group actions to him. However, Mr. Man at once repeated his report again as if Ms. Tin could not explain the matters clearly to the guest (Mar 01). Usually men were expected to do the reporting. Even if women members wanted to try the job, they might not be trusted with it, as they were thought to be unable to report clearly.

Men were expected to report the progress or results of important issues or main tasks, like the negotiation of rent rates of the new housing estate to the group. But women did not enjoy any advantages in taking up the reporting work. Rather, they

would be excluded, such as by way of not being asked and not being trusted to do so.

Even when men failed to report the case clearly, women were not asked to try the job. Instead of asking women to try the reporting, social workers would automatically take up the job. Sure, it would save time or it would be more efficient when the male leader or social workers themselves reported, but this action implied that they did not bother to listen to other participants' interpretations of the group activities, except to the male leader, who was regarded as the smartest one. The one thing they bothered about, was to ensure that the problem would be solved quickly, but not necessarily to be understood thoroughly by all the group members. Why were reports of personal feelings and comments not to be treated as relevant to group tasks? Of course these reports would be irrelevant, if participants' commitment and empowerment would not be part of the purpose of the group!

Even if women tried the reporting job, they would meet with criticism of their performance. For example, in a general meeting, social worker, Mr. Bon, asked those members who had attended the District Board Committee meeting to report the discussion. The members included Mr. Man, Mr. Chan and Ms. Tin. But Mr. Bon was pointing his finger at Mr. Man, showing a sign of invitation. Mr. Man started to criticize the committee members' decision that only the registered representatives of community organizations were allowed to express opinions in committee meetings, but other residents were not allowed to do so. As Ms. Tin knew the committee chairman, Mr. Tan, she knew why the committee had reached such decision. So,

when Mr. Man talked about the matter in the group meeting, Ms. Tin at once reported that she did not have an answer yet. However, Mr. Bon reminded Ms. Tin to explain the case in detail, otherwise no one would understand what she was talking about. Then Ms. Tin tried to explain the problem of the decision of the District Board Committee, by mixing the facts and the personal feelings and comments together. Immediately, Mr. Man criticized that she should report the case a bit more clearly. He then repeated the case once more with his comments at the end of the reporting (Apr 28). Actually, I did not find any difference between their reports about the factual information, except their different presentation styles. The male leader reported the facts first and followed with his analysis and criticism while Ms. Tin reported the case by mixing her feelings with her comments. The male leader evaluated Ms. Tin's report from his own standard and thus concluded that she had not reported the case clearly. From Mr. Man's point of view, a clear report required factual data to be distinguished from one's emotional feelings. His standard was accepted naturally without any discussion by group members or without being questioned by the social workers. This example of women's reporting showed that they were not trusted, if not regarded as incapable, to do the work well enough when they did not present it in the standard form.

Women were not only being viewed as incapable of reporting clearly, but they also were not being trusted with the job of analyzing policies. Women encountered unintentional discrimination in the group when analyzing and explaining policies.

Since women were believed to be unable to do analyzing well, they were seldom asked to do so. They were considered to be inferior in analyzing and explaining complicated policies or strategies. For instance, when discussing the housing policy of the rent exemption period for removal, Ms. Tin had difficulty in understanding the calculation of the rent exemption period at first. She was laughed at by the social workers, the male leader and group members. Even her friend, Mrs. Law, joined the male leader making fun of her. Mr. Bon, the social worker, criticized her that she should not remain at the primary level. He further wondered, as she was skillful in the calculation of majong playing, why she was unable to calculate the rent exemption period. But later, when I visited her, she could clarify and explain the policy clearly to me with the help of a calendar. Actually, this policy was a bit complicated. It stated that 14 working days, excluding Saturday and Sunday, were offered as the rent exemption period for the new flats residents would move into and it would take immediate effect from the date the residents signed the rental contract. Then, after the rent exemption period for the new flat expired, the calculation of one-month rent exemption for the old flat which residents would move away from would start. Thus, when residents signed the rental contract at different dates, they would have to pay different amounts of rent for the first month. This policy was not easy to understand by just listening to the verbal explanation. However, the social workers had never used any tools such as pictures or a calendar to help illustrate the calculation. In fact, even the male leader, Mr. Man, did not understand the policy for

a long time. However, the women rather than the men were suspicious of their ability to understand the policy.

In addition, women's explanations were not respected and accepted by others. For example, in the general meeting of the joint committee, Ms. Tin tried to explain why she had stopped a woman participant asking Dr. Hung an irrelevant question at the meeting. Her clarification was not accepted by that participant who was angry with her. That women continued to blame Ms. Tin and disagreed with the decision about the questions to be asked in the coming meetings with the housing department. The dispute was settled only after social worker, Mr. Ku, had explained the criteria set for questions in the meeting with Dr. Hung (Oct 29). In fact, even if women were allowed to try the job of analyzing and explaining strategies or policies, they were unable to convince other participants. Sometimes, they needed men or social workers to help persuade the group.

Therefore, women were hindered, if not excluded, from learning and trying the work of reporting, analyzing and explaining. On the one hand, they were not asked to carry out these jobs; on the other, they did not enjoy the confidence of and respect from the participants during their performance. As women tried such jobs, their contribution would be amended or criticized by others, including the male leader and social workers.

Without the affirmation by for social workers, women would not be trusted, even though they used actual cases or personal examples in their analysis and

explanation. For instance, Mrs. See explained how she had rejected paying the "mud fee"[14] as she moved to her new flat. However, Ms. Tin commented that she did not understand the policy while Ms. Pak offered help by explaining the procedures and principles of that policy. Mrs. See insisted that she was clear about it. What she had not explained was the trick she had played to avoid paying the fee. However, social worker Mr. Bon said nothing about Mrs. See's understanding of the policy. Instead, he just explained the policy again to the group. So at the end of the meeting, Mrs. See still could not convince Ms. Tin that she understood the policy (Feb 18). Women were not believed to be able to analyze or explain policies or strategies well and needed support from the male leader or social workers. This incident just demonstrates how women internalized the masculine rationality to discriminate other women members.

Whilst women's ability to analyze and report was doubted, sometimes they would be asked to report on minor issues with the social workers' or the male leader's guidance and help. For example, Ms Tin was asked to report on the discussion of the "mud fee" or on meetings with local housing officials. These activities had not been taken as important tasks, like the negotiations with the higher level housing officials on renting policy.

Moreover, women would be responsible for reporting on the meetings with

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[14] It is a fee that residents pay to the cleaning company used by the Housing Department for the disposal of decoration refuse when they move into the new flats.

councillors or officials at the local level, when the male leader had not attended. For instance, in a group meeting, Ms. Tin was asked to report on the meeting with the assistant housing manager Mr. Wong. During her reporting, Ms. Tin needed social worker, Mr. Bon's, guidance, and, as a result, she reported all the details clearly (Feb 18). As she had told me several times, she did not have the habit, and actually was unable, to write down any records after a meeting or an action. So she could not remember all the details of the group activities. That might explain why women usually asked social workers or the male leader to support and help them in trying the reporting work. Even if women wanted to try the job of reporting and were accepted by the group, they were still restricted to reporting about minor issues, or on meetings that the male leader was absent from.

Struggles

Although seldom asked to take up the job of reporting or analyzing, women would try to share their personal experience with group members. They liked to report personal activities together with their feelings or comments, ignoring the social workers' request to report the factual information first. For example, Ms. Tin and Ms. Pak sometimes reported their site visits to the group so that they could evaluate the progress of the construction work of the new housing estate. Also, Mrs. See and Mrs. Law enthusiastically shared their experience of their move with other group members and reminded them of what problems they should be aware of. In

fact, women learnt a lot of community issues and problems through the sharing of their experience with others.

Due to their limited literacy, women had their own way of analyzing the issues of concern. Instead of emphasizing logical or abstract reasons as men did, women members tended to use their personal experience and feelings, as well as actual examples to support or illustrate their ideas. Thus, the focus of the analysis of men and women was different. However, women's attempts were not quite as successful, because the men's style of expression was more accepted as the standard form, not only by social workers and other group members, but also by women themselves. As a result, women were seen as inferior when they did not analyze and explain problems in the men's way.

As we can see from the above findings, men took more initiatives in analyzing or explaining a policy or strategy as well as in reporting results of negotiations or collective actions to group members or visitors. They had confidence in doing the job. At the same time, they were believed to be able to do so. But for women, their analyses or explanations did not receive the same recognition as those by men. Instead, women needed confirmation and support from social workers or the male leader in order to persuade members or residents. As a result, women seldom analyzed or explained policies and strategies. The acceptance of the men's reporting and analyzing reflects the assumption that men have a higher ability than women. However, this ability was linked to differences in literacy skills, which women were

already in a disadvantageous position to obtain. Nevertheless, they had tried their own ways to explain and analyze the community issues about which they were concerned. But their analyses or explanations based on personal experience or decisions were only treated as of secondary importance in the group discussion.

In fact, the emphasis on written data and logical reasoning had been taken for granted as the standard form of knowledge, which required everyone to comply with. Personal experience or other evidence was treated as secondary or supporting information only. This standard form of knowledge was never challenged in the community participation. Instead, it was reinforced as the professionals made every effort to help participants to achieve the standard. And finally, maybe unintentionally, men's privileges and their sense of confidence were strengthened, whilst women's attempts for change were hindered.

Supporting Jobs Assigned to Women

On the other hand, women were mainly responsible for coordination, preparation, promotion, as well as care giving. These jobs were regarded as supporting the main work of the group. How did women become mainly responsible for these jobs? What expectations and comments did they encounter? Were there any differences between women and men in performing these jobs? Did these differences imply any power/gender relations? And how did women struggle? In this section, we will try to explore these questions.

Expectation

Usually, women did not take up the supporting jobs by their own initiative. They were assigned by the male leader or social workers to do these jobs. For example, during a general meeting, the social workers wanted the group to confirm a draft letter. It was a letter of complaint to a higher level official of the housing department about the estate housing manager's delay in installing security gates in the housing blocks. The male leader, Mr. Man, decided that it was too late at night for the group to discuss the matter. He then assigned Ms. Tin to have a look at the letter the next day when she was available. Without any verbal consent, Ms. Tin had taken up the responsibility (Oct. 08). Women seemed to be passive in taking up the supporting jobs, but they were expected to do them and they were automatically assigned to them.

It was same for coordination work, which women were expected to take on and were assigned the responsibility for. For instance, in a general meeting, when social worker, Mr. Ku, asked who would call the senior housing manager Mr. Liu to make an appointment, Mr. Man at once pointed to Ms. Tin, "the skilled worker (熟手技工)". Ms. Tin replied she was busy that week. However, both social workers, Mr. Ku and Mr. Bon, made fun of her. They asked her to choose between two options, one was to contact manager Mr. Liu and the other was to call the estate housing manager Mr. Chow whom she disliked very much. Ms. Tin said she could only promise to

make the call on the following Monday. After the social workers had checked with Ms. Tin's time availability day by day, they found that she really could not be available that week. Finally, Mrs. See was willing to pick up the job to contact the manager Mr. Liu. And Ms. Tin promised to follow up the coordination work in the following week (Mar. 15). The coordination work was considered to be women's responsibility and they could not easily reject the assignment.

Even if women members wanted to escape from the coordination work, they were still firmly demanded by the male leader or social workers to fulfill the responsibility. For example, Ms. Tin asked if she could be released from the job of coordinator responsible for submitting the agenda to the District Board committee meeting. Mr. Man refused her demand and said to her teasingly that she must expiate her crime by good deeds (帶罪立功). Social worker Mr. Bon added to the joke, "The King did not allow you to escape from the duty (皇上唔准)." Ms. Tin just smiled in response to their rejection (Mar. 01). A few days later, she went to the centre to make the contact work. Whilst such assignments might feel a bit better than orders, as the men would add some funny words, the power underlying the jokes still reflected the pattern that men assigned women jobs without asking their consent. And women never did the same to men or they probably could not do so. Could this imply unequal power relations between men and women in the group?

Women without paid work were regarded as being available during office hours. Therefore, women being responsible for coordination work became the norm

in the group. For example, in a group meeting, social worker, Mr. Bon, asked who could contact both the estate housing manager, Mr. Chow, and the District Board committee chairman, Mr. Tan, to arrange a meeting to discuss the "mud fee". At that moment, all the group members looked at Ms. Tin, who showed her reluctance by bending her head over the desk, saying, "It's me again." Mr. Bon explained that he would not force her to take the job. Ms. Tin then asked him, "Who else is available for the job then?" Mr. Bon again emphasized, "No one will be forced to." But then he asked Ms. Tin if she could help to contact those two parties. Finally, Ms. Tin agreed to take up the job (Apr. 28). Actually, she showed discontent that she was expected to be the coordinator every time. She told me that she queried why Mr. Kwok never took the job as he was available too. However, she never raised this question in the group meetings. The expectation of women to take up the supporting work reflected the assumption by people that women had more time, and that their time was not as precious as that of men. As a result, this assumption reinforced the bias in the distribution of jobs.

Even the women themselves agreed that, if they were available during office hours, they should take the responsibility to contact officials and councillors. For example, when social worker, Mr. Bon, asked in the group meeting who could contact the councillor Mr. Lee, Mr. Man looked at Mrs. See and Ms. Tin. He said, "You have more free time." Mrs. See agreed that they truly had more free time. So she promised to pick up the coordination work after Ms. Tin's refusal (Feb. 22).

Women accepted that they had more time than men. And thus, they should take up the supporting jobs accordingly.

The internalization of this responsibility could be seen clearly when looking at how women interpreted their role as coordinators. Both Ms. Tin and Mrs. See said they had to take up the job since no other group member was available for the coordination work. As Ms. Tin clarified, "I do not like the coordination job. As other group members did not have the time to do the work, then I would do it (Apr. 18)." They might not be happy with this, but they dared not reject the job as they regarded it as a commitment to the group. So, finally, women viewed coordination jobs as their own responsibilities.

Another kind of work that relied on women was care giving. Women seemed to be more aware of personal needs. For instance, during his meeting with the group, the assistant housing manager Mr. Wong was enthusiastically expressing his opinions on the new housing policies to the participants. He seemed to have no intention to stop talking. Ms. Tin knew that the social worker, Mr. Bon, had to go to school at four o'clock that day. So she actively ended the meeting and told Mr. Bon to leave first. Then, in order to continue the conversation, she invited Mr. Wong to go for tea together with Ms. Pak and myself (Feb. 14). Moreover, in general meetings, Ms. Tin often reminded the eldest member Mr. Chan that it was time for him to leave because he needed to go home at around half past ten. His home was in another housing estate. Ms. Tin would also urge Mrs. Ng to leave at about 11 o'clock

as she had to go to work the next day. Ms. Tin promised Ms. Ng to tell her the date for next meeting later. Women seemed to be good at noticing others' needs and offered their help.

Indeed, women would naturally accept their role as carer. For example, in the meeting with councilor Mr. Fong, Ms. Tin found that he was thirsty after having eaten so much fruit seeds. So she went out to bring water and cups for the group. While she was leaving the conference room, Mr. Man, the male leader, reminded her to bring in some more cups. Mr. Man was busy discussing with the visitor and so did other male participants. Only Ms. Pak and Ms. Tin tried to fill the cups with water and distribute them to all participants (Mar. 01). Women were expected to take care of others. Consequently, they had more experience and better skills to perform the job. Thus in return, they would automatically take the work as their inherent responsibility.

Besides looking after participants and social workers in various activities, they also provided sweet soup for the group. Mrs. Ng and Ms. Tin were the major persons bringing various kinds of sweet soup and deserts to the general meetings. Sometimes Mr. Hui and Mr. Chan also brought snacks, such as peanuts. But only women were responsible for arranging bowls and cups, and distributing the soup to group members and social workers. Of course, they also had to take up the cleaning after the meeting. Even if the snacks were brought by men, women still had to clean up the table while men hurried home. Actually, care giving had been taken for granted

as the women's job.

That women take on the caring responsibility might not be a problem itself, but that the group ignored their contribution was problematic. The group had never put care giving as an item on the agenda in the evaluation of the group activities. For example, in a group action, Ms. Tin had carried a pile of newspapers so that the participants could use them as padding when sitting on the wet floor outside the Housing Authority. However, her work had been unnoticed. It was not evaluated as a preparation job for the action. In fact, the group evaluation only focused on the skills of leading or speaking as well as the results or effects of the claim. As well, when the group evaluated their work and achievements, women's offering of food had been overlooked. Their contribution had never been acknowledged although the food had helped to create a warm and friendly atmosphere in the group meetings. Rather, the group was only concerned about the improvement in speaking and negotiation skills, as well as the accomplishment of the group tasks. Care giving was indeed not looked at as a job. Such neglect would then reinforce the mentality to judge the women's contribution as secondary and it thus helped to construct and maintain unequal gender relations in the group.

Performance

Although women were mainly responsible for coordination and care giving, sometimes men would take up the job of coordination and promotion. However, their

performance, as well as the expectations and assumptions encountered were different.

Usually, women had to rely on social workers to perform the coordination job, while men did the work more independently. When women had been assigned a coordination job, most of them would come to the centre to carry out the work with the social worker's help. For example, under the social worker's guidance, Mrs. See had tried to call a radio phone-in programme for several days, though at last the contact was not successful. Ms. Tin also asked a social worker, Mr. Bon, to teach her how to communicate with Dr. Hung. As a rule, when Ms. Tin called the housing officials in the centre, social workers would listen to the conversation on another hand set at the same time, so as to help her with feedback at once. Only when she contacted those with whom she was very familiar, such as councillor Mr. Fong, Ms. Tin did not need a social worker to stand by her side while she was making the call. Women seemed to be dependent on social workers since most of the time they had to come to the centre to finish the coordination as well as other preparation work.

Men, however, did not need to go to the centre to carry out the coordination job. Although they might require the social worker's briefing on factual information and persuasion techniques, they did not need social workers to remind and support them during the coordination. For example, as Mr. Man's contacted manager Mr. Wu, he just asked the social worker, Mr. Bon, to give him the phone number and the main points of the argument needed in the coordination after the group meeting. Then Mr.

Man made the call by himself and reported the result to the group in the general meeting. So, men seemed more independent in handling the coordination work as they seldom actively asked help from social workers.

Moreover, the expectation on men in taking up coordination jobs was different from that expressed towards women. Men were expected and assigned coordination work that needed persuasion and explanation, such as contacting higher level officials and mass media. For example, the male leader, Mr. Man, was asked by social workers to try to convince the senior housing official, Mr. Wu, who had talked with Mr. Man several times, asking him to do a favor for residents in deciding the rent rates of the new housing estate. Mr. Wu could have an influence on the decision making, because he was responsible for preparing documents and references for the committee to discuss the matter. Besides, Mr. Man was asked by social workers to make an appointment with the Housing Authority committee chairman, Mr. Fung, to discuss the problem of different rent rates in the new housing estate.

The male leader was also responsible for calling news reporters in order to complain about the housing policy of renting. Mr. Man had finally contacted two newspapers to arrange interviews with the group. In those interviews, Mr. Man was the main respondent to the reporter's questions, while women members, such as Ms. Tin and Mrs. See, just listened quietly. Sometimes they expressed their agreement to Mr. Man's explanation and argument. Finally, one newspaper published a half-paged article about the complaint. The group was excited about the report, especially the

photo of Mr. Man standing in front of the new housing estate. They unanimously agreed that he looked very smart in that photo. These examples reflected the assumption of men having higher ability. They were trusted to being able to explain and convince the subjects they had contacted.

Even when both men and women performed the same job, the difference still existed. For instance, Ms. Tin had once rejected taking up the promotion job as proposed by the male leader, because of her pessimistic view regarding the group action promoted in that activity. So Mr. Man had to pick up the duty himself even if he seemed not to be familiar with the promotion job. He asked women members about the details of the work such as when and where the promotion should be most suitably take place. That particular outdoor activity was aimed at collecting residents' signatures to support the group's action of requesting the same rent rate for all the blocks in the new housing estate. Ms. Tin at first refused the job, not only because she disliked such activity, but she also was not available on that day, as she had to prepare the meal for her younger brother every Thursday. Later, the date for the promotion was changed and both the social worker and the male leader were looking for Ms. Tin to help in the signature collection that day. But they could not find her during the setting up of the promotion counter. Later, Ms. Tin came back from the market with Mrs. Man. Immediately, Ms. Tin joined the promotion work though she still queried its usefulness. In that activity, the main persons to collect signatures were the three women members and a male member, while the male leader

most of the time served as the speaker, using an amplifier to explain their claim to residents (May 12). Thus, whilst the male leader actively took up practical work, he would become or remain the speaker rather than mere operators like the women.

The gender differentiation in the assignment of work to women and their acceptance of that work reflected the assumption of men having a higher ability, while women were regarded as inferior. During job assignments, attitudes towards men and women were different, making women subordinate to men. Women's acceptance to play a supporting role further reinforced the assumption of gender differentiation. In return, men's increasing self-confidence and women's feeling of inferiority were further strengthened. So, again, this was a vicious cycle affecting the division of labour in the group.

Struggles

But women still could create their own space and offer resistance within the process of job differentiation. Usually, women grouped together to do practical jobs, such as promotion and preparation. By doing so, they had chances to talk with each other and with other residents; they were interested in knowing more about community issues, like who had done what in the community. Such "gossip", like comments on the personality of officials and councillors were not welcomed during group discussions. However, this sharing of "information" helped women enjoy and commit to their community life. They would then feel more comfortable, at least not

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so scared, when they would meet those officials and councillors. Such exchanges of information among women members, as they performed supporting work, helped them build up self-confidence for further participation in other group activities.

Besides, women seized the chance to come together and talk about matters they were concerned about, but could not discuss formally in the group. For example, when women picked up promotion work, such as giving handouts, collecting residents' signatures, they did not do it alone. Rather, they would join together to carry out the promotion work. In an outdoor activity towards seeking residents' support to join a protest, women members Ms. Tin, Ms. Pak, Mrs. Law and Mrs. See, chatted with each other happily, like during a social gathering, sharing their daily life experiences (Jan. 19). Women could then gradually built up friendships as they worked together more often. Another gain from the sharing of personal resources was that women knew more about community issues and cases. The building up of friendship and networks, as well as the obtaining of information, will be further discussed in next chapter.

As women were mainly responsible for contacting local officials, they would try to favor their friends when performing the job. For example, Ms. Tin was assigned to contact the assistant housing manager, Mr. Wong, for an appointments. She tried to arrange a time that was convenient for both the male leader and her good friend, Ms. Pak, who had to work on shift. So it was no easy job, even in arranging meetings with officials on the local level. Nevertheless, women could find their own way to

increase their influence.

In this chapter, we have looked at how the division of labour and responsibilities was gendered through the constitution of different assumptions about, expectations and treatments of the two genders, as well as through their internalization of these differences.

As we found from above the illustrations, men were expected to handle the main tasks, such as reporting and analyzing, while women were virtually excluded from these jobs, so as to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of achieving the targets of the group. On the other hand, women were assigned to do supporting and practical jobs, like coordination, preparation, promotion and care-giving. They were expected to do these jobs because of the social role that women were being assumed to play and assigned as part of their societal role. As such, women's traditional roles were practiced and reinforced through their active participation in the group. Without any awareness of the potential to reinforce gender inequality, group members and social workers ironically joined together to routinize the gender differentiation as they advocated for grassroots' rights and interests as well as claimed to promote empowerment through community participation. What a pity that the practices of the community group focused mainly on instrumental tasks and ignored community building, which had once been their mission.

Nevertheless, women tried their best to perform the supporting jobs assigned to

them, as they seemed to be helpful in building up their self-confidence. Thus, their

participation still served as a chance for them to change their life.

After having examined the construction of gender differentiation in leadership

and labour division in women's community participation, we will further reveal how

gender relations and women's subjectivity were constituted in obtaining of resources

in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Access to Resources

Gaining access to resources is another important dimension of group life for grassroots participants. In this chapter, I will examine three aspects of this discussion of community participation; they are obtaining information, building up networks and skills training. How do gender/power relations exist and operate in these areas of access to resources? And how did women react to these relations and create their own space for accessing resources? I will try to address these questions in the following investigation.

Obtaining Information

In this section, we will look at how obtaining information was imbued with gender inequality within the group. Information refers to the knowledge, facts, news and data required by participants for their relevance for residents' interests and rights. In the course of community participation, both personal initiative and informants' preferences would greatly affect the degree to which participants were able to obtain information. As men have advantages in these two means, they could obtain more and better formal information. Nevertheless, women had their own ways to struggle for getting the information they needed.

Personal Initiative

Since the men in the group did not have any difficulty in reading and writing, they could easily absorb the up-to-date information given to them directly by officials as well as that coming from newspapers. With this advantage, the male leader would actively fax news clippings to social workers for group discussions if he found any relevant housing issues published in newspapers. And in return, social workers would also copy news clippings relating to housing problems, such as the water resistance problem in the nearby public housing estate, for the group to review. Usually, the male leader would be the first to read these news clippings and give his opinions on the matters. Sometimes, he was requested to give a brief summary of the news reports to group members so that they did not need to go through the details. As men could read the news by themselves, they obviously had advantages in gaining updated information about housing problems.

Moreover, men seemed to possess more information, as they could write down what they were concerned about, when learning about housing policies or information. For example, in a meeting with the local housing managers, the male leader, Mr. Man, was very much concerned about the official data provided by the housing managers. He jotted them down, together with the completion date of the new housing blocks and the policy of setting the "mud fee". At the same time, women just listened to the information, without any pens and paper displayed in front of them (Mar. 29). Consequently, men could easily report the information gained from meetings with officials while women could not. Men then seemed to be

able to have more information, especially about the official data.

Since most male members could read and write, they were advantaged in gaining information from written data or reports. However, most women could not easily absorb written information, as they had difficulties in reading and writing. They had to rely on social workers or the male leader to explain the written data or complicated policies to them. For example, Ms. Tin was illiterate; she said she would request social workers to digest the information first, and then re-tell it to her in a simpler way. Only thus was she able to understand the issue involved. Ms. Pak had the same problem with written documents; when in the meeting with the assistant housing manager, Mr. Wong, she asked him to explain the timetable for selection of the new flat, because she could not read and understand the data. After the meeting, Ms. Tin also requested the social worker, Mr. Bon, to help her to understand the official list (Feb. 14). In fact, written documents became a barrier to women obtaining information.

As women seldom jotted down information or data on housing issues, they might be unable to remember the details of a policy or updated statistics. For example, Ms. Tin could not remember the details of a meeting with officials. So she needed social workers to re-tell her the information provided in the group meeting (Dec. 03). Thus, women needed social workers or male members to interpret these written documents to them, so that they could understand the information involved.

Since women relied quite a lot on verbal explanations by social workers and the

male leader, they seemed to be passive in the matter of gaining access to information. Women usually waited for social workers to give it to them. Only when the information was closely related to their personal interest, such as the date of selecting new flats, they would actively ask for it. Otherwise, they would not dare to disturb the social workers. For instance, Mrs. Ng said she did not want to bother the social workers to report about the past group actions. Rather, she would wait to be told about those issues when chatting with other participants.

On the contrary, men, particularly the male leader, would actively ask social workers about housing policies or relevant information, instead of waiting to be informed. For example, in a general meeting, Mr. Man asked the social worker, Mr. Bon, how long the maintenance guarantee period would be for a newly established public housing estate. Mr. Bon clarified him that the Housing Authority was liable to take responsibility for the maintenance of structural problems forever (Jun. 16). Showing greater initiative, men got more advantages in learning information than women.

Informants' Preference

Moreover, men got further advantages in obtaining information as they were more respected and favoured by social workers and officials. For example, in a meeting with the estate housing manager, Mr. Chow, together with managers of the estate management discussing the moving arrangements, managers gave their name

cards to the social workers, to Mr. Man and the young male member only. No women members were given the name cards, though they were sitting next to the male members (Mar. 29). I had asked Ms. Tin if she had received any name cards of the officials. She explained that they were useless for her, since she could not read them. If she would get any name cards from officials, she would pass them on to the social workers at once. She said that it was better for social workers to keep the name cards of officials for the group. Although the male leader had already kept a pile of name cards in his wallet, women had their good reasons not to keep them. But later, when I was looking for a geriatrician, she immediately searched for a doctor's name card for me. Of course, name cards of doctors were much more useful for her than those of officials. Nonetheless, men seemed to receive more respect than women did during the gaining of information.

In fact, those who got the most information were the social workers and usually, they would pass it on to the whole group. However, social workers clarified information differently to men and women. They tended to share information with men and discuss it with them, but social workers would act like teachers in giving women information and they seldom asked for their opinions. Indeed, men and social workers would discuss and analyze strategies and policies without women's involvement. For instance, in a general meeting, with no intention of stopping women members' chatting about the new flats, a social worker, Mr. Ku, and the male leader, Mr. Man, discussed the plan and strategy to be used in the coming protest

against the Housing Authority. They analyzed what actions councillors Mr. Fong and

Mr. Lee would take on that day and their influence on the group protest. At that time,

the meeting seemed to have two sub-groups simultaneously discussing different

topics. Neither group would listen to or try to communicate with the other, until the

men's group made a decision. Social workers then stopped the women's group

chatting and explained the planning (Apr. 28). So men and social workers shared

information and made decisions for the group, without any intention of seeking

women's opinions.

This preference in offering information was explicit when participants were late

for the group meetings. In such cases, social workers would report to male members

on the progress of the group discussion and not to the female members. For example,

Jack had come late for the general meeting and the social worker, Mr. Ku, at once

explained to him what was being discussed in the group. Actually, male members did

not feel awkward to interrupt the group and ask for clarification about the progress of

the discussion. At the same time, social workers wanted to ensure that men had the

necessary information so that they could join the group discussion as soon as they

arrived.

But social workers had no intention of explaining the issue to women at once

and women members usually dared not ask what was going on in the group meetings.

Instead, they would quietly listen to the discussion until they caught up with it. For

example, in a general meeting, Mr. Au was late. The social worker, Mr. Ku, at once

told him about the issue being discussed. However, Mrs. Law, whilst arriving a bit earlier than Mr. Au, was not told about the discussion. She just seated herself quietly at the corner, listening to the discussion and she dared not ask any questions (Sep. 21). Other women members had similar experiences. In another general meeting, Ms. Pak took the agenda of the District Broad committee meeting from the social worker, Mr. Bon, and looked at it for a while and then gave it back to him. As Mr. Bon had already talked about it to the group before Ms. Pak's arrival, he did not explain it again to her even after the meeting, and she did not take the initiative to ask for any clarification either. So she missed the committee meeting, even though she was available that day. Indeed, she did not know about the matter and social workers forgot to remind her. They just thought they had already told all group members during the group meeting (Mar. 28). Being neglected, women were therefore disadvantaged in gaining information.

Sometimes, women were not told about the information, even it had related to them. For instance, Mr. Bon did not tell Ms. Tin he had sent the application for discussing a housing problem in the meeting under her name. She only got to know this when she met the housing manager, Mr. Wong, and the District Board committee chairman, Mr. Tan. So women were disadvantaged in getting the chance to obtain information, in addition to having their personal difficulties in digesting written information.

Men already had personal advantages in gaining information; since they could

read and write, they got much more information than women while most women were illiterate or semi-literate. The group looked upon written information as the main source of knowledge. Thus, the privilege of literacy helped men have more confidence in asking for information. Men's advantages were further strengthened when they were respected and assumed to have the ability to understand information. They were then offered more information. Thus, men got more opportunities to obtain information and catch up with up-to-date news and its discussion. On the other hand, women had difficulties in absorbing written information and dared not bother others for help. As a result, they were being neglected and treated as inferior in understanding the available information.

Women's Struggles

Nevertheless, women had their own struggles for information. First, women were willing to spend more time in learning about or practicing their understanding of a policy that was relevant to their rights. For example, Ms. Tin said she had finally come to know a bit more about the calculation of the rent exemption period, but still dared not say that she fully understood the matter. Mr. Bon laughed at her, for she had studied the calculation for half a year. In fact, Ms. Tin had taken every chance to learn about the policy; she had attended several meetings with officials that were held by another community group trying to explain and discuss the policy. She finally succeeded in understanding the policy, particularly after she accompanied the

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elderly to sign their moving documents in the housing department office. Women

had difficulties in understanding housing policies written in complicated forms. But

they would try hard to learn it, especially through personal experiences.

The second strategy used by women to obtain a good grasp of information was to

use actual cases and personal experiences to help them understand it. For example,

Mrs. See and Mrs. Law shared with the group about their experiences with the

moving procedures. So even though women could not understand the written housing

policy thoroughly, they would try other ways to overcome their limitations. Although

personal experience was not considered to be as important as the official data,

women used this kind of information to understand community and housing

problems.

Third, women could get information informally. While the men emphasized

obtaining relevant data through formal meetings with officials, women emphasized

personal relations. They preferred informal contacts with local housing managers to

obtain official news, particularly the news about moving arrangements. Actually,

women members had friendly relations with the assistant housing manager Mr.

Wong who was responsible for the moving arrangements for the community. They

would praise his work or even share jokes with him. Ms. Tin explained that she

regarded him as a friend, not just an official. Women members sometimes jointly

visited Mr. Wong, informally asking him for personal advice or for the information

about moving arrangements such as how many units of other housing estates would

be offered for the moving of the community. Ms. Tin believed that they could get more information through such informal visits to local officials.

Besides getting information, women would seek to improve the officials' work through informal contacts rather than during formal occasions. For example, Ms. Tin had asked Mr. Wong privately to enlarge the size of the official notices of the Housing Department so that the elderly residents could read the words more easily. She was very happy when Mr. Wong immediately changed the notices by following her request. So women tried other ways to settle their concerns informally.

Sometimes, Ms. Tin brought up-to-date information obtained from another community organization to the group. For instance, Ms. Tin told the group about the request for a lower "mud fee" by another community organization in which she had been involved. Her contribution was appreciated by the male leader. In fact, women got information through various sources, so that they could overcome the difficulty in understanding written official documents.

Despite their disadvantages, women members thought they had obtained more information through participation in the group and because of having more information, they felt they were smarter than other residents. As Ms. Tin said, "After joining in Ku's (social worker) group, I have learnt more about the Housing Department. Before that, I only relied on mass media to obtain the housing information. It was very limited (Nov. 17)." Similarly, Mrs. See recalled, "Before I joined the group, I did not know so much about the Housing Department." She

evaluated her benefits: "I seem smarter after participating in the group...because I have come to know more than other residents (Feb. 24)." For Ms. Pak, community participation even helped her at work: "I have learnt more about my right. It's useful in my work (Jul. 11)." Thus, women seemed to have a positive evaluation of their capacity to obtain information.

Women extended their chances of accessing information through spending more time to understand policies, using various kinds of information, as well as getting news from informal resources. Their self-confidence then gradually built up. Even though they were disadvantaged in obtaining information compared with men, women seemed to be satisfied with the improvement of their level of information.

Gaining information was an important way for women to escape their subordinated role. However, as official information was usually presented in written form, women were restricted in absorbing it directly or easily, as most women members had problems with reading. So women had to depend on social workers and the male leader to analyze or explain the information to them. On the other hand, men were easier to obtain information not only because they could read and write, but as they would actively ask for it. Also, as they were respected, officials and social workers preferred to give them the information they needed. As a result, getting access to information was imbued with gender bias. Though women tried to learn more through other channels, the main information emphasized by the group remained written materials. Indeed, social workers helped the group to get this kind

of information to achieve the group's tasks efficiently and effectively, rather than to challenge its prejudicial nature for the grassroots, especially for women participants.

Network Building

Another important dimension of obtaining resources in community participation for women was network building including friendships made within the group and personal contacts outside of the group. Men and women played different roles in networking. Women appeared to be more apt than men in building up supportive networks in community participation. They had made friends within the group as well as with participants of other community organizations. Moreover, women's enlarged networks facilitated their participation in the group activities.

Friendship within the Group

All women members very much acknowledged having made friends during their participation in the community organization. But their friendship had two levels: women would treat the male leader and social workers as teachers, while, as women, they supported each other as friends, sharing personal interests and experiences.

Friendship was built among women members. Most of them became good friends after joining the group and supported one another. They shared information and experience about community issues and personal lives as well. For example, women members such as Mrs. Law, Mrs. See, Ms. Pak and Ms Tin said they had

made more friends after participating in the group activities. Actually, Ms. Tin and Ms. Pak became good friends. They often discussed their selection of new flats and hoped to be neighbours after moving to the new flats. Ms. Tin told me that she and Ms. Pak had joined together for visits to the construction site nearly everyday. When Mrs. Law shared her own experience of the decoration of her new home with the group, she talked most of the time with Ms. Tin and Ms. Pak about the details of the work, such as how to design the kitchen. Thus, friendships in community participation led women to gain more supports for their daily life.

Furthermore, when friendship was built among members, the atmosphere in the group became more relaxed. For example, in one group meeting where Mrs. Ng had prepared deserts for the group, she reserved one for Mrs. Man, who would come late. That night, Mrs. Ng, Ms. Tin and Mrs. Man were chatting together merrily at a corner of the table, not so absorbed in the group discussion (May 31). Actually, women seemed to have created their own community during their participation in the group.

Women viewed most other women members as friends but regarded the male leader as teacher and valued his advice. The friendship between the women and the male leader was like that between students and teacher as were the personal relations between the women and the social workers. For example, Ms. Tin liked to address the male leader and the social workers as "Sir". Other women members used this title when calling them. Ms. Tin explained that she considered them as teachers and

supporters.

Sometimes, Mr. Man asked his wife to take care of Ms. Tin, who was living alone. For example, when Ms. Tin went to the Housing Department office to select a new flat for moving purpose, Mrs. Man came to accompany and encourage her. Asked by Mr. Man to look after Ms. Tin that day, Mrs. Man needed to finish her housework as early as possible and she was too hurried to have lunch. After Ms. Tin finished her selection, the two women went happily to have tea (Mar. 27). Ms. Tin thanked Mr. and Mrs. Man for their care. Mrs. See was also grateful to Mr. Man. She said she was lucky to have Mr. Man to help her in speaking. She regarded herself as a follower. Women considered the male leader and the social workers to be teachers and were thankful to their help and advice offered.

On the other hand, the male leader also enjoyed offering help to the women. For example, he gave his analysis of the future development of some newly established public housing estates to women members to help them decide where to move to. Ms. Pak was very worried whether she would be able to choose a satisfactory flat in the new housing estate. Mr. Man then made an enlarged copy of the list of new flats for her to mark down how many units were still available each day after the residents' selection of their new flats. Hence, Ms. Pak could prepare well before going to the Housing Department office to make her choice. Ms. Pak was very thankful to Mr. Man for that.

In fact, both social workers and the male leader viewed themselves as teachers

of the women members. When Ms. Tin had attempted to answer a resident's question

clearly in a mass meeting, they praised her in the group evaluation. The social

worker, Mr. Ku, said to Mr. Man, "At last, we succeeded in training Ms. Tin" (May

23). Furthermore, Mr. Man had suggested that Ms. Tin act as the chairman of the

mutual aid committee after her move. He encouraged her to try the job and he would

be her "consultant (師爺)" backing her up. Such encouragement and praise reflected

the men's sense of superiority. The teaching offered by professionals did help

women to change, but they tended to change to be the same as men internalizing

rational logic.

Most group members became friends, but the friendship styles were different

among genders. Friendship among women was on a reciprocal basis while relations

between men and women were those of teachers and students. Thus, hierarchical

power implicitly existed in gender relations.

Networks in the Community

However, women had more and better contacts with residents than men.

Women extended their networks with residents not only through participating in the

group activities, but also through joining in other community groups. From these

networks, they could gain information about the community, such as detailed

personal experiences of moving or even about burglary cases. Moreover, women's

stronger networking, in turn, helped them perform jobs and shoulder certain

responsibilities in the group. On the other hand, men seemed to act as advisors to or leaders of residents without enlarging their networks in the community.

Community participation provided an extra way for women to make friends and get to know more residents both of their own community and of other housing estates. For instance, Mrs. Law asserted that she knew more residents through community participation. When she attended mass meetings of the group, she would talk with some residents to clarify the community issues discussed. Thus, she could meet more residents and made friends with them (Jul.17). Participation in the community allowed women to contact more residents and get the chance to share information and experience with others.

Some women members built up networks not only through participation in the group activities, but also through joining in other organizations. For example, Mrs. Law and Mrs. Ng were core members of the mutual aid committee of their blocks. And Ms. Tin was an active member in another community group backed up by a political concern group. Participation in different community groups helped women to come to know more residents. When women's networks were enlarged, they could gain more information about the community as discussed in the previous section. For example, they could quote actual examples to illustrate their opinions about community problems, like the worsening crime situation in the community. Therefore, community participation helped women extend their networks and resources.

And vice versa, women's networks with residents helped their community participation. For example, when a journalist visited the group for details about their complaint, Mr. Man told Ms. Tin to lead him to the construction site of the new housing estate, so that the journalist could take a photo of it. Actually, Mr. Man was not familiar with certain places in the community he had lived in for years. He explained that he never dared to wander around the housing blocks because residents there would suspect him to be a thief. In order to get a good shot of the whole site, Ms. Tin finally led the journalist to a resident's home. That resident was a friend of Ms. Tin. So she allowed the journalist to take photographs of the site from her balcony (Feb. 16). Indeed, women's own network might help them to gain more influence in the group they participated in.

On the other hand, men contacted residents mainly during group activities. Usually, the male leader was treated as an advisor by the residents. For instance, when Mr. Man was walking towards the centre with other group members, a female resident identified him and asked about the progress of the new flat selection. In fact, Mr. Man did not know that resident (Feb. 25); he said he was like a salesman because so many residents sought his advise on how to choose new flats for moving to at that time. After the mass meetings, residents would surround the male leader and the social workers and ask them to explain information, even though women members had already explained those issues during the meetings.

It seemed that community participation helped women extend their networks in

the community. Women members had established supportive and reciprocal relationship with one another and with residents as well. On the other hand, women's networking increased their commitment and influence to the group. But men were still confirmed in to their leading role when building up networks both within the group and in the community. Instead of making more friends, men were being recognized as information providers or teachers. As a result, it would be difficult for men and women to build up equal friendships within the group. Nevertheless, women seemed to have stronger networking ability than men in the course of community participation.

Skills Learning

Having already looked at how gender difference operate in gaining access to information and in network building, we now turn to another area acquisition of skills. Gender differentiation was also reflected in two aspects in skill acquisition. First, men and women used different styles in learning skills. Men acted independently while women had to rely on social workers' help. As a result, men were assumed to have higher abilities than women. Second, there existed a bias in the emphasis on the type of skills. Presentation and negotiation skills were more honored than skills for practical jobs, the latter becoming secondary and not requiring many skills.

Learning Process

Group members would learn skills of negotiation and communication through their participation in the group activities. But the learning process was different between men and women. Men seemed more independent as they did not require social workers to provide them with training. On the other hand, women were more dependent on the social workers to help them to perform jobs such as how to communicate with officials or how to prepare a speech.

When women tried to do the presentation jobs, they needed social workers to help them in understanding information, as well as in preparing and practicing a speech or contact as illustrated in previous chapters. During the preparation, women could learn necessary skills from social workers. For example, when the joint committee wanted to seek Dr. Hung's advice on the problems of the rent rate policy, Ms. Tin was assigned to arrange a meeting with him for the group. She asked the social worker, Mr. Bon, how to make the contact. Women needed social workers to teach them the skills of communication. Mrs. See told how the social worker helped her do the coordination job:

> " 'Sir Bon' called me to come to the centre. He told me to make a phone
>
> call to who and who. He taught me how to do the coordination job [such
>
> as] preparing the conversation and practicing the speech. I didn't do it
>
> alone. Indeed, they taught me everything, I just only offered my voice [to
>
> perform the job]." (Jul. 05)

Most of the time, social workers offered training to group members to perform their jobs. Particularly, they would remind women members to come to the centre to have a briefing on how to communicate with officials or how to prepare and present a speech. Thus, women members seemed to receive more attention from social workers. For instance, the social worker, Mr. Bon, said he had to spend more time with women members in preparation of the task. "Usually, the preparation time for women was double as for men." He explained, "And men's preparation was usually more simple. They just need instrumental help such as the procedures of a mass meeting or the data needed for presentation." But for women, he recalled, "We had to comfort their nerves before going into the preparation of speech (Jun. 28)." Only after having eased women's fear of speaking, could he offer them technical help such as how to prepare speeches and which procedures they needed. As a result, social workers paid more attention to helping and training women to perform their jobs of speaking and communicating.

Women continued to ask help even though their skills had been improved. For example, the social worker, Mr. Bon, thought Ms. Tin could handle the work of coordination by herself. He realized her change, "At the beginning, I had to stand by her side helping her to communicate. Now, she could respond to the person contacted by herself. I just stay beside her not needing to remind her (Jun. 28)." Though he did want Ms. Tin to try the job independently, he found that she still did not have confidence with herself even though she had learnt the skills required. It was not easy

for women to act independently because they still lacked sufficient confidence.

On the other hand, male members were more independent in performing a job, especially the male leader and the youngest male member. Usually, social workers would give a briefing on the matters to men and leave them alone to prepare and perform the jobs, such as negotiating, coordinating or presenting. As Ms. Tin described, she and other group members, such as Mrs. See, Ms. Pak and Mr. On, had to go to the centre to prepare speeches, except Mr. Man, the male leader. She stated, " 'Sir Man' did not need to have preparation like us because he was familiar with the job already. He could handle it well." As Mr. Man stated, "I don't need any speech sheet. I won't require it. I just elaborate my own viewpoints (自己去發揮) (Jun. 26)."

Men were regarded as independent. Thus, they would not receive much attention if they did not ask for help. Sometimes, men could learn negotiation skills through social workers' sharing their experience in the group. But most of the time they had to acquire the necessary skills from their own experience. On the other hand, women seemed more dependent. In spite of that, they got more chances to learn and practice skills from social workers, who could provide them with new perspectives in understanding the community issues.

Type of Skills

While men did not get much chance to learn new skills from social workers,

women were limited by the type of skills. As the women were expected to take up the practical jobs for the group, they had to spend most of their time in the preparation work rather than learning different skills such as reporting or negotiating. Although more practice made women more skillful in doing practical jobs, they were limited to such jobs at the same time.

In fact, there was not much training of practical skills such as how to prepare the promotion work, or how to make tools and banners for group actions. These skills were learned only when women members understook the jobs. As social workers did not put much effort on offering training for these skills to group members, these jobs were then treated as easy or secondary and as not requiring any skills. For example, when the group discussed who would take up the job of giving the petition letter to authorities during a group protest, social workers only cared about who was willing to try the chairman role. The social worker, Mr. Ku, said that the job of presenting the petition letter could be assigned to any resident who joined the action. They never noticed that this job could help participants build up their self-confidence and commitment to the group. As a result, no one would value supporting jobs nor care about the skills required. So the provision of skills was limited and the sense of inferiority attached to supporting jobs was reinforced.

Perhaps the problem of gender difference in skill learning was not only a matter of the limitation women encountered, but also a matter of the attitude of how to value the "practical skills" women contributed. Group members as well as social workers

seldom praised promotion and coordination work or the work of making of banners and materials for group actions. At least, they did not put these jobs as an item on the agenda or for evaluation, like the performance of negotiating or speaking publicly. Consequently, only the skills of negotiating or speaking, which were mainly taken up by men, were considered as necessary and important skills for community participation. The bias towards certain skills helped to reinforce the unequal power relations between the two genders.

Facing disadvantages in skills learning, women could still gradually build up self-confidence. Mastering certain skills gave them a sense of contribution and willingness to commit more to the group. For example, both Ms. Tin and Mrs. See were skilled in making banners before they joined the group. They had more confidence in taking on the job of preparing banners and tools for group activities. They did not require much help, except for needing social workers to design and print the written text for them. Nevertheless, they seemed to be more independent in doing such practical jobs than in doing others. As Ms. See said, "Ms. Tin and I were familiar with the work [banners making for group protest]." Women felt satisfied with their performance despite the group's neglect of practical skills.

Though being viewed as dependent on the social workers, women got more chances to learn skills than men did in community participation. But at the same time, the types of skills they learned were limited to the kinds of jobs they performed, as no systematic training of different skills was offered by social workers. In spite of

this, women improved in practical skills. However, since only skills of speaking, negotiating and analyzing were acknowledged as important and necessary, women's practical skills were seen as insignificant or minor. The skewed emphasis on certain "lower" skills was thus imbued with gender differentiation in the group. Nevertheless, women's skills were improved through more practice and their self-confidence was then increased. So, even with limited chances, women still had their ways to make changes.

In this chapter, I had revealed three aspects of accessing resources in community participation, including obtaining information, network building and skills acquisition. Men and women had different experiences when trying to access various resources; gender differentiation was reinforced through the biased emphasis on knowledge and the lack of awareness on the part of social workers and all participants. Indeed, professionals' intervention in skills training and information provision made the gender problems in community participation more complicated and obscured.

Nevertheless, women had tried to create their own space so as to extend their access to resources. Particularly their strength at networking helped to overcome their disadvantage considerably.

After examining the operation of gender/power relations in the involvement in leadership, in the division of labour and the gaining of access to resources, that

served as important aspects of group life, we will now summarize what we have

learned and discuss its implications in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I will try to review the study and discuss its implications. First, I will briefly summarize our research journey. Second, I will try to formulate conclusions about the findings of the exploration. And lastly, I will discuss the lessons we have learned and the implications for future community organizing work leading towards an egalitarian world.

The Research Journey

As the mission of community work is to free the grassroots from oppression through participation, I have raised the gender question in chapter 1. Did this affect the applicability of liberation to women as they participated in community organizations? To address this question, this study tried to explore women's experience in achieving liberation and breaking away from oppression in their community participation.

I have adopted the perspective of poststructuralist feminism looking at how the power/gender relations as well as women's subjectivity were constituted and re-constituted in their participation in community organization. Three main aspects of group life including involvement in leadership, division of labour, and access to resources were examined. When designing the research methodology, I have used a qualitative research approach based on feminist consciousness, to conduct the study.

As the research is targeted at the constitution of personal perceptions and gender relations in the course of the participation process, I have employed both participant observation and in-depth interviewing as data collection methods for the fieldwork to ensure credibility.

To achieve an in-depth analysis of women's experience, I have selected one community organization as a sample case. It was set up by an NLCDP team with both active men and women members having joined it for between less than half year to three years. To start the fieldwork, I have first engaged in participant observation with the group for about 10 months, by attending the group meetings, collective actions, mass meetings and other group activities. I then carried out a number of in-depth interviews with all the women members to understand' their perceptions of their participation. The male leader as well as the social workers, who had great influence on the group and the women in particular, have also been interviewed to explore how they perceived their own role and women's participation in the group.

Findings

What have we found in the constitution of women's oppression and liberation in the course of this research? In this section, I will try to highlight the findings that have already been presented in the previous chapters to address the main question. First, the exploration found that gender differentiation was sustained in the community organization. It was reinforced through a masculine bias towards

knowledge on the one hand and an interactive legitimizing process on the other. However, women still tried to struggle for their own space in the group, even though changes were limited and preliminary. Nevertheless, community participation provided the opportunity for women to learn and struggle for changes and liberation. I will discuss the details of these concluding remarks as follows.

Gender Differentiation Reinforced

First, gender differentiation was found to exist in the community group. Men and women encountered different restrictions, expectations, acceptances, and comments in their community participation. Their different experiences were due to the taken-for-granted assumptions of the gender role. Men were seen as capable and having higher ability towards taking leadership roles whereas women were viewed as inferior and secondary. Instead, women were expected to take on supporting jobs and roles, and, in fact, they were bound to taking such jobs and roles, even if they had spent more time participating in the group. In this way, women just repeated their traditional role rather than seeking changes in their community participation. Hence, gender differentiation was sustained in the group as men were privileged and women were hindered in their participation.

To make matters worse, women's subordinated role was never questioned during the organizing process. Rather, the gender hierarchy was reinforced through the interactive legitimizing process and the bias towards masculine knowledge

standard.

Knowledge Bias

The knowledge emphasized in the group was the one that was based on the ability of literacy and rationality. Such knowledge bias supported the unequal gender relations in the community organization participation.

How did it work? First, the group stressed the ability of reading and writing, and of rational analysis, assuming it to be the path to achieve group tasks and improve the grassroots' life. Most information that the group considered important was contained in written documents, such as the petitions by the group or housing policies. Literacy then became the knowledge standard in evaluating one's ability. This knowledge standard favoured men as they had already achieved certain privileges in gaining social resources, such as the opportunity for education. So they could easily meet the literacy requirement. On the contrary, women, particularly grassroots women of older generations, were disadvantaged because of their restricted access to resources, especially education. Therefore, the faith in literacy-based knowledge helped construct the gender differentiation in the group.

Alongside the standardization of the literacy-based knowledge was the exclusion of other types of knowledge. As we have illustrated in the previous chapters, knowledge based on personal experience and on emotional expressions was treated as irrational and unknowledgeable, instead of being respected and appreciated.

When other knowledge styles were not being recognized, participants skillful in such alternative knowledge, and who were usually women, were being marginalized and regarded as inferior.

The exclusion of alternative knowledge not only disadvantaged women, but also distorted their self-confidence. And lastly, the distortion solidified when women themselves accepted the biased knowledge as the standard ability one was required to have. Believing that gaining such knowledge would get power, women tried and were encouraged to learn the biased ability, acting like men in order to "solve" their problem of inferiority and incapability.

Being unaware of the biased knowledge standard reinforced the prejudiced conception of one's ability and values. Instead of recognizing and exercising one's own power, the grassroots had to first learn and match the required standard for competency. Participants who were disadvantaged by the existing social structure would then suffer more. And those most likely to do so were women. Therefore, the biased knowledge standard hindered other more diverse knowledge styles on which the powerless rely in their everyday life, thus harming or even blocking the empowerment of the grassroots.

Oppression Constructed through the Interaction Process

Another key to the constitution of gender differentiation in the group was the interactive legitimizing process of the gender bias. Actually, the conception of

gender bias required agents or actors for expansion. When no one was aware of or cared about the risk of gender inequality, the oppressive modalities got the chance to survive and were thus reinforced in the group.

During the organizing process, participants including women, embraced and confirmed the gender bias through their personal interactions. Without any challenge, the participants exercised the oppressive course of action.

Indeed, the unequal gender/power relations needed participants' internalization of gender bias for legitimacy. One's biased perception could not alone maintain the gender inequality in the group. Rather, gender inequality was constructed and reinforced through the dynamic interpersonal relations in terms of expectations of, assumptions about, comments to, and acceptance of group members during their participatory actions. Tolerated by group members and social workers alike, the oppressive conception of the two genders became the norm in the group.

Taking for granted the biased conception of genders, the group then repeated the expectation of women taking the supporting role and men the leading role. Such acceptance of the differentiated gender role further affected or strengthened group members' perception on gender. As a result, gender differentiation was sustained in the community organizing process.

The fatal danger of such legitimizing process was that unequal gender relations did not manifest as an explicit tension between men and women. Rather, it allowed gender differentiation to be obscured by the friendly and harmonious atmosphere, so

that the group members felt satisfaction without realizing it as a problem.

Stepping-stone for Liberation

However, women might not entirely be subjected to oppression during their community participation. Liberation was still possible for women since the power relations within the group were always dynamic.

Women were able to seek changes through community participation. As we have illustrated in chapter 7, women were strong at networking, especially creating reciprocal relationships with group members and residents. With expanded networks, women got more information about the community issues. Moreover, even though they participated in the group in a supporting role, they could still learn certain things, such as communication skills, particularly from the social workers. When gaining more skills and information, together with expanding their community networks, women could gradually increase their self-confidence. They believed they had learned more and had become smarter after their active participation in the community process.

As well, in the course of learning and practicing their voicing of their rights and interests, women were not afraid and were more willing to express their dissatisfaction. They tried their own ways to seek improvements in their life. For example, they increased their influence informally or seized every chance to request solutions to community problems they were concerned about, as discussed in the

previous chapters. Therefore, community participation did provide chances for women to counter the inequality they experienced.

Unfortunately, women's struggle for change may not ensure their liberation from gender inequality. Since community participation is a dynamic interaction process, the gender/power relations are not fixed and are always being re-constituted. Within this ongoing process, women may change their subordination and release from oppression, but at the same time, even if freed from oppression, women may not secure their challenges to inequality. If women achieve change through acquiring the biased ability to compete with the oppressor, but without awareness of gender inequality, they may possibly, but not surely, become another oppressor thus reinforcing gender differentiation. So the dynamic interactive characteristics of change render the attempts on liberation more complicated and multidimensional.

Community participation does not guarantee the liberation or empowerment of the grassroots, but rather, it may create the possibility for the reinforcement of gender inequality, covered by the claim for collective rights. Under the mask of rational and literate knowledge, men got advantages and took important posts while women served as supporters, thus mimicking their subordinated role in society or family. Moreover, through personal interactions during the participation process, the gender bias became legitimated and strengthened. But community participation was a dynamic process. It also served as a stepping-stone for women to try to change the oppression in their life. Nevertheless, one needs to be aware that personal liberation

does not ensure the elimination of gender bias. Without sensitivity to gender inequality, women's liberation may just be a masked reinforcement of further oppression.

What Have I Learned?

This exploration of women's participation experience in community organization showed that gender inequality is not something separated from our minds and determined alone by the hierarchical nature of the social structure. Rather, the oppressive conception of gender has already affected the ways in which we make sense of the world and of ourselves through the socialization of gendered identity through which we grow up. Our focus on fighting inequality thus needs to go a step beyond the oppressive structure.

Existing community work advocates empowering the grassroots to compete for resources so as to release them from oppression. Unfortunately, this kind wish may result in legitimizing the oppressive situation instead of eliminating it. To get the tasks achieved may be important, but to neglect the dynamic power relations, particularly gender relations, among the grassroots will finally lead to reinforcing the oppressive practices, however unintentionally. In fact, to get power from the powerful may just become a musical chair game, only replacing the existing oppressors by new ones. Although empowering the grassroots to improve their life is a mission of community work, we still have to be aware of the true meaning of

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improvement.

Both organizers and participants focus mainly on the achievement of instrumental tasks and ignore community building in the course of collective organizing. However, if lacking the building of community, their success in acquiring the betterment of living could only be a kind of personal enhancement rather than empowerment. That explains why would a participant exercise oppressive power over other members after improving one's abilities.

Maybe what we should do first is to build the awareness of or sensitivity to all forms of oppression in our daily practices and in our making sense of the world. We have to bear in mind that we are the agents, carrying out oppressive courses of actions, so that we may avoid and locate them to be challenged.

Thus, if want to avoid the reinforcement of inequality in the grassroots' participation life, social workers may need to consider the anti-oppressive approach (AOP) in the implementation of services in community organizing. As Dominelli (1996) explained, AOP is "a form of social work practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities in the work that is done with people whether they be users ('clients') or workers (p.171)." The employment of such approach helps to tackle oppression and gender inequality, in particular those that are hidden in grassroots' community organizing.

As a whole, the study has offered a review of the risk of gender inequality in community organizing work. It has tried to raise attention to gender issues that have

been overlooked in the field. If we could create the awareness of and sensitivity to oppression in all forms, we might be able to avoid the ridiculous situation that, on the one hand, we try to claim social justice, but, on the other, we neglect and reinforce gender differentiation during the organizing process.

These implications are not new in our understanding of women's situation. But what made this research different from the previous studies was its focus on the gender/power relations and subjectivity constituted through language and discourses in women's community participation within a specific context. Instead of providing grand narratives to explain the causes of oppression in their totality, my focus on the micro and contextual level has helped to obtain a more in-depth understanding on the construction of women's oppression and liberation.

However, the study has its limitations. First, the time was for studying the dynamic gender relations in community organization has been too short. In fact, a longitudinal study would help to detect and pinpoint the subtle conflicts in or complexity of the dynamic interpersonal relations. Moreover, with limited time, the exploration of the constitution of gendered perceptions was quite difficult, since participants were not accustomed to express and explain their taken-for-granted conceptions of the gender role reflected in their participatory actions.

Nevertheless, the attempt to locate gender problems in a local context is important for the understanding of its survival and reinforcement. I therefore argue for more explorations of how oppression is constructed and liberation possible in our

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daily life and within a specific context. Another implication for future exploration is that the use of a poststructuralist feminist perspective helps the researcher to go a step beyond structural determination. To be aware of the interlocking of power, subjectivity and language may help to reveal the complicated constitution and re-constitution of gender relations in daily life.

Yet oppression may offer us a stable, conforming, efficient, or even privileged life, if and only if we could insert ourselves into the hierarchy of the powerful. But at the same time, such stratification of human society would diminish, if not eradicate, our capacity to create and diversify our life styles with respect and dignity and by which we characterize human beings and which is required for the development of mankind. Of course, liberation takes the risk of abandoning conformity, privileges and efficiency, especially if we measure the risk in terms of a livable and sustainable world. Advocating for liberation may face uncertainty in that we never know what will be the result of the battle. Still, if we want to survive as human beings, such risk, whilst costly is worthwhile.

Appendix I

Summary of Community Development Service

Type of Service	Service Criteria	Provision as at 31.3.1998		
		Govt	NGO	Total
a) District Community Centre/ Community Centre	An area with a population of 80,000 to 120,000 not covered by (b) and (c) below	13	13	26
b) Area Community Centre/ Estate Community Centre	An area with a population of 40,000 to 80,000 not covered by (c) below	20	-	20
c) Neighbourhood Community Centre/ Community Hall	An area with a population of 15,000 to 40,000	45	-	45
d) Neighbourhood Level Community Development Project	The first three criteria and one or more of the remaining criteria must be fulfilled for an area to be selected as a project area: (i) A population between 3,000 to 15,000. (ii) The area would not be cleared within 3 years. (iii) Low income areas. (iv) Geographically isolated communities being remote from the town centre and not accessible to welfare services. (v) New settlement with inadequate welfare services. (vi) Heterogeneous communities with groups of conflicting interests, different ethnic groups or social classes. (vii) Areas with long-standing environmental/social problems.	-	51	51

(adapted from Social Welfare Department, 1998, p.115 & 231)

Appendix II

Confirmation of Participant Observation
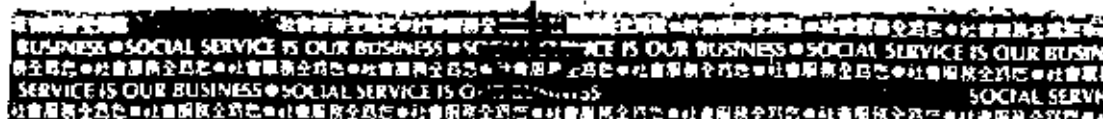
香港基督教服務處
HONG KONG CHRISTIAN SERVICE

September 24, 1999

Miss Yu Fung Ying
c/o Dr Chan Kam Wah
Department of Applied Social Studies
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Hung Hom
Kowloon

Dear Miss Yu,

Re : Field Observation in Cheung Sha Wan Community Development Project

Your letter of August 25, 1999 referred. I am glad to inform you that permission is hereby given to you to conduct field observation in our Cheung Sha Wan Community Development Project in your fulfillment of the requirement of the Master Degree of Philosophy in Applied Social Studies at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The period of the observation should start from October 1, 1999 and end on June 30, 2000. In order to protect the right and privacy of our clients as well as to ensure the services at CSWCDP would not be hindered, interviews with our clients should have our and their prior consent. We reserve the right to terminate any observation and/or interviews at any time if we find the welfare of our clients and/or workers is going to be affected. Furthermore, no identifiable personal details should be included in the report/thesis.

Please give me your written reply if you have no objection to the above-mentioned. Thank you.

Wishing you a successful and enjoyable participation process.

Yours sincerely,

Suen Lai Sang
Assistant Director

SLS/LYK/cy

Appendix III

Fieldwork Schedule

| Time \ Date | Participant Observation | | | | | | Sub-Total | In-depth Interview |
	Group Meeting	Joint Committee Meeting	Meeting w/ Official/ Council-or	Group Action	Mass Meeting/ Promot-ion	MISC*		Respondents
Aug. 99	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	--
Sep. 99	2	1	--	--	--	1	4	--
Oct. 99	1	3	1	--	--	1	6	--
Nov. 99	3	--	1	1	--	--	5	Tin
Dec. 99	2	1	1	--	--	--	4	See/ Pak
Jan. 00	3	--	2	1	2	1	9	Tin
Feb. 00	2	--	3	--	--	2	7	See
Mar. 00	2	--	2	--	--	1	5	--
Apr. 00	2	--	--	--	1	2	5	Tin x2/ Pak
May. 00	1	--	1	1	3	--	6	--
Jun. 00	2	--	--	--	--	--	2	Tin/ Man/ Ku/ Bon
Jul. 00	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	Tin/ See/ Pak/ Law/ Ng
Aug. 00	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Au
Total times:	20	5	11	3	6	10	55	18

* Miscellaneous group activities including preparation work, group gathering, meeting with news reporter, district board meeting, etc.

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