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An Investigation into Widows' Discursive Constructions of Their Families - Using Jaber F. Gubrium's Ethnomethodology

A Thesis Presented for Degree of Master of Philosophy at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University by LAM Siu Keung

Department of Applied Social Studies The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

September 2000
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Abstract of thesis

"An Investigation into Widows’ Discursive Constructions of Their Families -
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submitted
by
LAM Siu Keung
for the Degree of Master of Philosophy
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A husband’s death damages his family permanently. It will never be the same again. His surviving family needs to reconstruct itself in order to carry on living as a family. This arduous reconstruction is mainly carried out by the widow. When she explains to herself as well as to others why she reconstructs her family in the way she does it, she needs to bring in her discourse the fundamental problematic "What is family?" This problematic is evidently important for developing family intervention strategies in social work. It happens to be the focus of study for Jaber Gubrium, an American Sociologist.

Gubrium belongs to the sociological school of ethnomethodology. Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology, never studied the family. Ethnomethodology is deeply concerned with the social construction of reality. Garfinkel developed it as a theory of social action that runs contrary to that of Talcott
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Vantage point of my study

This study looks into concrete cases of families coping with a crisis, the death of husbands. My concern in this study is two folded. One is with social theory; the other application in social work practice.

On the theoretical side, I aim to examine a time-honoured sociological topic since Talcott Parsons: The meaning of family. Particularly, I endeavour to delve into one important sociological school in which has been rapidly developing after the hay days of Parsons in the 1960s and has been contributing to the development of family theory in the Western sociological academia. This school of thought in discursive constructionism, which highlights that social entities are not “things-out-there” but constructed, negotiated and maintained through possible discourse. I have identified a key figure, Jaber Gubrium to represent this discipline. Gubrium is a prominent empirical researcher-turned-social theorist, and his major problematic is rested on three general theoretical questions: "What is family?" "Where is family?" and "Who is family?"

To locate more specifically my theoretical approach, I would describe my attempt as one to apply Gubrium's approach on family study to the case of Hong Kong and with the target group being widows. In terms of methodological concern, I examine the theoretical and contextual background of the method Gubrium employed in his classical studies of family and selectively adopt and abandon some of the concepts in his method while devising some of my own to cater for the unique cultural situation of Hong Kong and that of my target group. By doing so, I trust that my study can contribute to the social constructionism study of the family by examining its social work applications and implications to the context of Hong Kong.
On the side concerning social work application, I have carried out a small-scale empirical research aiming at providing a novel perspective to supplement the prevailing social work intervention approach, that can help families experiencing the loss of the breadwinner cope with the crisis. This new intervention direction, as I would like to emphasize, is directed specifically at widows losing their husbands because, in many cases, both local and foreign, (1) it is the husband who is often the major money maker of the family; (2) losing husbands not only brings about tremendous psychological stress, but also, mainly owing to (1), provokes the considerations involving financial arrangement to widows; and (3) widows are more likely than widowers to seek help from people outside her family of procreation. Therefore, my project carries a commitment to draw insights from the empirical research, which could open a way to supplement existing social work approach. The new perspective is expected to help the widow in mobilizing the hidden strength of the "family" - a key term which will be examined both theoretically and empirically in this thesis - and ultimately enable her to cope with the crisis successfully.

1.2 Theoretical Concern and social work application

At the first sight, the two sides of the concern in this study mentioned above seem very unrelated to each other. However, I would argue for the reverse of it, i.e., I contend that they are interrelated. To justify this claim, I have to illustrate clearly the reasons behind. First, throughout the research process, I regard myself as a "sociologist-cum-social worker." I therefore view social theory and social work application as mutually informed each other. Second, I would like to highlight that discursive constructionism has a special theoretical relevance to social work intervention. In many cases encountered by social workers, the objective fact of the existence of "misfortune," e.g., the passing away of one's husband, is unalterable and the structural damage thus brought about to the client is not amenable to social work intervention. A major role of social work intervention, is the mobilization of one's resources, social and psychological, to survive the crisis. In doing so, it inevitably involves a subjective construction by the clients, including the concept of family in the case of the family-in-crisis. And, it is
important to note that, in my case, the widow is usually the one who conducts this reconstruction discursively. The widow tends to provide verbal justifications both to others and herself when she tries to explain the way she has coped with the crisis. In this case, in helping her survive the crisis, the major role of a social worker is should not be confined to giving financial assistance to the client, or to introduce behaviour modification to surviving family members. Instead, social workers usually use conversations – i.e., discourse in its narrow sense – to facilitate the coping strategies of family members. Therefore, I contend that discursive constructionism and social work intervention are by their very nature closely linked with each other. Besides, one should be reminded that drawing theoretical insights from social constructionism to social work application or vice versa is not novel, albeit not common, endeavours in the Western academia.¹

Having examined the major aims of this thesis, I find at least two ways in which I can proceed with my project. One is to begin with the discussions of relevant social theories and lead to the development of a social work intervention approach. The other is to begin with an extensive collection of empirical cases and, after a detailed analysis, the results culminate in the development of a social theory appropriate of theorizing them. In this thesis, I opt for the first way due to two main reasons. First, I observe that, traditionally, social workers are not sensitive to the theoretical implications of social theories. Only until very recently do a couple of local social workers begin to query the overwhelming influence of psychotherapy over the family social workers who ignore the perspectives from the wider social contexts.² Personally, I agree with these handful local scholars that such unbalanced development is unhealthy to social work practice. Besides, the workload required by the extensive collection of empirical cases then the analyses them for developing of a theory will be too heavy to be managed for a study in this scale. More importantly, I deem that, to a large extent, this task has been

² 朱志強 (forthcoming)社會工作與心理及家庭治療．典範與本質：社會工作反思．八方出版社．
done successfully by Gubrium who carried out social work related studies (of course, all these studies carried theoretical implications at the end.) in a variety of empirical settings like nursing home, rehabilitation hospital, day hospital and caregiver support groups.3

1.3 Organization of the thesis

In this thesis, I first link up Gubrium's theory with the traditional social theories which carrying significant implications to family studies in chapter 1. The three key figures I have chosen are Talcott Parsons, Reuben Hill and Harold Garfinkel. I then turn to review local family research literature in chapter 2. I find that most local researchers simply copy Western theories into local settings. In this regard, local researchers make no new theoretical claims but just local re-confirmations of what have been said in the West. Their significance lies in supporting import theories with local data. Worse still is that their patronage of Western theories are highly selective to ignore some very influential work in Chapter 4. I then provide a critical examination of Gubrium's discursive constructionism, with the focus on the three questions he raised, i.e. "What is family?" "Who is family?" and "Where is family?" Answers to these three questions provide a point to diverge from the existing local literature and are expected to shed light on the development of a new method for social work intervention. My task then is to find out the answers in local context and modify Gubrium’s theory accordingly, and derive new social work intervention perspective that can improve or supplement existing ones.

With the purpose to collect local data, I chose widow as my research subject and in-depth interviews were conducted. The justifications for the choice are presented in Chapter 5. Definitely, widows have their characteristics that unique to them and different from other subject groups like widowers. Literature on widowhood and the influence of patriarchal traditions on women, with Chinese widow in particular, is also reviewed in Chapter 5, so are some details about the samples of my cast study.

Throughout the interviews, a non-directive approach which tries to avoid imposing any presumption of family on subjects was adopted. I simply prepared a set of non-directive questions concerning family lives, and let subjects freely associate the meaning of their families, I just interrupted when there was a need to make the conversation go on and for necessary clarifications in case of possible misunderstanding. These details are provided in Chapter 6. Also in Chapter 6, individual case analysis is completed and the concept of Garfinkel’s mundane description as data is applied for analysis. I then thread the individual findings into a few characteristics in the reconstruction of family conceptions of widows.

The last Chapter of this thesis, Chapter 7, is, first, to deepen my understanding of the needs of widow families. I believe that this task can be accomplished through discerning different risk levels to which the six widow families belong, and hence, the scope for social work intervention can be clearly depicted. Second, I shall use one of the six empirical cases as an example to illustrate the prevailing ways that local social worker would deal with it. What follows afterwards will be the third and the final task – to demonstrate how the ethnomethodological approach can supplement prevailing social work intervention practices in helping widows coping with the crisis. The contribution of this study, if there is any, is only to serve as a stepping stone for further development in local family theory, and for developing social work intervention approaches basing on discursive family concepts in the Hong Kong context.
Chapter 2
The Changing Western Problematic - What is Family?

2.1 Introduction

This dissertation is an empirical study of Hong Kong families. But it is also a conscious study of the theoretical basis of past local works. This chapter aims at identifying and introducing major focuses of Western family theories since Talcott Parsons. I believe that it is more appropriate to characterize the modern development in family theories as shifting in focuses rather than as efforts to locate continuity to or opposing arguments in other theories. Different focuses of family theories have profound implications on the empirical studies of family, and even on the actual development of family patterns, as we are beginning to be aware of the institutionalization of social theories. I deem a careful examination of major focuses of Western family theories a most appropriate starting point for a sound and solid empirical research on family, and for a critical review of local family theories.

Family theories since fifties have been shaped largely by structural-functional theory of Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons. The existence of families is accountable by the ways they meet the needs of society for its continuation and that its existence is actualized through the replacement of its members. There are four main functions for the family, namely reproduction, maintenance, social placement and socialization of the young.

It is however Parsons who constructed the sociological model for a comprehensive social analysis based on that functional approach of family. The structural functional approach Parsons represents, in very simple terms, views a relationship between two factors necessary to the continuation of each other and to the structure that they are in. The classical example of this kind of mutual relationship is that between industrialization and the isolation of the nuclear family, as expounded by Parsons (1955).
The systems theory approach of Reuben Hill is not in a strict sense rebellious against Parsons. It is a shift of research focus from the relationship between the family and the social structure as a whole, or to put it in the framework of Parsons, the functional fit of the isolated nuclear family and the pattern of employment, to the family itself as a system, and interacting with other systems. The whole problematic is changed. Family theories are no longer about the function of the family in the structuring of the society. To family theories adopting the systems theory, it is the functioning of the family as a system that is the crux of the matter.

Hill is famous for his call for theory unification which is “an all-purpose general family framework which could be understood and used by representatives of all the many disciplines working in the arena of family study.”4 His systems theory of family is an exemplary of his advocacy. The generality of systems theorizing of family, with its generality of concepts, has had a wide influence on family theorists of several disciplines.5 Hill’s systems theory opened up a new space for family research. Discussions about family control, family boundaries, and family development were prospering, so was the modeling of individual problems within a relationship dynamics, and the practical policy dimension of family theories also gained a theoretical backup in Hill’s contribution.6

From a theoretical goggle, I might be able to offer another perspective on Hill’s contribution to family theories, by looking at his predecessor as well as the one who guided the direction of family research to depart from his. To briefly summarize his shift from Parsons, one can say it’s a shift of the unit of analysis from action to

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4 Hill points out that for any particular theoretical approach they can be understood in terms of certain general properties of social theory. These general properties, he suggests, can be visualized in four dimensions, namely, structure, process, time and space. Hill and Hansen, 1960, quoted in Hill, R. (1966), “Contemporary development in family theory.” *Journal of Marriage and the family*. p.23.


6 ibid., pp66-71.
interaction. I then find Garfinkel coming after Hill, in the sense of his offering another new focus for the development of family theories. And in the sense that he turned the focus of family development from macrosociological analysis to microsociological one.

Though himself a student of Parsons, Garfinkel disagrees in almost each and every aspect of academic work with his teacher. His disagreement with Parsons, however, is in nature not different from that with Hill. Garfinkel’s main interest is in building a theory of social action, but one very different from that of Parsons. Garfinkel represents a different focus of family research, however, not only as compared with Parsons’s but also with Hill’s, through his alternative framework based on the experiential structure of individuals and his ethnomethodology. His work is grounded on that of Alfred Schutz, the social phenomenologist.

Garfinkel and his ethnomethodology can be characterized, as far as family study is concerned, as introducing a new unit of analysis and a new object of investigation. It is well recognized that in different theoretical approaches, the principal object of investigation is usually different. David Cheal (1989) even doubts whether “the family” is a basic unit, or a derived unit, or one unit of analysis among a number of plausible possibilities. Trost (1990) goes so far as to say that “Evidently no one 'knows' what a family is: our perspectives vary to such a degree that to claim to know what a family is shows a lack of knowledge.”

If the shift from Parsons to Hill is still subtle, the change from Hill to Garfinkel should be apparent. Garfinkel is interested in how practical reasoning of members of society produce order. He challenges the presumption of social institutions and shared value among members of society and concentrates on the constructing and organizing of subjective experiences in social action. An easier, and more relevant to my discussion,

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way to understand his relationship with both Parsons and Hill in family theory is through the exposition or application of his theory in family research by Jaber Gubrium. Gubrium characterizes the notion of family along Garfinkel’s theoretical line as a way of attaching and detaching meaning to interpersonal relations. He argues that the process to accomplish this attachment is in “social interaction, in talk and practical reasoning. Thus family discourse, not the family, is highlighted.”\(^9\) It summarizes nicely the shift of the focus of family theories of Garfinkel and Gubrium from that of Hill.

2.2 Talcott Parsons: The structurally isolated nuclear family

A first step towards understanding Parsons’s analysis of the family is through comprehending his theory of action and this requires a thorough review of some of his essential concepts: norms, social integration and voluntaristic theory of action.

2.2.1 Voluntaristic theory of action

As the voluntaristic theory of action is composed of ample concepts related to norms and actors’ conformity, it can help me have a better understanding of Parsons’ theory of action.\(^10\) For Parsons, norms and value are the main constituents of social integration, which are subject to the orientation of collective action. \(^11\) In fact, many sociologists pointed out that Parsons was preoccupied with the relationship between human action and social integration.

In analyzing actors’ action, one question arises: If there is a choice among many alternative courses of action, is the chosen course of action a random one or guided by

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\(^10\) Parsons observed that there are some kinds of patterned rules guiding every aspect of social action. He explained that reality maintenance is possible because “normative standards” constitute the basis on which courses of action were chosen.
certain criteria? Parsons approached the question at first from a normative perspective, i.e., in Mayhew L.H.'s (1982) words, the norm of rational efficiency. However, if all courses of action were chosen in terms of economic and effectiveness calculations, conflicting pursuit of ends, as argued by Hobbes, must result. Hobbes proposes that social life is not based on "rational calculation" alone, there must be some guiding frameworks coordinating conflicting interests. He calls these normative control frameworks agreements or social contracts. However Hobbes’s proposal has its own weaknesses. With such kind of social contracts as coordinating frameworks, they are thus non-empirical and shed no light on how actors could establish courses of action and ends.

Parsons's solution is that norms and its contents can not be derived from philosophical speculation about the agreement of rational individuals, norms must be studied naturalistically. He contends that social norms are not founded on rational calculations of individuals, whenever there are more than one person, norms - criteria of choices - must be responsive not just to the immediate interests of the actors, but also to the maintenance and coordination of their relations. By this argument, the function of social integration forms the foundation of Parsons's analysis.

When discussing normative control on actors' choice of courses of action and means, there comes an interesting question: As norms create constraints to actors in pursuing their own goals, how can actors ensure their personal interests in obeying the norms? Parsons raised a concept of "institutionalization." This concept suggests that norms often become attached to ends or even become ends in themselves. Further, institutionalization also provides a framework as to how conformity to norms becomes patterned, routinised and commonly supported. Throughout the process of

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14 The most elegant definition of institutionalization is "a linkage of norms and end -- actors coming to seek conformity as an end." Mayhew, L.H (1982) ed. Talcott Parsons on Institutions and Social Evolution,
institutionalization, there are two emphases contributing to its success: socialization and the hierarchy of control.

For socialization, its ultimate goal has already been reflected in the definition of institutionalization stated above: "a linking of norms and ends - actors coming to seek conformity as an end." It implies that actors are taught to conform to norms habitually, not because of fear of punishment or promise of rewards, but just for a natural inclination to conform. In other words, conformity to social norms is a need disposition in the actors' own personality structure. However, the theoretical space opened up by the concept of socialization caters only for those conformed actions. For deviant behaviour, it is not justifiable to conceptualize it as "unsocialized." For a theory to be universally applicable, it must comprehend the full range of structural conditions of order and disorder.

Based on the ground of socialization, Parsons further developed the concept of hierarchy of control, which proposes that social actors' inclination to conform is only one of the forces that support stable institutions. There are other forces and conditions that are hierarchically structured and contributed to the stabilization of social system. Actors dealing with the realistic world should follow regulative norms on the one hand and cope with conditional elements on the other. Such a process, as well as the resulting social order, can be viewed as exhibiting a hierarchy of control in the sense that some forces (to conform to social norms) are close to the ultimate conditions of action and others are close to the intentional or value-oriented pole of action. Parsons argues that the utmost normative element is not individual intention, but general values, with which concrete patterns of social life are regulated, i.e., the higher level general value control the lower level social life pattern. In his analysis of social system, four levels of hierarchy control

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15 "[T]he 'need-disposition' system of the individual actor seems to have two primary or elementary aspects, which may be called the 'gratificational' aspect and the 'orientational' aspect. The first concerns the 'content' of his interchange with the object word, 'what' he gets out of his object interchange with the object world, 'what' he gets out of his interaction with it, and what its 'cost' to him are. The second concerns the 'how' of his relation to the object world, the patterns or ways in which his relations to it are organized." Parsons, T. (1952)

were specified. The highest level is value and the other three are norms, collective goals and roles. As this conception of hierarchy of control is less relevant to my study, I shall not go deeply into his analysis.

2.2.2 Industrialization and family functions

In the industrialization era of USA, some sociologists linked social phenomena such as high divorce rate and low birth rate to the loss of family functions. The loss of family functions refers to the fact that some needs of family members, which formerly could be met within the family, are now met by outside agencies.\(^\text{17}\)

Parsons do not agree that high divorce rate and low birth rate are due to the loss of family functions. He points out that with increasing supply of residential buildings, the society could provide single family house to family members that prefer to stay together. As a matter of fact, more and more families are willing to live in such an arrangement. He termed this living pattern "family home." This kind of family home, consisted of families with small number of members, is well adapted to high geographical and occupational mobility needs of industrial societies.

Though not convinced that family has lost its functions, he believes that the American family has undergone some process of differentiation,\(^\text{18}\) in the sense that except some "root functions," other functions of the family have been taken up by social organizations like churches, the school, professional associations, etc. This differentiation process, according to Parsons, has weakened the kinship in society, but not

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\(^{17}\) It is not clear whether the nuclear family or the extended family is a unit under consideration. In most cases, it should be the functions of the extended family, or even the kinship. In some cases, functions performed by the nuclear family in industrial societies have increased. So failure to distinguish the extended family from the nuclear family may reach to confused conclusion. Luis, L.O. (1977) ed. *Beyond the nuclear Family Model.* California: SAGE

\(^{18}\) Different families in different societies have different functions. The difference should be associated with the extent to which the society is structurally differentiated. For example, in agricultural or primitive societies, there are relatively few concrete social systems, various social groups like extended family, the clan, the kinship, etc., have membership in overlapping with each other, so the boundaries between the nuclear family and the groups are relatively blurred when contrasted with the nuclear family in contemporary industrial societies.
the nuclear family.\textsuperscript{19} The nuclear family, as defined by Parsons, consisting of parents and their dependent children, ordinarily occupies a separate dwelling not shared with members of the family of origin of either spouse, and that this household is in the typical case economically independent, subsisting in the first instance from the occupational earnings of the husband-father. The rising number of nuclear family found in our society does not signifies the decline of the family,\textsuperscript{20} but only that it is a result of transfer of a variety of functions from the family to other structures of the society. In this sense, the family, has become a more and more specialized agency than before.

Back to the "root functions" that are maintained by the nuclear family, Parsons deems that the functions of the family in a highly differentiated society are not to be interpreted as functions directly on behalf of the society, but on behalf of personality. That is, the family is a place producing human personalities. In production, Parsons claims that there are two crucial processes, the first one is the primary socialization of children\textsuperscript{21} and the second one is the stabilization of adult personalities. These two processes are the most basic and irreducible functions of the family.

When the nuclear family is viewed as a "socializing agent" of society, it is clear that the function of stabilization of the personalities of adult members of both 'sexes' is concentrated on the marriage, that is, the spouses depend on each other. From this point of view, a particular significant aspect of the isolation of the nuclear family is the sharp discrimination in status, which it emphasizes between family members and non-members. In this regard, ties with spouses' parents and adult siblings, are correspondingly weakened. The nuclear family is said to be in a "structurally unsupported" situation.

2.3 Reuben Hill: Family as a social system

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p.50
\textsuperscript{21} The family is peculiarly suited for this task, by virtue of the prolonged dependency of the human infant and the intensity and priority of relationship within the family.
Parsons, as a structural-functionalist, described the process of historical transformation in Western societies as one of progressive "functional differentiation." He pointed out that social structures are differentiated in the way that each social unit performs only a limited range of functions. The family is one of such kinds of social units and performs a small number of functions such as infant socialization and adult personality stabilization. The high differentiation of functions found in the modern family, in particular the nuclear family, according to Parsons, is an adaptation to the highly industrialized and urbanized society. Since each social structure, when viewed from this differentiation perspective, only produces a small number of requirements for its own existence. As a result, it must depends upon exchanges with other social structures for its continuation.

This isolated nuclear family theory had brought enormous influence to macro-sociology in the fifties and the sixties. However, in the mid-sixties, the so-called "Parsons bashing" appeared. In Sussmann and Bruchinal (1962) clearly states that: "The ideal description of the isolated nuclear character of the American family system cannot be applied equally to all segments of American society. Regional, racial, ethnic and rural and urban, relations and family continuity patterns are known to exist." "Understanding of the family as a functioning social system interrelated with other social systems in society is possible only by rejection of the isolated nuclear family concept. Accepting the isolated nuclear family as the most functional type today has led to erroneous conclusions concerning the goals and functions of these other social systems."22

After the "Parsons bashing" in the sixties, the family systems theory offered another focus that influences contemporary macro-sociology. The idea of family as a system was derived from an interdisciplinary general systems theory, which originated in engineering. A system is a set of interacting elements which is capable of maintaining a "boundary" between itself and the outside world.23

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2.3.1 Characteristics of family as a system

Reuben Hill (1971) is one of the sociologists who introduced the family systems theory into family studies in early seventies. According to this theory, a family is considered as a social system because it carries the characteristics that are listed below:

1) family members occupy various positions which are in a state of interdependence, that is, a change in the behaviour of one member leads to a change in the behaviour of other members;
2) the family is an equilibrium-seeking and adaptive organization;
3) the family is a relatively closed, boundary-maintaining unit; and
4) the family is a task performing unit that meets both the requirements of external agencies in the society, and the internal needs and demands of its members.\(^{24}\)

According to Hill, each family is enclosed by a boundary. Within the boundary, family members have different social positions or roles like father, mother, husband, son, etc. They work together to solve problems faced by the family. In David Cheal's words, “successful solutions to problems become stabilized as normative behaviors. That is to say, the patterns of family life are believed to be supported by a general consensus among the members on what are appropriate and useful ways of acting.”\(^{25}\) The network of relationships that links family members together arises from shared normative expectations and these patterns distinguish one family from another and that is what Hill meant when he said that all families have "boundary maintaining qualities."

The concept of equilibrium maintenance assumes that there is a range of possible states within which the system can function and to which it can adapt. Whenever disruptions happen to the family, it will attempt to set up new interactional arrangements satisfactory to all parties concerned and the family often goes through a process that begins with an equilibrium to a disequilibrium, then to a reorganization of the family

which accomplish a new equilibrium.

The communication that happens within the family, on the one hand enables members to solve problems collaboratively, and on the other hand maintains the structure of the family. Hill further asserts that because of these collaborative endeavours among family members, it lays down a precondition for the family’s successful adaptation to the changing outside environment and for the continual performance of functions that keep it viable.

Hill (1971) identifies six such functions, they are:

1) physical maintenance of family members through providing food, shelter and clothing;
2) addition of new members through reproduction or adoption and releasing them when mature;
3) socialization of children for adult roles in the family and in other social groups;
4) maintenance of order within the family and between family members and outsiders;
5) maintenance of family morale and motivation to carry out tasks in the family and in other groups; and
6) production and distribution of goods and services necessary for maintaining the family unit.36

2.3.2 New concepts for family research

The family systems theory has a wide influence on different family related disciplines. Family therapy is one of those affected. From a systems perspective, the family represents a spring of potent therapeutic resources, for it can regain the equilibrium within the system through collaborative endeavours of members, despite the disruptive effects of the changing social context outside the family. Paul Boss explicitly pointed out:

"We emphasize, therefore, that a crisis does not have to permanently disable a
family ... Human systems, unlike mechanical ones, can learn from their experiences, even painful ones. After a crisis, families can redefine themselves and their resources ... or reconstruct their reality by changing the rules by which their system operates ... Crisis does not have to break the family structure. It only temporarily immobilizes it and may, in fact, lead to an even higher level of functioning after recovery than before.  

Cheal pointed out three ideas that are basic to all family systems theories, namely, family controls, family boundaries and family development. Family control is the capacity of a family to control its own behaviour through “feedback.” Feedback is a mechanism that channels the information to the decision-making process and induces behaviour change of the system. In other words, the feedback mechanism, that is, communication, is to impose control over the system. Broderick and Smith (1979) identified three levels of controls. The lowest level is family rules, the second level is cybernetic control and the highest level is morphogenesis.

As mentioned earlier, the family is a system with a boundary that provides a degree of separation from the outside world. In order to facilitate exchange between the family system and the outside world, the boundary therefore must be permeable to some extent. The two extremes of the permeability of a boundary are the "closed system" at one end and the "open system" at the other. A family system that has a healthy boundary and a

28 “Feedback," according to Carlfred B. Broderick (1990), can be positive or negative. He considered that feedback consists of a circular process in which a family member can influence his or her own future action in turn. The loop will be a positive one if the net effect of the loop is to increase the probability of the family members' repeating or escalating their behaviour. On the contrary, negative feedback loop is one with net effect that reduce the probability of the family members' repeating or escalating their behaviour.
29 “Family rules” refer to those regulations that prescribe particular response to particular inputs.
30 “Cybernetic control” occurs when information about the behavioural “output” of the system is then compared to some criterion, such as a goal or a policy, and choices are made between alternative rules that are available for use in the system’s repertoire.
31 “Morphogenesis” is the capacity of a system to change its own structure.
32 A closed system is described as an unhealthy one, for it has hindered the exchange of information between the family and its context. All important needs must be met within the family.
33 An open family system is believed to have potential problems defining what or where its boundary is. When that occurs it is said to suffer from "boundary ambiguity" which is thought to be associated with disorganized conditions of family living, which in turn give rise to family stress and to a variety of
control hierarchy is capable of developing its complexity and functioning in the direction that meets challenges of the outside world. According to Hill, the concept of family development rests on a view of the family as "a closed system of interacting personalities [which] is organized in such a way as to meet certain functional prerequisites through the accomplishment of certain individual and developmental tasks."\textsuperscript{34}

2.3.3 Critique of the family systems theory

The family systems theory is certainly a framework for contextualizing family interactions. But I have also seen that it does have its self-imposed limits. Criticisms of the family systems theory mainly came from feminism which is a form of thinking that tends to favour analyses of external constraints. Lerke Gravenhorst (1988) is one of the critics. She points out that from a systems perspective, the family is considered as a concrete unit, the interest and subjective feelings of its individual members, especially those of women who have long been care takers to other family members, are largely neglected. In this regard, the dependent role of women within the family is further consolidated. She says:

"More specifically, they must be thought of as a series of constraints set by patriarchal society in which the woman continuously makes a virtue of necessity. Her 'career' is doubly burdened by her being a member of both the lower-class and the female gender. She proceeds from the neglected, uninformed, and untrained girl to the young unskilled worker and single mother. Her next step is to married woman and caretaker of her child, and further to the mother of still more children and to the cleaning woman paid by the hour."\textsuperscript{35}

Besides, the feminist critique of the family systems theory also focuses on the neglect of gender differences within the family. Rachel Hare-Mustin (1987) pointed
“System approaches, by viewing family members as equal interacting parts in recursive complementarities, tend to ignore differences in power, resources ... assuming that men and women in the normal family are at the same hierarchical level.”

The difference in gender power between women and men is certainly a social issue rather than simply a family issue. It is said that the interactional pattern within the family must be an extension of the outside social structure. However, a careful examination of the systems theory reveals that attribution of different levels of control to different components of a system can be done easily with the theoretical resources of the systems theory and can then easily cater such criticisms. Another attack of a similar nature on the family systems theory is on its assumption that members’ endeavour to maintain the existence and continuation of the system is taken for granted. Jacobson (1985) points out that members' commitment in fact varies from a desire to preserve the system to a desire disengage from it. The reasons behind each kind of commitment must not be simply neglected, but should always be accounted for. That however can be tackled with the systems analysis of malfunctions.

A more serious attack is on the arbitrariness of the boundary of the family system. It contends that without a proper theory guiding the principles of family boundary maintenance, the concept of family boundary becomes “the mere container of the system’s substance designed, as it were, to keep the context at bay...” Cheal cited a wife-beating example in his discussion on this attack. However, from the perspective we
are taking, it suffices to comment that the family systems theory propounded by Hill has been only able to offer a framework of analysis but the unit of accounting to be employed is far from being satisfactory in view of the experiential level of life. And that is where Garfinkel enters the scene.

2.4 Harold Garfinkel: Critique of Parsons’s theory of action, and ethnomethodology

2.4.1 The Parsonian backdrop

The brief review of Parsons’ conception of norms and social integration provides a useful, in fact essential, background for understanding another important concept of his, i.e., systems of social action, one of the central claims in his seminal work The Structure of Social Action (Parsons, 1937). It is the central ideas of this work that highlight the contrast between Parsons the teacher and Garfinkel the student.40

Theoretically, any concrete phenomenon to which the theory is applicable may be described as a system of action.41 The basic units of such systems, Parsons argues, are “unit acts.”42 These unit acts, in turn, are composed of the following: (1) an actor, the agent of the end; (2) an end, a future state of affairs towards which the process of action is oriented; (3) a situation in which the actor acts and which he or she seeks to transform by his/her action, and which is analyzable into two elements: those over which the actor has no control - conditions, and those over which the actor has control - means; (4) a mode of orientation, comprising at least one selective standard, in terms of which the actor relates the end to the current situation, that is, guiding the choice of means.

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40 Or viewing it in another way, their common interest in building a theory of social action reveals their academic heritage.
42 “[A]ny concrete phenomenon to which the theory is applicable may be described as a system of action. In the concrete sense, such a system is always capable of being broken down into parts, or smaller sub-systems.” Parsons, T(1949)p.731.
From the elements that comprise the action frame of reference, some major implications can be outlined. First, since the concept "end" is a future state to be achieved, it cannot come into existence if the actor does not do something about it. Second, this frame of reference is subjective in a particular sense. This is because an action must always be brought up as involving a state of tension between two different orders of elements, namely, the normative and the contextual. These two orders, with the normative as selective standards and the contextual as an interpretation of the present situation, are necessary to be subjectively determined. In sum, the specification of each element in the action frame of reference inevitably involves some recourse to the subjective point of view of the actor. This stress on the subjective direction of human effort to overcome real world obstacles - Parsons' concept of "voluntaristic metaphysic,"43 accounts for how social actors alter the conditional elements in the direction of the conformity of norms. In other words, Parsons tries to explain how the subjectively held normative ideals guide social action.

Parsons argues that most of the actor's courses of action are determined by a set of "subjective elements." For example, orientations and attitudes that are the elements opaque to the actor who is seen only as the bearer of internalized value patterns - the "facts of social structure evolved in response to the functional imperatives" - and the task is accomplished by virtue of the "facts of personality" - a set of psychological properties and processes which include the mechanisms of socialization.44 In this context, action is to be analyzed as the product of a causal process which, although operating in the minds of the actors, is all but inaccessible to them and hence uncontrolled by them.

John Heritage in his book *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology* (1984) points out three most problematic areas of Parsons's point of view: the problem of rationality, the problem of intersubjectivity and the problem of reflexivity. Regarding rationality45, Parsons

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44 Ibid., p.21.
45 Parsons contrasts what the actors know about the circumstances with what is known with scientific methods, so as to determine the extent of rationality. Heritage (1984) quotes Parsons' definition of rational action as: "Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons
believes that actors’ action is rational only if actors’ interpretation of the situation coincides with the “objective fact.” In Parsons’s words:

“The rationality of action ... is measured by the conformity of choice of means, within the conditions of the situation, with the expectations derived from a scientific theory applied to the data in question and stated, ... Action ... is rational in so far there is a scientifically demonstrable probability that the means employed will, within the conditions of the actual situation, bring about or maintain the future state of affairs that the actor anticipates as his end.”

At this point, the superior cognitive claims of science are upheld by emphasizing the value of “hard” empirical data. However, when an actor’s explanation does not adequately account for his action, his knowledge is not reflecting the “objective fact.” Parsons asserts that under such circumstances one must make reference to the internalized values or additional psychological processes. In this case, the “role of institutionalization in the organization of action and hence the role of normative determination in conduct” is highly emphasized. In other words, for undetermined cases, Parsons resorts to value and norms for explanation. Garfinkel (1967) seriously attacked the neglect of the actor’s interpretation of the circumstances by Parsons and he derided the actor as “judgmental dope” in Parsons’s theoretical framework of rationality.

In accounting for the intersubjectivity of knowledge, Parsons’s viewpoint is similar to that of rationality, i.e., objective knowledge can only be obtained through scientific procedures and convergence of such kind of objective knowledge will ultimately lead to a common understanding of the external circumstances. But in the cases of institutionalized actions which are “normatively determined,” Parsons’s account

46 Parsons, T (1949)p.699
48 Ibid., p.27.
49 Ibid., p.27.
resorts to his "institutionalization theorem" which proposes that common value standard will determine the nature and limits of knowable actions within any given institutional framework. In this regard, the "institutionalization theorem" takes no account of the actor's cognitive judgment and interpretation in consideration and only provides an "external and programmatic account." Following this line of thinking, Parsons totally rejects the phenomenon of reflexivity. He postulated a psychological process that ensures that the actor's action is driven by an internalized normative drive that does action consciously unaware.

Garfinkel disagrees with every major aspect of the Parsonian theory of action. To rebut his teacher's arguments, Garfinkel proposed a vivid example - the jury project, which casts so many problems that the Parsonian approach cannot account for. Garfinkel suggests that for mundane conduct, choices cannot simply be divided into "rational" and "normatively determined" actions. Rather, most of the courses of actions are situationally determined and based on the actor's immediate evaluation. However, for various elements like immediate judgment on the environment, Parsons holds a view that run totally against Garfinkel. Parsons wrote:

"It is fundamental property of action thus defined that it does not consist only of ad hoc 'response' to particular situational 'stimuli' but that the actor develops a system of 'expectations' relative to the various objects of the situation. These may be structured only relative to his own need-dispositions and the probabilities of gratification or deprivation contingent on the various alternatives of action which he may undertake."52

2.4.2 Ethnomethodology

In his early writings, Garfinkel pointed out the major difference between Parsons's theory and his. He traced both of their theoretical orientations to the works of Max

50 Ibid., p.28
51 In his study of the jury project, Garfinkel(1952) found that it is not possible to establish "scientifically correct" verdict and to use it as a basis to discriminate what is fancy and what is fact.
Weber. He suggested that the approach of Parsons is already well worked upon and that was to build a generalized social system by uniting a theory about the structuring of experience with another theory about what is a man. Or in Garfinkel's words, Parsons was, speaking loosely, working on an attempt of synthesis between the facts of social structure and the facts of personality. On the other hand, Garfinkel wrote that he was working on another development which was not yet adequately exploited, seeking a generalized social system building solely from the analysis of experiential structures. Obviously, Garfinkel was searching for a theoretical framework that would directly grasp the procedure, by which actors analyze their circumstances and devise to carry out courses of action. Contrary to Parsons, the subjective view of actors is much valued in Garfinkel's theory.

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology borrows its main ideas from phenomenology, which declines to deal with objects, but rather, with the activities of human subjects. The world of everyday life has been characterized by phenomenologists as "immediate," "commonsensical" and "taken-for-granted." In everyday life is the most basic technique in handling "data" and assumptions. Alfred Schutz, a social phenomenologist, argues that the social world is, in the first instance, experimentally interpreted by its members as meaningful and intelligible in terms of social categories and constructs. He disagrees with the idea that "methodological procedure of science is unitary regardless of their domain of application, the goal of science is the explanation of individual phenomena by reference to general laws and that scientific statement must be testable by reference to publicly observable events." Schutz proposed a verstehende approach, which postulates that the world can only be meaningfully interpreted by

52 Parsons, T. (1952) p. 5.
54 Husserl's fundamental idea is rooted on an emphasis on the contingent and contexted encounters between the human subject and the world. His idea - Lebenswelt - depicts the mundane world of lived experience already existing as a product of the unreflecting cognition of ordinary actors. (Ibid. p. 44.)
55 "Governed by pragmatic considerations, the natural attitude involves the suspension of doubt that things might not be as they appear or that past experience may not be a valid guide to present and future experience." (Ibid. p. 41)
56 Ibid., p. 45.
ordinary social participants.\textsuperscript{37}

The idea of studying the subjective view of the social actor and no other person, and that only the actor himself can gain immediate access to those experiences, carries enormous influence in Garfinkel's development of ethnomethodology. In his language, Garfinkel defined the major objective of ethnomethodology as:

"[T]he investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life."\textsuperscript{38}

I can see that the emphasis on production of social actors' subjective experience is the core of ethnomethodology. There are two elements that need to be examined, namely, indexical expressions and rational properties. In addition to these two elements, I shall also look into Garfinkel's ideas of reality maintenance and role of action which are central to the application of his ideas in family studies.

\textbf{2.4.2.1 Indexical expression}

Prior to Garfinkel, according to Heritage (1994), a pre-Wittgensteinian view of language was commonly upheld by social scientists. According to this view, language carries a representative function and the meaning of words only "stands for" what is represented in the real world. Such a concept about language permeates sociological activities at the empirical, theoretical and metatheoretical levels.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} "The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist - social reality - has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs that determine their behavior by motivating it." (ibid.p 46)


At the empirical level, social scientific research is largely dependent on what actors report about their circumstances, experiences and attitudes. Actors are treated as competent and motivated, and little attention was put on "reasons" that might have contributed to shaping of actors' utterances. Such a notion of language is quite different from that of Garfinkel. Garfinkel commented that organizational data collected are largely treated as simple factual statements that are quite independent of the occasions and contingencies of their production. At the theoretical level, sociological interest was largely put on those areas that actors' depiction of their worlds can be treated to be significantly inaccurate or faulty - investigation and explanation of the "sociological error." Conversely, for those matters that actors can report competently and accurately, they were treated as "largely uninteresting." At the metatheoretical level, as mentioned earlier, words are considered as signs and referents representing what is in the real world. In this regard, the role of language is narrowed down to the role of representation and it is assumed that all social actors have common agreement and understanding on what the words stand for.

Garfinkel's stance runs entirely against the above-mentioned point of view about language. He proposed a brand new direction of research that focuses on actors' capabilities of mastering their language. Unlike other sociologists that found actors' language largely uninteresting, he proposes that in order to understand language we have to focus on the actions of language, that is, utterances, which are constructively interpreted in relation to their contexts. That means that we have to study utterances against a background of elements like who (say it), when (to say), how (to say) and what (to be said). Such an approach to "mundane description" is consistent with his

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\[\text{As Heritage (1981) puts it: "Social actors may often not be the best equipped observers of their own activities, that actions may project, rationalize or lie in the course of depicting their opinions, activities and circumstances and, more generally, that actors' accounts may be informed by a swarm of distorting motivations." (Heritage, J. (1983), "Accounts in action" in Accounts and Action, ed. By G. N. Gilbert and P. Abell. Gower Publishing Co. Ltd. p. 117.) As a matter of fact some sociologists even treated actors' reports and their actions as two separated systems. As C. Wright Mills (1940:904) puts it: "we need not treat an action as discrepant from 'its' verbalization for, in many cases, the verbalization is a new act. In such cases, there is not a discrepancy between an act and 'its' verbalization, but a difference between two disparate actions, motor-social and verbal. Quoted in Heritage, J. (1983), "Accounts in action" in Accounts and Action, ed. By G. N. Gilbert and P. Abell. Gower Publishing Co. Ltd. p. 120. Though they treated actors' actions and accounts as two separate systems, they nevertheless recognized that both social} \]
overarching focus on the accountable nature of social action.  

Since Garfinkel treats mundane description as a form of social action with reference to how it will be recognized and described, description is considered as (1) making reference to states of affairs, and (2) occurring in particular interactional and situational contexts and therefore be viewed as chosen and consequential. Being a form of action, description is reflexive in maintaining or altering the sense of activities and unfolding circumstances in which they occur. More important, they are accountable. Contrary to other sociologists' interest in the "sociological error," Garfinkel's notion of ethnomethodological indifference ignores whether the actors' depiction of their circumstances are correct or faulty, but only focuses on how the descriptive accounts are used by actors to organize and manipulate their social settings. Garfinkel considers that accounts, like actions, are subject to scrutiny with reference to a set of unstated assumptions or common understandings. Thus accounts can be treated as environmentally or situationally sensible, i.e., indexical. For example, when a man shouts, "Fire," it means start shooting in the battlefield. But in the downtown, it may means a conflagration. The word "Fire" is therefore an indexical expression, its exact

actions and the verbal accounts are institutionally organized.

Garfinkel (1967): "[T]he activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings accountable." Being accountable, in this sense, is not identical to providing direct explanation of their conduct. Rather, he used the term "accountable" as a synonym for "observable-reportable," which proposes a logically prior analytical task namely, the description of the organized ways in which the intelligibility of ordinary conduct is recognizably exhibited "incarnately," i.e., in the details of its doing. As Garfinkel put it: "The policy is recommended that any social setting be viewed as self-organizing with respect to the intelligible character of its own appearances ... [A]ny setting organizes its activities to make its properties as an organized environment of practical activities detectable, countable, recordable, reportable, tell-a-story-aboutable, analyzable - in short, accountable." Garfinkel, (1967) p.33, quoted by John Heritage in G. Gilbert and P Abell (1981), p.121.


63 Reflexivity refers to the fact that our sense of order is a result of conversational processes: it is created in talk. For ethnomethodologists, to describe a situation is at the same time to create it.

64 This "ethnomethodological indifference" carries enormous significance to my proposal of social work intervention approach. In conversations with bereaved families, researchers or social workers, are not in position to judge the families. It does not mean that the researcher loses interest mundane phenomena. Rather, keeping distance enable the researcher dispassionately examine in detail the practical activities.

65 Indexical expression, a major theme of the ethnomethodological approach, refers to those statement "[W]hose sense cannot be decided by an auditor without his necessary knowing or assuming something about the biography and the purpose of the user. [T]he circumstances ... that exists between the expresser and the auditor" Harold Garfinkel (1967) p.11, quoted in Mayrl W. W. (1973), "Ethnomethodology: Sociology without society" in Catalyst. Vol.7. Win., p.16.
meaning must make reference to the social setting and the circumstance in which it is uttered.\footnote{66} In Heritage's words, "[T]he 'refferent' of the utterance could only be grasped by getting who was speaking, when or where it was said and must be by knowing what had been said or what had happened just previously."\footnote{67} In other words, the hearer holds a "natural attitude" on the speaker's biography, purpose and the circumstances, and uses it as the basis to interpret the "indexical expression."

When discussing about communication or mundane description between a speaker and a hearer, a series of questions inevitably await to be answered. Are there enough terms to exhaust all contexts or states of affairs?\footnote{68} Do the speaker and the hearer always hold common understandings on all matters? The answer is definitely no. Heritage concluded that human descriptions are not holding a "one to one" relationship with the states of affairs that they depict. Rather, they undoubtedly approximate and locate fields of possibilities. The hearer must perform active contextualizing work to gain the precise meaning of the description. Such a kind of understanding in relation to its referent context, in Heritage's words, is "adequate-for-all-practical purpose."

In addition to this contextualizing activity, there is an interpretative process, which treats descriptions as actions and should not be overlooked. Heritage asserted that "no description is strictly compelled by the state of affairs it describes, any description is thus inherently selective in relation to the state of affairs it depicts."\footnote{69} Descriptions are said to be selective in several aspects. First, no description can exhaust the state of affairs it describes, there must always be other ways that the referenced state of affairs could have been described. Second, the description refers to the state of affairs in a particular way.

\footnote{66} The mutually elaborative character of account and the constituent features of a setting has indeed been the center of Garfinkel's discussion of sense making. As Heritage (1984) put it: "[T]here is an inherently reflexive relationship between 1) the way in which an account is used to make sense of the constituent features of a setting, and 2) the ways in which these constituent features are used to make sense of an account." Heritage, J. (1983). "Accounts in action" in Accounts and Action, ed. By G. N. Gilbert and P. Abell. Gower Publication Co. Ltd. p. 122.

\footnote{67} Ibid., p.143.

\footnote{68} "Contexts" and "states of affairs" are words used by Heritage. If we conceive "context" and "state of affairs" in Garfinkel's idea of indexical expression, they refer to those elements like biography, purpose of the users and the circumstances. In this regard, "indexical expression" is the text.

For example, we may describe a bus in terms of its colour, model, route, or in terms of its brand and shape. Third, a description does not necessarily mean that a describer must speak, for one can grasp the content by understanding the purpose or motive of the speaker at a particular moment. Heritage encapsulated these three aspects with three questions: (1) why is the speaker referencing that object, (2) in that way, and (3) right now? When these three questions are considered together with other contextual indices, we can understand a description, the relationship between words and referents, against, and interpreted with, the larger social context. The sense of a descriptive utterance is thus always contextually determined. For example, watching a TV news report of the famine and civil war happening in Zaire, a watcher lamented, "How kind God is." If we view the utterance against the referent state of affairs, we would fail to establish a "literal" correspondence, but only can conclude that the lament was intended to be ironical.

The above example illustrates the elaborative relationship between the utterance and the invoked state of affairs. The real sense of an expression can be constructed in terms of the speaker's attitude, shared common views on the invoked state of affairs and understanding in the purpose of the speaker's expression. In sum, the sense of a descriptive utterance then is always contextually determined. Heritage said, "An actor's treatment of a description will unavoidably address it as contexted, as unavoidably an action which maintains, transforms or elaborates its context of occurrence." That means, with its indexical and temporal features, a descriptive account unavoidably reconstitute the circumstances in which it occur and thus inevitably should be treated as an actions.

2.4.2.2 Rational properties

By "rational properties," Garfinkel seems to refer to those making an action or expression understandable to a fellow participant in the situation in question, but does not refer to

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Gower Publication Co. Ltd. p. 150.
76 Ibid., p.151.
properties conforming to the standard notion of rationality. 72

As proposed by Schutz, our language is inherently "typifying." Consider the following example: The human visual system is able to discriminate up to 7,500,000 different colours, but only countable English names are commonly used. The same phenomenon can also be found in other languages like Chinese and Japanese. Even with such a limited vocabulary, we are able to discriminate and communicate the differences. In everyday life, every state of affairs may be unique, but our vocabulary is limited. However, through the medium - language - a speaker is able to communicate with his fellow participants. This interesting scenario suggests that the boundaries of the applicability of a term is negotiable and subject to change, its exact meaning is determined by contextual factors and the "relationship" between the speaker and the hearer. By the same token, past description and concept application do not necessarily determine future usage. The boundaries of the range of application are continuously reaffirmed or revised in new acts of speaking.

With such an idea in mind, I can see that human description is undoubtedly approximating only (with a limited vocabulary to describe unlimited number of pictures in everyday life). Rather than directly pinpointing the definite properties of states of affairs, we instead locate fields of possibilities that need "contextualizing" by the hearer in order to "work out" the exact meaning the utterance carries.

Though it seems that the way a human description occurs is quite abstract, in everyday life a particular context will elaborate and particularize the sense of the "wide range" description to the extent that the hearer can accurately capture what the speaker intends to convey. For example, the descriptor "grasshopper" may carries different

71 Ibid., p.156.
72 Unlike Parsons who construes rationality from a scientifically produced social fact perspective (please refer to footnote 16), Garfinkel's theoretical framework is solely built on an "I-Thou" relationship (the speaker and the hearer). Based on this concept, a series of "paired words" like observable-reportable and meaningful-intelligible were proposed with natural attitude as the underlying assumption. As a matter of fact, with reflexivity of indexical expression being taken into account, we can see that both the "I" and the "Thou" parties are active parties and the speaker and the hearer alternatively take up the "I- Thou" role during conversation.
meanings to different hearers in different situations. Hong Kong taxi drivers can accurately interpret it as a New Territories taxi. The referent object presented to the vision of the speaker and the hearer is thus reflexively elaborated and with common understanding on certain words, refined by the particular colour and shape of it, together with common understanding on certain use of words. It thus comes to the extent, as Garfinkel puts it, “unavoidably elaborate.” In sum, “rationality” is rationality within, or relative to, a particular hearer and a particular social setting.

2.4.2.3 Reality Maintenance

Garfinkel tries to explain why reality maintenance is possible by integrating the moral element with the cognitive element. A series of ingenious experiments that he termed “breaching experiment” carried enormous implications to his analysis of factors that maintain social structures. As mentioned earlier, ethnomethodology was developed along the line of phenomenology that puts its emphasis on the “natural attitude,” the life world. According to Schutz, the subjective life world is characterized by “schemes of meaningful experience.” As far as these schemes remain valid in everyday life, they provide interpretive tools for social actors to account for everyday events. Normally, these schemes retain their validity in interpretation. However, when it comes to an occasion that these schemes fail to provide guidelines, it is also an occasion for us to observe the different dimensions of actors’ integrative rules, i.e., cognitive elements. Garfinkel called these cognitive elements “background expectances.”

In his breaching experiments, he instructed experimenters to break (breach) the congruency of relevance which is one of the idealizations of the thesis of reciprocal perspectives purposed by Schutz. Breaching experiments are based on the critical assumption that the subject assumes that each party of conversation presumes “what is talking about without any requirement of a check-out.” However, with this assumption

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According to this idealization, the actors assume that differences arising from their unique biographical circumstances are irrelevant for the purposes at hand of each and they have selected and interpreted the actually or potentially common objects and their features in an identical manner or at least an ‘empirically identical’ manner, i.e. one sufficient for all practical purposes. Schutz, (1962)p.12, quoted by Heritage, J.
being broken, the hidden mechanism that regulates the normal functioning and normal interaction will be uncovered. Some of the reported results are reproduced below.\textsuperscript{74}

Case A: The subject(S) was telling the experimenter(E), a member of the subject’s car pool, about having had a flat tire while going to work the previous day.

S: I had a flat tire.

E: What do you mean, you had a flat tire?

She appeared momentarily stunned. Then she answered in a hostile way:

‘What do you mean? What do you mean? A flat tire is a flat tire. That is what I meant. Nothing special. What a crazy question.’

Case B: The victim waved his hand cheerily.

S: How are you?

E: How am I in regard to what? My health, my finance, my school work, my peace of mind, my ...

S: (Red in the face and suddenly out of control.) Look. I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don’t give a damn how you are.

The experimenter’s breaches resulted in interactional breakdowns, and breaches were very rapidly and powerfully sanctioned. However, in some breaching experiments, the subjects successfully transformed the sense of the breaching moves by interpreting them as other possible explanations of behaviour, e.g., it is a joke, so as to normalize the situation or at least to maintain a sense for the moves.\textsuperscript{75} Though in all breaching experiments, “perceived normality” of events was impugned, not all subjects respond in an identical way. In the latter case, I can see that when subjects’ valid experiential interpretation was being challenged, they could rapidly interpret the situation by adjusting his “taken-for-granted” facts and resorting to new “schemes of experience.”

\textsuperscript{74} Garfinkel and ethnomethodology, Oxford: Polity Press, p.81.

\textsuperscript{75} Garfinkel (1963) pp221-222

2.4.2.4 The role of action

With the significance of reflexive aspects of the documentary method taken into consideration, I understand that since actors are no longer conceived as passive spectators of a scene, their actions reflexively transform the scene which is undergoing development as a temporal sequence of actions.

Heritage makes use of the greeting example to illustrate the reflexivity of action. "Greeting exchange," as used by Heritage, is a "rule-governed" behaviour. In this case, governed by the norm: when greeted, return the greeting. Being greeted, the actor was placed in a "situation of choice - to greet or not to greet." In the process of making a choice, a number of points about the nature of conduct and its normative organization were identified by Heritage:

1) Once the actor was "trapped" in the greeting situation (being greeted by another acquaintance), the scene was reconstituted. The unfolding scene cannot "mark time" or "stall for a while" (Garfinkel's concept of "no time out").

2) The norm to return a greeting is doubly constitutive of the circumstances it organizes. On the one hand, parties of the scene maintain and develop the "perceivably normal" course of the scene by perceiving, judging and acting in accordance with the dictates of the norm, and on the other hand, they use the same norm to notice, interpret and sanction departures from its dictates.76

The above concern on the role of norms, or maxims of conduct, in the organization of ordinary actions, is also central to both Parsons's and Garfinkel's work. Parsons considers the role of norms, essentially one of guiding, regulating, determining or causing the conduct that may occur in circumstances that are treated as if they are already pre-established or pre-defined. There are two points about Parsons's view. First, he treats the actors as cognitively equipped to recognize situations in common, and once the
situation is commonly recognized, the application of common norms enables the actors to produce joint action. Second, he treats the actors' circumstances as essentially unchanged by their course of action, hence the role of time as an essential component in the unfolding succession of "here-and-now" reconstitution of the actors' circumstances is ignored. But for Garfinkel, the common norms, "rather than regulating conduct in pre-defined scenes of action, are instead reflexively constitutive of the activities and unfolding circumstances to which they are applied." In this regard, reflexive application of norms determines the "appropriateness" of conduct in the unfolding circumstances.

2.5 Gubrium: The discursive family

Garfinkel has in family research a faithful follower, Jaber F. Gubrium, who has utilized Garfinkel's theory of action in his study of the family.

Talking about the family, we are accustomed to thinking of it as a specific set of social and its ties, members are persons living together and related by blood, marriage, or in some cases, adoption. However, in modern society, there are more and more couples living together without being married, more and more unmarried couples having children and more and more married couples living apart. These "familial arrangements" make the traditional notion of the family vague and less powerful in defining what/who is family. While biological kinship and legal status are no longer the best way to define what is the family, there comes a view that the family is nothing more than a human construct. The constructionists, who tend to consider language, meaning and the interactional process as the most important factors to study the family, have raised the second major shift in the focus of family theory. Gubrium is the key social constructionist in family research. The family, as depicted by Gubrium, is not considered as an ontological object. Rather, he believes that the family should be conceptualized

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17 Ibid., p.109
18 The constructionist approach in studying family was clearly spelled out by Gubrium as: "we attend not to any particular social unit that might be called a family, but to processes through which assignment of
“in terms of descriptive practice, that is, the commonplace communicative process through which realities are formulated and made meaningful.”

In other words, it is important to focus on the activities that produce “family.”

In Gubrium’s view, family discourse should be one of the foci of studying the family. He considers family discourse more than a set of terms, it also contains ideas about domestic life. For example, to speak of “being a family” is not only to use the term “family” to describe a set of social relationships, but also to convey the notion that the relationships under consideration are, say, trusting and giving, not calculating. This notion is quite similar to the Chinese notion of “we are of one family” (大家是一家人) when giving or being given a familial status, and it also implies certain privileges and obligations. Family discourse, in his language, is rhetorical and is a way to make sense of social relations. Gubrium asserts that family usage is rhetorical in the sense that it “is a means of both tacitly and explicitly advocating particular understandings of persons’ attachments and responsibilities to one another.” Simply put, that is doing things with words. Consider the following abstract from the Milwaukee Journal (7/2,8/2,1992), a record of a dispute over family “visitation rights”:

"It angers me to be called a nanny because I cared for that child 24 hours a day. I put her to bed every night. I walked the floor with her when she was sick. It was me who had to take her to the hospital on more than one occasion."

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family status to that (or any )group of its member is made, our interest is not in family as a ‘thing’ per se, but rather in the process through which family is constituted as a thing, an object unto itself.” Gubrium, J.F & Holstein, J. A. (1994)“Constructing Family: Descriptive Practice and Domestic Order” in Constructing the Social, ed. by Sarbin, T.R. & Kitsuse, J.I. London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: SAGE, p.246

Ibid.,p.231.


In this statement, I can easily sense that the speaker felt it inappropriate to treat her merely as a baby-sitter or nanny. Rather, as a particular kind of relationship (she implicitly claimed it as near to a mother-son relationship) already exists, she should be considered as a family member to the baby. Obviously, her usage is rhetorical as well as descriptive. On the one hand, the statement describes the daily engagement of the baby sitter with the baby; on the other hand, it conveys a message that attachment grounded in daily care and concern can supersede even that of biological kinship. By selectively applying family terminology, social ties can be assigned a domestic meaning which in turn leads to a familial status. Other examples are "He’s like a brother to me," "I’d do anything for the baby, anything a mother would do," "we are just like of a family," etc. Being given a familial status not only carries a kind of social ties, but also simultaneously assigns domestic rights and obligations.

In a series of theoretical and empirical investigations he and his associates did on families with members with Alzheimer’s disease, Gubrium raised three questions: What is family? Who is family? Where is family? As mentioned earlier, although family membership is routinely discerned on biological and legal grounds, they are not the only conditions of assignment. In his two-year study on Maida Wood in Lakeview (a nursing home), the following analysis was recorded:

SAGE, p.234.
31 Rhetoric is to use language in a particular way so as to articulate and affect the meaning of family.
34 Gubrium raised the idea of "what question," "how question" and "why question" in his later writing. He called them as "the common threads lead qualitative inquiry to an array of research question" Jaber F. Gubrium & James A. Holstein (1997), The New Language of Quantitative Method, New York: Oxford University. p.14. The "what question" is concern on questions like "what is happening," "what are people doing," etc. The question intends to explore the factual content that created through talk and interaction undertook by social actors. The guiding question of the "how question" is how are the realities of everyday life accomplished? In other words, it intends to explore the procedures that persons undertake to construct, manage and sustain the social worlds. The final question is the "how question" like why people act in particular way. Analyzing social activities through concepts of "what question," "why question" and "how question," we can capture the ordinary, everyday procedures as "members" methods for making those same activities "visibly-rational and reportable-for-all-practical-purpose." Garfinkel, H. (1967) Studies in Ethnomethodology, Englewood, J.J, Prentice-Hall: Paperback, p.vii.
35 Maida Wood said that she became a resident one-day when, unbeknown to her, she was placed in a medical courier van on the alleged pretext of being taken to the doctor for a checkup and trucked to the nursing home. She presented a common post-admission status and as time passed, Maida grew resentful of the abrupt, unforeseen placement. Upon learning that her children had planned it, she resigned herself to being bereft of filial loyalty. Gubrium, J.F. (1987) "Organizational Embeddedness and Family Life" in Aging, Health and Family: Long-Term Care, ed. by Timothy H. Brubaker. Newbury Park, California: SAGE, p.29.
"Maida was drawn to a small circle of other patients at the home, two women and a man. They became fast friends, so close and visible that they were known throughout Lakeview by staff members and many other patients as Maida’s behest, would be highly solicitous and wary for staff inattention. When any of them was temporarily absent from the home, the others became fidgety and worried lest things were not going well for the missing member of the group. There was even a recognizable division of concern among them: Maida the organizer and advocate; Freda the warm and affectionate mother; Sara the group’s baby; and Harold the purveyor of needed resources and said to be a ‘very, very handy man’..."

Obviously, to Maida, what is family and the family in practice was not simply a matter of kinship. But to Maida’s daughter and son, the picture was totally different, the presence of so-called “quasi-family” was undoubtedly a hindrance to the “real family” feelings. Gubrium commented that as far as Maida and sympathetic others (to Maida) were concerned, Maida’s son and daughter were not even at best what a real family should be; rather, Sara, Freda, and Harold were. Gubrium’s analysis not only took Maida’s, her son’s and her daughter’s sentiments and feelings into consideration, but also those of all other persons concerned. This is his idea of “organizational embeddedness of family life.” Since in contemporary society, family life is in link with organizations of all kinds, especially human service professionals like social workers, “the sense of domestic order that makes troubles a social relation recognizable and meaningful as familial objects may thus emerge from interactions far removed from the household.”

Applying the concept of “organizational embeddedness” in family study helps to explain how a family might be differently constructed out of the same “objective circumstances.” This is because different persons have different ideas of “What is family?” “Who is

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86 Ibid., p.29
87 Ibid., p.29
88 Not only is the family assigned membership in accordance with practical considerations in and about the organized contexts in which matters of membership become topical, but what the family functionally is, is likewise embedded. (Ibid.,p.30) The definition given by Gubrium and Holstein (1993) is “Organizational Embeddedness refers to the circumstances in which domestic order is constituted, not the actual integration of family members into the working life of organizations...” The term “organizational” here in its most general sense, referring to any socially structured circumstance.
89 G. Miller (1991), Ibid., p.68.
family?” “Where is family?” and their contextually relevant notions of family are linked to, and shaped by, their organizational backgrounds and orientations.

In his *What Is Family*, Gubrium considered that biological and legal ties are only candidate qualifications for membership, and contended that “family is a discursive project.” As a social construct, family is only meaningful when this “project” can meet the interpretative demands of the situation at hand. Gubrium raised three aspects that question the presence, form and function of the family. These are the affectional, custodial and durational factors. In other words, I have to answer questions like “Who cares about other people?” “Who takes care of others?” “For how long, the care rendered?” when articulating a family.

In the same book, Gubrium gave the following exchange, which is another exchange to illustrate his view on what family is:

Police : Are you the boy’s mother?
Woman : As much as he’s got.
Police : Well, where is his mother? Where does she live? Does the boy have a family?
Woman : She lives across town, but she don’t have anything to do with him.
Police : Well, who are you?
Woman : Esther Franks, I’m his momma.
Police : Just a minute, Who’s the mother? What are you saying?
Woman : I’m his momma. I raised him since he was a baby. He’s mine to look after, so I got to claim him.

From the exchange, I can see that the immediate purpose of the police officer was to find out the boy’s “family,” which implies blood-tied relationship and someone who

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92 The exchange happened when a police tried to find out someone could bake care of a psychiatrically
would care for him in a familial manner. The woman's familial status was debatable on both legal and biological grounds. However, as care taking was a salient and consequential familial dimension, the woman thus assumed a familial status better than the boy's biological mother did, who had actually abandoned him.

To study family discourse as it is applied to concrete domestic affairs is to focus on what we might call "descriptive practice." In other words, descriptive practice is our field of data - family discourse in use. As mentioned earlier, if I consider the family as socially constructed, I can thus make use of the family's descriptive practice to "deconstruct" the domestic order into its constitutive language and the interactional process through which reality is produced. The central principle of the family discourse perspective, as alleged by Gubrium and Holstein, is that

"[T]he social world and its form are made concrete and meaningful through everyday talk and interaction, by way of descriptive practice. Conversation, testimony, and case histories - discourse of all kinds - are not as much spoken or transcribed descriptions of reality, as they are tacitly constitutive of objects and events. In this regard, family as a social object may be construed as both a production and a by-product of family discourse." 

Accordingly, Gubrium borrowed Garfinkel's idea of "seen but unnoticed" practical reasoning to into domestic life. In his various writings, Gubrium repeatedly quoted his study on caregivers of family members with Alzheimer's disease. Throughout the impaired boy who was came across by the police.


94 Deconstruction is a kind of working backward, from the taken-for-granted social realities of everyday life to the descriptive practice that produces them, we can document the process by which reality is constructed and can make visible the ways in which the affairs of the household come to be publicly recognized and understood as they are. Ibid. p.27.


96 Practical reasoning is a process whereby the generalities of local culture are linked discursively with the circumstantial particulars of everyday life, thereby constituting meaningful objects of attention or concern. Ibid, p. 66.
process of caring, the caregiver encounters general understandings of what families are: should the patient be hospitalized, am I doing well enough, and how to effectively help the patient. All these are elements of the local culture reflecting what family is and what family members should do to help a member in need. According to Gubrium, I can analyze these understandings by orienting to the caregiver’s practical reasoning, which, like local culture, reveals itself in family discourse. In a nutshell, family discourse provides a way of making of and organizing social relations, conferring upon them domestic and familial meaning. 97

Chapter 3
Local Family Theories - An Unfinished Copying Task

3.1 Introduction

Since sociology was introduced as an academic discipline into the local universities in the sixties, there have been a very small number of local sociologists who managed to produce some indigenous theories about the local Chinese family. In this section, I shall divide the local theories of family into three mainstreams, and discuss their relevance or to be more precise, irrelevance, to our problematic: What is family? Omitting them will render this dissertation incomplete.

First, I shall examine the first local theory about the local Chinese family advanced by F.M. Wong (1972, 1975) in the first half of the seventies. His idea of structurally isolated nuclear family follows closely the classical structural-functionalist thesis which suggests the breakdown of traditional family under the impact of industrialization. Second, I shall discuss the idea of household strategy put forward by C. H. Ng (1989) who examined Wong’s thesis after more than a decade. Ng suggests that household strategy can provide not only a new approach to understand the family, but also an alternative to the then dominant theoretical tradition - the structural-functionalist view of the family. Afterwards, Ng, together with Lee, studied the idea empirically by collecting and analyzing oral histories of twenty two families (Lee and Ng (1991)). In the same year, Ng (1991), being the first local sociologist to raise the general theoretical issue of “what family is?” to the local sociological community, put forth his bold view that “the family” should be but a shorthand in sociological discussion.” Lastly, I shall look into a separate theoretical development which began to take shape in the late seventies. It is the idea of utilitarianistic familism, advanced by S.K. Lau (1978, 1981a, 1981b). It is a local idea for local consumption. In construction, his idea is very similar to the many brands of familism that have appeared in the Western research literature. It is an ideal type construction - a time-honoured and celebrated paradigm beginning with Max Weber’s The Spirit of Protestant Ethics and the Rise of Capitalism. The following account summarizes a joint paper I wrote with P.K Lui
and Vincent Yeung.  

3.2 Wong (1975): The structurally isolated nuclear family

Wong wrote a series of papers (1972a, b, c) on the local family, culminating in Wong (1975). Beginning with a brief mention of Weber’s thesis that the rise of the nuclear family is a result of industrialization, Ogburn’s thesis that under the impact of rapid technological and social changes the family has undergone a process of defunctionalization, and Parsons’s thesis that the structurally isolated nuclear family is an outcome of the functional specialization of the family rather than its defunctionalization and disintegration, and citing Lang’s studies on the traditional Chinese family and Goode’s studies on several societies, Wong (1975) sees his study as one that “continues to explore the relationship between industrialization and family structure in a new context - Hong Kong.”

The supposed connection between industrialization and family structure was “established” in a historical narrative in which the two were “demonstrated” to be occurring at a synchronized pace. The rest of his study is several correlational analyses of family structure (the nuclear family versus other family forms) on the one hand and type of native township (large city, small city, town, village) of the male family head, his educational attainment, his occupation and his religious affiliation on the other, all of which were found to be statistically significant on some local data. Wong calls these socio-demographic characteristics “industrialization correlates” and interprets them to “confirm” the expected connection between industrialization and family structure. Yet, Wong (1975) has no theoretical originality, and follows closely the then prevailing Western sociological conclusion:

“For the study, the association of industrialization and the nuclear family is conceived as one of functional interdependence rather than unilateral determinism. Hence, the rise of industrialization creates various social conditions, such as emphasis on

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98 Lui, Yeung and Lam (forthcoming). Hong Kong family theories: The past, the present and the future,” accepted for publication by Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences. (In Chinese.)
individual achievement and accountability, economic independence, functional specificity, universalistic evaluation, and social and geographical mobility, which operate in one way or another to disrupt the traditional kinship on the one hand, and facilitate the widespread adoption of the independent nuclear family on the other. In return, the nuclear family system also plays a significant role in the development of industrialization. Its structural isolatedness, as characterized by residential and economic independence and freedom from kin control and intervention, is geared to meet the requirements of the modern industrial system, and is therefore capable of expediting the growth of industrialism.  

The influence of Wong's publication on the orientation of the local family policy can be reflected from the 1991 White Paper on Social Welfare.

The overall objectives of family welfare services are to preserve and strengthen the family as a unit and to develop caring interpersonal relationships, to enable individuals and family members to prevent personal and family problems and to deal with them when they arise and to provide for needs which cannot be met from within the family. With these objectives in mind, support services have been developed to assist families when they are unable to discharge their caring and protective functions satisfactorily.

Wong's study is indeed a local re-confirmation of Parsons' thesis that the effect of industrialization is to make the nuclear family of the couple and their children the normal or modal type. The structurally isolated nuclear family is an outcome of the functional specialization of the family. Wong's significance lies in being an imported theory supported by local data and hence providing a starting point for local theoretical development.

However, I deem that Wong's structural-functional approach carries limited relevance

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to our problematic "What is family?" This approach assumes that, in order to function, family needs resources, skills, aspirations and plans that are constituent parts for maintaining the family as a whole. It works as if different parts of the body orchestrate to maintain the function of the whole body. Following this line of thinking, a family is "in crisis" when an internal or external event disrupts its equilibrium. However, I hold that a crisis is not caused by a particular event objectively defined as crisis-creating, but by the way a specific family perceives and reacts to that event. Structural-functional approach tends to argue that the crisis-state is of limited duration and must be overcome by family reorganization. Structural-functional approach thus offers a conservative and all-embracing framework to account for almost all kinds of structural change. It implies that the structural change of any event is as such because it aims at serving a certain function, while that certain function is generated as such in order to be compatible with the structural change, i.e., a complicity between structure and function which account for any social event.101

To illustrate what will be missing within the structural functionalist framework, a hypothetical example is shown. Supposed that there is a four member family with two daughters (7 and 18 years old respectively) and with the father, the breadwinner, suffered from cancer. A structural functionalist may focus on how the family undergoes structural changes in response to the crisis imposed on the family. For example, the mother may stay at home to take care of the patient and the family, the elder daughter has to abandon the opportunity for further education and is forced to take up a job. Later, the family might be considered as having overcome the crisis and regained equilibrium in terms of value, style of living, relationship, etc. However, a structural functionalist may overlook some important factors, which I would like to look into in detail, such as the degradation of living standard, the sacrifice of the interest of the elder daughter, the

101 In George Ritzer's words, the relationship between structure and function is characterized as follows, "In structural functionalism, the terms structural and functional need not be used in conjunction, although they are typically conjoined. We could study the structures of society without being concerned with their functions (or consequences) for other structures. Similarly, we could examine the functions of a variety of social processes that may not take a structural form. Still, the concern for both elements characterizes structural functionalism." Ritzer, G. (1992) Sociological Theory, McGraw-Hill International Edition, Sociology Series, p. 233
hidden conflict among the members, etc. In this sense, structural functionalism tends to be biased and cannot reflect a full picture.

3.3 Ng (1989): Household strategy

Ng sees his idea of household strategy (Lee and Ng (1991), Ng (1994)) as an antithesis to Wong’s idea, the allegedly dominant theory. Ng (1994) believes that there is currently an impasse of local family studies, which is a result of the success of a “hegemonic” structural-functionalist paradigm rigorously wrought by Wong (1972, 1975). Ng stresses that the explanatory power of the dominant local theory regarding “how families as conglomerates of real people may figure actively in that apparently unstoppable march of history, how they may intervene into the formation of definite social identities, and possibly play a big part in influencing the social and political scenario of the past, present, and future”102 seems to be impotent. Moreover, Ng (1994) shows his discontent with the lack of local effort having been devoted to the theoretical debate. He writes,

“[T]he absence of substantial empirical studies since ... [the eighties and] ... [t]he lack of rigorous theoretical and methodological debates on family studies ... [are] in sharp contrast to the situation in thriving areas of social studies in Hong Kong, namely those on class, politics, and economic change. ... An amorphous but unmistakable feeling within the academic community that family studies is at best marginal to the central concerns of Hong Kong society in the transition to 1997.”103

For the household strategy, Lee and Ng (1991) defines it as follows:

“Household strategy can be seen as the approach devised by a family to cope with the opportunities and constraints posed to it by the environment. It reflects the characteristic ways by which a family amasses, combines, and puts to use different

103 Ibid., p.95.
kinds of resources, or ‘inputs’; plans and makes decisions regarding these resources and welfare; and decides on how to reconcile the divergent claims of individual members and the collectivity’s interests. ‘Inputs’ can be derived from two sources: from social networks (family, kin groups, friends, neighbours, and other primary or quasi-primary groups) and from formal institutions (e.g., educational institutions, religious bureaucracies). It can be assumed that families are differently endowed with or have different degrees of accessibility to these resources. Their uses of these resources are furthermore shaped by the value perspectives and interest positions of their members and by their decisions and choices. ... The[ir] coping responses have varying implications in terms of familial structure and social mobility.”

On the surface, the definition is more micro-sociological than macro-sociological, focusing on the family as a group of strategists. But this is an incomplete view of Ng’s theoretical intention in the idea. But this is an incomplete view of Ng’s theoretical intention in the idea. Ng (1994) claims for it a great macro-sociological relevance:

“It sees families as the sites where major forces of economic and social intersect, and as active collective units, families can react to and shape the present and future course of major social events. ... [It can explain] the patterns, paths, mechanisms, and consequences of social mobility in post-war Hong Kong. ... [It helps to explain] the contradictory identities and potentials for social conflict that emerge as a result of the evolving patterns of gender division of labour in family of Hong Kong.”

I point out that Ng’s idea of household strategy is borrowed from Tamara Hareven (1982), whom he admires. Also following Hareven, Ng analyzes oral histories of local families in the life course perspective. I argue that in this respect Ng is closer to being a family historian than a family sociologist. One of the best collective statements of family

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106 Ng (1989) used the term “family strategy” whereas Ng (1994) used the term “household strategy.” Hareven (1987) used the former consistently. We assume the two terms refer to the same idea.
Historians in the English-speaking world is the Tenth Anniversary Commemorative Issue of Journal of Family History (Volume 12, Numbers 1-3, 1987) with an apt issue title “Family history at the crossroads: Linking familial and historical change,” and the summary and introduction to the special issue was written by Hareven (1987), as its editor. Hareven (1987) specifically singles out family strategies and the link between the family and the process of social change for discussion. Clearly, she has high hopes for it as a theoretical centre-piece and an empirical entry point. Hareven (1987) in her illustration of family strategies, made the purpose of such theoretical orientation much clearer. It states:

“A study of family strategies enables us to examine the interaction between, on the one hand, the social and economic constructions and external cultural values in the society which dictate these choices; and, on the other hand, the family members’ values, to the extent that those values diverge from the external ones.”

“An examination of strategies provides a key to the linkage and interaction between family patterns and larger social and economic processes such as … [T]he inheritance and management of family resources … [A]nd the world of work …”

To sum up Ng’s and Hareven’s idea, if one wants to understand the larger society, one needs to study the family. Three main salient features of their household strategy are summarized as follows,

1) Collective family strategies are not always in harmony with the strategies of individual members. An examination of strategies also requires an understanding of tension and conflicts within the family;

2) Communication pattern forms an important base of the decision-making process within the family. Moreover, imposition of such decision on individual members is a process that involves power distribution;

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107 These oral histories are transcripts of in-depth interviews in the interview guide approach.
109 Ibid.
3) Elements like needs, resources, skills, etc., vary from family to family, thus the way each family functions also varies.

Ng’s idea of household strategy is an explanatory schema of the family’s response to the external environment, in terms of several key concepts, namely, resources available to the family, its plans and decisions, the reconciliation of divergent claims, aspirations, interests and values of its members. In fact, Ng is clearly aimed at some specific familial behaviour - the family’s intentional response to the external environment - i.e., an intentionality that structural-functionalism has overlooked. I see that Ng has as a clear and honest theoretical purpose to reject the structural-functionalist hegemony. Regarding the possible intentional household strategies, Ng is unambiguously specific; there are only five categories of household strategies, namely, survival, piecemeal aggrandizement, professional advance, new world entrepreneur, corporate business advance.110

However, there are several vital questions concerning these five categories which remain largely unclear in Ng’s texts. For example, how are these five categories derived from the empirical data? What possible bias and missing have been imposed willy-nilly, consciously or unconsciously on these categories? Is there any interrelation between these five categories? Is there any fuzziness between the boundaries of these categories? Or, they can be clear-cut from one another in a neat way? To me, there is a glaring missing on how these five categories are derived and can be legitimated as scientific sociological categories. I have reason to wonder whether Ng has led us to escape from the snare of the structural-functionalist hegemony, or he just imposes on us another hegemony with a new label. Seen in this light, while the idea of household strategy is theoretically cogent and conceptually neat, it nevertheless suffers from a serious conceptual-schematic shortcoming, that is, the extremely small conceptual room it affords to further theoretical development. It

is virtually a solidified conceptual schema.

Apart from specific ideas about the local family, Ng (1991) is the first local sociologist to raise the general theoretical issue of "what family is?" to the local sociological community. He makes the following claims:

"[T]he prevalence of the ideal-typical isolated nuclear family is much exaggerated. Different forms of families coexist ..."

"... 'The family' should be but a shorthand in sociological discussion. The concept is often reified to become a living unit in its own right. The family is seen to have its 'needs'; ... shed 'its' functions, and change 'its' internal modes of conduct, etc. ... It is often forgotten that families are composed of living individuals structured by particular interests. Members of a family unit may have common as well as divergent interests, and the impact of social change on the unit is never uniform for all members concerned. The members also react not in terms of a mythical unity. Some may take the overall interests of the unit as a priority. Some may not, or not unreservedly. In the latter case, conflict and compromise are necessarily involved."  

My hope of looking for some hints for our problematic from local sociologists are once again shattered. Ng's answer to "What family is?" ends up in a bold but unjustified claim, "... 'The family' should be but a shorthand in sociological discussion." Unfortunately, the lack of local debate on Ng's claim restrains us from further discussion. However, on this point, we believe that, "[Ng's] claim of 'the family' being no more than a shorthand in sociological discussion deserves the most serious response if it is to be understood as a theoretical choice he has made that the individual who belongs to a family instead of the family of which he/she is a member should be the proper unit of analysis for family theory." I also point out that Ng's claim seems to be a conclusion he draws at least

partly from his reading of the current lack of theoretical consensus in the West, which Cheal (1991) summarizes as follows:

"The principal unit of analysis is often not the same in different theoretical approaches, even when a common term such as ‘family’ is employed. The term family is often used to mean different things by different theorists, and in some cases ‘the family’ has been replaced by other units of analysis in family studies. Current issues include whether ‘the family’ is a basic unit or a derived unit, or if it is simply one unit of analysis among a number of plausible possibilities ... More fundamentally, the reflexive questions raised by family experts include whether or not we know what ‘family’ is, and whether or not such a thing as ‘the family’ even exists at all ... Trost (1990:442) concludes that ‘Evidently no one “knows” what a family is: our perspectives vary to such a degree that to claim to know what a family is shows a lack of knowledge.’ There is much at stake in current debates about definitional problems."\(^{13}\)

3.4 Lau (1978): Utilitarianistic familism

Lau developed his idea of utilitarianistic familism in the late of the seventies and beginning of eighties. For Lau, “[Utilitarianistic familism is] a coherent set of normative and behavioural tendencies which can be used for explanatory purposes.”\(^{14}\) In the West, familism has been a popular construct and has been studied mainly as an independent variable at innumerable locales, communities and collectivities.\(^{15}\) It is usually constructed specifically for a particular locale, community or collectivity. Many brands of familism have appeared in the international research literature.\(^{16}\) Lau adopts the use of ideal types


\(^{15}\) A recent search on the Sociofile of the keyword “familism” yielded 134 entries spanning the past three decades. The idea was found to be used for ethnic groups in Latin America, United States, Canada and Europe; urban, small-town and rural locales and communities, special religious groups; and third-world countries.

\(^{16}\) For example, Banfield (1979) published his idea of amoral familism for the southern Italian community Chiaromonte (“Montegrano”), and used it together with “interesse” (acting on the principle of immediate personal gain) to characterize the behaviour of the Montegrano people, and to explain their continued poverty.
of familism which has followed a time-honoured and celebrated paradigm beginning with Max Weber’s *The Spirit of Protestant Ethics and the Rise of Capitalism*. Its salient feature is a usually unidirectional discourse beginning with an ideal type of spirit, ethos or some kind of pervasive culture, and ending with an ideal type of era, epoch, or some kind of, as Charle Tilly puts them, big structure and large process.117 Lau’s underlying theoretical ambition is to understand the latter, i.e., local political stability, in terms of the former, i.e., utilitarianistic familism.

Despite Lau’s endeavour to anchor his theory to the classical sociological theory, his tendency to perceive a discontinuity of history in his theorizing of the local family seems to strip his theory of the academic merits received from the local sociological community. Lau writes:

"The Chinese society in Hong Kong is not an indigenous society with historical continuity. It is a new society formed primarily by immigrants from various parts of China ... Consequently, the Chinese society in Hong Kong is no faithful replica of the Chinese society on its natural soil. It is a Chinese society developed in a particular historical and geographical setting, and is geared to insuring its survival and prosperity in a far-from-benign socioeconomic environment."

I am critical of the ahistoricality of Lau’s theory. I contend that Lau’s own paradigmatic attitude is curious. On the one hand he makes a paradigmatic claim for the purpose of his construction, but on the other hand he admits the ahistoricality of his theory. His explanation for his ahistoricality is far from being satisfactory. Migration does not necessarily imply cultural discontinuity for the collectivity concerned. That Hong Kong being a migrant society simply implies that there are more than one migrant culture - the Shanghaise remain Shanghaise, the Chaochowese remain Chaochowese - which meet one

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another at Hong Kong. Socioeconomic environment had almost never been benign on Chinese soil, as testified by historical studies in late Qing and the whole Republic period. There was in fact a continuity of hardship for most immigrants.

We also point out further that taken as an ahistorical construct, utilitarianistic familism is at the best a theoretically-informed selective summary. If one is true to the spirit of positivistic sociology, one should consider a formalization and concretization by way of a scale or an inventory, factor-analyzed and validated.\textsuperscript{119} Clearly it was not Lau's (1981) theoretical ambition. The theoretical and methodological status of utilitarianistic familism is therefore less than secure - it can neither be a historico-sociologically buttressed ideal type nor an empirically validated psycho-sociological construct. As a result, it remains in any sociological analysis a working, varying but vague idea - a surprising conclusion even to ourselves.

\textsuperscript{119} Such familism scales do exist, for example, Bardis Familism Scale (Bardis (1959)). It was tested or used in Aldrich, Lipman and Goldman (1973), Aldrich, Goldman and Lipman (1975), Heller (1976), Rao and Rao (1976) and Bardo (1979).
Chapter 4
Theoretical Preparations for the Empirical Research

4.1 Introduction

Before I proceed to discussing the target group of my empirical research, i.e., widows, in this chapter, I aim to bridge three conceptual gaps that have been laid down implicitly in previous chapters. First, I have to illustrate the theoretical and methodological grounds shared by Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism. This discussion can justify my fundamental viewpoint that Gubrium’s discursive constructionism is a development of Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology, and the former approach can be entitled, “Gubrium’s ethnomethodology.” Second, I have to provide justifications of appropriation of Gubrium’s ethnomethodology to answering my major theoretical problematic – What is family? – in my project concerning families suffered from the loss of husband. Third, in order to link up my theoretical discussion with an empirical research, I have to illustrate what methodological insights can be derived from Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism; and explain how these insights can contribute to my empirical pursuit.

4.2 Gubrium’s discursive constructionism as a development of Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology attends to the commonsense practices, procedures, and resources that persons use to produce the taken-for-grantedness of the life-world. Developing upon Schutz who proposes that the life-world is “indeed the unquestioned but questionable matrix within which all our inquiries start and end,” Garfinkel affirms that it is this “unquestioned but questionable matrix” where Schutz’s notion of “taken-for-grantedness” takes its ground. Garfinkel becomes the first person

who appropriates Schutz’s social phenomenology and attempts to continue Schutz’s unfinished empirical mission, i.e., looking into the structure of the taken-for-grantedness of the life-world.

Garfinkel proposes a special technique in order to “force” the actor to produce “reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world [i.e., the taken-for-granted life-world, in Schutzian sense] can be detected.” By “making trouble” in ordinary social situations, he attempts to demonstrate the centrality of horizontal background understanding, and contextual knowledge in actors’ shared recognitions of social events. Having inspired by earlier “incongruity experiments” pioneered by Asch and Bruner and Postman, Garfinkel calls his technique “breaching experiments.” He says,

In accounting for the persistence and continuity of the features of the concerned actions, sociologists commonly select some set of stable features of an organization of activities and ask for the variables that contribute to their stability. An alternative procedure would appear to be more economical: to start with a system with stable features and ask what can be done to make for trouble.

Procedurally, he begins with “familiar scenes and ask what can be done to make trouble.” To the actor, the “breaching questions” perceived in a normal environment can “produce and sustain bewilderment, consternation, and confusion; ... produce the socially structured affects of anxiety, shame, guilt, and indignation; and ... produce disorganized interaction ...” Consequently, “breaching experiments” are able to make

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126 Ibid.
visible the “seen but unnoticed” expectancies of social interaction and they can tell us “something about how the structures of everyday activities are ordinarily and routinely produced and maintained.” To Garfinkel, “breaching experiments” are a means to uncover the assumptions that underlie everyday reality and solicit social order from the disrupted the taken-for-granted reality.

While Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology develops upon social phenomenological initiatives suggested by Schutz and puts major emphasis on the role of actor’s constitutive practices in the formation and maintenance of social order; Gubrium further develops Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and emphasizes the necessity to investigate how the traditional “objects” and “facts” proper to the field of sociology, i.e., in his case, the family, can be regarded as practical and discursive accomplishments. Contrary to what is widely thought to be the demise of the family, Gubrium’s theoretical pursuit is clear when he highlights that the family is “a distinct object of everyday life,” and what is more important, said he, is “its reality-status as a recognisable and distinct social object is secured through the challenges of public discourse.” (Emphasis mine) Seen in this light, I thus suggest that Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism share a similar theoretical problematic – looking into the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life. The major difference is that the latter further develops the former in a direction leading to the rethinking of the traditional sociological “objects” and “facts.” Therefore I claim that the latter is a development of the former.

Let me further concretize my claim by pointing out that Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism also share similar methodological presumptions. As mentioned in passing, both disciplines emphasize locally managed, ongoing practices of reality construction and maintenance, and treat the social construction of reality as an ongoing discursive accomplishment. Talk and interaction are thus their empirical focuses. While Garfinkel attempts to look into the taken-for-grantedness of the life-world through “making trouble”, or asking “breaching

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127 Ibid., p. 36
questions," Gubrium’s methodology is founded upon unstable social settings. In his article “The family as project,”129 which the term “project” suggests that “family is both a practical undertaking and an extending outward, a concerted externalization a objectification of experience,”130 Gubrium states clearly that his empirical investigation is based on the families having troubles, i.e., in his own words, “[b]ased on data gathered in settings where the family side of personal troubles is a regular concern …”131 And, by being “challenged,” said Gubrium, family members can “provide possible meanings for, and to spell out the substance and bounds of the family form as an abstract entity in its own right, separate from its members, … [which is] called the family in the large.”132

The similarity of methodological presumptions between Garfinkel’s ethnography and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism becomes even more evident when Gubrium illustrates how a social worker explained to the members in a support group session with family caregivers of Alzheimer’s disease victims. The social worker said,

It seems like we mostly just take things for granted and you just don’t know what kind of family you are until a crisis like this happens. And that’s what we’re here for, really, to help you sort it out.133

Immediately after this quote, Gubrium writes that it “tacitly revealed the task of the family project.”134

In sum, by showing how Garfinkel’s ethnography and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism are similar both in terms of major theoretical problematic and methodological presumption, I conclude that Gubrium’s discursive approach is a development of Garfinkel’s ethnography. Hence, throughout this thesis,

129 Ibid.
130 Ibid., p. 293
131 Ibid., p. 273
132 Ibid., p. 274
133 Ibid., p. 281
134 Ibid., p. 281
"Gubrium's ethnomethodology" is a synonym of Gubrium's discursive constructionism.

4.3 Justifying Gubrium’s ethnomethodology as my method

Next, I have to argue in what ways Gubrium’s ethnomethodology can be applied to my project concerning families surviving the loss of breadwinner. In order to do so, I have to examine the methodology and the possible social work application of Gubrium’s research projects.

Gubrium is clear that to inform his major theoretical problematic, i.e., “What is family?” he has to collect data from settings where the family side of individual disability and dependence is a focal concern. In fact, he conducted researches in a variety of social service settings including nursing home, rehabilitation hospital, day hospital and caregiver support groups, where family life was frequently discussed in connection with issues concerning long-term care for patients with chronic illnesses.

A typical example to show how his methodology works is the participant observation of support groups for family caregivers of Alzheimer’s disease (senile dementia) victims. In the support groups, there were frequent topics of discussion involving competing conceptions and perceptions of “family” as a significant component of the Alzheimer’s disease experience. Gubrium pointed out that the group sessions offered direct evidence of the social organization of the family project. During the discussions, family members articulated the family order in relation to the practice and substantive concerns of diverse circumstances. Therefore, challenges and considerations provoked in such groups can serves as a means to transform one’s “family” as an entity from an tacit and undistinguished background feature of everyday life into an explicit “object” of the family project which, according to Gubrium, is “a practical, discursive construct, built out of as well as reflecting, concrete domestic

137 Ibid.pp.274-275
Based on data gathered from settings where the meaning of "family" is rethought, negotiated and even debated, Gubrium suggests three features of the family project: (1) the awareness of the social form, (2) family conduct in the large, and (3) family usage. These features refer respectively to (1) "the emerging sense of the entity as a thing separate from members"; (2) "its perception as a behaving social form," and (3) "the manner in which those concerned use family in the large to understand domestic affairs."

Relating Gubrium's ethnomethodology to my project, I regard that the death of a breadwinner in a family, no matter whether it is a sudden death or a death after a long medical treatment, undoubtedly induces a crisis to surviving family members. The crisis situation certainly provides an opportunity, a challenge, and a sudden turning point for the rest of the family to regain equilibrium. The readjustment of the rest of the family owing to the inevitable change of "family strategy and planning" inevitably brings about necessarily instability within the family. In many cases, it is the widow who makes decisions on how to plan for the family; conducts negotiations with others in order to cope with the crisis; and is held morally responsible for the repercussions that may result in the readjustment process. A typical example is that, to cope with her husband's death, a widow has to decide how her husband's former role, i.e., the main financial supporter of the family, can be replaced by another person or shared by other family members. All these restructuring within and outside the nuclear family boundary must lead to a reconstruction of the meaning of "What is family?" In this regard, I deem that the widow's re-articulation of the family order in relation to the practices and substantive concerns over the death of her husband is very similar to Gubrium's cases in which caregivers were compelled to rethink "What is family?" in the support group sessions.

Apart from the fact that the empirical case used by Gubrium is in parallel with mine,

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138 Ibid., p.274
139 Ibid., p.275
I contend that my endeavour to help the family losing its breadwinner is similar to Gubrium's concern of pooling "substantive resources for assigning meaning to their [caregivers'] lives." Gubrium elsewhere describes the major task of the support groups. He says,

As support group participants recollected experiences, they claimed to become aware of the meaning of burden and familial responsibility in ways they had not previously considered. It was not just the support groups proper that offered a stock of new and provocative questions and substantive resources for assigning meaning to their lives, but the groups' reflection of a public culture.\[141\]

Gubrium also points out that through shared formulation of family order, the support group may reach "a common understanding resulted about the obligation to pull together as a family."\[142\] I see that this common understanding very useful in social work intervention because, as Gubrium says, that "hidden family strengths" can be mobilized. A social worker in a support group organized by Gubrium explained to the participants that,

I hear what you're saying and I've seen it many times. Many families just don't get it together as group, like working together as a team. There are many with hidden family strengths that just never get expressed for some reason.

In my project, I claim that the task of Gubrium's support groups is akin to that of mine in attempting to help families-in-crisis. It is presumed that before the crisis, the notion "What is family?" is vague and largely unquestioned, i.e., taken-for-granted.\[143\] But, in counseling with the widow, I suggest that the remarks and discussions provoked can be turned into descriptive resources for the widow. Gubrium writes that "Awareness of the

\[140\] Ibid., p.275
\[141\] Ibid., p.276
\[142\] Ibid., p.281
\[143\] Here we adopt a standard social phenomenological position of Alfred Schutz. He claimed that the actors are living in the life-world which is "an unquestioned but always questionable matrix." Schutz (1973), "The intersubjective world and its representational relations: Signs," Collected Papers 1: The Problem of Social Reality, p.326-327.
family in the large is a matter of putting resources to work, the task of bringing those concerned to consider the familial reality of the burden of care in terms of a distinguishable stock of [practical] options.\textsuperscript{144}

So illustrated, I regard that it is appropriate to adopt Gubrium’s ethnomethodology to my project.

4.4 Methodological insights derived from Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism

In this section, I need to be clear of what methodological insights are derived from Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology and Gubrium’s discursive constructionism and I have to justify the method that I opt for in my empirical research.

Undoubtedly, one of the major contributions of Garfinkel’s “breaching experiments” is to vest in the researcher a clear methodological role, i.e., disruptive role. However, I decide not to apply Garfinkel’s “breaching experiments” to my empirical research owing to two reasons.

First, Garfinkel’s “breaching experiments” can no longer proceed when the actor is no longer willing to answer the “breaching questions.” In this situation, emotional distress created to the actor causes a serious ethical issue. According to past experiences, actors who did the experiments almost unanimously remarked that the “experiments” had created anxiety and dread for them.\textsuperscript{145} Thus, with high experimenter anxiety, how can I ensure that the subject is willing to listen to the questions and continue to answer? How can we ensure that the subject is willing to spend his time to answer breaching questions? And, how much content can be solicited from a stressful breaching question-and-answer situation?

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p.279
Second, Garfinkel propounded that a series of "breaching questions" can trigger to turn his/her gaze at the taken-for-grantedness of everyday life experience. Garfinkel holds an assumption that through the answers to the "breaching questions," not only the taken-for-grantedness must be made known, but also the more that the answers are clarified, the more the taken-for-grantedness becomes known. But in the "breaching experiments," the activity of the actor is subjected to sudden and forceful interruptions. Normal activity of the actor in everyday life is thus disrupted. The background expectance is uncovered suddenly and in the flash of a few seconds the subject refuses any further uncovering and closes it firmly. A series of questions arise: What is the connection between what is uncovered and what is still not? Why this piece of background information is uncovered but not the other pieces? Would the breaching questions cause a radical change to the structure of the taken-for-grantedness of the lifeworld, leading to, at least, a short-term disruption and subsequent alterations to the actor's "natural attitude?" As a result, our scope of understanding of the taken-for-grantedness is seriously restricted by the actor's tolerance to the "breaching questions" and the level of anxiety that the actor can tolerate.

Therefore, in my study, I deliberately give up the application of "breaching experiments" for moral and practical reasons. But how can I solicit the meaning of "family" from surviving members and in what ways I can open the possibility of raising a new social work intervention approach directed at widows. In this project, I attempt to apply Gubrium's ethnomethodology. That means, as a theoretical assumption, I regard that the family is not considered as an ontological object, rather, it is conceptualized in terms of descriptive practice - that is, the discursive interaction through which realities are (re)formulated and made meaningful. Thus said, if I follow strictly Gubrium's ethnomethodology, participant observation in mutual support group for widows will be the best way to study the meaning of "family." However, it is impossible for me to participate in an established "widow support group" organized in local social work agency owing to ethical problem. Moreover, time constraint does not allow me to form a new "widow support group" with my individual effort. Therefore, I decide to choose
another method. As mentioned earlier, Gubrium argues that the attaching and detaching a meaning to an interpersonal relation is in embedded social interactions and practical reasoning. I thus use in-depth interview with the widow as my method. And, I, as a interviewer, have a role to invite, but not force, the interviewee to talk about the situation of his/her family and to carry out practice reasoning concerning in what ways the family copes with the crisis. At the end of the interviews, records of family discourses will be used as data.

In my empirical research, I start with some leading questions\(^\text{146}\) that touch upon the carrying out of family life after the death of the husband, hoping that the interviewee, the widow, would relate her response to other family members, relatives, and family events. The leading questions are deliberately set to avoid explicit reference to the notion of “family.” They do not contain any leading terms like “family,” “household,” “home,” etc., so as to avoid imposing the value of the interviewer to the interviewee. Such kind of impositions will probably lead the interviewee to answer in the way that follows the value of the interviewer, instead of hers. These leading questions are meant to stimulate the interviewee to think about how her family life has been after the death of her husband. I believe that in responding to the questions, the interviewee inevitably relates her answers to particular persons and events. If her narrative begins with persons like family members, relatives or even friends, she will be talking thematically about social and probably “familial” connections. If her narrative begins with particular events, e.g., Chinese New Year festival, she will inevitably be relating them to persons, and very likely “family members” who involve. Following the spirit of Gubrium’s ethnomethodology, I consider that the social connections described by the interviewee in fact reflecting her construction of “family.”

The first leading question that asks how her family life was in the past few months after the death of her husband is supposed to lead the interviewee to talk about her reflections on daily life. I, the interviewer, is not to lead the direction of discussion

\(^{146}\) For examples, 1) 你先生不幸過身已經有一年幾啦，你響呢段時間內日子係點過呢？2) 年過節，你係點過呢？3) 呢段日子有無D野你係覺得唔開心？
unless there is a need to make the conversation continue, or I want the interviewee to further elaborate the term(s) that she has used to describe the events or persons involved. I ask follow-up questions that are supposed to further facilitate the interviewee to talk more about how her family copes with the crisis. In case that the first leading question can no longer trigger the interviewee to talk productively, I shall proceed the next leading question. From her answers, I shall pinpoint the persons, events, localities, settings, etc. that the widow raises. According to Gubrium’s ethnomethodology, the investigation into her construction of her family begins when she at her own initiative mentions terms that are related to the conception of “family.”

Yet, I believe that different family members perceive the crisis differently, but I hold that the widow, having been deeply involved in the life, the illness and the death of her husband, is the one who has to undergo most acute internal and external reconstruction of her family. She deeply feels that the death of her husband renders her family incomplete and in deficit. Using Garfinkel’s words, the death of the husband has “made trouble” which intensely and negatively affects the ordinary social situation of the wife (now the widow). The widow is in trouble with her family. Construction or reconstruction of her family will occur naturally when she attempts to cope with the crisis. Following the logic of Garfinkel’s breaching experiment, the widow is likely to bring up some issues that were taken-for-granted in the past. Therefore, the crisis, in this case, the loss of her husband, forces the widow to ask herself, as well as to explain to others: ‘Who belongs to my family?’ “Where is my family?” and “What is my family?” From this perspective, I contend that the coping strategy of a mourning family is inseparable from the question: What is family? And, in order to look into these matters, the widow of is my most knowledgeable informant. And, in the next chapter, I shall examine the characteristics of my target group – widows.
Chapter 5

Widow: Target group for the Empirical Research and Social Work Intervention

5.1 Introduction

In this section I shall justify our choice of widows as the target group for investigation; we shall also discuss some characteristics of widows and widowhood by drawing reference to relevant literature.

There are a few characteristics about widows. Firstly, they face a significant change in their families that necessary leads to a change in their conception of family, as husbands are by any means members of families under most conceptions of families. Secondly, husbands are usually the major, if the sole, money makers of families, thus the losing of husbands both brings about tremendous psychological stress and provokes financial considerations to widows. There are also findings suggest that widows, more often than widowers, fell back on parental family support.147

The first characteristic, which is the permanent loss of a significant family member, justifies our looking through the goggles of widows to examine the concept of family. The financial stresses widows usually face pressurizes the original family concept the widows has had. This parallels the use of old people living in Elderly homes by Gubrium, in which the old people are physically detached from their kinship family members for a prolonged period which most likely lasts until they die.

The emotional grief and other psychological sufferings together with financial stresses that usually follow falling into widowhood are a sufficient ground for social work intervention. The higher propensity to seeking help of widows, at least comparing with widowers, makes them a good target group of this study.

5.2 Widowhood and widows

The death of a breadwinner in a family is traumatic to its member. Among the survivors, the wife must be the most bereaved one. How worse is the impact on the widow is determined by many factors, like the cause of the death and the age of her husband and herself at that the time that event occurred. Besides, the significance of the marriage to the widow and her emotional involvement with her husband are also important factors to the "rehabilitation" of the widow from the loss of her "better half."

With the increasing number of nuclear families in modern world, people develop less connection with other people and thus intensify meanings of the few threads of connectedness that remain. In other words, this trend has increased the significance of a small number of highly significant others. As nuclear family is a typical living arrangement in modern societies like Hong Kong, the death of such others, thus must be more devastating than in societies in which people have connecting threads with numerous others. This is a product of individualization, urbanization and industrialization. As identified by Lopata (1996), there are two major sets of consequences of death of the husband to the wife: (1) personal, in terms of her emotions and sentiments; and (2) social, in terms of the role that she takes on, at least temporarily, i.e. widow. The status of widow, to a wife means there is a cutoff of her past involvement and dependency and anticipated future in the relationship with her husband. She thus experiences great disorganization and hence re-examines of some taken-for-granted concepts, like the family.

Below I discuss the major themes of widowhood and then follow them with a brief introduction of some most direct sources of support available to widows. I then conclude this section with the concept of perceived support opens the way to link the

149 Ibid., p.89.
discursive constructionist view of the family and a new social work intervention perspective basing on it.

5.2.1 Major themes of widowhood

Several themes can be identified in the analysis of widowhood. These themes include grief, remarriage, relationship with kin, additional stressors and others source of support.

Grief

Without discussing grief, it is not possible to understand the changes in social relationships that widowhood brings into the world of the widows.

In the first place, in literary sense of the word, grief may harm the widows. Many of them suffer from physical symptoms, which are caused or aggravated by the shock of their husband's death. Symptoms have been reported include loss of weight, rheumatism and fibrosis, indigestion, falling hair, insomnia, dizziness and fevers, etc. Some people may think that the severity of grief would depend on whether the length of husband's death had been made known to the widows. However, researches indicate that the shock would be scarcely less severe even when the husband had been gravely ill for a considerable period of time. In a study conducted by Marris (1958), some widows indicated that the house they used to live with their husbands had become so unbearably charged with memories, and all the stuff in the house made them associated with their husbands. These widows often spent hours in public place, in order to avoid everything that associated with their losses. In some cases the widows admitted that even after three years, they were still subject to an impulsion to escape from places and stuff that might prompt them about memories of their husbands. Being failed to escape from such kind of intolerable distress, the widows became apathetic to almost everything, including their relationship with other people like kin and relatives.

151 Ibid., p.15.
Marris (1958)\textsuperscript{152} summarizes four signs of grief of widows, namely (1) physical symptoms; (2) loss of contact with reality, i.e., inability to comprehend the loss, brooding over memories and clinging to possessions; (3) a tendency to withdraw, i.e. to escape from everything that recalls the loss; and (4) hostility against the doctor, the fate and even in turn against oneself. Of course, this classification of signs of grief is oversimplified. However, it serves to make clearer some of the typical reactions to bereavement.

The impacts of grief are also described systematically by Schuchter (1986)\textsuperscript{153} in his analysis based on several studies of widow and widowers in California. Schuchter points out that grief is composed of six dimensions. The first dimension is "emotional and cognitive responses to the death of a spouse." Signs of this dimension include shock, sudden high experiences of pain of grief in response to reminders, a sense of loss, guilt, loneliness, etc. Widows may also develop anger towards the deceased spouse and anyone around her; and often feel being exploited by the whole process. The second dimension includes coping with "emotion pains and suppression of this pain." Strategies like avoidance to stimuli that associated with the deceased spouse and keeping oneself busy all the time are common among widows. The third dimension of grief focuses on "the continuing relationship with the dead spouse." This dimension includes the survivors’ maintaining contact with the dead through hallucinations and conversation, symbolic representation in the form of clothing, rings and similar objects. The fourth dimension involves "withdrawal from social functions, works and interest." In other words, the normal functioning of daily pattern of the widow has been changed. Very often, the change also accompanies with deterioration of health. The fifth dimension is characterized by the change of relationship with others like relatives and friends. The change can be more detached or more closed. The last dimension is the change of identity of the widow. With her husband died, a widow is no longer a wife of somebody, but an "unmarried" woman. With a change of identity, self-concept of the widow also

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p.21

changes accordingly.

Besides the study and analysis done by Marris (1958) and Schuchter (1986), there are some other studies on the same topic confirming the above findings. They categorize the manifestation of grief exhibits into four groups, namely psychological, social, somatic and spiritual. In the psychological aspect, responses like shock, disbelief and denial are common reactions of a person who has his/her beloved deceased. In many cases, sadness manifests in continuous crying, guilt feeling manifests in withdrawal behaviour and anxiety manifests in fear of death of oneself are very common. In social aspect, guilt feelings that leads to withdrawal behaviours makes the relationships with people other than that with the deceased person become more distant. S/he is intensively preoccupied with the deceased person and views all other people as less important. Such an apathetic attitude towards life is in fact a mechanism that leads the bereaved to handle their situation by abandoning their defence against grief, and thus they are under the strain of continual conflict. In some cases, this strain makes them turn to an outlet by arousing feelings of resentment and blame towards other people and eventually end up to a decline in the quality of social relationships. In the somatic aspect, according to Gass-Sternas, K.A.(1995), poor physical health and high amounts of depression-dejection, fatigue-inertia and little vigor are common to widows. In the last aspect, spiritual manifestation of grief, Schneider (1984) points out that during the initial awareness of loss, the bereaved deems that all the meanings of his/her life has gone and vision on future is diminished. The bereaved then will question all the previously existing belief system like his/her faith in God, fairness of life, fate, etc. However, with the passage of time, the bereaved eventually reach a stage of acceptance during which s/he tries to find out the meaning of loss and imperfection of life become acceptable.


Ibid.

Additional stressors

Widowhood means that great change has occurred in the life of a woman. Changes are so drastic that all dimensions of her life will be affected. With her husband having passed away, additional demands and responsibilities often make the widow feel guilty and isolated because she may fail to meet to all demands. These feelings are more obvious to widows with additional stressors. For example, death of another close relative, home moving, unemployment, etc. In general, three kinds of difficulties that arise from widowhood can be identified. First, from the moment the husband fell ill, money has been short. Additional expenditures such as medical expenses, special diets and transportation of family members, add to the burden of the family. After the death of the husband, unless assisted by insurance or retirement schemes, the bereaved families inevitably face a problem, the falls of income. Second, entering into widowhood implies that a woman has no husband to help her anymore. It means that a widow has to adapt to new challenges that arise from the multi-roles she has to take because she is now the mother, the housekeeper, the breadwinner and the father. Third, for the widow to face new challenges successfully, she needs the moral support from her family, kin, relatives, as well as friends to guide her through the crisis of bereavement.

Remarriage

Undoubtedly, widowhood brings numerous losses to the widow. Support from friends and relatives can replace some of the husband's practical functions and help release a widow from grief. However, some specific functions of a husband cannot be compensated by support from friends and relatives. Provision of companionship is one of these functions. It is important to note that the need for companionship is not equivalent to the need for a company. Even without love, marriage promises constant companionship which friends and relatives are not able to offer. Besides, marriage often implies a constant income support and a specific social status. Therefore, the idea of remarriage may emerge to the widow.
Children’s need for a father is another reason that why widows consider remarriage. The death of the husband makes the family an incomplete one. The incompleteness of the family is harmful to the development of younger children, for they have no father role to look upon to. However, remarriage also brings in difficulties. Conflict may arise between the children and the stranger. Widows may fear that a step-father will do their children more harm than good if the relationship between them is not a harmonious one. That is why some widows postpone any thought of remarriage until their children grow older.

The Chinese saying “be loyal to one man for a life time” implies another traditional concept that refrains most Chinese widows from considering remarriage. The longer a marriage has been lasted, the lower the possibility that remarriage occurs. In most cases, this loyalty to the deceased husband will into strong loyalty to her children. So for the families in poverty, it is natural that the widows look to their children, and especially their sons, to take their father’s place and regain the financial independence of the family.

In sum, to compensate the loss brought about by the death of her husband, a widow can turn to her parental family for assistance: tangible, intangible and psychological. However, her dependence on them is likely to cause a sense of status loss. If she turns to her children, she may overburden them. She will risk another painful adjustment if her children decide to marry. However unselfish assistance and support offer by the children and relatives cannot be a perfect substitute for the reciprocal love between the widow and her deceased husband. In this regard, remarriage becomes a possible solution for the widows to cope with the crisis. However, remarriage sometimes creates new difficulties for the widow. For example, it will be harmful to the children if a widow puts them under the custody of a stepfather who does not feel responsible to them. Besides, regarding her psychology, she has to reconcile herself with respect to her divided loyalty between her new and deceased husband. A widow will fall into dilemma if such problems of remarriage occur.
Remarriage is undoubtedly a solution to widowhood. However, both local and foreign experience reveal that remarriage is more common among men than among women.¹⁵⁸ There are some explanations for this phenomenon. First, widowers tend to marry women who are young and single rather than widows. In many societies including conservative Chinese society, widows who marry young men are stigmatized. With the life span of women increased, widows outnumber widowers and the possibility of meeting a suitable partner for a widow thus lowered. Second, Chinese in general hold a negative attitude towards remarried women. People considered it is a matter of "losing face" for a man to marry a woman who has married once before. It is especially so if it is the first marriage of the man. If the woman is widowed, she is considered as inauspicious and the marriage will endanger the health of the man. In most cases, widows are not welcome by their parents-in-law-to-be. Third, the chance of remarriage will be further lowered if the widow has children. To bring up children in family with a different family name is considered as a "losing investment." In Chinese culture, people fear that their legacy will be transferred to the "widow turned-daughter-in-law." In this regard, it is more difficult for a widow to "exit" widowhood than a widower.

It is worth mentioning that remarriage is discouraged in traditional Chinese society. The commendation of "monumental archway of moral integrity" in fact imposes social constraints to the freedom of widows. It is a taboo for most Chinese widows to discuss remarriage. If the widow has children, concerns like whether the children will like or accept the potential step-father, or whether he will take up responsibility to take care of the children, will be striking. For old widows, the chance of remarriage will be low when compared with that of their young counterparts. This is because with the elongation of women's life span, old single women often out-number old single men. In our society it is more acceptable socially for men to identify younger women as marriage partners than it is for women to identify younger men. Besides demographic factors, it is also common for a Chinese woman to hold a belief that a moral woman should marry

to one and only one man in her lifetime. In my study, none of the subjects said a word on remarriage, not to mention that they appreciated support from a man that could be her potential husband.

Relationship with kin

The termination of a marriage through death brings changes to the pattern of the relationships among the widow and her friends and relatives. So many conflicting emotional and practical needs that affect how well a widow adjusts to her husband's death. On the one hand, a widow strives to maintain her sense of independence. On the other hand, she may find loneliness sometimes unbearable but she may not be willing accept a man as a substitute for her affections. The balance in these two conflicting attitudes affects the widow's perception of social relationship.

After the death of husband, widows are likely to turn to her parental family for advice and help, especially for those whose parents are still alive. Parents' home is the place where the widows meet their brothers and sisters. But with their parents die, the brothers and sisters drift apart because they have no common place to meet each others and no respectful common figure that serve as a "moral glue" to stick everyone together. Thus whether or not parents are still alive influence the intimacy of the relationship among the widow, her brothers and sisters.

In daily exchange, women in general play a more active role in maintain contact with other family members than men. Since family relationships centre so much on women, it is natural for the family to have more frequent contacts with members of wife's parental family than that of the husband's parental family. In this regard, it is more likely for a man to be "absorbed" into his wife's family and joining in her family gatherings. On the contrary, visiting to members of her husband's family become rituals

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159 Chinese sayings like "loyal official should not serve two sovereigns, chaste woman should not marry two men" (忠臣不事二父，貞女不更二夫)and "it is justified for a man to remarry, but unreasonable for a woman to do so" (夫有再聚之義，婦無二適之文)
and only take place in special occasions like Chinese New Year or the birthdays of her mother-in-law or father-in-law. Since a wife tends to remain rather aloof from her husband’s family, it is natural for her to maintain even less contact with them after her husband’s death. Such an unbalance relationship among the families in question accounts why the widow often turns to her own parents’ family for support after the death of her husband.

Other sources of support

Support from people other than kin also plays an important role in contributing to the healthy recovery of the bereaved family. An appropriate definition of support is coined by Miller N.B., Smerglia V. L., Gaudet D. S. and Kitson G. C. (1998) who puts “support” as “the perception of available help from one’s social network”. In extreme stressful events like widowhood, support from others will greatly increase soon after the occurrence of the event. According to Stylianos and Vachon (1993), widows find support from their parental family members most helpful and support from her spouse’s family less important. Moreover, they claim that with the passage of time, support from friends and peers ultimately takes up that from family members and becomes most important to the widow.

In most cases, it is very difficult for widows to face the financial problem and they are reluctant to become dependent on their relatives, even if this is possible. Once the shock of bereavement is eased, they want to regain their independence as soon as possible, for it is irksome to receive kindness continuously but not able to reciprocate. The sense of being under an obligation is a continual constraint. In local cases, CSSA or going out to work are two options that constitute a dilemma to widows. It does not mean that relatives cannot help the widows anymore. On the contrary, enabling a widow to go out

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to work is perhaps the most useful practical function that her friends and relatives can perform. Taking care of the children for the widow and hence releasing her from onerous housework is a typical example of this function. However, in reality, there is an old Chinese saying: "prolonged poverty is difficult of be taken care of." In this sense, even if support from friends and relatives is adequate in the short period after the death of their husbands', widows are eager to regain their financial independence quickly. The discussion of remarriage and relationship with kin should be put in this context and we will explore how the availability of sources of support affect the widows' reconstruction of families in Chapter 6.

The difficulty then lies on how could widows continue to mobilise and utilize sources of support, from kins or other sources, through the reconstruction of their conceptions of family. This is because as we discussed about seeking help from our family member is taken as short-term and should not be sustained. A careful descriptions of relationships between reconstruction of the conceptions of family and sources of support is then in place.

5.2.2 From actual support to perceived support

In additional to actual support, Kesser et al (1995)\textsuperscript{162} raised another idea: perceived potential support. Kesser (1995) believes that perception of potential support resources may enable one to cope with the stresses with a more eased feeling, for she can hold that she will always have supports if she needs some. However, no hard feeling is created for she actually not using it. Thus, it is important to help the widows to identify potential sources of support that she never think of, in addition to finding actual support for her.

As I shall expound in greater details in Chapter 7, perceived support hints on a

strategy of moving from reconstructing of a new family concept to the creation of new sources of actual and perceived support to widows.

5.3 Chinese widows in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the majority of the population is Chinese, among which some are locally born and some are immigrants from Mainland China. Widows, a specific group of people who are constituents of the general population, thus also is consisted of local people and immigrants. Since most locally born and immigrant widows are Chinese, they have some characteristics in common while differ in other aspects as they grow up in different social and cultural backgrounds.

It is generally agreed that Hong Kong Chinese society is basically a patriarchal society. Some prevailing concepts that lead to the inferior status of women are common here. For example, terms like “ngoi-ka-nui” which is heavily loaded with feudal connotation are still familiar to everyone and frequently used by people to describe their married daughters. The term implies that married daughters are no longer members of the family, they thus are not eligible to inherit legacy of their ancestors. Discriminating customs like “ding uk” policy is still upheld in the New Territories of Hong Kong.

That being said, tough it seems that Hong Kong women are still in a disadvantaged position when compared with their male counterparts, in most other cases, they have equal opportunities to access to almost all social resources when they are in turn compared with their rural China immigrant counterparts. In fact, in a modern society like Hong Kong, the influence of traditional concept on human behaviour is far less explicit than that in rural China. In Hong Kong, people are more susceptible to Western ideas and education level is much higher than that in rural China. They view women having their husbands deceased in a more or less neutral way. The death of a husband is perceived as a misfortune to a woman and widows are considered as miserable and needing a helping hand. In general, widows can receive sympathy and support from

parents, in-laws, relatives, friends and neighbours. In my study, it is obvious that for the three Hong Kong borne widows, though relationship with their in-laws become more detached after the death of their husband, they can still get along well with each other and meet each other in special traditional Chinese festivals. No resent from their in-laws are reported.

To understand the situation of immigrant widows in Hong Kong, I have to examine the traditional Chinese family system and the traditional position of women within the system in rural China, so as to comprehend the influence of traditional concepts on widow’s position in society.

We often come across some concepts like “chuen,” “fong” and “ka” when discussing Chinese villages. These terms are frequently employed by new immigrants to describe their positions within the family system. In the first glance, these words seem to be neutral and only describing relationships among a group of people. However, the traditional principles and rituals behind these terms do contribute to the inferior position of woman in traditional Chinese society.

Chuen, can be interpreted as “village” in English. Within a chuen, especially in Southern China, male residents often bear a same family name, and people often address a chuen by referring to the family name of its residents, say Lam Chuen, Chan Chuen, etc. Members of a chuen are believed to descend from a common ancestor, and therefore they all bear a common family name. The sociologists call it a lineage.163 Within a lineage, only males and unmarried females are counted as members. But for female members, their membership will be forfeited once they get married. They will be considered as outsiders since they are married to members of another lineage.164 For a woman who married to her husband, she does not acquire membership of the chuen of her husband, she is only a mother of its members if she gives birth to her children. Since she does not acquire her membership in her husband’s chuen, she is not eligible to any heritage if she

bears no heir, i.e. a boy, to the family. As a matter of fact, traditionally bearing no heir is one of the seven reasons that a husband can legitimately divorce his wife.\textsuperscript{165}

*Fong* refers to the small unit of a clan. Members of different *fong* descend from different sons of a common male ancestor. The structure looks like a tree and each branch of this tree is a *fong*. Each *fong* has its common properties and a place to worship their ancestors. Daughters can never form a *fong* of her own in her clan of origin, she thus is not eligible to the distribution of properties that belonged to the *fong*.

*Ka* is the basic unit of this complicated system. It approximates to "family" in English. A *ka* is formed by marriage of a man and a woman from two different lineage, the two people bear different family names. In traditional Chinese village, modern Western concepts like "nuclear family," "single family," "compound family" and "extended family" have never existed. They are only sociological language. For Chinese, there is only small family (*ka*) or big family.\textsuperscript{166} Small family refers to what sociologists call "family of procreation"\textsuperscript{167} which consists of a couple and their unmarried children. Big family refers to family composes of other members in additional to that of small family. Very often, these additional members are parents of the husband. Big family approximates to what sociologists call "extended family" in the West, but often go so extended as to cover remote relationships that do not exist in most Western societies.

Upheld by Confucianism, hierarchical distribution of power within family is emphasized. The distribution is mainly based on sex and age. In general, male members are superior to female members and the aged is superior to the young. In this regard, the son must be obedient to his father, and the wife must be obedient to her husband.\textsuperscript{168} Of course, other factors like one's rank in the family tree is equal important to determine one's position. Besides hierarchy of power, job division is also emphasized. It is common for traditional Chinese to hold views that man has to handle the more

\textsuperscript{165} 岳慶中(1990)中國的家庭與國．吉林文史出版社・p.236.
\textsuperscript{166} 徐揚杰(1992)中國家族制度史．人民出版社・p.3.
\textsuperscript{167} 謝秀芹(1986)家庭與家庭服務．五南圖書出版社・p.1.
important external affairs of a family, while woman is left to tackle the less important internal affairs like taking good care of children and parents-in-law.

In rural area, traditional beliefs carry enormous influence on the daily living of people. Women who are married become part of the family of her husband and her connection with the family was through her husband. Her position and status within the family are either determined by the position of her husband or her children. Women are never considered as of independent identity but are attached to male members of their families. One of the major tasks of woman is to give birth to heir of a family, so as to carry on the family name and take up legacy of the family. It is extremely a misfortune if her husband died of illness during the prime of life. It is much better if she has given birth to boys, she will be allowed to stay in the family. If a widow does not has a heir, the fear of losing inheritance to a woman will cause the family to be hostile to the widow. Besides, widows are often considered as inauspicious and will bring back luck to her succeeding husband.

It goes without saying that it is not possible to have a single view on widows of China. People in cities and people in rural areas show great differences. My study, though not means to contrasts the two groups of widows, did confirmed the discrepancy arose from different backgrounds of the subjects. I should look into this in Chapter 6.

5.4 My sample

This empirical part of this study is to examine the discursive constructedness of conceptions of family. In order to trigger widows’ discursive constructions of family, the subjects must fulfill two criteria. First, the impact of their husband's death must be fresh enough. It is not desirable if their husbands have passed away long ago since the reconstruction(s) or recall of past reconstruction(s) of their conception of family by the widows would be difficult. Second, the subjects must be married to their husbands for a

considerable period of time. Preferably, the couples should have been deeply involved in the family lives. Both criteria are aimed at ensuring that the subjects had a taken-for-granted, i.e. unquestioned, conception of "family" before the death of their husbands.

As mentioned before, the best way to verify Gurbium's ethnomethodology in family study is to apply the model in group setting. For example, as a observation participant in a group for widows. However, after discussion with some social workers and field instructors of university social work departments, I found that with considerations like ethical issues, time arrangement and acceptance of clients, it is not possible to find a group that suits my study. Alternatives, though less perfect, like in-depth interview then came to my mind.

I target at getting only a six to eight case sample due to time and resources constraint. I first approached the Cancer Patients' Resources Centre for assistance. A social worker, Ms. Chan, received me and had a thorough discussion with me before introducing me to her clients. After having understood my research purpose and the detailed arrangement of the interview, Ms. Chan agreed to locate suitable subjects for me. Two weeks later, Ms. Chan introduced three subjects whom are members of their self-support group to me. Ms. Chan had explained to these three subjects the purpose and arrangement of the interviews. With consent from the subjects, Ms. Chan gave me the telephone numbers of these three subjects and I phoned them directly to arrange the interviews.

With only three subjects in hand is absolutely inadequate. I then seek help from Ms. Sze, a social worker of the Society for Community Organizations (SOCO) that provides services to new immigrants. Ms. Sze told me that widows were not uncommon among their members. In this regard, Ms. Sze agreed to locate suitable subjects for me. She asked me to attend a seminar organized by the SOCO, in which I met the three widows and briefly introduced myself and the proposal of the interview to them. They agreed to help.
Subject profile

Mrs. A

Mrs. A is now 51 years old, she has married for 24 years. Her husband died with cancer six months ago. Mrs. A has two children, one boy and one girl, who are 23 and 17 years old respectively. Her son is an insurance agent and her daughter is a student. Mrs. A’s father died one month before the death of her husband. She has three sisters and one brother in Hong Kong. In her husband’s family of origin, Mrs. A has three brothers-in-law and four sisters-in-law. Relationship between Mrs. A and her siblings is harmonious whereas that with her in-laws is less intimate. Mrs. A lives in public housing. She has tried to apply CSSA but failed because her son who is employed lives with her. Mrs. A is now trying to find a job, so as to ease financial difficulty. Mrs. A is physically healthy but with some psychological disturbance.

Mrs. B
Mrs. B is 46 years old and has married for 26 years. Her husband died 8 months ago. Mrs. B has two children, one boy and one girl, who are 24 and 20 years old respectively. Her son is now working in the USA and her daughter is a nurse. Mrs. B's father is eight years old and she has six sisters and two brothers in her family of origin. She gets along well with them and receives great support from them, especially from her father. In the family of origin of her husband, Mrs. A maintains good relationship with her brother-in-law whereas her relationship with her mother-in-law is less intimate. Mrs. B lives in a self-own private apartment, and she is financially well-off because her children are employed and her husband was a civil servant with a sum of pension good enough to sustain her living. Mrs. B has excellent physical and psychological health.

Mrs. C

Mrs. C is 45 years old and had married for 16 years before her husband died 6 months ago. Mrs. C has two sons who are 14 and 6 years old respectively. The boys are attending schools. Mrs. C has two sisters who maintain good relationship with Mrs. C. Her mother is still alive and give support to her during funeral arrangement and afterwards. Besides, Mrs. C can get along well with her mother-in-law, two brothers-in-law and one sister-in-law. Mrs. C is unemployed and is now living on CSSA. This family lives in a mortgaged private flat which bought with money borrowed from one of her younger sisters. Mrs. C seems to be in good physical and psychological condition.
Mrs. D is a Mainland China immigrant immigrated to Hong Kong after her husband had died in Hong Kong one year ago. She is now 52 years old and got married for 15 years. She has a daughter aged 12 years. All members of Mrs. D's family of origin, including two brothers and two sisters, live in China. In Hong Kong, she has two suk-pai-dai-lo who only maintain minimum contact with her. With physical and psychiatric problems, Mrs. D is not able to find a job. She is now living in a rental quarter of a private flat and is making a living on CSSA.

Mrs. E

Mrs. E is also a Mainland China immigrant that immigrated to Hong Kong one year ago.
Her husband died with cancer when she arrived Hong Kong. Mrs. E is 36 years old. She has married for 14 years and has two daughters aged 13 and 11 respectively. Her two daughters are attending school and Mrs. E stays at home to take good care of them. Mrs. E's mother-in-law lives alone in China. Mrs. E also has two brothers in Hong Kong and seven sisters in China. Mrs. E pays visit to her sisters occasionally whereas she maintains minimum contact with her two brothers who, according to Mrs. E, look known upon her because she is poor. Like Mrs. D, Mrs. E is also living in a rental quarter of a private flat in Shamshuipo. She is now living on CSSA.

Mrs. F

Mrs. F is now 38 years old. She is a Mainland China immigrant that immigrated to Hong Kong 10 months ago, just six days after the death of her husband. Mrs. F has two daughter aged 8 and 5 respectively. She is now living in a rental quarter of a private flat. Like Mrs. D and Mrs. E, Mrs. F is also living on CSSA. In Hong Kong, the relatives that Mrs. F has include her husband's two suk-pai-dai-lo and one younger brother.
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169 With money borrowed from her younger sister.
Chapter 6.
Data Analysis I: Sociological Analysis

6.1 Method

Interviews took place either in interview rooms of social service agencies or at the homes of the subjects and on a one-to-one basis. A set of leading questions was prepared. The interviewer, myself, was vigilant to remain non-directive. All interviews were audio-taped, and contents were transcribed for data analysis. Each subject was asked to sign a form of consent (with clearly stated research objectives) before interview (See Appendix 7). Confidentiality of data obtained had been re-assured by the interviewer before the interview commenced.

Leading questions

Below are the five leading questions that I prepared for the interviews:

1) 你先生不幸過身已經有一年幾啦，你響呢段時間內日子係點過呢？

2) 過年過節，你係點過呢？

3) 呢段日子有無 D 野你係覺得唔開心？

4) 有無 D 野你係覺得開心呢？

5) 踏番你身邊所有野，你而家覺得乜野對你係最緊要？

All the five leading questions are neutral with respect to any possible notion of the family. They do not contain any value-carrying terms like family, household, home, etc., so as to avoid imposing the conception of the interviewer to the interviewees. Such kind
of impositions would probably lead the interviewee to answer in the way that follows the value of the interviewer, instead of her own. These leading questions are meant to stimulate the interviewees to think about how their family lives were after the death of their husbands. We intend to organize the answers in term of personal relations. In responding to the questions, the interviewees refer to persons and events. If they relate to persons like family members, relatives or even friends, they would be talking thematically about social connections, that is, relationships between them and the persons that they had mentioned. If they mention events, they would inevitably be relating them to persons involved. In this way, though events might appear first, their answers would inevitably end up in descriptions about social connections, that is, the interpersonal relationships involved. I consider that the social connections described by the interviewees in fact reflect their conception(s) of family and reconstruction of it (them).

The first leading question that asks how their family lives had been in the past few months after the death of their husbands is supposed to lead the interviewees to talk about their reflections on daily life. The interviewer refrained from intruding unless there was a need to make the conversation continue or he wanted the interviewees to further elaborate terms that they had used to describe the events or persons involved. The interviewer asked follow-up questions that are supposed to further facilitate the interviewees to talk more about their family lives. In case one leading question did not trigger the interviewee to talk productively, the interviewer would proceed to the next leading question. From the interviewees’ answers, the interviewer sorted out persons, events, localities, settings, etc. The investigation on their construction of their family conceptions took place when they, at their own initiatives, mentioned terms that were related to the conception of family. These terms include *ka, ka-ting, uk-kei, uk-kei-yan, ka-yan, chi-kay-uk, and chi-kay-yan.*

6.2 Data constraints

In general, Chinese women are conservative in disclosing family affairs to people outside their families, not to say a stranger. Widows were reluctant to participate in the research.
After a thorough explanation by the social worker who had been organizing and supporting them, only three members of the Resource Centre agreed to participate in a "one shot" interview. The three widows who agreed to attend an interview are relative more "open minded."

Besides, with the purpose to protect her clients, the social worker of the Resource Centre was not willing to refer clients who had not gone through grieving process. So those widows that were willing to attend an interview were those deemed to have gone through emotional crisis and with their internal conflict reconciled. In this regard, impact brought about by the loss of their husbands was less explicit.

**Interviewing Context**

For the three subjects referred by the Resource Centre, they agreed to be interviewed in the interview room of the centre after their group meetings in Saturday afternoons. In this regard, three interviews were arranged in three consecutive Saturdays. The interview room is about 50 square feet, decorated with soft illumination and with two sofas that allowed the interviewer and the interviewees to sit squarely. Since usually there is no booking for the room in Saturday afternoons, there is no time constraints for the use of the interview room.

For the other three subjects referred by the SOCO. There is interview room or other place that suitable for interviewing was available in the Shamshuipo centre of SOCO. I had to consider alternative place. After discussion with the widows, they thought their home would be the most convenient place for the interview to take place. So, interviews were arranged in weekday afternoon in when the widows are free from onerous housework.

All interviews were audio-taped, contents were transcribed for data analysis. Each subject was asked to sign a form of consent (with clearly stated research objectives)
before interview (See Appendix 7). Confidentiality of data obtained was assured by the interviewer before the interview commenced.

For the three widows interviewed in the interview room of the Resource Centre, as the physical setting allowed, no distraction from outside environment and interviews ran smoothly. However, for the other three interviews that held in the widows' home, the physical setting varies. Distraction from outside environment and other persons did occur occasionally, and to a certain, disturbed the smooth proceeding of the interviews.

For Mrs. D, her home is located in a sector of a private apartment, area is limited and the sector is used as a living room, a bedroom and at the same time, a dinning room. It is not a good place for an interview to take place. Besides, the younger daughter of Mrs. D attends morning school and was at home while the interview was taking place. In this regard, distractions like disciplining her daughter and answering telephone calls hindered the smooth proceeding of the interview.

For Mrs. E, her living environment and "family" composition are similar to that of Mrs. D. In fact, living in a sector of a private apartment is common among new immigrants. The interview with Mrs. E lasted for about one and a half our. Answering telephone calls and dialogues between Mrs. E and her daughter were main distractions to the interview.

For Mrs. F, living environment is also similar to that of Mrs. D and Mrs. E. However, when I arrived Mrs. F's home, I found that besides Mrs. F, her elder daughter and her mother were also there. Her mother was preparing dinner in the kitchen and her daughter was lying on the bed. Amid the interview, her daughter made noise to draw her mother's attention and the interview was disturbed when Mrs. F disciplined her daughter. This interview session lasted about forty-five minutes.

6.3 Everyday and sociological languages
In line with the ethnomethodological approach, I shall begin my analysis with the notion and meaning of the family that the subjects actively construct by themselves in the interviews. The interviewer was vigilant to avoid use words, phrases and terms that refer to the family until such words, phrases and terms were mentioned by the interviewees themselves. From the way they use these words, phrases and terms, I clarify, classify and consolidate them into keywords and associated definitions that refer to the family. It would be seen that the same keyword may not mean the same thing in different cases. In other words, these keywords are case-specific. My task after finishing specific case analyses will be to integrate case-specific keywords into some general concepts.

In my analysis, I need to refer to terms and concepts of Western sociology. Such terms like family, nuclear family, extended family, parental family, household, lineage are needed for sociological analysis, but they are not indigenous terms. The interviewees did not use them, or not even knew them. They are terms constructed by the sociologists, and hence should be clearly distinguished from those by the interviewees. I make the distinction by using the indigenous terms directly when the interviewee's own construction is meant, while retaining the sociological terms as part of the language of analysis. For example, the term family is a sociological term because the interviewee used indigenous terms like ka-ting and uk-kei. The term family is translated in English-Chinese dictionaries as ka-ting, but we shall not therefore consider the two as equivalent to each other. The reason is that the former is situated in Western sociological discourses on the family, including that of Gubrium who denies its existence, while the latter acquires its meaning within the indigenous discourses. The two kinds of discourses do not overlap. The family, however it may mean, is always a configuration of mutual addresses between members. Every member can always be addressed to in different forms. The husband's father is at the same time the wife's father-in-law. They emphasize different aspects of her relationship to and her different feelings and different degrees of affection towards the same person. It is part of her construction of her family, or, as it will be explained later, her families. Having clarified these technical points, I can now begin with Mrs. A.
6.4 Case analysis

6.4.1 Mrs. A

Mrs. A used two terms to refer to the family, namely, ka-ting and uk-kei. I categorized her uses of the term ka-ting into five definitions or groups of meanings, each of which refers to different collectivities of persons related in different ways. For the sake of clarity, I shall call them ka-ting I, ka-ting II, ka-ting III, ka-ting IV and ka-ting V. There is always an element of time because ka-tings have a temporal existence only, they exist for a period of time and then vanish. Therefore some of the ka-tings may refer to the same composition but at different points in time. Mrs. A used the term uk-kei in three groups of meaning, which I shall therefore call uk-kei I, uk-kei II and uk-kei III. It will be seen that although some of them are to a large extent synonyms of some of the ka-tings, uk-kei is definitely different in some finer aspects. Let us examine the data.

Ka-ting I: The interviewee (the mother), her son and daughter. The deceased husband
would be included were he still alive.\footnote{Extract 1: "個仔仲有一段時間要負擔家庭" Paragraph 6 of Appendix 1. Extract 2: "我地家庭個開支" Paragraph 50. Extract 3: "個仔照顧呢個家庭" Paragraph 74. Extract 4: "好似我...又要顧自己家庭" Paragraph 76. Extract 5: "呢個家庭" Paragraph 80.}

**Ka-ting II:** The interviewee (wife), her husband, her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and unmarried or dependant brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, and her children later, formed an vertically and horizontally extended family, which split into two different households. Each household was called a *ka-ting*. These *ka-tings* had now vanished.\footnote{Extract 1: "分開兩個家庭" Paragraph 30. Extract 2: "我地負責出兩個家庭" Paragraph 34. Extract 3: "兩個家庭" Paragraph 34. Extract 4: "叫做一個家庭" Paragraph 36. Extract 5: "兩個家庭...分開" Paragraph 44.}

**Ka-ting III:** Her son and his future wife. The interviewee accepted the hiving-off of her son into a *ka-ting* of his own in the future.\footnote{Extract 1: "我個仔....遲早都有自己個家庭" Paragraph 6. Extract 2: "個仔有自己個家庭" Paragraph 6.}

**Ka-ting IV:** Her brother/sister-in-law and his/her spouse. Several *ka-tings* (as each brother/sister married) are included under this category.\footnote{Extract 1: "各人有各人個家庭" Paragraph 56. Extract 2: "成立左幾個家庭" Paragraph 58. Extract 3: "個每個家庭" Paragraph 80.}

**Ka-ting V:** There were two *ka-tings* to form this *ka-ting* V. One was the interviewee, her parents, siblings. The other was her husband’s parents and sibling. The interviewee considered two to be one *ka-ting* to her.\footnote{Extract 1: "個仔仲有一段時間要負擔家庭" Paragraph 1. Extract 2: "我地家庭個開支" Paragraph 50. Extract 3: "個仔照顧呢個家庭" Paragraph 74. Extract 4: "好似我...又要顧自己家庭" Paragraph 76. Extract 5: "呢個家庭" Paragraph 80.}

**Ka-ting I** coincides with what the sociologists call the nuclear family. The deceased husband would be included if he were still alive. It was the anchor family for Mrs. A, it was her *ka-ting*. The notion of a nuclear family as a mental structure was very firm and clear in her mind, as we see that sociologists also call *ka-tings* IV and V nuclear families. She used it to refer to nuclear families at all points of time (*ka-ting* I was past if the deceased husband were included, *ka-ting* IV was mainly in the present, and *ka-ting* V was in the future), it is therefore an atemporal structure for her. But as it
will be seen immediately that she neither constructed nor practised the idea of a nuclear family. The nuclear family was therefore a social non-reality to her even though she had a very firm and clear idea of it as an atemporal structure. It remained a sociological concept that she did not know.

*Ka-ting* II is a complex notion. In the first place, it was a vertically and horizontally extended family in Western sociology, a notion that Mrs. A was unlikely to realize or know. Her husband being the elder son married earliest. She accepted that she was absorbed into her husband's family (and thus a vertically and horizontally extended family was formed). Then the extended family was split because of living arrangement into two residences. She called each residence a *ka-ting*. The sociologist calls it a household. In her case, the households were not simply residences because the extended family was clearly organized into two households as separate economic units. She and her husband shouldered the expenses of one of the two. Notice that if the interviewee perceived her marriage to her husband as a hiving-off from the husband's parental family, she would probably be unwilling to do so. She would reason that her husband's parents and siblings formed another nuclear family to which she (and probably also her husband) would have no responsibility. Clearly the notion of a nuclear family was never a social reality to Mrs. A, she never constructed it, she never practised it. By accepting her responsibility to this extended family as two *ka-tings* II, she was also rewarded. Her own children were sent to the other *ka-ting* where they were taken care of free-of-charge. Looking at the living arrangement in the macro-social perspective, it was a family strategy in Western sociology in order to survive the rapid urbanization that was happening then. One *ka-ting* was the "combat unit" whose members struggled to earn money or to receive an education while the other was the "civilian unit" where the old and the young were sheltered at a less expensive cost of living.

*Ka-ting* V was Mrs. A's own construction. We cannot find an exactly equivalent term in Western sociology. We can only call it kinship very loosely. Her construction arose from her need. She needed to construct a new *ka-ting* that could accommodate

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some of the sources of support. In fact, though not explicitly spelled out, we can see that with her father and husband deceased almost at the same time, all the members of this ka-ting V have contributed to the expenditure of the funeral arrangements.

Notice that the interviewee’s own parental family did not appear as a ka-ting. It was called an uk-kei by her. She used the term uk-kei to refer to different collectivities of persons too.

_Uk-kei I:_ The interviewee, her son, her daughter. Again, the deceased husband would be included.\(^{175}\)

_Uk-kei II:_ Her husband, her father-in-law, mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.\(^{176}\)

_Uk-kei III:_ The interviewee, her father, mother, sisters and brothers.\(^{177}\)

_Uk-kei I_ corresponds exactly with _ka-ting I_. Both her own and her husbands’ families of origin were called _uk-keis_, indicating that _uk-kei_ has a different connotation, if not meaning, from _ka-ting_. It emphasizes the origin, the lineage. Notice that _uk-kei_ cannot be written in formal Chinese. It is a usage peculiar to the Cantonese. It can probably be translated into the term house, a term used in Western anthropology. Also notice that Mrs. A did not use it to refer to physical accommodation of a _ka-ting_, which in daily Cantonese it is sometimes used to refer to. The ways that she uses the term _uk-kei_ suggests that her usage is well regulated and clearly delimited by linguistic and social tradition, and is not easily borrowed to other uses like _ka-ting_.

Now forms of address. Mrs. A consistently addressed her father-in-law and

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\(^{175}\) Extract: "自己屋企冇一個人" Paragraph 14.

\(^{176}\) Extract: "先生屋企個邊" Paragraph 14.

mother-in-law as *lo-ye* and *naai-naai*, very traditional and formal forms of address. Reflexively, she must address herself as *sun-po*, the corresponding form of address for daughter-in-law. She confirmed her position within her husband's family. *Sun-po* is not a daughter of any kind in any Chinese sense. It is a different class of membership in the Chinese family. It is a relationship to *lo-ye* and *naai-naai* who are heads of the lineage. From that relationship, her relationship to her husband formally derives. It is an anachronistic discourse in the modern eye: A woman is married to her husband, and from that her relationship to his parents derives. As it will be seen in some other cases, the interviewee concerned addressed her father-in-law and mother-in-laws as husband's father and husband's mother. They are not equivalent forms of address to father-in-law and mother-in-law. They are different forms of address emphasizing different chronology and priority of the relationships between the same set of persons. In highlighting this difference, Mrs. A's form of address can be seen as a personal pledge to share the responsibility of her *lo-ye* and *naai-naai* in raising her *suk-chai* and *koo-chai*, and she really did it.

Mrs. A addressed her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law in three forms. First, *suk-chai* and *koo-chai*. They are forms of address consistent with *lo-ye* and *naai-naai*. Second, "children of *lo-ye* and *naai-naai*. It is still in a form consistent with *lo-ye* and *naai-naai*, with a de-emphasis of her own relationship to them, which in turn is a de-emphasis of her own membership in that family. Third, "brothers and sisters of husband." It is a more serious de-emphasis of her relationship and her membership. In fact, she did further de-emphasize both by calling all the in-laws as *chan-chik* or "people on the side of husband." These different forms of address probably reflect familial changes over the years. The same set of people appeared differently to Mrs. A at different points in time. The family of *lo-ye* and *naai-naai* was perhaps conceived as already vanished, it did not exist in reality any longer, and it was history only. Her

4: "同我屋企好傾過同佢D兄弟姐妹" Paragraph 86.
178 See paragraphs 38, 46 and 70 for exact wording.
179 See paragraph 42.
180 Paragraphs 14, 16, 20, 30, 36, 38, 54, 76 and 86.
181 Paragraphs 56 and 80.
182 Paragraph 66.
membership in that family was de-valued in her eye. She treated her membership differently now. She considered that her membership in the old family was now broken into different memberships to different new families. She was only a chan-chik to the families of brothers-in-laws and sisters-in-law, while she was still a sun-po to whatever that remained in the family of her lo-ye and naai-naai. There is clearly a temporal order at work. In that temporal order her different forms of address are not contradictory. The temporal order is clearly sign-posted by the rise and fall of many families and households. That of her lo-ye and naai-naai disintegrated into several families, those of her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. That of her own was also beginning to fall with the demise of her husband, and she was expecting her son to hive off into a family of his own. In that process of change, the ka-tings that the sociologists call nuclear families clearly took hold of her as an atemporal structure because it was always there.

It is also noticed that Mrs. A addressed her parental family in different forms. First, neung-ka. It is consistent with lo-ye, naai-naai, suk-chai and koo-chai, a very traditional form of address. When she was married into the family of her lo-ye, her own parental family became a ka-ting where her mother (neung) belonged. She was still a daughter to her parents, but her membership was changed from an unmarried daughter to a married one. She was no longer a full member, she was now an affiliated member, so to speak. Second, "our ka-ting"\(^{183}\), or "my uk-kei yan."\(^{184}\) It emphasizes the origin, the lineage. Third, "brothers and sisters."\(^{185}\) Her marriage and the changes it brought to her membership were de-emphasized.

What do we learn from this fascinating variety of calling one's families and addressing members therein? If there is something called the family, it clearly exists (sometimes concurrently and sometimes at different points in time) in multiple social contexts and settings. Clearly, Mrs. A would not have been able to capture this complexity if she did not carry out more than one construction. The complexity demands it. In fact Mrs. A was clearly never in doubt about the existence of ka-ting or

\(^{183}\) Paragraph 62.
\(^{184}\) Paragraphs 18, 66, 68, 70, 84 and 86.
They were real in her constructions, although not all of them were real at the same time in one single construction. She belonged to multiple families. The key to understand the complexity is the multiple social contexts and settings with reference to which Mrs. A constructed her families, which in the interview appeared as forms of calling one's families and addressing members therein. All these forms of calling and addressing are reflexively related back to Mrs. A. She belonged to multiple families with different kinds of membership. This clearly hints at the amenability of the family conception. What remains to be explored is the constraints and limits of such amenability. What should have a very preliminary exploration of this when we finish looking at the particular cases.

6.4.2 Mrs. B

—— — : Ka-ting of her brother
—— : NGOI-ka of Mrs. B
—— — — : Ka-ting of Mrs. B, equivalent to Ka-ting I of Mrs. A

Unlike Mrs. A, Mrs. B did not have the experience of ka-ting II, that is, split households of an extended family. Her uses of the term ka-ting\(^{185}\) was very neatly circumscribed by

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\(^{185}\) Paragraphs 12 (twice), 14, 64, 68 and 82.

\(^{186}\) Extract 1: "我家大家庭" (Ka-ting of childhood of the interviewee, a group of persons related by marriage and blood, its membership composed of the interviewee, her mother, father and siblings.)

Paragraph 44 in Appendix 2. Extract 2: "未曾經歷過有家庭" (The unmarried siblings of the interviewee
considerations of marriage.

Quite a few of her brothers and sisters never married, they were not considered to have ka-ting of their own (extracts 2, 3 and 7), and they were considered to belong to her parental family, which was a ka-ting according to Mrs. A (extract 1). Her brother-in-law and sister-in-law were married, and were considered to have ka-ting IV of their own (extracts 5 and 6). She, her children, and very probably her deceased husband too, formed a ka-ting I.\textsuperscript{187} Marriage was the defining characteristic for Mrs. A to use the term ka-ting. This unambiguous delineation is only broken by her claiming herself to be a member of her parental family. She also referred to it as ngoi-ka,\textsuperscript{188} a traditional and formal form of address. But it should be interpreted very carefully. She mentioned that her husband was close to her parental family,\textsuperscript{189} being a frequent mah-jong partner to her mother. In this sense, her husband was "absorbed." There seems to be little agony since his father died when he was at a very tender age and he took care of his young brothers and sisters, so that his being absorbed in his wife's parental family was a seemingly natural transition when his brothers and sisters grew up and married. Mrs. B sometimes used "my parents' side"\textsuperscript{190} to refer to her parental family. Opposite to this side, there must be the other side. But the other side was not a neat whole like her parents' side. With her brother-in-law and sister-in-law hived off into separate ka-tings, the other side had only one person dangling around, her mother-in-law. Mrs. B mentioned that her husband was not close to his mother.\textsuperscript{191} She and mother-in-law did not feel close to each other, whereas she enjoyed a very good emotional support from her
father.\textsuperscript{192} She referred to her mother-in-law sometimes as *ka-poh*\textsuperscript{193} and sometimes as "husband's mother."\textsuperscript{194} *Ka-poh* is a traditional but not a formal address for the mother-in-law, and is certainly not to be addressed her in her presence. The traditional, formal and proper address in her presence is *naai-naai*, which Mrs. A used very consistently even when she mentioned her mother-in-law in her absence. Mrs. B mentioned her long dead, and probably never met father-in-law in an even more detached and informal address, "husband's *lo-dau.*"\textsuperscript{195} In her perception, his husband's parental family almost vanished while her own was still striving. If the two sides were competing, clearly her parents' side won out.

The only significant link that Mrs. B still had with her husband's side was a brother-in-law, whom she consistently addressed to as *suk-chai*. Her husband took over the role of a father to this brother-in-law since their father died early. The latter respected the former like a father.\textsuperscript{196} Mrs. B clearly took over the authority of her husband, and the *suk-chai* also respected her.\textsuperscript{197} She called him to help in minor repairs of home appliances after her husband's death, and he gladly responded.\textsuperscript{198} They were in frequent contact. At the other end, she maintained minimal contact with her sister-in-law only. Mrs. B clearly had a discreet use of her membership in her husband's parental family. She classified very discreetly individual members into different degrees of contact. Her use was so discreet that that family was no longer a unity in her construction, and her membership was broken down into relationships to individual members. It was a conscious act although there was a family history backing it. The case of Mrs. B confirms the observation I made in that of Mrs. A. There were multiple families to which the interviewee belonged. The two interviewees differ in one point, namely, one was more discreet in handling her memberships than the other.

\textsuperscript{192} Paragraphs 88, 132 and 134.

\textsuperscript{193} Paragraphs 74, 80 and 88.

\textsuperscript{194} Paragraphs 72, 74 and 78.

\textsuperscript{195} Paragraphs 80 and 84.

\textsuperscript{196} Paragraphs 80 and 84.

\textsuperscript{197} Paragraphs 88 and 90.

\textsuperscript{198} Paragraph 94.

\textsuperscript{199} Paragraph 136.
It should also be noticed that the brother-in-law, though very helpful and responsive to Mrs. B, was never absorbed into her own ka-ting. It may seem to be contrary to one's theoretical expectation if Gubrium were followed. However, we should argue that this is to introduce the culture and traditionism factors as limits and constraints to the amenability of family conceptions to construction. It was probably because that the brother-in-law could not be placed at any conceptual position legitimate in the Chinese family. He could not be addressed like a husband because he was a suk-chai and it would be incestuous in the Chinese mind to consider him to be the husband. He could not be addressed like a son because although Mrs. B took over the role of her husband the brother-in-law could at the most be considered a brother. And she was probably unwilling to address him like a brother because she had a very firm and clear idea of her "parents' side." It however, should be noted that Mrs. B did mention the brother-in-law as "treating her husband like his father". In this way, she justified her seeking help from this brother-in-law, even though the justification could not be made consistent within a clear familial structure since she in no way see this brother-in-law her "son". Such implicit inconsistency might have prevented Mrs. B from fully gauge the potential support her brother-in-law can offer.

When Mrs. B mentioned her parental family, she often used the verb fan-hui, which implies that she was a member of the family before and this membership could be regained by "going back home." It was a large family. She further differentiated its members. Her father was her main source of emotional support.\(^{200}\) To emphasize this point, she twisted the definition of uk-kei-yan to the extent of claiming that those who show concern for her were her uk-kei-yan.\(^{201}\) This construction carries an important implication – that again family conception is susceptible to reconstruction, in some cases, outside the constraint of culture and traditionalism. The fact that it is something that did not happen with other cases however indicates that the constraints and strategies, as well as particularities, of different cases matter. This is something extremely important especially when social work intervention is to be proposed.

\(^{200}\) Paragraphs 158, 159 and 160.
\(^{201}\) Paragraph 156.
6.4.3 Mrs. C

Traditional *ka-ting*, equivalent to *ka-ting* II of Mrs. A

*Ka-ting* of Mrs. C, equivalent to *ka-ting* I of Mrs. A

*Ka-ting* of origin of Mrs. C. As her siblings hived off into separate *ka-ting* after marriage, this *ka-ting* consists of her mother only.

Like Mrs. A, Mrs. C addressed her mother-in-law as *naai-naai* except for one occasion.\(^{202}\) She unambiguously considered herself belonging to "*naai-naai*’s side" because of her marriage.\(^{203}\) Her traditionalism is further confirmed by her subscribing to family reunion dinners on her "husband’s side" (which is equivalent to "*naai-naai* side") in traditional Chinese festivals.\(^{204}\) She attended them dutifully even after the death of her husband.\(^{205}\) It was a traditional *ka-ting*\(^{206}\) in her view. Her husband was the vital link, and with his death, her tie to the "*naai-naai* side" was weakening.\(^{207}\) Visits to and *yum-cha* with *naai-naai* were becoming less frequent.\(^{208}\)

This traditionalism was only one of the several constructions Mrs. C carried out.

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\(^{202}\) Paragraph 96 of Appendix 3.

\(^{203}\) Paragraph 28.

\(^{204}\) Paragraphs 24 and 26.

\(^{205}\) Paragraph 90.

\(^{206}\) Paragraphs 26 and 28.

\(^{207}\) Paragraphs 8 and 94.

\(^{208}\) Paragraphs 24 and 80.
To Mrs. C, *ka-ting* referred to her husband and her children. It was a *ka-ting* I construction. She further elaborated that if her *ka-ting* I lived with her mother-in-law, then they were only one *ka-ting*, implying that since they did live separately her *ka-ting* I was a *ka-ting* of its own. She added the condition of independent household into her definition of *ka-ting* I in order to distinguish it from the "*naai-naai side." She also claimed that her *ka-ting* I was a *ka-ting* of its own because she and her husband married to form a *ka-ting*. In other words, the traditional *ka-ting*, the "*naai-naai side," appeared more and more nominal, ritualistic and formalistic when Mrs. C continued to carry out other constructions. It was inevitable because clearly she could not capture her daily experience satisfactorily in thought and speech without going beyond the traditional *ka-ting* construction.

A similar lingering with traditionalism and going beyond it is also found in her construction of her own parental family. When all the daughters were married, her mother alone was a *ka-ting*, so she claimed. The reasoning behind this claim is that all the daughters were married into their husbands' families, and as a consequence lost their membership to their mother's family. Clearly this traditionalism did not tally with her personal experience.

While she admitted that by tradition she should be closer to *naai-naai*. She personally felt that she was closer to her mother. In terms of personal relationship, she considered her husband closest to her, then her mother, and only then her "husband's

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209  Extract 1: "佢有佢個家庭，結左婚就另外一個家庭" (When she married her husband, her husband has his own *Ka-ting*. This *Ka-ting* is distinct from his mother's since they are not stay together.) Paragraph 50. Extract 2: "家庭同埋一齊住……一個家" (If she stay together with her mother-in-law, there are no longer two distinct *Ka-ting*, but merge into one.) Paragraph 52. Extract 3: "算另一個家庭，只得佢一個" (Her mother has her own *Ka-ting*, but all members have left, and left her alone.) Paragraph 54. Extract 4: "一齊住就一個大家庭" (Same meaning as abstract 3.) Paragraph 58.

210  Paragraph 48.
211  Paragraph 52.
212  Paragraph 58.
213  Paragraph 50.
214  Paragraph 54.
215  Paragraph 66.
mother.\textsuperscript{216} She did not explicitly call her mother, her sisters and herself a \textit{ka-ting} or \textit{uk-kei-yan}, but clearly a very close relationship was between her and one of her younger sisters. On Saturdays or Sundays they sometimes had \textit{yum-cha} together,\textsuperscript{217} In festivals they sometimes had dinner together,\textsuperscript{218} she lent her money to buy a flat,\textsuperscript{219} she accompanied her most often after her husband passed away.\textsuperscript{220} This generosity and concern could only be explained as a consequence of their once-upon-a-time membership to a now vanished \textit{ka-ting}, her parental family. It was sisterhood, which is a derivative of parental family. But the parental family was not revived. It was a historical effect, as old membership paid off. It was also a historical construction.

6.4.4 Mrs. D

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{family_tree.png}
\caption{Family tree of Mrs. D and her relatives}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item [---] : \textit{Ka} of her brother-in-law, equivalent to \textit{ka-ting} VI of Mrs. A.
\item [-----] : \textit{Ka} of the son of her brother-in-law.
\item [-----] : \textit{Fong} of her brother-in-law.
\item [*****] : \textit{Ngoi-ka} of Mrs. D.
\end{itemize}

Neither \textit{ka-ting} or \textit{uk-kei} were mentioned by Mrs. D. She was a recent immigrant from a village in Guangdong. Her husband was a permanent resident of Hong Kong and went back to the mainland to marry her. He was also an immigrant but of a longer standing.

\textsuperscript{216} Paragraphs 68 and 96. These are the only two occasions that she did not address her mother-in-law as \textit{naai-naai}.

\textsuperscript{217} Paragraph 10.

\textsuperscript{218} Paragraph 46.

\textsuperscript{219} Paragraphs 120-126.

\textsuperscript{220} Paragraph 86.
It will be seen that her rural background stands out very clearly in her construction of families.

She used the term *ka*\(^{221}\) to refer to her brothers-in-law and probably their families (extract 1), the family of her eldest brother's son after his marriage (extract 4), the families of her second eldest brother-in-law's two sons after the death of the brother-in-law without specifying whether they were married or not (extract 3), the family of her brother's daughter who was married to a Hong Kong permanent resident and emigrated to Hong Kong (extract 6), the family of a remote relative (*soar-tong-dai-lo*) including her son, daughter-in-law and a grandchild (extract 7). On the surface, *ka* seems to be an equivalent of *ka-ting*. But this surface equivalence is deceptive because Mrs. D used the term *ka* in close connection with another term *fong*\(^{222}\).

*Fong* is a very traditional Chinese notion. Male descendants from a common male ancestor are grouped into branches like a tree, a construction very similar to that of the anthropologists. She had a very clear idea about it (extract 2). Female descendants are not counted. Each branch, depending on where the cut-off point is made, is called a *fong*. Once the cut-off point is made, the further division of a *fong* is *ka*. So there are several *kas* in one *fong*, as she explained to the interviewer (extract 1). Again, it depends on where the cut-off point is, the boundary of a *ka* varies. *Ka* is therefore a unit of classification of male descendants from a common male ancestor, and to categorize *ka* in the way that *ka-tings* have been categorized in the case of Mrs. A will be erroneous. *Ka*, when used in conjunction with *fong*, is a complete different construction. It is also noted that the whole *chuen* (literally translated as village) was *chan-chik* (literally meaning kinsfolk and relatives) to her\(^{223}\) indicating that it was probably a village occupied by a single clan from a common male ancestor. Mrs. D has therefore a very clear idea


\(^{223}\) Paragraph 88.
of patrilineage, from chuen to fong to ka.

Once this is understood, Mrs. D’s attachment to her brothers-in-law in spite of their deteriorating relationship to her can be understood. They accused her of not taking care of them like her husband had been before his death. Her husband used to pay the bill for occasions like worship of ancestors and family reunion, and probably he also gave them money. She hoped that they could offer a helping hand when she visited her husband’s grave - a very serious and solemn occasion to her - but she deemed that they were probably not willing to do so. Mrs. D did not think that her brothers-in-law were unreasonable, but only lamented she was poor and was unable to continue her husband’s practice. She accepted the responsibility she had to her brothers-in-law. In a similar vein, she remained attached to her husband’s chuen although she felt that members of the chuen looked down upon her after the death of her husband. She explained their behaviour in terms of the fact that she was an ngoi-sing-yan (not carrying the same family name as that of the members of the chuen), an affiliated member of the chuen at the most. She kept in touch with remote kinsfolk from the same chuen in Hong Kong, they sometimes helped her but certainly were not very enthusiastic. Neither her brothers-in-law nor remote relatives paid the same respect as Mrs. D did to the constructs of chuen, fong and ka. She inherited and reproduced a very traditional construction of family that clearly bounded her exploration of potential sources of support.

Her commitment to the traditional construction was so thorough that she considered her parental family as ngoi-ka and that she and other sisters had no right to inherit that family. She kept visiting her elder sister whom she said was wealthier than she, but greedy and unfriendly to her. She kept visiting her younger sister who she said was poor and greedy and kept blaming her for not treating her well enough. She also kept visiting her younger brother whom she liked because he was very amicable and invited
her to his home and gwoh-kai\textsuperscript{229} one of his two sons to her for she had no son. She was very grateful to him because gwoh-kai was a very great favour in traditional Chinese society. Notice that she never considered that she and her daughter constitute a \textit{ka}. It was not one because only a male descendent can inherit it but she had no son. The other younger brother she did not maintain frequent contacts because he had moved to the city. Clearly, Mrs. A maintained her membership to her parental family, which had in fact vanished after the deaths of her parents and in her mind was inherited by her young brothers.

Mrs. A inherited and reproduced a completely traditional construction of family, or familism to be exact. The death of her husband did not make her to change her mind. All the unreality was explained in terms of her own position in the \textit{chuen} and her state of poverty, thus rendering the very traditional construction intact. She had a \textit{ka} of her own only in the sense that she had one nominal sons gwoh-kai from a younger brother, and her own daughter did not count. It was a state of misery for a widow in traditional Chinese society. Mrs. D constructed this state although the traditional Chinese society was far from being a real existence, and in fact she was taken care of by a modern social security system, the CSSA. Even her reconstruction or efforts of reconstruction took place revolving this bounded conception of family.

### 6.4.5 Mrs. E

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{family_diagram.png}
\end{center}

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: \textit{Chi-kay-yan} of Mrs. E

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: \textit{Uk-kay} of Mrs. E

\textsuperscript{229} Paragraph 78.
Mrs. E was also a recent immigrant, a widow and a CSSA recipient like Mrs. D. But her construction was entirely different. In the first place, it was not sure from the interview whether she considered that she and her two daughters constitute a family. It can only be assumed that they did because they lived together and traveled back to her village town in Dongguan together. It must be a family as long as the official CSSA is concerned, and she was reaping benefit from it. She used the term *uk-kei* only once, but only marginally. She glossed over her own family life. Perhaps she was hiding certain facts, which in any case the interviewer would never be able to know.

On the other hand, Mrs. E was very enthusiastic in blaming *chan-chik-pan-yau* (relatives and friends) being unable or unwilling to help her (extracts 1 to 11) including her brothers-in-law (extract 10), brothers (extracts 3, 4, 5 and 6) and mother-in-law (extracts 7 and 12). The whole world seemed to own her a favour.

Some of these blames were found to be unfounded. One of her brothers in Hong Kong looked after her daughter for years before she migrated to Hong Kong, and when her husband was dying he brought a letter of certification, which facilitated her application to go to see her husband at his dying bed, back to her in Dongguan. She offered no reasonable excuse for her cutting off her relationship to this brother. Similarly, she told the interviewer nothing substantial to justify her cutting off many relationships. She cut herself off from all the brothers and brothers-in-law in Hong Kong. She offered a very vague reason that she was poor and *chan-chik-pan-yau* avoided her being afraid that she might ask for help. But this reason was hard to believe since she was well covered financially by the CSSA, and she was grateful to the

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220 Paragraph 120. 
222 Paragraph 134. 
223 Paragraphs 6, 19 and 40.
government. It seems that all her brothers or brothers-in-law were in the lower class and none really enjoyed a standard of living much higher than that of CSSA recipients. The only relative that she maintained a close relationship was a tung-heung-je-mui, a female fellow villager, a very remote relative, who Mrs. E said offered a lot of help. But what specifically was the help was not elaborated by her. It is hard to conceive this fellow villager was part of her family although Mrs. E granted her a familial form of address. What does this self-isolation from one's chan-chik in Hong Kong mean? Why she had to withdraw and refuse her membership in various families that she was entitled to? I can offer no answer.

Back to her village town, Mrs. E now maintained a distant relationship with her mother-in-law. She visited her and gave her some pocket money when she returned, but did not dine with her any longer like the old days when her husband was alive. She did not maintain any contact with her two brothers-in-law at the village town on the ground that they did not help her and did not reciprocate the help her dead husband gave them. Of all the seven sisters in Mainland China, only one she maintained frequent contacts. She gave the reason that this sister was willing to help her. Again, what specifically was the help was not elaborated.

All these withdrawals clearly contradict her admission that her brothers, her sisters, her mother-in-law were chi-kay-yan, and that besides her daughters her brothers were the closest kinsfolk to her. She did not mention that her brothers-in-law were chi-kay-yan. She did not mention Ms. Sze and Ms. Fok, the social workers who helped her a lot, as chi-kay-yan. The only chi-kay-yan that remained were her two daughters. Her rationalisation of these withdrawals is not convincing. But it was a deliberate construction, a construction that must have a purpose behind, a purpose that the

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234 Paragraphs 2, 96 and 102.
235 Paragraphs 22 and 24.
236 Paragraph 102.
237 Paragraph 154.
238 Paragraphs 70, 86 and 114.
239 Paragraph 58.
240 Paragraphs 16, 18, 116, 118 and 120.
interviewer was not able to discover. This mystery aside, Mrs. E’s construction is in stark contrast to Mrs. D’s. Mrs. E was not bothered at all with the Chinese traditionalism, that is, chuen-fong-ka. Nor was she concerned with having no male heir to her dead husband. She did not mention visiting her husband’s grave. She did not seem to care whether she had any family to belong to. All these stirred up feelings in Mrs. D.

6.4.6 Mrs. F

Mrs. F was a recent immigrant, a rural women married to a Hong Kong permanent resident who was an immigrant of much longer standing, a widow and a CSSA recipient like Mrs. D and Mrs. E. Her construction of families is not as extreme as those of the other two widows, and the three of them show a wide range of possible constructions for widows of a similar background.

She managed to maintain a relationship with her husband’s suk-pai-dai-lo, remote kinsfolk of the same ancestry.\(^{241}\) She met them on occasions like visits to the ancestral

\(^{241}\) Paragraphs 32, 34, 45, 46 and 58 of Appendix 6.
graves, she paid visits to some of them and once had a dinner at the home of one of them during the Chinese New Year, she contacted the daughter-in-law of one of them frequently, who was at a similar age of her. The traditional Chinese kinship was there, although she lamented that it was weakening after the death of her husband but she was as strongly attached to it as Mrs. D was. Notice that none of the locally raised widows never mentioned any remote kinsfolk and relatives.

Her two brothers-in-laws showed care and concern to her. One of them invited her to dinner during the Chinese New Year, a family reunion, a symbolic act of solidarity. The other one was the custodian of one of her daughters when she was still in the mainland and lent her money for her husband's funeral. Mrs. F acknowledged this help between brothers, a brotherhood, and made good use of it. By now, they only kept contact through the telephone. She continued to acknowledge the relationships as chan-chik but at the same time accepted a personal remoteness between her and them, and admitted that she and they had separate ka. Notice that the term ka appeared, but it was not related to the kinship system chuen-fong-ka. She used suk-pak-dai-lo, which underplays the systemic aspect of chuen-fong-ka. It is a weak form. She also mentioned that after the deaths of her husband and her mother-in-law the house she once lived in the village was occupied by the son of one of the brothers-in-law. and she considered it as a sign of not treating her as a family member. She stopped visiting him after that, and was deliberately absent from family occasions such as ancestor worship. It is not known whether her perception was justified. She gave an excuse that they looked down upon her, looked down upon her because she was heung-ha-
It was nevertheless a changing construction, cooled as a consequence of her husband’s death. It is also not known whether that she bore her husband no male heir had any significance in her construction.

Mrs. F’s mothers and siblings were staying in a village town. She used the term *chi-kay-uk* to refer to them, even though they were not staying together and some of them had their own families. *Chi-kay-uk* is therefore simply a notional entity, rather than a reference to a concrete family. It is not the first time we meet notional entity, similar entities like vanished families of origin exist in previous cases, and it is a very common feature of discursive construction of the family. She used *fan-hui* to mean her visits to *chi-kay-uk*, she has not relinquished her membership to her parental family, she did not consider it dying and in this sense, Mrs. F was in common with Mrs. D. It contrasts starkly with her construction of her husband’s parental family, which she did not even call it an *uk* but simply *goh-tau*, the other side.

Finally, she referred to the family of her own, that is, herself and her two daughters, as *heung-kong-chi-kay-uk*, the *chi-kay-uk* in Hong Kong. Like Mrs. D, she used the same term to refer to entities of very different meaning to herself. The term *ka-ting* did not appear, so is the case for Mrs. D and Mrs. E. Perhaps *ka-ting* was an urban concept, a modern term, which is not commonly used in rural China.

6.5 Overall analysis

6.5.1 Amenability of family conceptions

Comparing the conception of family, from just six cases, we see a wide variation.

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255 Villager, see paragraph 158.
256 Paragraph 136.
257 Paragraph 134.
258 Paragraph 36, 56 and 144.
259 Paragraphs 144 and 160.
260 Paragraph 140.
261 Paragraphs 175 and 176.
From a very simple construction of that of Mrs. E, to the elaborated and multiple ones of Mrs. A, the conceptions of family differ among different persons and are not subject to the same constraints as the cases of how Mrs. D and Mrs. E diverge in their efforts expanded in associating with their *chuen*, *fong* and *ka*. What is of particular interest and relevance to us is two-folded. In the theoretical side, we see that construction of the agent is centered in the existence of conceptions of family. It reveals clearly the amenability of the conception of family to construction, though we of course should not neglect or play down the role of the constraints and structuring force of cultural factors and traditionalism on the construction. This hints that in the practical side, a carefully structured intervention approach should integrate both agents active construction and the active constraints facing different individuals.

### 6.5.2 Features of reconstruction of family conception

With the death of their husbands, in my cases, widows tend to become more attached to their own families of origin but more detached from their husbands' families of origin. Such change is reflected also by changes in forms of address. The detachment can be voluntary like that found in Mrs. A, B, C and E or involuntary like that found in Mrs. D and F. On the other hand, attachment to parental family is, I argue, reconstructions of family conceptions.

Parental family and the extended families of the widow's husbands represent ready resources for widow's reconstructions of family conception. In the cases of Mrs. A and Mrs. C, the reconstruction took place along this line. In this sense, we could say

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262 I found that all the six interviewees, to a varying extent, had made use of different forms of address to describe different relationships. For example, Mrs. A, sometimes addressed her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law as *shuk-chai* and *koo-chai*, and sometimes as "children of lo-ye and naai-naai" and sometimes as "chan-chik." Mrs. B, addressed her mother-in-law as *ka-poh* but addressed her deceased father-in-law as "husband's lo-dao." Similar findings can also be found in the remaining four cases. They in fact coincide with what Gubrium has pointed out that family discourse provides a way of making of and organizing social relations, conferring upon them domestic and familial meanings. By applying different forms of address to the person concerned, the interviewee defined or redefined her relationship with him/her. The commitment, obligation and intimacy in the relationship can be emphasized or de-emphasized according to different contextual and time factors.

263 This confirms the findings in some literature, see footnote 147.
that for them family conceptions in a normal situation takes a form of rings with the core being the nuclear family; the outer rings form a hierarchy of families. These families exist at the same time, of which the case of Mrs. A is most illustrative. Such a hierarchy however does not necessarily determines the order of reconstruction of family conception. This is because the organizing of the family conception revolves with the husbands who are the closest to them. When there husbands pass away, the centre for organizing the family conception change to themselves. Here often the “ngoi- ka”, or their own parental family stands out as the closest. We however note that in some places where traditionalism has a strong effect like in the case of Mrs. D, the order of construction might be different, so is the strategy of family conception. Mrs. D showed strong influence by the traditional value in her homeland. Her domain of family conception is very large, at least comparing with the other five cases, and is extended to chuen, fong, and ka. Maybe also due to her complete buying of the traditional value, her order for organizing the family conception showed a different order from other cases. She tried to reconstruct a family conception with the chuen, fong and ka of her husband, and only after the failure of that, she resorted to a reconstruction with that in where she was brought up. She fell in a despair when all these turned out to be unwilling to offer the support she tried to gain with a family conception reconstruction. This implies the limits to the prevailing social work practices in family intervention that resort to clients' own family construction. We shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter 7.

Other strategies to reconstruct family conception could also be identified in our case study. The case of Mrs. B revealed yet another aspect. Mrs. B resorted to incorporate her own parental family in her family reconstruction. Yet this reconstruction has been insufficient, as she has not been able to secure enough support. Here we note the role of her brother-in-law. Though Mrs. B refrained from addressing him as a member of her reconstructed family, she did mention the brother-in-law as “treating her husband like his father.” In this way, she justified her seeking help from this brother-in-law, even though the justification could not be made consistent within a clear familial structure since she in no way see this brother-in-law her “son.” Such implicit inconsistency might have prevented Mrs. B from fully gauge the potential support her brother-in-law can offer.
An intervention that help Mrs. B to break the boundary on sources and utilization of support imposed by the socially constructed boundary of family is then in order. We shall see more on this point in Chapter 7.

6.5.3 Temporal order of family construction

Another point worthy mentioning is of less practical concern, but of sociological interest. Although Mrs. A, Mrs. B and Mrs. C, constructed more than one family, families constructed by them might or might not exist simultaneously. Some might have vanished and replaced by other families. In the case of Mrs. A, we can see that with the fading out of ka-ting VI, ka-ting I was constructed and was a social reality to her. In the future, her ka-ting I would also vanish with her son getting married and hiving off into a ka-ting of his own. A similar pattern can also be observed in the cases of Mrs. B and Mrs. C. As the sister-in-law and brother-in-law of Mrs. B hived off into their own families, her husband’s parental family was no longer a unity in her construction, but one that was broken down into several families, to which she maintained contact with some selectively. In the case of Mrs. C, a similar pattern of change can be observed in her construction of "naai-naai side."
Chapter 7
Data Analysis II: Scope for Social Work Intervention

7.1 Introduction

Before examining how the sociological analysis contributes to the formulating a social work intervention approach, I need to tackle three main tasks. First, I have to deepen my understanding of the needs of widow families. I believe that this task can be accomplished through discerning different risk levels to which the six widow families belong, and hence, the scope for social work intervention can be clearly depicted. Second, using one of the six empirical cases, i.e., Mrs. D, as an example, I shall illustrate what are the prevailing ways that local social worker would deal with it. What follows afterwards will be the third and the final task – to demonstrate how the ethnomethodological approach can supplement prevailing social work intervention practices in helping widows coping with the crisis.

7.2 Needs for intervention: Risk levels of widow families

Kathleen A. Gass-Sternas (1995) deems that whether a widow can recover effectively from bereavement depends on the interplay among different quality and quantity of stressors and resources she possesses. She puts forward three risk levels to characterize different types of widow families, ranging from high-risk single parent widow families to healthy single parent families. She propounded three risk levels, namely, (1) high-risk single parent widow families, (2) vulnerable single parent widow families, and (3) healthy single parent widow families.

High-risk single parent widow families

This category consists of those families having more than one stressor at the time of bereavement, e.g., death of other closed relatives, loss of job, health problem, financial
difficulty, etc. These widows consider their bereavement as a threat to their life and families. Regarding resources, these families lack external psychological and material support, and they do not have enough knowledge to deal with their problems. Moreover, other stressors also co-exist. Therefore, high-risk widows have poor psychological-emotional and poor physical health, and higher susceptibility to tension-anxiety, depression-dejection, fatigue-inertia and other psychiatric problems.

**Vulnerable single parent widow families**

These are families in which stressors and problems exist and the grieving process has not yet been unresolved. Like those families in the high-risk group, widows are overwhelmed by the thinking that bereavement is a very negative and harmful event to the family. However, they are more optimistic towards future and believe that all difficulties can be overcome once problems are resolved. These families may have other stressors like mother-child relationship and communication obstacle between the widow and her children.

Unlike those of the high-risk group, though with difficulty, the widows have sufficient strength to maintain normal functioning of the family. This is because they can access to key resources like religious belief and social support that can contribute to alleviating the pain of the grieving process. Like those reported in the high-risk group, psychological-emotional problems are common in this group.

**Healthy single parent widow families**

These widow express positive meaning of bereavement. They consider that the death of their husbands is a challenging event to life and the harmful effect can be overcome. These widows are resourceful. They have ample social support, grief management skill, religious belief, etc. They used adaptive coping strategies to handle difficulties arose during bereavement. One characteristic of this group is their active participation in social groups, so as to keep they busy and less recalling unhappy memories. Unlike the
above two groups, these healthy single parent widows reported healthier both physically and psychologically. Low level of anxiety, anger, depression and fatigue were reported. As they considered bereavement as a challenging event to life, they can pick up smoothly new roles and responsibilities.

7.2.1 Risk level of the six cases

Case A (Vulnerable)

Mrs. A is a vulnerable widow. At the first glance, Mrs. A seems to be a high risk subject. This is because one month after her husband's death, her father died also. That means additional stressor, i.e., a second closed relatives died in this case, is presented. With her husband's funeral over, Mrs. A reported she has lost control over her emotion and cannot stand but cry all the day in any place. Obviously, she is in need of understanding her grief and ways to manage her emotion response. Besides, when her father died, Mrs. B was busy with her husband's funeral arrangement, she was not able to offer assistance to her siblings while they were busy with funeral arrangement. Self-blame for doing nothing for her father after his death was reported. In terms of financial problem, Mrs. A and her daughter are now living on her son's earning only, money is thus very tight. Limited financial resource, together with the death of another closed relative, i.e. her father, thus are disturbance to Mrs. A. Initially, Mrs. A refrain from sharing her feelings with anybody including her children and siblings, she tried her best to handle everything herself. However, she found that it is intolerable for her to face all the difficulties alone. After realising her emotional disturbance, she turned to Ms. Lam, a social worker for counselling and had learned about the grieving process and skills to manage grief. With help from the social worker, Mrs. B found her family of origin is a source of support, because she maintains very relationship with her sisters, who are always ready to listen to her and offer helping hands if she needs. She is now much ready to share her feelings with her children and siblings. Now, Mrs. A maintains frequent contact with her sisters, they go yam-cha on Sunday whenever they are free.
With the support from her siblings and the social worker, Mrs. A become more open-minded and seems to handle her grief very well. Furthermore, Mrs. A has good health.

Mrs. B (Healthy)

Mrs. B has been widowed for one year when she attend the interview. She has one boy and one girl. The boy is now working in the States and the girl is a nurse in Hong Kong. Mrs. B's mother was deceased one month before the death of her husband, with two closed family members died within such a short period, it should be a major stressor in her life. However, Mrs. B seems to handle grieving very well. She told the researcher that in the first three months after her husband's death, she just could not stand but cry all day long, but now it is much better. Mrs. B is a tough guy, she manages to acquired new skills quickly like filling governmental documents that used to be done by her husband. She knows clearly that what she must achieve in order to maintain her independence. Mrs. B is very resourceful, she has the support of her family, especially from her father who is always ready and available to listen to her during her grieving. She is able to continue with all family functions and assume her spouse's responsibilities. Mrs. B apprises her bereavements a challenge and uses adaptive coping strategies which included problem-focused coping, keeping busy and learning new skills like English and cooking. Besides, she also takes up voluntary work to offer support to cancer patients in hospitals.

Mrs. B is financially secured because her deceased husband was a civil servant, pension from the government was guaranteed. Besides, her children are employed. Mrs. B can maintain a very good relationship with members of her parents' and parents-in-law's families. Psychological and practical support from siblings and in-law is adequate, no major stressor was observed. The widow has excellent health and grieve normally.

Mrs. C (Vulnerable)
Mrs. C has two sons, one attending primary school and the other one attending kindergarten. Mrs. C mentioned less about her grief, but explicitly said that she had accepted her husband's death though it was sudden. In terms of resources, she is now depending on CSSA on daily living. Regarding accommodation, she is now living in a flat owned by her. She borrowed money from her younger sister for the flat before her husband's death, indicating good relationship with her sisters can be maintained. Besides, during her grieving, her mother, sisters and mother-in-law were available to accompany her. In that sense, support from relatives is ample. Unlike Mrs. A, resent towards in-laws was not found. She does recognize the favour that her siblings and in-laws had done to her. The major stressor of Mrs. C is her financial difficulty. Without a job and saving, CSSA is barely enough to support Mrs. C and her two dependent children. With less money, Mrs. C pays less visit to her friends and this will certainly further limit her social circle.

Throughout the interview, Mrs. D did not mention anything about her sorrows, neither did she mention any person whom she had shared her feelings with. It is not unreasonable to believe that her feelings were suppressed.

Mrs. D (High risk)

Mrs. D is a high-risk single parent widow. Mrs. D is a new immigrant. She moved to Hong Kong with her daughter one year ago, just before the death of her husband. There are multiple stressors in addition to the death of her husband. These stressors include poor relationship with her relatives, financial problem, poor health and adaptability problem. Mrs. D appraises her bereavement as a threat and harmful loss. With her husband deceased, she deems that relatives of hers and her husband's reject her, she feels that relatives like brothers-in-law look down upon her and are not willing to offer helping hand when she needs assistance. She uses less adaptive way of coping such as escape-avoidance. For example, feeling hostility from the kinfolk, whenever Mrs. D return to her mother town, she returned there quietly, trying not to irritate them. Besides, though her in-laws probably do not offer a helping hand if she pays visit to her husband's grave,
she does not think that her in-laws are not unreasonable, but only lamented that she was poor and was not able to please them like her husband do before.

Mrs. D lacks a sense of security, she tries her best to find her sense of belonging in the chuen of her husband's. Being rejected by the kinsfolk, she turns to her sisters. She buys them gifts and pays visit to them regularly, trying to maintain good relationship with them and to win their recognition. Most importantly, she finds her identity there. Mrs. D has few resources. She has little family support and her social network is minimally helpful. With no education and little knowledge, Mrs. D depends on her nephew whom though offering help occasionally, was not enthusiastic. Mrs. D seldom goes out Shamshuipo on her own.

Serve physical problem like high blood pressure and psychiatric problem like high tension-anxiety was reported. She is now seeing psychiatrist and doctor regularly. With severe physical and psychiatric problems, Mrs. D is not able to take up simple jobs like selling dim sum in Chinese restaurant. She is now depending on CSSA.

Mrs. E (vulnerable)

Major stressors of Mrs. E are financial difficulty and limited social support. Mrs. E moved to Hong Kong for a year. She is now living with her two young daughters on CSSA. Regarding her relationships with relatives, Mrs. E reported that they had detached from her after the death of her husband. Now she has little contact with them. When Mrs. E needs assistance, she now turns to tung-heung-je-mui and social workers, rather than relatives. Not justified by the reasons given by Mrs. E, apathetic attitude of her relatives seems to be a reflection of her anger-hostility response arose from unresolved grieving process. Throughout the interview, Mrs. E talked little about herself, but kept complaining on the indifference of her relatives, blame-anger response towards other persons is obvious.

Though anger-hostility response was reported, Mrs. E seems to be okay in
maintaining normal functioning of her family, she can take good care of her daughters and manage to handle housework very well. Besides, Mrs. E knows clearly what the resources is and what the social worker can help. For example, when she needs assistance in handling CSSA problems, she approaches social worker for help. Besides, she also participates actively in voluntarily work organized by the New Immigrant Service Centre of the SOCO, so as to widen her social network. In the nutshell, though with unresolved grieving problem, Mrs. E seems to be able to maintain family functioning because she has assessed to some key resources like CSSA and support from social workers.

Mrs. F (vulnerable)

Like Mrs. E, blame-anger responses towards relatives were reported, this must be arose from unsolved grief. Mrs. F is now living with her two young daughters on CSSA. She is now staying in a rented quarter of an apartment in Shamshuipo. Mrs. F said that no relative was informed of the death of her husband, reflecting the family has limited social connection. Among those relatives in Hong Kong, the only connection that Mrs. F has is with her husband's suk-pai-dai-lo and younger brother. Though Mrs. F complained that they were not enthusiastic in offering helping hands and looked down upon her, symbolic act of solidarity such as extending invitation to Mrs. F for dinner during the Chinese New Year and lending her money for her husband's funeral arrangement were reported. Mrs. F commented that the relationship with family members of her husband’s became more detached after his death. Regarding members of her family of origin, Mrs. F said that they were much closer when compared with that of her husband’s. She comes back to her mother-town once a year to visit her mother-in-law and siblings living there.

Like the two vulnerable widows described above, Mrs. F uses less adaptive coping strategy like distancing in response to the indifference of her relatives, she now seldom phones her suk-pai-dai-lo and in-laws actively. After becoming a member of a family service centre, Mrs. F participates actively in the programmes organized by the
centre. She attends meetings actively and maintains good relationship with friends known there.

Mrs. F is not resourceful in Hong Kong, her family member in mainland China can provide no support to her, except a sense of belonging when she travels back to China. The social service centre seems to be her only source of support, she acquires assistance there and knows friends there. Though only with minimal support from CSSA, Mrs. F did not complain over financial difficulty throughout the interview, she really appreciates her living in Hong Kong when she compares the living with that in Mainland China. Normal functioning of the family can be maintained and no physical symptom was reported throughout the interview.

7.2.2 Intervention needs of my six cases

According to Gass-Sternas (1995)'s classification, in the six cases, one belongs to "high-risk", three "vulnerable", one "healthy." As a social worker, I can identify three general presenting problems in the six cases.

The first problem is their insufficient knowledge and ability to handle problems arising from the grieving process. When her husband dies, the widow has to adjust to her new life with new demands. However, with her beloved leaves her forever, she is preoccupied with a painful struggle in grief. This grieving process can take months or even years before the widow can totally recover from this painful experience. Amid the grieving process, her energies are absorbed in this struggle, and her feelings are disturbed to an extent that all aspects of her living are affected. In fact, among the six cases, five of them have not coped with grief successfully and hence there are needs for social workers to intervene.

The second presenting problem is financial problem. I can see that except Mrs. B who is living on her husband's pension, the other five cases are living on CSSA. They deem that financial worry is one of their main concerns albeit different in degree.
With two or three family members, they can receive a few thousand dollars from the CSSA. In a metropolis like Hong Kong, a family with a few thousand dollars per month is barely enough for a basic living with minimum standard. I thus have reason to believe that the low self-esteem of the five cases is owing to the low income.

The third presenting problem is their limited social network and social support. This phenomenon is most obvious in the three cases who have recently immigrated from Mainland China. My observation reveals that emigration results in cutting-off to their original social network and social support system. Subjects concerned thus have to rebuild their social network. It becomes a great problem to them if they fail to do so.

7.3 **Prevailing local social work practices in dealing with families-in-crisis**

Before I go on suggesting a novel approach to supplement prevailing social work intervention practices, I have to examine, first, the inadequacies of prevailing local social work practices in dealing with families-in-crisis. And, at the same time, I attempt to unravel underlying values on the notion of “family” in the social work field by using the in-take face sheet used by local practitioners as a case in point. Second, a “high-risk” case, Mrs. D, will be selected as an example to show how it will be dealt with by using prevailing skill and practices by local family social workers. Third, using several case, I shall discuss on how Gubrium’s ethnmethodology can open a way to supplement and improve prevailing social work intervention practices in helping widow families coping the crisis.

7.3.1 **Face Sheet**

When a person approaches a social work agency for assistance, the first step the social worker takes is to conduct case in-take. Here, the in-take face sheet is of special importance in understanding underlying values on the conception of family in the field of social work because it is used to evaluate the needs of families-in-crisis at the very
inception of the case. Although different social agencies may have different procedures, currently, there is an agreement among all social service agencies that any new family case which is provided with family counselling or casework service must be reported to the Clientele Information System (CIS) on Family Counselling and Casework of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS). The CIS is established to gather basic information on client’s profile and service provision for review, monitoring, and the planning of the service.\footnote{Guideline on How to complete CIS Forms for Family Counselling/ Casework Service, Revised Ed. HKCSS: 1999. p.4.}

In other words, almost all subvented social service agencies which provide family counseling and casework services have to participate in the System. What follows is that all social workers in the field have to submit a Face Sheet to the HKCSS after any case in-take. The Face Sheet asks a series of stipulated questions concerning the family such as family type, family composition, origin of family members, etc. To facilitate the social workers to fill in the Face Sheet, a guideline has been provided by the HKCSS to clarify the meaning of major items in the questions on the Face Sheet. The explanations of these terms provide me with clues to unravel underlying values of local social workers on the meaning of “family.”

In the Face Sheet, there is a question asking the client to report to which type of the family s/he belongs. His/her answer is then matched with four options provided, namely, (1) “nuclear,” (2) “extended,” (3) “one-person” and (4) “unrelated.” If the answer does not fall into one the four options, s/he has to specify it, and the suggested alternatives are “single parent,” “couple without children,” “grandparent(s) with grandchildren,” “others” and “unknown.”\footnote{Guideline on How to complete CIS Forms for Family Counselling/ Casework Service, Revised Ed. HKCSS: 1999. p.4.} The guideline provides clear definitions of each family type. Undoubtedly, the Guideline attempts to cover all possibilities of family type. However, some wordings and descriptions used in the Guideline reflect underlying values on the meaning of “family” in the field of social work. For example, regarding the first two options of family type, i.e. “nuclear family” and “extended family,” emphasis is put on the blood-tied and marriage-tied relationships among family
members. Besides, the fourth option, i.e. "unrelated," is in fact not a type of family, it only emphasizes with whom the principal client is living together in a common place,\textsuperscript{266} which can be characterized by another term, household. So said, I claim that underlying values on family in the social work field are still highly locked with the blood-tied and marriage-tied relationships, and the physical boundary of a group of people living in a well-defined area. However, in real situations, people often regard the others as "of one family" even if they neither have blood-tied, nor have marriage-tied relationship, nor live together within a physical area. Seen from the perspective, I foresee that Gubrium's ethnomethodology does carry some new insights which can contribute to the local social work field.

Besides, the Face Sheet also requires the client to report his/her family composition. In the Guideline, "family composition" is referred to "the particulars of the principal client and his/her family members and relatives living/not living with the client." (Emphasis Mine)\textsuperscript{267} From this definition, I can see that the scope of meaning of the family hinges upon the meaning of the keywords: "living/not living." To report those who are "living" with the principal client, s/he reports indeed the household composition. However, if those who are "not living" with the principal client also constitutes what is called the "family composition," this undoubtedly extends the concept of the family to one similar to Gubrium's. So, does this implies that people who are "not living" with the principal client can be regarded as belonging to the same family? If it is the case, I shall congratulate the field for accommodating a wider concept of "family." However, I strongly believe that it is not so. There are two major reasons to support my viewpoint. First, if the field really means to adopt a wider concept of "family," the meaning of the keywords: "living/not living" should be elaborated in detail. However, nothing is mentioned in the Face Sheet and the Guideline. Second, according to some well-experienced social workers,\textsuperscript{268} people who are "not

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\textsuperscript{265} ibid., p.8.

\textsuperscript{266} The example given in the Guideline is 'friends, M.I. patients renting apartment jointly.'

\textsuperscript{267} Guideline on How to complete CIS Forms for Family Counselling/Casework Service, Revised Ed. HKCSS: 1999. P.8.

\textsuperscript{268} Here, I have to acknowledge the assistance from several well-experienced social workers: Mr. Chu Chi Keung, Miss Tse Fong Shan, Sandy, Miss Ann Wong and Miss Sue Wing Chi, Christine.
living” with the principal client are included in the data sheet largely because they can be
contact persons in case of emergency. Therefore, to a certain extent, the Face Sheet
reflects that the field treats the notion of the family in a narrow sense, i.e., as bounded,
first, by the blood-tied and marriage-tied relationship; and second, by a physical area.

However, in looking merely at the Face Sheet, I cannot acquire the whole picture
of underlying values of local social workers on the notion of “family.” Undoubtedly,
what social workers actually do in the field is of primary importance. In the following, I
shall use a high-risk case, Mrs. D, to understand prevailing ways that social workers in
the field would handle the case. Afterwards, I shall propose in the final section of this
thesis that how the ethnomet hodological approach can be adopted to supplement
prevailing social work practices.

7.3.2 Prevailing practices that local social workers would adopt to deal with Mrs.
D’s case

Based on the data abstracted from the interview transcript, Mrs. D has two major
presenting problems. The first problem is the psychological stress induced by the bad
relationship with her in-laws, relatives and clansmen living in her mother town; the
second her limited social network and resources in Hong Kong.

The first presenting problem is in fact a manifestation of her need for attachment
to the family (i.e., ka) and her desire to be identified as a member in the traditional chuen-
fong-ka configuration. As a matter of fact, since marriage, Mrs. D had been living in
her husband’s village (i.e., chuen) in the past decade. From the transcript, Mrs. D
expressed explicitly that the chuen was where her root was. This explains why Mrs.
D keeps returning to her mother-town though she realizes that her in-laws (which is
broadly regarded as fong), relatives and kinfolk are hostile to her. Having
acknowledged Mrs. D’s eagerness to go “home,” the well-experienced social workers,

269 This section cannot be finished without the help of the invaluable information given by several well-
experienced social workers. See ibid.
with whom I have interviewed, deem unanimously that local social workers would not
discourage Mrs. D to pay less visit to the chuen as the meaning of going back "home" is
important to Mrs. D’s life and psychological well-being. Rather, social workers would
place emphasis on helping Mrs. D in facing her relatives with ease, and persuading her
not to please them unconditionally at the expense of her own living quality in Hong
Kong.

In examining prevailing practices that local social worker would adopt to handle
the case, I also realize that social workers would apply cognitive-based behaviour therapy
in order to minimize Mrs. D’s level of anxiety and insecurity caused by the hostility from
her in-laws, relatives and kinsfolk. Among different cognitive treatment techniques,
reality therapy, was often suggested by the social workers being interviewed. Reality
therapy is a treatment technique which compels the client to judge her own behaviour
realistically and to determine if it meets her basic human needs, i.e., giving and receiving
love, achieving self-respect and respect from others.

Next to reality therapy is another prevailing way to tackle Mrs. D’s problem of
anxiety and insecurity. This technique is called “systematic desensitization.” This
technique requires Mrs. D, the anxiety-ridden client, to preview the images of her
anxiety-provoking situation in her mind, i.e., meeting her in-laws and relatives. Then,
she would be told to practice the relaxation responses that would be called forth in the
mental rehearsal. On the whole, the prevailing practice aims to modify Mrs. D’s
perception of her situation, and hence Mrs. D’s behaviour can be changed accordingly in
order to cope with her problem more effectively.

270 "...但唔同城市風俗嘛，但以我先生嘅話為主嘛，咁D都唔會為主嘛...” Paragraph 78. Appendix 4.
271 Reality Therapy is "a new approach to psychiatry and postulated two basic human needs: to give and to
receive love, and to behave in such a manner as to feel worthwhile to oneself and to others. [...]clients
seeking professional help are people who through their actions have failed to satisfy these needs. [They
are not regarded] as sick but as weak and requiring assistance in order to change. The reality therapist's
task was to force the client to judge his behaviour for what it was, and then to educate him to take
responsibility for fulfilling the aforementioned needs." (Turner. p. 94)
272 ibid.
273 Different social workers use different terms to characterize similar intervention. Some use “relaxation
In respond to the second presenting problem of Mrs. D, i.e., her limited social network and resources, social workers would help Mrs. D to widen her social network, so as to increase her resources, both psychological and material. A common way adopted by social workers to achieve these objectives is to encourage Mrs. D to participate in mutual support groups, volunteer works, and leisure activities. Through contacts with others, Mrs. D could sharpen her communication skill and meet more friends. Besides, group activities like those for parents with their children and those for new immigrants, are particularly suitable for Mrs. D because she can acquire parenting skill and better adapt to the living in Hong Kong.

Described above is a simplified picture of how local social workers would design their intervention work plans in dealing with a case like Mrs. D’s. However, I regard that the prevailing local practices lack one crucial element which, if appropriately acknowledged and utilized, can become an important source of support to the widows. This element is the mobilization of hidden family strength derived from the discursive construction of “family.” Therefore, my next and final task is to draw insights from Gubrium’s ethnomethodology and endeavour to suggest a new approach – the ethnomethodological approach – to supplement the prevailing social work intervention practices. In doing so, I hope that the ethnomethodological approach can contribute to helping the widows in pooling extra resources through the discursive (re)construction of the meaning of family.

7.4 The ethnomethodological approach (EA) of social work intervention

To make myself clear, I state clearly that the overarching theme of the ethnomethodological approach (EA) social work intervention is to turn the discursive construction of family into a major source of support to widows. Moreover, it is important to note that EA is not a general intervention approach that can be applied
virtually to all types of cases. Instead, EA, I believe, should be an approach to supplement the prevailing social work practices in dealing with families-in-crisis.

Let me illustrate the how EA can be applied to a couple of my empirical cases. First, the social worker has to be sensitive to the individual needs of each case. For example, Mrs. A has a relatively strong social support network. Mrs. A can cope with the crisis effectively by adopting some common intervention practices such as grief handling skill. One major characteristic of EA is to provide an intervention through which under-utilized and unutilized sources of support (in terms of hidden family strength) can be mobilized. For example, in Mrs. C’s case, I do realize that she has under-utilized the source of support from her suk-chai. From her transcript, Mrs. C expressed implicitly that she had a sense of uneasiness in response to the assistance offered by her suk-chai. The reason is that Mrs. C perceives her uk-chai as not “a member of her family” (chi-kai-yun). Since in traditional Chinese culture, asking a non-family member for help might induce a sigma that “no family is willing to take care of her.” In this case, EA can offer a proper framework for social workers to help Mrs. C in constructing a discursive family with her suk-chai. For example, since suk-chai highly respects Mr. C for his past assistance, suk-chai, according to Mrs. C, regards Mr. C as “father.” So described, if the social worker can induce relevant family discourses, e.g., “It seems to me that your suk-chai respects you like his ‘mother’”; “Your suk-chai treats your well, just like your son, right?” Therefore, EA provides the intervention strategy which can to a certain extent absorb Mrs. C’s feeling of uneasiness in seeking support from the non-family member, her suk-chai.

Apart from mobilizing the under-utilized source of support, EA can be applied to mobilize the unutilized source of support. To illustrate this, Mrs. D is a good case in point. Mrs. D is classified as a “high-risk” case. Having used the prevailing social work interventions, the social worker fails to help her cope with the crisis. She still suffers from high level of anxiety and insecurity. I therefore deems that EA offers a new approach which Mrs. D’s case can be tackled.
To handle Mrs. D’s case, as mentioned above, local social workers place emphasis on minimizing Mrs. D’s level of anxiety and insecurity through psychotherapy. They also stress on how to expand her social network through various kinds of group activities. While acknowledging the use of psychotherapy in lowering the anxiety level of Mrs. D, EA is to put emphasis on probing into the characteristics of her present social network and looking for possible ways through which a new concept of family can be reconstructed. In other words, the social worker should identify potential family members for Mrs. D’s new constructed “family.” These potential family members can be Mrs. D’s friends, neighbours or any other acquaintances. They can also be siblings, relatives or kinfolk with whom Mrs. D does not regard them as belonging to “her family.” For one to be qualified as a “potential family member,” the most important criterion is that s/he has expressed to Mrs. D a sense of intimacy, i.e., s/he understands Mrs. D’s difficult situation, sympathizes with her, and is willing to help her, at least, psychologically, cope with the crisis.

In Mrs. D’s case, there are two such potential “family members.” The first one is her soar-tong-dai-neung (Dai-neung hereafter), a remote relative of Mrs. D. In the past, Dai-neung did not have a close relationship with Mrs. D in the mother town in Mainland China. However, since Dai-neung immigrated to Hong Kong, their relationship began to develop. Their relationship became intimate when Dai-neung noticed that Mrs. D’s husband died of cancer. It is because one of Dai-neung’s son was also killed by cancer. Moreover, her daughter-in-law was accidentally killed in a traffic accident. Therefore, it is clear that these personal backgrounds let them feel and see things at the other’s perspective very easily.

Another potential “family member” is Mrs. D’s friend (Mrs. X hereafter) whom she met in SOCO. According to the transcript, Mrs. X also shares similar background with Mrs. D because Mrs. X is also a new immigrant from Mainland China and her husband died of cancer several years ago. Besides, they support each other through

\[274\] “…我話佢個黃・佢幾正常我・佢鄉下有個仔・他係CANCER死咗嘅個仔・同病相憐・佢都係得當…” Paragraph 32, Appendix 4.
telephone contacts, shopping together, and participating in various group activities organized by SOCO. Reading from the non-verbal gestures, I can see that Mrs. D deeply appreciates Mrs. X's concern. Moreover, Mrs. X is the only non-blood-tie related person with whom Mrs. D maintained constant contact. 275

Instead of encouraging Mrs. X to participate in various kinds of group activities, the social worker should encourage Mrs. D to bring along one of her two "potential family members" in the subsequent counselling sessions. In this case, I would suggest that Mrs. X is more appropriate than Dai-neung to be involved in the subsequent interventions. The reason is that Mrs. X is living near to Mrs. D and frequent contacts between them can facilitate the discursive construction of family. According to the EA of intervention, the social worker strategically uses family discourses such as "You two share many similarities, don't you? I think that you should help each other more frequently... just like sisters, right?!" to help the two clients acquire a sense of "family." In order to facilitate the intervention, the social worker should encourage them to participate in some leisure activities together. For example, Mrs. D, Mrs. X and their children may visit Ocean Park together with free/or discount tickets provided by the social work agency. The social worker should also encourage them to meet each other during important Chinese festivals, e.g., Lunar Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, etc. The ultimate objective of EA is thus to encourage, but not force, the two clients to construct a "discursive family." One should be reminded that Gubrium's ethnomethodology stresses on the social actors' descriptive accounts to organize and manipulate social order. Therefore, when the social worker introduces strategically family discourses (e.g., "You two look like of one family!") to the relationship between the two clients, it is expected that "family usage" (e.g., Mrs. X would attribute her helping Mrs. D to "We are like sisters!") will be bred in daily life discourses between them. When such a "discursive family" is constructed, I believe that both Mrs. D and Mrs. X will benefit from it. This is because, according to Gubrium's ethnomethodology, family usage does not only describe a set of social relationship, but also convey the

275 "仲有一個，係新移民協會嘅，又係同病相憐嘅，又係單親家庭，係朋友來，經常傾下計，嘅下唔凍。" Paragraph 34, Appendix 4.
underlying social order of the notion “family” that implies trust, giving and, most importantly, non-calculating relationship. In other words, with such an obligation to help the others, support, both psychological and material, received by Mrs. D will be increased by the pooling of hidden family strengths. Therefore, following Gubrium’s ethnomethodology, in re-assigning meaning to Mrs. D’s and Mrs. X’s life, i.e., “sisters,” “substantive resources” can be pooled.

By emphasizing the strengths of EA, I do not mean that this approach does not have limitations. The major limitation indeed resides in how social workers assess the willingness of the clients to “form” a family. For example, if Mrs. D is willing to regard Mrs. X as her “sister” but not vice versa, Mrs. D will be deeply hurt and inflicted with frustration. This also marks the major limitation of Gubrium’s ethnomethodology in applying it to social work practice. Therefore, in the course of adopting EA in social work intervention, the social worker must be sensitive to the attitude of the clients in forming families with the others.
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Appendix 1

Mrs. A  A：訪問者  B：被訪者

1  A：你幾多歲結婚？
2  B：27歲。
3  A：你先生過唔係半年，咁你係呢段日子係點過？
4  B：好難過，係精神上。
5  A：生活上呢？
6  B：生活上就唔怕迫切，因我係係都做緊嘅，但長遠上都係有問題，因佢
     係早都有自己嘅家庭，而個女讀完中學仲要讀大學，咁個仲係有段
     時間要負擔家庭嘅經濟，如個個係係有自己嘅家庭，就有問題，但前幾
     個月都未曾想過呢D問題。
7  A：個病突然係？
8  B：好突然，成家都無心理準備，其實係今年年初我先生都一直有病，但
     直到五月先知係肝癌，一知道已經好末期，一過啲身之後，佢嘅事事
     未做完之前，好多嘅唔想做，所以我當時嘅精神，完全專注係呢方面，
     佢後事做咗後，我自己發覺控制唔到自己嘅情緒。
9  A：係咪D事做咗後，精神失去寄托？
10 B：咁後來經過林姑娘輔導啲幾個月，就好好多，我就希望可以試下自己
     幫自己，唔再輔導。當時係九月，而我剛好見佢一份工作，我呢幾個
     月都發覺係好啲，當然同舊時係唔得比。
11 A：現在日常生活中，最常接觸嘅係邊個？
12 B：我先生過啲身後，我係唔想接觸人，唔想出屋企門口，我好似好若無
     其事咁，但當佢係唔係度時，我就成日哭，就算係火車，係好多唔
     地方我都一樣哭，不能自我控制，唔一定要見到有關我先生嘅先哭，
     我去沖涼時都哭，哭到沖完，晚上都一樣，當時我嘅兄弟姊妹就唔
     係我先至睇我，我唔唔係佢係知道我而家咁，怕佢係擔心。
     因為係我先生過啲身一個月前，我爸又過啲身。係啲時間至親唔兩個
     個都死咗，我覺得好辛苦。特別係我奈係未過身個幾時間，慨半個月
     度啦，知道我先生係肝癌，同我爸爸係同間醫院，因為講大話騙佢，
     說我先生無事，又見我爸爸吊唔D喉管係身度，想到我先生係短期內
     都會變成啲，好多時去到我爸爸病房都唔敢入去，即使是唔就就來死。所以我
     爸爸去啲之後，我係好內疚，佢死後嘅事事後，我咩都唔做過，都
     系我D兄弟姊妹去做，但我當時唔知道我自己豋做法會影響到我日後
     嘅情緒，我仲係係自己好堅強，可以處理埋D問題，當時我又好似
     處理得好啲啲，直到我先生喪事完咗之前，各様嘅我唔係盡量自己去做
     唔，我唔啱個仔嘅啲，同埋我先生係好多兄弟姊妹，因為係我先
     生過身那幾日，我係好辛苦，我想佢係陪埋我個仔去做，但我
     發覺佢係好多意見，所以好多嘅都由我安排，直到喪事完咗後。
13 A：你啲短時間兩位至親過啲身，在處理啲多問題時有無人幫你？
無，我爸爸喺D就兄弟姊妹喎，我先生喺邊邊地多啲，先生過啲年過日
我頭唔住，我希望自己屋企有個人，同埋我先生屋邊邊有人，同我
傾個去殯儀館搞埋棺木嘅D啲。

A: 你話先生喺邊邊有人，係指邊D人？
B: 佢D兄弟姊妹。
A: 佢有幾多兄弟姊妹呀？
B: 連埋我先生八個，我先生係最大啲，一共四個仔四個女，我屋企就連
埋我五個，有一個細佬，一個家姐，兩個妹，不過過D有D人太
多意見，我後來去教堂呀，佢地要陪埋我去，我唔使，唔想聽咁多意
見，自己一個人搞得掂。

A: 你覺得佢地點解比咁多意見？出於咩嘅？
B: 其實個個都係關心，只不過D人以自己意見最好，我先生過身前
十日入醫院，佢兄弟姊妹都好多意見，不過有D好難令人接受，我都
知道佢地比好意，但有時好意未必係好事，嘅D我先生病情惡化，
唔上得上療養院，我打電話俾我仔，叫佢唔好去療養院，佢地後來
打電話俾我個仔，話老老病成咁咁唔來探佢，話佢唔住做嘅，其實佢
地唔知我個仔係呢個時候承受唔好大壓力，可能我太關心佢地。

A: 佢個個係？
B: 我D孖女，我唔想佢地太擔心，所以好多嘅都唔講俾佢地聽，後來我
情緒出現啲問題，我都無話俾佢地聽，後來來呢度，林姑娘話我應該
話俾佢地聽，話佢地已經咁大個可以承受到。
A: 你頭先有講佢先生D兄弟姊妹，咁喺件事中佢阿爸阿媽點呢？
B: 過啲身，我老爺呢，差唔多八十歲，返啲鄉下住，唔想佢太擔心，無
話佢知，有一次佢上屋企，我先生坐係最唔好地方，我老爺坐係最光嘅
地方，喺佢話肝炎。

A: 聲番成個過程，你覺得佢地同先生嘅D兄弟姊妹係關係點？
B: 關係唔會講係親蜜，係唔講係好多嘅大家嘅法好嘅同。
A: 唔以前來往好多唔？
B: 因為以前我老爺奶奶係馬鞍山住，唔係時馬鞍山好偏僻，係唔係有船去，
所以讀書同埋做嘅D就同我地一齊住，老爺奶奶同埋D細係馬鞍山
住，唔係時因我先生住，佢地好尊重佢。
A: 佢仔係係住係馬鞍山？
B: 我未結婚時，我先生同佢做嘅D妹呢就住係九龍住，後來結咗婚分
開住，不過結咗婚幾個月後，又返去同佢地住，係係分開兩個家庭咁
嘅，經じ上都係，我地就負擔出面嘅家庭，老爺奶奶就負擔入面嘅家
庭。
A: 即係你老爺奶奶係係馬鞍山同埋D整緊書嘅住，你同你先生就同埋D
做嘅係係九龍住。
B: 喪嘅期間我同佢地關係都係好，好過佢地對佢阿哥嘅，所以一路小
嘅嘅我一向都唔理佢地D嘅，所以一向關係都維繫得係好。
A: 你地在九龍幾多人住？
34 B: 四個，加埋我先生同我就一共六個，後來我個仔出咗世，就比我老爺
同奶奶帶，佢地比較重男輕女，我第一胎係仔，佢地好開心，馬鞍山
住比市區好多好，又有D教會學校，所以就比佢地帶，而我地就負責
出面個家噉，兩個家庭嘅經濟都分開嘅，後來到馬鞍山收屋拆嘅時候
呢，就搬咗去美林邨，同埋一條邨，但係就唔同一齊住。
35 A: 頭先你提一個家庭嘅，你覺得點先為之一個家庭?
36 B: 好似我地嚟嗰陣，同埋佢D個佬妹一齊住，雖然我地估估唔著，佢細佬
係從屬關係，但因為整體經濟唔可以分開，個家庭係我先生同埋佢做
咗繼續養強D，嚟陣時就叫一個家庭，因為經濟同生活都係埋一
齊，到後來馬鞍山拆屋，我做嘅，大家分開住，嚟陣就唔叫一個家庭。
37 A: 嚟陣時邊幾個住?
38 B: 有一個細佬後來結咗婚，搬咗出去，咁就唔叫同個家庭啦，嚟陣時，
我先生同一個叔仔做嘅，就養佢兩個細妹，我個仔因為比老爺奶奶帶，
所以都要約番D錢，所以嚟陣負擔都幾重。
39 A: 因為同埋一齊住，所以你就認為係兩個家庭?
40 B: 基本人上係以往同埋經濟來分開嘅，咁到後來個女出世，我奶奶身體
唔好，就比外人撫養，我份糧比奶奶同埋接養，都無嘅，等於零，所以
負擔都好大，後來咁搬咗去美林邨後，我個仔D成績差唔好咗，我先生
話唔得嘅，所以我就開始無做嘅，嚟陣個女得這麼零，個仔讀三年級，
直到個女四年級我先做番嘅。
41 A: 嚟時個居住安排係點?
42 B: 係美林邨，我地四個人住，奶奶老爺同埋佢D仔女就係另一個大單位
住，嚟陣時經濟就分去住，佢地還佢地。
43 A: 咁你覺得呢個係兩個家庭定一個家庭?
44 B: 兩個家庭，根本經濟同住都分開，係過節呀，生日呀，先比錢佢地，
唔需要個個月都比。
45 A: 家庭對係來說，一定要一齊住，同埋一定有經濟聯繫。
46 B: 咁你預嘅，因嚟時兩個姑仔都未做嘅。
47 A: 頭先聽你講你而家都幾擔心。
48 B: 係，香港來講，雖然話唔會餓死人，但有D福利，一般人係好難想像，
好似公援咗，其實真係有D人唔想揀，但係有D人又真係多多多揀。我
先生病嘅時，我曾經同埋D姑姊妹，問可以申請D咩嘅，佢地話你個仔
有嘅做，唔可以申請公援，就可以申請傷殘津貼，結果係我申請唔。
49 A: 你地嚟時想申請公援，但因個仔有做嘅唔得，你地有無試過其他方法?
50 B: 嚟陣時，以當時嘅環境，係連我地家庭嚟講都係可接應咗，唔好
話我先生去睇病嘅，另D自己出錢，嚟陣時我先生仲有三萬幾蚊，咪
用嚟整D錢去睇。
51 A: 咁係嚟段時間，係個仔收入又唔多，開支又大，有無人支持過你地?
52 B: 佢地系我先生入院時都比過D錢，有D就比一千， 有D就比五百嘅，
但你呢D係唔計長貧難顧，無可能長期係佢地嘅。
53 A: 佢地係?
54  B: 我先生兄弟姊妹。
55  A: 咁佢地經濟情況點呀?
56  B: 始終你各人有各人嘅定庭，就算人地好有錢都好，你始終都唔係好想接受人哋嘅樣嘅，譬如我如果合資格掟公線，我個心就唔係太難過，但如唔係你亦要接濟，我自己個心就唔係好想嘅。
57  A: 你話佢地已經有自己家庭，但如唔係假設你仍然在一齊住，你會唔會接受呢?
58  B: 無可能一齊住嘅，在香港無咁嘅機會，你話成立咁幾個家庭，有咩可能幾個家庭一齊住呢?
59  A: 咁佢地仍未結婚呢?
60  B: 咁我就會，因為我曾經負擔過呢個家庭，而佢地又係出於自願嘅，咁就會接受，但而家各自有家庭，我覺得好過意唔去。我先生過咗幾個我想佢地比佢多啲D梗係比較少D，係我先生病嘅嘅時候已經比佢D錢，我過意唔去。
61  A: 咁你自己喃邊?
62  B: 我爸爸係五月過身，我先生就六月過身，係我爸爸過身時，我地成個家庭都要使錢嘅，所以自好多嘅都唔想比佢地知，唔想佢地擔心。
63  A: 有咩嘅人?
64  B: 我自己，一個家庭，一個細佬同兩個妹，四個女，一個細佬。咁我地感情都好好，其實佢越關心D人，你就越唔想佢地擔心你嘅，所以我一直都啱佢地知我情況。
65  A: 頭先你係冇噉嘅般唔啱家庭嘅，咁你點樣睇親疏啱關係?
66  B: 其實我自己對我先生嘅邊D人，就好似對自己屋企人咁，譬如好似經濟能唔呀，我個人上噉兩個家庭劃咗等號嘅，佢唔同家庭上，始終都係自己屋企人親。
67  A: 佢屋企包括咩嘅人呀?
68  B: 包括我父母啲，自己兄弟姊妹啲，係感情上我自己屋企係親D，但經濟能一樣。
69  A: 咁你點解覺得自己屋企親過你先生過邊呢?
70  B: 咁如如果只有一個時間同屋企人相處，我就揀咗自己屋企人，如果有兩個時間，就係佢一個嘅，在感情上有頻頻，佢覺得家庭方面始終係D。同様當我係自己有問題時，我同屋企人開始關我多啲。好似我先生後期入唔可以，醫生話佢蛋白質入腦，令到精神錯亂，所以唔比有蛋白質D食物佢食，但我D個腳佬，想當然佢唔好有營養嘅，比D好高蛋白質嘅食物佢食，當然佢會樣做，你都係關心佢。
71  A: 那而家你係自己分嘅幾組係噉，自己娘家嘅，老หลายๆ嘅，同埋你自己D個腳佬，你根據自己屋企的定義，會點分呀?
72  B: 條係自己同一眼啲，凡係係唔係就會分開唔可以，喺居住好，經濟能好，全部分開啲。
73  A: 咁頭先你話好擔心自己經濟能，你預期會點?
74  B: 短期來講，情況都唔咩嘅，因我個仔重啲拖，重未結婚，因唔如果我個女繼續讀書嘅話，起碼重有四五年，你無理由話個仔係咁照顧呢
個家庭，唔去拍拖嘅，到嚟時再算啦。

75 A: 你話你個仔併唔係自己嘅家庭...。

76 B: 梗係嘅啦，好似我嘅結咗婚，又要養我先生D姐妹，又要顧自己家庭，我根本無可能再比錢我父母，雖然我父母唔需要我養，但我都希望同 D錢併地。同様情況會出現係我個仔身上。

77 A: 將來你個仔結咗婚，你有無谂過同佢一齊住？

78 B: 好難到以後嘅事，同唔同住又要睇佢另外一股係點，好似我同我奶奶關係，外人睇就幾好，但若果同佢住，就未必會一定好，以後嘅事，而家唔諗住。

79 A: 你心見中有無D親戚可以必要時提供經濟資助。

80 B: 我都係話住如唔講係呢個家庭搞唔掂，我到時都係向政府要求幫助嘅嘅，我唔想話向親戚朋友，始終每個家庭都係睇人好，人睇你好，搞嘅話你都唔好麻煩人啦。

81 A: 踏番你曾經同你先生D姐妹住過一齊，咁你先生過咗身至今，你地多唔多來往？

82 B: 根本我地都唔係想見佢地，即使我個仔個女，都係來唔呢度見林姑娘，我先同佢地講，連我自己D兄弟姊妹我冇講，佢地來到我自己都忍得好辛苦，咩人都唔想見，而家見過林姑娘就好咁好多。

83 A: 咁D叔仔，姑仔平時有無聯絡咗？

84 B: 老嫂係鄉下出嚟就一齊飲下茶，平時好少，咁我自己的企嘅D呢，就嗪下邊個禮拜日得閒就約出來飲茶。

85 A: 若果你先生係度會點呢？

86 B: 都唔會，就算我先生同我屋企都好傾過同佢D兄弟姊妹。

87 A: 從前早幾年做節會點安排？

88 B: 兩邊一人一日嘅，其實都係出去食餐飯咁。

89 A: 自己幾個有無做？

90 B: 都無嘅，已經去過兩個屋企做，已經做多咁一次啦，變咗我地自己無做。
Appendix 2

Mrs. B A: 訪問員 B:被訪者

1 A: 你先生年紀已高，可否請下你呢一係點樣過呢?
2 B: 初初喺3個月成日，就算係而家一講起我都嚟，一係係會，我可能係
會眼裏啲或者比較感性啲，除非我唔喺去出面，唔係間距度，唔係
我會谂起啲喺喺開心嘅事，即係，我唔能夠靜落來一靜落來就唔得。
3 A: 生活上又怎樣?
4 B: 生活上就自己做自己嘅。
5 A: 點樣自己做自己?
6 B: 因為我個係係美國，我個女係做護士嘅，咁樣如嘔我個女去咗返工，我
咪自己打發我自己時間嘅，我去四圍學嘅，我唔鍾意打麻雀，我識但
唔鍾意，我去同英文會話，拼音，學國語，咁一個禮拜已經有咁我
3日時間，其餘嘅日咪係係屋企嘅，我嘅學歷係好低，係小學係度
咁如嘔我去學下啲嘅，我就係係屋企做功課，查字典，聽錄音帶，咁都
用咁好多時間，我唔會好無聊，好得閒係屋企嘅，我自己攪到自
己好忙。
7 A: 你以前都係無做嘅嗎?
8 B: 我一向都有做嘅。
9 A: 咁你幾時停咗無做嘅?
10 B: 係我先生病啲時就辭咗職，我專心照顧佢，我夫時一向都係做工廠，
車嘅工廠，做咁好耐。
11 A: 咁你係係屋企住你先生啦，直到你先生不幸地過世嘅，咁你就開始
學三樣嘅?
12 B: 唔止嘅?
13 A: 即係開頭學三樣嘅?
14 B: 一開始咪逐樣學嘅，咁講課本喺啲，我咪而家學三樣嘅。
15 A: 學啲除咗打發時間，仲有其他咩啲作用啲?
16 B: 如嘔講英嘅英文嘅，咁就因為我以前D水平好低，我去邊度係係依靠
我先生嘅，因為先生講學識係比我好，咁去美國探他，跟住佢就OK，
咁而家我先生唔係度，如嘔我真係係度個係，係語言方面，我係一定
遇到困難，所以我一定要自己學，最低限度，我都要識聽少少，係唔
會話一啲唔懂，一啲都唔識。
17 A: 你個係過喺去美國學嘅呢？係係讀書?
18 B: 初初過去係讀書。
19 A: 去喺幾耐呀?
20 B: 我個係係90年過去嘅。
21 A: 咁後來就留喺係邊度?
22 B: 讀完書之後而家係係邊度做嘅。
23 A: 做咩，咁就係唔理?
未有居留。

係香港呢邊，有邊個同你一齊住？

我個女。

係你先生過咗罪後，你過時過節是點過呢？

嘅我地一向都好簡單，人唔係好多，喺以前我先生係我，都係得三個
人。嘅呢啲燒肉同雞去拜神。

啲如果聖節，新年，甚至生日，啲你點呢？

無野攪。啲如果係過年過節就拜神。喺前以我先生好鍾意去我外家，
我爸爸嘅邊，因為佢地鍾意打麻雀。

啲你先生過咗罪之後，你同你爸爸來往係點樣嘅？

我都成日返去，我做完我自己嘅嘅就返。

你地住得遠唔遠？

唔遠。

啲而家返多咗定少咗呀？

之前我先生未曾病時就少，因爲要返工，放假時，又要係屋企做清潔。
到後來我先生病咗，我無做啲啲，咁有時我先生想打麻雀，咁我地
係我先生到我嘅嘅邊嘅啲。啲而家到我先生過咗罪後。啲我都無去做嘅，
因爲太辛苦，啲變咗無事忙，得閒啲。

啲即係返多咗？

啲好多時都返去，有時我個女返咗工咗返去嘅邊食飯嘅，自己一個人
費事煮飯嘅。

你個女返工時間係可以令你地日日見面？

唔定時嘅。如啲係返下午兩點，啲我嘅中午煮一餐，我同佢兩個。
如啲係返早嘅，啲我晚上就要煮飯嘅。啲即係我都係煮一餐飯。

有時你個女喺係屋企，你就返去外家到？

係啲。如啲我個女返工或去街嘅返來食，而我自己一個係屋企無嗲做，
我做啲我啲功課，我咪走返去我爸爸嘅邊食飯。

你爸爸嘅邊啲咩啲人？

我好大家庭，爸爸有9個仔女，有好多姊妹都無結婚嘅，啲所以都幾
熱鬧。

啲有幾多姊妹，姐姐？

我爸爸有7個女，我係最大嘅，有個大哥一個細佬。

啲你爸爸係呢段時間裡同你啲過係點樣啲？

啲我爸爸係一個好仁慈嘅老人家，係啲係返後生時已經啲啲，啲如啲
啲同我溝通都係用筆寫嘅。口講少少一部份啲，但如果啲想詳細知道
都一定要用筆寫。

啲即係你都經常返去同佢地見面？

係，經常返去。

啲你同6個姊妹相處又點樣啲？

係難講啲，啲我係有兩個姊妹就結咗婚，中間同細細個，其他咗啲都未
結婚，啲係地都曾經歷過有家庭，有兒有女呢，有丈夫呢，有好多啲
都係唔能夠明白箇中嘅感受，但係佢地好支持嘅係．係佢地同我個
先生嘅感情都好好．
53 A: 佢地都對你好嘅，佢係依段時間，佢地有無做啲實質上嘅嘅嘢？
54 B: 佢地咪成日叫我返去食飯呀，有邊度去邊度，去旅行叫埋我去，即以
前就無咁多嘅．
55 A: 係你個角度去睇，就以前你同你啲妹嘅接觸就少嘅，就反而係呢段時
間就多啲，你點解覺得佢地會咁照顧你呀，有節目預埋你呀？
56 B: 以前我要返工，我一定唔得閒去，咁我而家實在係太得閒喇，只不過
我自己無事忙，自己揀啲來學，咁而家佢地有節咪叫埋我去，一定
問我去啲去，因爲佢地除咗返工之外，都係好得閒，無家庭．
57 A: 你點解你同你啲妹嘅關係，如果唔係你自己去形容？
58 B: 你話佢地好諗關心我嘅，又唔係，佢係佢地又唔係唔諗關心我，佢係
如果你要佢地好深切啲明白你箇中感受，我諗佢地感受唔到．
59 A: 你對佢地嘅感覺都幾好？
60 B: 無咩嘅．
61 A: 唔你個大佬同細佬呢？
62 B: 個大佬大我一歲又未結婚嘅，細嘅個就結咗婚，有兩個女，佢係比較
唔係咁關心我，可能因為個個女有好多病，佢地同婆媳嘅精神都唔咁
落個女到，因為個個女細細個就已經有一種病，好嚴重嘅，成日要入
院．
63 A: 唔大佬嘅？
64 B: 大佬就無咩嘅，因爲女多，所以返到屋企都唔踎佢理，只係返工放工，
平時我地講嘅都唔少嘅．當我先生病時，佢都有吩咐啲妹幫我嘅．
65 A: 你都覺得佢對你好嘅？
66 B: 照顧就唔講咁嘅嘅，一般嘅，佢無家庭嘅男人一般都唔識用行動去支
持你嘅，因爲佢地同兄弟係屋企都唔係退一步，就算佢地點頭嘅關心你
係好，佢地唔識得表達出來，唔係我唔係有啲喺佢就即刻來幫，或者
知道我唔得閒喺度，佢地煲完嘅煮嚟俾我．
67 A: 你認為屋企係包括邊D人？
68 B: 如佢係外家嘅嘅，我爸爸嘅，我媽係我先生過世之前一個月中風去
咗，我姊80幾歲，我我80幾歲．
69 A: 係佢自己外家嘅嘅以及你先生同佢女嘅嘅，你點睇呢兩個家庭．
70 B: 係我同佢外家嘅關係好嘅，反而我爸爸爸我先生仲有過嚟我地，他們
感情同好嘅，啲有時我係屋企做嘅，我先生去唔係同佢噉，佢見到
我先生時唔會問我係邊度，但係如佢先生無關係我過去喺，佢地一
定會問我先生係邊度，即係我爸爸對我先生好過對我嘅，即係佢地
個感情，或者佢地係唔計過，即係仲嘅．
71 A: 即係你先生呢邊同你外家嘅嘅來往都好親密？
72 B: 好親密，親密過我先生媽媽嘅邊．
73 A: 你先生媽媽係邊個？
74 B: 我家婆係有四個仔女，我先生係最大啲嘅，但係我先生同佢媽媽嘅感
情唔係話十分好，一般咁喇，但我先生唔細佬對我地好好嘅。

75 A: 咁你同你先生囉訪嘅來往呢？
76 B: 唔係咁好。
77 A: 反而同外家囉嘅仲好，咁係你先生有病嘅時間呢？佢媽媽有無聯絡？
78 B: 佢媽媽好大年紀，佢現在80歲，我先生有事嘅時候係5年前，94年，
當時佢都差不多80歲，你話一個80歲嘅老人家，你可要求佢幫什麼呢？
佢想幫，但係沒有能力。
79 A: 咁依家你同佢嘅相處如何？
80 B: 我都好肯出去探我個叔仔，即係我同他個叔仔嘅感情好過我同我家婆。
因爲有個叔仔當正我先生係佢老豆嘅，因爲我個家好生到入過咁，
佢好細個就無老豆，咁我先生就差唔多養大我個叔仔，所以我個叔仔
就好尊重佢大仔。

81 A: 佢地年紀差幾遠？
82 B: 都係十一，二年到喇。
83 A: 即係可以當老豆嘅嘅？
84 B: 係嘅，我先生嘅老豆死咗之後，佢初初Shock到嘅錢，全部都揾番來養
細佬同阿媽，好顧家。
85 A: 你同你個叔仔嘅聯絡都幾多下？
86 B: 唔多。
87 A: 即係多過家婆？
88 B: 我家婆係同我個叔仔住，但好老實，我同我家婆唔係咁FRIEND嘅，我
感受得到我個叔仔係好啱我。
89 A: 唔係基於一種當你先生係老豆嘅原因？
90 B: 唔係，佢係即係就算我先生現在過咗生都好啱，有咩事幹，一叫佢，
佢就來幫我，例如電器，得番一個女人，呢啲啲有時唔識嘅嘅，一叫
佢，佢就會好主動來喇。
91 A: 佢都好幫助你喇，咁你覺得係咩嘅原因呢？
92 B: 佢尊敬佢大仔啲，因為佢大仔以前都照顧佢好耐。
93 A: 佢同你叔仔之間，即係你先生過咗生之後同之前嘅關係係親密咗或疏
離咗？
94 B: 即係點講呢？我地個關係一向都唔差，咁細佬同家嘅情況，咁細佬以前
屋企有事幹就叫佢幫嘅我個叔仔，我先生好叻嘅，咩都識做，
咁而家有事幹就叫佢幫我個叔仔，因為我知道佢一定唔會拒絕我。
95 A: 你自己有大仔又叔仔，其實佢兩邊都可以揾嘅？
96 B: 我大仔好少係屋企做嘅，而且佢工作同電器呢方面無咩關係，而我
通常都要人幫我整下電器，我個叔仔呢方面就熟行啲。
97 A: 唔係晒日子都唔啫係唔開心？
98 B: 唔係，係之前我同個叔仔都唔需要議會，只係等做工返來幫屋企，我意思唔係話
我先生人工低，而佢個仔去讀書，係需要好多錢，咁同我地係有個
計劃等個仔讀完書就輪到我個女讀，咁咪成日話住儲錢。係收時有什
麼文件來往都係仕部由我先生理，我就完全唔知，咁到後來我先生過
啲身之後呢，佢係公務員，一向都係交税，等到税局啲人寄信來要我
佢報清清楚楚，有啲唔啱未有寫清楚，我唔識啲，因我程度低，我咁
攞啲女嚟，佢係都啱識．因我先生好女，而且好啲女，所以我個報
稅都係由佢佬嘅．我個女又係啱唔啱理嘅．我個女讀得多書，咁報
税係由佢俾嘅，佢生啱一句就話啱識，咁我覺得唔無收唔啱嘅，讀啲多書
啱識，於是就話啱氣重啱啱佢阿姨，佢就話啱啱一向都係佬佬．於
是我個心就諗，現在佬佬死啲，你唔駛學嘅．嘅次我好聽啲佢，我
係比較啱啱媽媽，其實我已經覺得我個女好幸福，佢而家竟然話自己
張紙便都啱識，我唔啱啱我係呀．我嘅完佢之後，我就唔駛佢佢，
我自己幫佢先生佢．我個女知道我係比較堅強嘅人，唔啱容易放棄．
其實佢係意思就唔係真係啱想做，而係佢覺得好疲倦，所以我叫佢時
佢就唔想做，但過啲佢就應該做，但我就係想快D做完，佢就唔好拖
啱，快啱告一段落啱．所以我一叫佢做啲，就啱願做，但經過呢一
件事之後，我叫佢做啲，佢就唔敢接我啱，佢會好快同我做啱．爸爸
啱係，佢唔可以話啱識嘅，你以前就話爸爸係，而佢家死啲，佢唔
可以話啱識，要由一個小學畢業嘅喺做．

99 A: 咁你都係佢係供完你個仔去外國讀書之後，就輪到仔女，佢係因係你先
生過啱生，而個計劃有所影響？

100 B: 咁係過生，而佢係因係病逝之後，因啱唔敢搏，因讀書要用好多錢，你
無理由話讀到一半無錢而唔再讀嘅．

101 A: 佢個女幾歲呀？

102 B: 四年前啱，佢剛剛讀完中七，然後去啦嘅護士．

103 A: 即係佢個女讀護士時就開始病啱嘅？

104 B: 係，因此我地就唔再搏．因我地唔知我先生係病情係點．

105 A: 咁佢個女點睇？

106 B: 咁鍾意，同唔鍾意啲，成日話爸爸有得去佢就無得去．哥哥有得去讀
大學，而為何佢無得去，佢話香港嘅制度唔好，學位少啱，如唔啱
佢自己一定讀到大學．佢話同學都讀到大學，佢話自己因為啱盡力，
而係話香港嘅社會制度唔好，令佢讀唔到大學．

107 A: 於是佢就去讀護士嘅？

108 B: 因係佢當時讀完中七之後就無路走路，因係我當時話剛剛送左個仔去美
國讀書，我個仔讀中五時嘅成績佢係佢，佢係普通，而佢又唔士
去讀中六，於是佢就去啦讀政府嘅高級職業學徒，半工讀，政府保
送佢去讀嘅，2年讀黃化，2年讀理工．咁我個仔當時可能初初讀書
就未盡力，但之後佢識得啱書，反而啱成績就好．於是呢地就諗，
而家個仔讀得佢，不如送佢去美國搏一搏，因係佢唔知道為何叫做讀書
喇嘛．因中學時佢唔知為咩要啱書，但當佢做啱政府學徒，讀咗4年
畢業之後，政府都話佢係唔得去科文，但後來因為國那邊喺學校收
佢．咁我先生好鍾意佢細路嘅書，咁佢又好響喺美國，於是佢去咩
國喇．

109 A: 咁去讀書幾耐，你先生才開始病？
110 B: 約4年，佢99年去美國，我先生94年開始病。
111 A: 你先生病咗幾耐？
112 B: 約3年零8個月。
113 A: 係唔係時間長，好似你唔開心，佢係唔係痛過多啲？
114 B: 可能我地時常去聽講座，我地有咩事都係兩公婆商量，我地係無懶人
嘅，我先生係好信任我，我叫佢去邊去聽講座，佢就同我一齊去。我
先生病嘅之後，我一步皆未曾離開過佢，凡係有咩講座，都係兩個一
齊去。
115 A: 係唔係時間又長又啱開心呢？
116 B: 讀唔到大學，佢畢業後，我先生同佢地報進修學院，佢跟住爸爸嘅指
示去讀，終於修完一個澳洲護士學位課程，有個學位，條氣都順順嚟。
佢而家反而覺得自己係功過人，係自己讀番來，係我先生病時，我個
女長發過佢老豆脾氣，話自己唔駛老豆供佢讀書。但我地成日都話如
唔噉你真係想，我地會比佢去，勉強都有足夠嘅錢。
117 A: 仲有咩開心嘅事情？
118 B: 係我先生病時，我地成日去聽講座，有心理準備，到醫院方面話所有
療程都做嘅，都依然無好轉，又成日叫我地等。我地知道老醫係再
無辦法，於是我地刻離中醫，日日吃中藥吃咗2年零8個月。
119 A: 係唔係時間你點同佢爸爸嘅邊相處？
120 B: 鍾意咩同老公過去打麻雀。
121 A: 你参加咗好多興趣班，嘅你同佢地班人相處又點？
122 B: 我而家就參加咗手工班，就將自己整好嘅送給醫院梅布當作癌症病人，
送咗之後我地都會流茶同講咗邊個朋友又唔係好嘅，又寫啲慰
問卡慰問下佢。
123 A: 你覺得佢地有時飲咗茶，寫下慰問卡嘅呢種關係又點？
124 B: 雖然對唔系病人有幫助唔，大係好過佢地自己話三話四。
125 A: 係唔係班人裡面，有咩話題個好傾嘅？
126 B: 咁快，我地㗎會友都係一齊坐係度，一邊做一邊傾計，有時就整啲嘢
返來食下，大家聚會後，有時就去飲茶。
127 A: 係唔係友相處，同爸爸同相處，同叔仔同會相處，係呢3種關係有
咩嘅，或唔同？
128 B: 同啲會友講起病程，我就會知道係咩事，但係好似返到同啲好講，佢
地感到唔到啲感覺。佢地只不過話唔好咁咁嘅，你好表面，因佢地
無呢個經歷。
129 A: 有無啲同啲個妹投契啲？
130 B: 無，普通，可能我地太多妹，我自細就係大佢地，但係我又唔會講
好嚟我啲妹嘅。
131 A: 你同爸爸與會友相處又有咩同？
132 B: 我同我老豆好傾得埋，我有咩寫比佢睇，佢就感受到嘅，如啲同佢會
友誘，我同少講嘅，因我講嘅好直，怕會講啲嘅會令到佢的人好擔
心，怕講錯嘅，因我始終唔係專業人士，我同爸爸係係坦率啲，但只
限於爸爸，而唔係妹，因爲同我唔妹講，佢地都唔明。

133 A: 咁你老豆係呢段時間都同你好親密，都能支持你?
134 B: 係，有時我講佢但，我好辛苦，佢就話好彩你嘅子女大，如喺唔係
仲辛苦呀，我聽完就哭喇，我老豆好嘔我。
135 A: 你先生嘅話仲有兩個，佢問你係邊係又點?
136 B: 好嘅，可能佢係又有一個家庭，為生活，唔得閒，佢地可能唔係唔
想開你做，但可能無時間同你講，我同佢係嘅聯絡少啲。
137 A: 咁係你先生過生前後，關係上又有無改變?
138 B: 無，都係少。
139 A: 係而家，你覺得咩嚟係最重要?
140 B: 最緊要係唔好病，自己顧自己，係我先生病時我都係咁同佢講，有時
佢同我講，因為佢減退休，佢成日話如喺個天百多兩年命佢较好喇，
可以享受下人生，咁我咪安慰佢啲，話你而家有事幹都仲有我係度，
佢係如果我有事，我就要去老院。
141 A: 如喺你不幸真係有病，咁你認為你個叔仔會點呢?
142 B: 佢有自己嘅家庭，但無可能成日照顧佢，因為佢都要養生活，就算有
心佢都做唔到，就算係我個女都一樣，因為佢都無可能話辭頂工去照
顧我，我話可以辭頂工去照顧我先生，我個女都要顧自己，要用
钱。我有心理準備，我知道自己啲下場。
143 A: 咁你話叔仔有自己嘅家庭，你認為佢自己嘅家庭又包括咩嘅人呢?
144 B: 我個仔同女。
145 A: 咁你爸爸呢邊呢?
146 B: 我爸爸啲。
147 A: 佢阿哥呢，你認為佢係另一個家庭?
148 B: 唔可以話係另一個家庭，如喺叔係阿哥，阿妹在金錢上能否幫忙，就
一定可以，但是唔係通常我唔係，好似我先生死後，我曉曉死不著，
時常哭，無人知。
149 A: 你個仔係呢邊做事，會否留香港?
150 B: 會，但佢老豆就好想佢係美國落地生根，希望能做得現喇，佢無綠卡，
只有工作證，佢好少耍返來。
151 A: 有無事就難揹佢?
152 B: 係，因爲工作要佢唔係咁容易，所以自己一定要靠自己同自己，一
定唔可以比自己病，所以唔可以話成日係家企諗嘅不快嘅事。
153 A: 佢話佢時常去學好多啲。
154 B: 係，我一向都佢咁，就算返工即時都佢。
155 A: 當佢講起家企，你係咩去界定家企?
156 B: 佢係關心我，同明白我嘅底話，咪係家企人。
157 A: 任何人都係?
158 B: 係，只要肯聽，明白我嘅人，但我先生死後，就無人再敢提起我
先生，個個頂企逃避，費事講，變得我難過，但佢唔明白，如喺佢
講，當時人嘅心境係會鬆啲，有時後而自己成日話住，因係自己想講，
但又無人肯聽你講，反而自己會諷埋一邊，有時咪可能會做傻事囉。

A: 咁個個可以聽你嘅心底話，明白你。
B: 我爸爸，講心事咁揀我爸爸。
A: 咁你話你以前有咩都同你同學商量，咁同你爸爸講關係係點？
B: 都係好，不過以前就唔駛頭痛呢啲嘅嘅，因爲我先生做咩都好長遠嘅計劃，佢死後，我變咗好似無咗主意嘅。

A: 就變咗係你爸爸多啲？
B: 唔係，只不過同佢傾，係我呢個人係，最緊係係我先生，第二係我爸爸。
A: 咁你話起屋企人就係話起這兩個人？
B: 係嘅，咁我而家同我個女係就好啲嘅，佢佢就曾經講過，唔好以為只係懼，我早晚都一樣懼，唔好以為你係老公係好懼，我死老豆一樣懼懼嘅。
佢講嘅嘅話後，我自己反省，係懼，可能佢係係懼晚懼，只不過我無去關心佢，我都覺得佢講得好對，因為我成日顧住自己，咩而家我先生死咗，你仲比面色我睇，叫佢填張紙表都唔得，咁樣就忽略咗佢嘅感受，佢一句話就令我醒請。

A: 咁而家佢又認為一家人係點樣相處呢？
B: 有啲嘅就應該攤開來講，唔好話咁得罪邊一個，我個人就唔整意講啲轉彎抹角嘅，咁就唔如唔整意講。

A: 咁你問爸爸無話有咩嘅敢講？
B: 無，有啲嘅想講就講。
A: 同哥哥妹妹就唔咁樣。
B: 無，就疏啲。
A: 咁你同叔仔講過又點？
B: 都無咩嘅，佢好純，通常我講咩佢咪聽啲嘅。
Mrs. C  A: 訪問員  B:受訪者

1  A: 你先生不幸係7月份過咗生，咁你個段日子係點樣過？
2  B: 都好突然。但無法，只好接受，因為仲有兩個仔。開頭都有啲親友幫拼，因紛又要攬佢哋身後事。開頭個月咖好忙。到火化咗之後又撞正係暑假，咁咪係屋企。最初就我媽係我，都係好難過。
3  A: 你有邊個陪你？
4  B: 我奶奶。仲有我妹妹。
5  A: 你以前同你奶奶、阿妹、媽媽嘅關係係點？
6  B: 一般都幾好。我媽個邊就見面多啲，而奶奶嘅邊就少啲。因爲我媽比較老，而我奶奶嘅邊就有我叔佗同姑仔。而先生分工就少啲假期，就算假日都返。咁我自己同我老婆去奶奶嘅，咁我係自己去我媽度過，帶埋兩個仔。
7  A: 咁你點解選擇去你阿媽度？
8  B: 因為阿媽親近啲。同奶奶就隔啲啲，好似無我先生係度，就無咁親近。但同奶奶都好嘅。而我先生都好孝順，一有時間都會過去。
9  A: 咁佢同你啲妹又點？
10 B: 都係好，但前幾年就無見面，因係就醫啲日子，但這兩年回來咗。就好啲，又係親近啲。因為都係係唔係財通訊，但返來後有時星期六、日可唔得不食茶。
11 A: 你先生過咗生之後到而家，佢見到阿媽係多還是少啲？
12 B: 多啲。因係佢又好掛住我地。佢星期六都會過來，係肯唔放心。
13 A: 你媽幾多歲？
14 B: 73歲。身體唔係咁好。有糖尿要醫藥。同埋成日有老人病，如風濕、傷風。
15 A: 你屋企同佢阿媽屋企遠唔遠？
16 B: 車程要半個鐘，佢住順安村（西華），我住太子，我奶奶住馬鞍山。
17 A: 以前係做節，你係點樣同佢阿媽見面？
18 B: 咁知道我地嘅約到奶奶度食飯，咁佢咪提早做飯。照做咗，我爸爸過咗之後，只得我媽媽一個。
19 A: 除咗做節，仲有咩其他時間見面？
20 B: 有。平時出來食茶如果放假去阿媽度食飯，得閒就上去佢度，見面比較多。而我奶奶係咁啲，因係佢都要返工，佢比較後生。前兩年先退休，得閒有時同老公去佢屋企食飯。
21 A: 佢去見奶奶嘅邊少啲，除咗係因爲冇咁多時間。佢係年紀，佢係有無原因？
22 B: 係。
23 A: 咁係佢先生過咗生之後，佢同你媽、奶奶，有邊見面呢之數有無改變？
24 B: 咁奶奶有啲多啲。奶奶開頭都多，但呢個月都少啲。得閒有時會同奶奶食茶，佢打電話，就少啲。做節都有返去佢度做，但平時就少。
25 A: 咁你又點睇，點解做節就唔好做奶奶度？
26 B: 傳統家庭，係係一家大細一齊食飯。
你認為傳統家庭應該包括什麼人？

兄弟姊妹。即我先生喺邊，嫁咗比我先生，就屬於我奶奶喺邊。

佢喺邊有幾多兄弟姊妹？

有兩個細佬，一個細妹，一個結婚咗，一個未結婚。

佢喺邊家庭有幾多人？

爸爸過咗身，兩個妹都結咗婚，都有其他兄弟姊妹，但係係我大

妹妹嘅，好少見面。做節都係我個個妹同阿媽。

如唔有得選擇，做節你會返邊度呢？好似今年中秋節，你會點揀？

會返阿媽度，會自然啲。

就自然啲，感覺上有咩唔同？

無咗拘束，因爲奶奶係長輩，好多事到好似唔敢，無咗自由，拘

緊啲。

咁細路仔同麻麻嘅關係又點？

係好，無咗拘緊，係度玩。其實都啱算好拘緊啲，因為都見咗多次

多年，但有時就唔敢亂講嘅。因唔係同自己阿媽，但係我係性格

就講嘅都唔係原諒我。但奶茶唔同，係有時講嘅記住係心就

唔好啲。因阿媽以前對我多啲，喺我奶奶都好啲。

如唔係我地唔講傳統，係我係你會返自己阿媽度係好啲啲？

係。咁我先生係比較鍾意返佢自己阿媽度。我先生係孝順老

人家，有時我話去我阿媽度，佢都樂意。

而家你同你嘅妹嘅面唔多啲？

一般啲。

佢地係分開住？

係。

你地做節都會一齊？

係。有時會約埋一齊，如喺有個啱我閒咗幾個另一日啲。我就最

得閒，因我無做啲，佢地就返工。

咁而家你心目中係一様嘅叫家庭，你會記起邊啲啲？

咁起先生，仔女。

佢又啲睇，你先生個家庭同你奶奶喺邊？

都係一様，只不過喺同埋住，佢有佢個家庭，係係結咗婚係另外

自己一個家庭。

佢佢覺得係一個大字家庭，定兩個小家庭？

都係分開咗兩個家庭。因係我覺得家庭係同埋一齊住，同埋一齊

就當埋一個大字家庭啲。佢而家分開住，係係兩個家庭。

佢同你阿媽喺邊又點呢？

佢係都算係一個家庭喺，就只得佢一個。

你話你個妹嫁咗就係另一個家庭？

係。

咁即係你認係你媽媽，係你先生，係你奶奶，三係三個家庭？

係，因為都唔同埋住，如係一齊住就係一個大字家庭。

咁佢同你阿媽個關係，會唔會因你組織係另外一個家庭而疏離啲？

疏離啲啲。但有另外一種感受，做咗啲先係知道做媽媽對仔女係

著點呀。
A: 咁係你同你先生結婚前，係你心目中，你奶奶個家庭係唔存在，
咁突然問咁多係你先生嘅邊個家庭，你點呢？
B: 開頭都唔係好適應，慢慢嘅。
A: 但你都當你先生嘅邊個係係親呢？
B: 都幾親。
A: 如噉比你分親疏，你個會點分？
B: 排我先生，我阿媽，其次就佢阿爸。
A: 咁傳統上點？
B: 就奶奶親啲嘅，但我自己就覺得係自己阿媽。
A: 以前你屋企要揀幫手，你會揀邊個多？
B: 都無，通常自己揀嘅。
A: 如噉啲嘅要問老人家？
B: 我奶奶就識多啲，有間禮儀，拜神。
A: 邊個識多，就問邊個？
B: 係。
A: 你奶奶同你阿媽多多唔多見面？
B: 唔多，通常都係過年時，或我阿媽來我度，而奶奶又來，咪見到噉，
咪飲啲茶。
A: 你覺得佢地個關係係係定親？
B: 呢兩年都無去拜年，因我媽年紀大。
A: 你地而家幾耐去一次奶奶度？
B: 通常幾個月。
A: 你同你啲妹見面都係少？
B: 又唔算少，間中。
A: 咁你同佢啲係結咗婚，咁你又點睇佢地之間嘅關係？
B: 反而結咗婚就親啲噉，因為我都有仔女，所以成日都見多啲，因為
係啲細路嘅年紀差不多，大家約出來玩下。
A: 係你先生過咗身之後，邊個陪你最多？
B: 我媽，同一個細妹。對落細妹。
A: 咁你話嘅時候同啲妹無咗，而家就親啲，點解呢？
B: 因為以前佢係外國，我又懶寫信親，而家多啲見，親近啲，話題
都唔啲。
A: 係你先生死後，就有個中秋節，你又點過？
B: 提早去阿媽度，正日就去奶奶處，暫時都係同以往一樣。
A: 咁將來會唔會有改變？
B: 唔知呀。
A: 如噉有改變呢？
B: 可能係因為我先生唔係度，關係就疊啲啲，都唔好啲。可能我奶
奶或者會提早做節，因為佢都係我先生，咁我先生唔係度，奶奶
就或者會係我叔嘅啲。
A: 咁你覺得係係先生係有一個橋樑作用係度？
B: 係。佢係心目中係係仔仔細細，有時我叫啲佢，佢都話唔好，但
係我先生比佢就係。
A: 係你先生過身之後，到現在，有啲咩事係開心？
都無咩，傷心就有。或者我同個仔嘅關係就好啲喎。因我當時同
佢，佢就成日頂嘴，但現在就少啲。比以前生性啲喎。

個細仔就好細？

係，對佢好似無影響。過咗身唔係好耐，可能以爲去試旅行，咩
都唔識啲。

除咗同佢同阿媽及奶奶嘅邊接觸，以前仲會有無同其他人見面？

都無咩，前個幾年佢同細佬結婚，又同佢唔仔玩。而家都無嘅。

而家又有無轉變，會唔會多咗啲朋友見面呀？

都無。

如嘅叫你總結一下身邊嘅人，你會點講？

親近啲嘅，見到我有時都幫我，以前都唔會。喺電器呀，我完
都唔識嘅，咁我妹妹同邊邊都會幫我。咁我先生個細佬都有話過如
喺啲嘅可以攞佢，但我唔識，可能少講啲嘅同叔仔邊邊。

咁你點睇你叔仔同妹夫？

其實兩邊都差唔多，但我同我個妹就見得多啲。以前反而同叔仔
見得多啲，因為我個妹未返來，返來後變啲同個妹嘅關係好啲，
就同細佬呢啲。

你同三妹就少見面？

少啲，但係佢同唔係次次約佢都出來，但自從我先生死咗之後，
佢都盡量出來，除非真係唔識得開。

咁講係你先生同細佬嘅話，你話以前親啲，而家就疏啲，係點解啲？

都唔關係，係我先生過身之前同佢關係唔係好，係因為佢同細佬
個太太，就成日覺得奶奶只係說我先生好啲，咁變家同好妒忌嘅，
咁之前兩年啲關係就變差。我先生去時，佢都有來，但之後就無咩
聯絡。

咁你對你自己個家庭，即你同兩個仔，將來會有咩變化？

希望佢地長大，自己養到自己，獨立，唔好依我，將來一齊住
得，唔齊住又得。讀好書。

佢有無整將來你個仔結婚喇，會點呢？

開心啲，責任完咗啲。

咁你將來會唔會同個仔一齊住定點樣呢？

如隔細佬啲著意都唔所謂。

你地嘅經濟狀況係點呢？

搬緊綜援6000蚊包埋租金私人樓，要供樓，供咗幾年。

問邊個借錢？

親友，就唔駛供款比銀行，咁咪等勞工賠償，然後返還比親友。

邊個親友借？

我細妹。

咁點解會同你細妹（二妹）呢？

無嘅！因佢有冇同能力而且又肯借。

當時有邊個人選借錢？

唔啲，除咗我二妹。

你而家嘅綜合足不足夠日常開支？

好緊。
A: 主要支出是？
B: 雜費多喇，讀書又多雜費，同病呀，反而食唔係好多，交通亦唔
多。
A: 而家6千蚊，係唔駛比供樓？
B: 係呀，只係生活費。但係都唔係，因舊時先生搵錢，生活都係差
啲啲。
A: 你奶奶同你媽媽有無話經濟上幫你？
B: 都無。長貧難顧，而且我阿媽都係攞老人金。以前都係我地幾姊
妹比錢阿媽，奶奶同老爺都退咗休，而且個細佬細妹都唔係憂好
多，而且有第二個細佬仲有3個仔女要養，有弟就失咗業成年幾，
最近先搵番啲做。
A: 你自己搵啲擔心經濟問題？
B: 會啲。唔知點，無咩安全感，以前我先生有收入，可以儲多啲錢，
但而家就無收入，我又做唔到工，個仔又細。
A: 經濟上啲緊，會唔會去街都去少啲？
B: 會。
A: 探親友都少啲？
B: 都無咩朋友，因係好耐都唔做啲，無聯絡啲工友，以前我做電子
零件，而家都唔啲，而我又十幾年無做工，所以現在出街都唔
好困難，學歷又無。
A: 你先生以前做邊行？
B: 係建築公司做修理機械。

完
Appendix 4

Mrs. D A：訪問者  B：被訪者

1 A：你先生過咗身至而家都年幾，你落咗來香港已經年幾，你係一年幾生活點樣過？

2 B：不如人啲，思想好似做牛做馬咗，如嚟唔係香港政府，粥水都無得食，思想上成日掛住。

3 A：掛住D咩嘅？

4 B：心反反覆覆咁想嘅，個心谂住佢係無病，冇病唔知點算，我先生我唔想信話佢係唔病，冇CANCER，我都唔想佢無病，醫生話冇病成日話係中尾期，佢自小就係孤兒，四歲佢母親就改嫁人，三歲佢老豆就過咗身，係下D阿嬤係有感情去關照呀，而家我返去，要我比錢養幾家人，我邊有錢呀，返到去一個都唔喺，香港咁多個親戚，鄉下啲多，但過身前個個都唔話，佢係貧窮家庭打電話，無個咋我。

5 A：鄉下有咩人？

6 B：咪幾房人，最親嘅就係兩三家啦，即係叔叔伯而家反目成仇，要我養活幾家人，見我，我都唔敢返去，要我比錢，我都比到盡嚟，要我養活幾家人，我點計呀？政府糧我，唔係我賺錢咁，如果我做得嘅，我就唔使喺政府糧份伙嘅，去寫字樓，年紀又大，又唔識英文，香港人都失業，邊個諗呀？

7 A：而家係鄉下啲幾家人點呀？

8 B：最親嘅嘅。

9 A：咩人來嘅？

10 B：D大哥，先生D大哥？

11 A：幾多個？

12 B：兩家就分出三家，得個最大啲個大佬個仔結咗婚，咪又多啲一家嘅，而家細個啲大佬過咗身，D仔又分出兩家，變啲而家就有四家，呢四家人而家都[喉]住我，佢有個女嘅，出咗香港做老細，接人地D工程，來做佢們幾大都唔放過我，問我攞唔，次次都返去問我攞唔，我邊有錢比，以後咪都唔喺我，從頭數到尾。

13 A：邊個啲喺香港住？

14 B：即係我個個女，個個女嫁人，嫁咗隔里村，成家都出啲。

15 A：以前你先生同佢，同頭先講啲幾家人關係好唔好呀？

16 B：好，好到啲，而家我先生過咗身，身份證都係佢攞嘅，攞咗唔認識我先生係佢老豆，寫三個月嘅，來香港做黑市勞工，一年來两次。

17 A：喺以前你地關係我幾好嘅？

18 B：食啲，著啲都係我睇啲嘅，拜山都係我先生睇啲。

19 A：喺點解你係過咗身，你地關係就差啲呢？

20 B：反面嚟，想啲我唔好，要我養活幾家人嘅。

21 A：在鄉下呢，除咗啲兩個大哥幾房人，仲有無...。

22 B：有，一大房人，喺D疏房嚟嘅，同個宗族，無咩來往嘅。

23 A：頭先你話佢係香港有D親戚，係咩親戚？
有一個大佬，又係疏房嘅，而家我打電話佢都唔睬。
話我窮，話我難，我有咩事，打電話要佢幫我嘅。
你以前同佢有無聯絡嘅？
有，佢返鄉下，我都去佢屋企坐喺，佢唔係個時都買衫嘅呢啲嘅，而家就
唔睬我嘅。
除咗個疏房大佬，仲有無其他親戚嘅？
仲有一個住係沙田，蝦係我大娘，疏房嘅，佢好疏好嘅，即係住同一
條村嘅，佢都好關照我嘅，佢唔係個係路見不幸，佢個新抱同車撞死嘅，
個仔就無人帶，就要來香港撈個仔女嘅。
佢點關照你嘅？
我同佢唔通，佢都幾同情我，佢係個仔，都係CANCER死嘅，同佢
相識，咩都傾得埋，而佢到人生勢路冇，都唔識幫我到，佢個仔又唔識生
活。
除咗呢兩個，仲有無其他人你有聯絡嘅？
仲有一個，係新移民協會嘅，又係同佢相識嘅，又係單親家庭，係朋友來，
經常傾下計，買下嘅。
你先生係係係係過身嘅，嘅時邊個料理佢。
唔你唔係幾房人，但佢係都忠誠嘅，蝦佢。
你係先同佢地都算關係佢係好嘅。
而家反面啦，而家我係外姓人嘅，差一皮嘅。
你而家係解仲返鄉下？
返，我而家返鄉下都係直行直路，返我間屋度，佢地見到就鬧，話我食
著都唔比佢。
佢係你點解仲返去呢？
我返我家姐度，我想返去接佢。
佢有室，仲有無其他？
有，家姐呀，妹呀，細佬唔係有，我而家無懂無勢頭，食都食政府嘅，我
有時返去都係偷偷返去。
佢有幾多姐妹？
一個家姐，兩個細佬，一個妹。
同唔同鄉下住？
我返到鄉下去我家姐係同家姐都搭車成半個鐘，我返佢度睇下就走嘅。
你以前同佢家姐關係點呢？
佢係家姐係政府糧嘅，返咗休嘅，硬係要錢，無錢無得傾，錢係面
色都唔同嘅，我兩個細佬，每年分到兩箇糧，每年實在係，唔比唔得嘅。
佢同係係細佬關係點呢？
我表面嘅。
佢係你點解仲返去呢？
天上烏雲走馬燈啦，佢唔來，我唔去亦是同母親，佢已經走頭無路，
都要去啦，都係親嘅。
佢唔去唔去個妹度？
56  B: 我個妹自身都難保，佢日日搵唔到工做，無工做，生活解決唔到，佢唔係農民，佢有個舖頭，不過唔近市，生活佢自己同個妹
57  A: 你有無去佢舖頭嘅？
58  B: 有，我無睇佢舖頭，我返去去都買一兩件衣服佢舖，我買呢件一件嘅D比佢舖，睇佢舖唔妙啲嘅，我無得到，著少D都買一兩件比佢舖，係知佢舖我嘅D名牌，唔買D名牌。
59  A: 你返過幾多次舖頭？
60  B: 都成十次嘅，那，暑假要返，清明要返，新年要返，返去外家度。
61  A: 佢外家係係佢家姐度？
62  B: 唔係，佢細佬係外家。
63  A: 咁佢家姐另外計？
64  B: 唔係D親戚嚟。
65  A: 點解當佢細佬係外家呢？
66  B: 我細佬係佢家，D仔繼承咗佢妹係。
67  A: 唔系你個個細佬，你返邊個度多？
68  B: 兩個都係隔一條巷住，我唔話佢舖。
69  A: 唔系你次次返去都去佢細佬度？
70  B: 我無返去過，呢次我話佢住邊去嘅，個細佬無嫌棄我。
71  A: 邊個細佬？
72  B: 唔話你有無都返來啦，我來接你。
73  A: 唔大嘅個呢？
74  B: 大個細佬出外，城度。
75  A: 唔係你返咗成十次都無去外家度呀？
76  B: 我自己唔敢去見人唔，我外家個條村呢係水上人，打漁嘅，不過D人走晒啦，剩番幾戶人，隔里大村D人起屋廬唔同，你話我啱點去呀？唔又係佢人。
77  A: 唔係佢細佬叫佢返去？
78  B: 唔係，佢話你有無都唔論嘅，佢話佢幾時返我唔接佢返去嘅，我話我唔幾啲。
79  A: 你自己點睇嘅？
80  B: 我走頭無路嘅，返去睇嘅，話下唔噉噉到唔幾家人嘅，鄉下有D人幫我拜山嘅，話下唔幾家人唔噉噉我幫佢拜山，確實唔噉去，唔比佢人地唔噉。
81  A: 有咩事要辦嘅？
82  B: 唔係三月，九月要開拜山，開山，開山唔大件事，要使唔噉D人唔噉，唔噉唔得喺。
83  A: 你點睇你先生噉，同埋佢外家噉邊人啲關係？
84  B: 我以前無分彼此，因我先生噉唔到錢，無工做唔噉番鄉下。
你點睇D關係呢？

我而家走投無路嘅。

你而家有無D親戚朋友而家好多聯絡嘅？

我而家直線唔敢聯絡，即係我先生喺生啫陣喲，成條村都係親戚，一過咗身，個個唔啱嘅。

你而家在香港，除咗個粥堂大嫂，仲有無其他？

有一個侄女，嫁喺香港個個，我而家打電話佢，佢都唔理我。仲有一個粥堂大伯，佢都唔肯嘅。佢喺香港都成四五十年嘅。係佢帶我出嚟，即係鄉里，要俾啲事，要求得到。佢都肯帶，即係要使錢嚟，無錢使唔啱嘅。啲事情佢都肯幫我，但係佢話我無錢比佢，佢又曾經同我反面，鬧我。

呢個大伯係同村嘅？

係最疏最疏嚟D，佢前幾日有打電話嚟話而家D細路仔夠十二歲父母要出嚟做嘅。我係做咩，我係精神病科，而家香港人都失業呀。我地又同埋來工呀。我做過車仔，又做啲，又要做啲D顧客，我係做咩呀，做咩一個月就炒嘅。

你係咪要睇精神病科？

個醫生都講咩清楚，不過以前大陸嚟D話我四十八幾，身體已經好似六七十咁嘅。

佢而家過時過節點過？

無呀。

有無去親戚朋友度？

無呀，我係搞車都唔知點搭，唔食藥啲時連招呼都唔識打呀。

佢係咪有困難時邊個幫佢多？

唔呀，我有困難個次，高血壓，唔起得身，喺九九九，救護車來車我唔去醫院。打咗三支葡萄糖，抖一抖咪自己一步步走。

咁平時要搬搬揈揈，又或者有咩要問啲，又揈邊個？

無呀，唔係啲D嘢。如嘢要搬搬屋呢，咪講啲D話街嘅，比嘔一二拾蚊，都肯嘅。嘔次嘅身份証去灣仔，我唔識路，咪叫新移民協會個鄉里帶我去做，不過第二次去揈証佢就唔肯個，我咪打電話個侄女嚟，嘔次佢又肯嚟。

你而家綜援揮癟幾多？

我千八佢千七蚊嘅，要咩啫。

佢一年返唔多次鄉下，啲女邊個睇你？

梗係帶埋佢去啦，佢唔返我唔返。

而家係生活上有咩困難？

係咁住。

在親戚啲邊係有咩睇法？

佢大伯呢有錢佢唔講，無錢佢唔肯。唔使動腦筋，唔使求人，佢幫得到我都幫。個侄女，等於斷路線。提出咩咩要求嚟，佢實話唔得閑。佢今年你問屋住，更加唔會叫你嚟。
Mrs. E  A: 訪問者  B: 被訪者

1 A: 你丈夫過世至今已一年幾，呢一年幾你生活點樣過？
2 B: 初初係大陸都唔多啲少有D積蓄，食唔D積蓄，後尾過咗四個月就
   批唔落來，我11月落到來，一月份搞到公援，一路到而家都係靠公
   援生活。
3 A: 你而家過年節點樣過法呢？
4 B: 又係好簡單嘅，過年節又係好似平時咁嘅，無特別咩嘅。又
   討信屋D菜嘅。
5 A: 而家係咪係同兩個女係香港，有無其他......？
6 B: 無啲，兩個女出埋來香港，無咩親戚朋友，親戚朋友見到我地咁樣
   都走唔晒，我都話一年三百六十五日都係食自己嘅，都有個大佬大
   媽係度嘅，不過見到你嘅環境都無話講得你嘞，我呢個女都從來無
   去過佢度。
7 A: 你以前同佢地關係點嘅？
8 B: 都係過而家嘅關係，自從先生唔係度，都差啲，唔會講得我地呢D
   人。
9 A: 你覺得係咩啲原因呢？
10 B: 唔想起我地嘞，知道我地窮，驚我地食佢嘞。
11 A: 你出來時你先生已經過唔食喇？
12 B: 過唔食，批咗我雙程出来攞住後事，返唔去四個月又批出嚟，唔同
   埋個大女出來嘅。
13 A: 咱你個細女係唔係已經係香港？
14 B: 個細女之前係香港出生。
15 A: 咱你係香港呢一年幾，如果有困難時會搵邊個幫吓手啲？
16 B: 我都唔知箇人幫手，又唔知政府，租唔間房住，好細，凍姑娘見我
   地咁，叫我去桂林街，本來話住走，個女係大陸，後來返去，四個
   月又申請得落番落來，親戚朋友又幫佢到。
17 A: 你唔使時最需要親戚朋友幫咩啲手？
18 B: 常唔到呀，係我個個女，邊個人都唔幫我。
19 A: 你有無搵個人幫手？
20 B: 無啲，剩係教會囉個箇姐個家姐，聽到話幫做啲事議員，佢幫我
   走走揾揾。
21 A: 你在教會議何地？
22 B: 唔係教育，我有個姊妹，佢老公又有唔係度，嘅陣時佢間會講，咪
   叫佢地幫佢手。
23 A: 你個姊妹同你係咩啲關係呢？
24 B: 廳論係嘅，佢係個細女，都好啲，後尾社工幫佢搞到而政府
   工，佢見到你唔時咩啲唔識，咪幫佢唻啲。
25 A: 唔你唔啲有話搵吓大哥大嫂啲啲？
26 B: 摴著你都係唔到你啦，你自己知道自己形勢，傾嘅電話，人地講
   啲都唔同嘅，無謂喇，盡自己能力咪算啲。
27 A: 你覺得佢地唔想幫你？
B: 唔想，我叫佢同我帶封信返大陸，叫內地快D批我出，我先生病成
啲嘅，睇環境喇，佢都唔想帶。
A: 你喺時同佢感情點呢？
B: 一路我先生都好關照佢嘅嘅，喺時佢剛剛出來，我先生做地盤都帶
佢一齊做，都關照佢嘅，點知調轉頭佢做唔返。
A: 你大佬落咗來幾耐？
B: 落咗來好多天囉，特赦唔時。
A: 你同佢係同鄉下時感情點呢？
B: 普通嘅，叫佢喺咗幫我帶信，唔叫個大佬幫我帶囉。
A: 邊一個大佬？
B: 元朗嘅個。
A: 即係佢有兩個大佬？
B: 都唔會幫到我。
A: 點解你會覺得佢地對你咁冷淡。
B: 可能覺得我地唔係佢，長貧難顧啲。
A: 係你譴起揾人帶信時，你第啲譴起邊個？
B: 唔個大佬，即我先生帶佢一齊做嘅個。
A: 唔個係．
B: 二佬嘅，佢唔肯呀，佢唔肯我咪叫元朗個帶囉。
A: 你點解會譴起揾佢地呢？
B: 咁無人呀，無親朋呀，但係我先生死呀，無人去睇過我呀，我搵醫
務社去做責備體嘅嘅嘅嘅，嘅嘅嘅嘅嘅嘅，係我個妹
妹咁叫我去搵社工嘅。
A: 你而家點樣睇你同大哥二哥關係呢？
B: 無咩聯繫，總之而家我搵緊炒粥，總之而家我同佢房租，咪睇住來使
囉。
A: 而家炒粥有幾多呀？
B: 有九千蚊，佢係房租都三千四百蚊，又要水電呢。而家又話要減房租。
A: 而家你同兩個女啲生活點呀？
B: 總話得個嘅嘅，總之好嘅嘅嘅就唔輪到我地食啦。
A: 唔係你先生過唔到而家，你有咩嘅覺得會唔開心嘅？
B: 有唔開心嘅就係先生唔係度，最親嘅都唔當你係人。
A: 最親嘅係邊個？
B: 叫你話大佬呢D親唔親？
A: 叫你覺得最親係大佬？
B: 唔係啲親喲，唔係係親兩個女啲，不過兩個女細，唔識嘅。
A: 你話兩個大佬最親，喺佢話時對佢地有咩嘅期望嘅？
B: 對人有咩期望嘅？話都唔唔講嘅，見到地地咁，唔係親講，話住話
啲自己能力咪算，佢地幫又哆，唔幫又係啲。
A: 你啲時除咗叫佢地帶封信，仲有無其他要求呢？
B: 無啲，帶信咁簡單，唔係啲，仲睇有其他要求呢，都唔敢同
佢地講係嘅嘅，佢地知道咪算嘅，知道都唔講電話來自己盡啲能
力咪算嘅。
A: 除咗兩個大佬外，仲有無其他親戚？
無呀。
你而家仲同佢地有無聯絡嘅？
好少，佢地無比電話我，我又無比電話，細嚼個，同我帶信嚼個呢，
我有時打電話佢佬婆，但無打電話比我大佬，佢又無打電話比我，
總言之好普通，好生疏嘅。
你打電話比你二哥嘅佬婆，即你二嫂喇，傾D咩嘅？
佢話嘅電話來做咩，我話無呀，打電話來問下，都唔講嘅，佢從來
無打過來，惹得多都唔想惹人啦。
咁你點解仲打電話比佢呢？
佢始終都係自己人啦，咁打咗都無所謂，但打得幾次，人地都唔係
幾想惹你。
如嘔佢話自己人，你覺得香港有邊幾個？
係得佢兩個係。
係你點睇佢同兩個女嘅關係？
自己盡咗能力，最緊要讀得書，讀好書唔好讓爸爸失望。
頭自你講你兩個阿哥自己人咁啦，咁過年過節，新年咁又有無去拜
年？
係咁嘅，但無叫你去，好生疏啦，自己有無困難都唔會向佢講嘅。
佢係鄉下時，你話佢先生都有介紹份工，比佢呀咁，都應該有D來往
咁嘅？
有。
佢地有無返鄉下？
都有，好少，細嚼時有先生，唔使佢仲地咩咩嘅，自己盡自己能力。
佢頭先話佢地係自己人嘅關係，咁應該係咩？
應該話自己人互相愛護咩嘅，我諗係，人地環境又唔想你，自己靠自
己啦，無謂去騷擾人咩嘅。
我諗佢都有朋友嘅，街坊咩嘅，咁你有咩講去話大佬係自己人
咩？
佢係大佬都係佢自己人呀，不過仍幫佢幫佢又係另一件事，
我反而朋友仲好，鄰居仲好，有時佢D舊衫舊褲嘅，舊嘅，唔有時
人地唔要，叫我去執，人地見我地唔住，衫又無，又餓地嘅。
佢而家在大陸有無自己人咩？
佢地都唔係，我先生啲喺，不過佢幫你到我嘅，佢自己都話佢唔記得
自己。
佢幾大年紀，仲有兩個仔在鄉下。
七十幾歲，不過我地聖誕節嘅時候住返去，三個人交通費都好犀利，
佢又無咩，返去又無咩嘅。
佢地一年返幾次咩？
我就返得D睇吓佢阿媽，我D女一年都係返去3次嘅，唔會逗留得
耐。
以前佢地鄉下係唔係一齊住嘅？
唔係，自己住。
佢跟邊個住？
佢同埋老爺住。
95  A: 係唔邊有無其他親戚呀?
96  B: 有幾個家姐係鄉下，哎，咩嘢人都咁唔到啦，好彩香港有政府，我
先生死咗，我咩嘢都唔識都無人話埋來睇，咁仲有咩嘢期望話幫
呀．
97  A: 唔你鄉下嘅D有咩嘢幫到?
98  B: 鄉下嘅D佢又話係鄉下，有籍口幫唔到，D籍口好多．
99  A: 你覺得同你D家姐關係點?
100 B: 無咩點，嚟時我先生有事，打電話返去，叫佢地幫我做咩，佢地都
幫我做，走去我奶奶嘅頭話D啲佢聽，佢地都去．
101 A: 佢先生仲有兩個兄弟在大陸唻，同佢地鄉邊有咩嘢聯絡嘅?
102 B: 有啲，佢又話大陸幫唔到”隆D咩都未曾幫過，全都靠政府，靠
自己，個陣時我先生死咗，我有四個月時間係鄉下，我去埋我家庭
度．
103 A: 呢一個家姐?
104 B: 唔個家姐排第四嘅．
105 A: 你排第幾?
106 B: 我排第八嘅，我八姐妹，嚟個家姐有間舖嘅，我幫佢睇舖舖啲，個
女就同埋食飯，讀書就自己嘅，算係咁嘅啦．
107 A: 佢同佢關係都算係幾好嘅?
108 B: 係呀，我同家鄉下係係返去個陣度，咩嘢都同佢溝通嘅，寧可打
長途電話同佢溝通都唔同嘅D人講嘅．
109 A: 係D人?
110 B: 呢，出邊個D嘅，佢地都唔會同啲你，可憐你，你只煩到人，人地
有心幫佢，就會耐唔耐咩嘅啦．
111 A: 佢除咗同第四個個有聯絡，有無同其他嘅D有聯絡?
112 B: 啲廣州嘅個又係好，不過由東莞去廣州又遠，又要使錢，咁耐唔耐
傾下電話嘅．
113 A: 佢當唔當佢地自己人?
114 B: 當，不勝都當，不過香港嘅D人唔當我係伯．
115 A: 而家佢兩個女返學時間，你就D咩嘅呀?
116 B: 洗下衫，做下家務嘅嘅，有時幫施姑娘做下義工嘅嘅，幫人地搬下
屋，睇下細佬嘅嘅．
117 A: 佢點樣識到施姑娘嘅?
118 B: 都話個陣時我先生過咗身，霍姑娘去探D老人，睇到我環境咜，叫我
我去桂林街，個陣時佢介紹我識施姑娘，個陣時佢都唔知佢係社工．
119 A: 你同施姑娘關係點呀?
120 B: 無咩話呀，你要見佢實意見到，佢一個星期都冇幾日係桂林街，個
陣時施姑娘叫我唔好走，我話你幫到我個女就唔走，如唔行，我
就放低細妹係香港，擺公務，屋企個女又無人管佢，點不知天無
絕人之路，大陸又批我地出．
121 A: 佢係住返鄉下，啲個細妹點呀?
122 B: 寶妹咪係細妹係元朗嘅，係細妹係阿哥度嘅．
123 A: 啥啲話答應呀?
124 B: 咪陣時我有嘅嘅，我媽咪答應，我媽咪知道我係係，先生有咩係度，
同個女返去，無得食呀，媽咪應承個細女撈係佢度，就向政府申請
福利。
125  A: 啥陣時你媽咪同埋你大哥係元朗住？
126  B: 係嘅，啥陣時我先至死，佢擔心個女，媽咪見咗，嘅叫佢唔使擔心咁
多，到時個女撈係佢度度嘅。
127  A: 你媽咪而家……
128  B: 死咗囉，今年暑假啥陣。
129  A: 啥陣係你提出係佢提出帶你個女？
130  B: 佢提出，我地都唔敢要求。
131  A: 你感覺係點？
132  B: 算佢係幫到我。
133  A: 佢提出啥時，你個大佬有咩啲講嘅？
134  B: 佢唔出聲嘅，媽咪提出，個女又唔使食佢嘅，公撈咁比佢佬嘅，
媽咪話講係好事嘅。
135  A: 你而家過時過節，有無去你元朗個大佬度？
136  B: 無好，佢又唔喚，費事啦，點知人地鍾唔鍾意，係啥人地大時節
叫你食飯先至話鍾意呀你呀，而家電話都無聯繫。
137  A: 即係你覺得媽媽過生身就……
138  B: 好淡。
139  A: 咁你而家有困難時會揾個邊個幫手？
140  B: 都無嘅，自己揾嘅。
141  A: 施姑娘呢？
142  B: 公撈咁D實在人幫咗嘅，好似申請公撈啦，其他係自撈嘅，你無
話佢唔係個中人者，啥D真係要揀社工嘅，唔撈佢嘅。
143  A: 而家你返鄉下就住係四定姐度嘅，咁你先生在生時，你有無同佢媽
媽一齊住？
144  B: 無一齊住，係住埋同一個區，不過佢幾十歲都幫佢到我，我都同情
佢嘅。
145  A: 而家返鄉下有無去探佢。
146  B: 都要睇佢嘅，雖然搵公撈咁嘅，都有三幾百比佢嘅，都起碼心
唔有老人家揀心。
147  A: 你覺得你同佢係咩係關係？
148  B: 媽咪同養係關係
149  A: 親唔親？
150  B: 親係親。
151  A: 以前你你鄉下時有無同佢住過？關係又點？
152  B: 住過，無咩點呀，先生又比錢我，都有比錢佢。
153  A: 過時過節時點呀？
154  B: 如係個仔返凈個係自己食嘅，佢就自己煮嘅，鄉下地方，其實
我先生生時開支都係大，有頭家，D兄弟唔多唔少都籤下，唔係話
唔係你錢，有時叫你買嘅事嘅，日用品係唔係由佢收排錢。
155  A: 而家返去有無叫奶奶食飯？
156  B: 無食飯嘅，睇佢佢就走喇，我地D親戚家庭好慘嘅，無先生無物，
D細路幾時等得到佢大呀，不過我都識做，自己盡能力唔去騷擾佢，


A: 邊個係呀？
B: 即係自己嘅人，我唔去騷擾佢，費事騷擾人地。
A: 而家公私夠唔夠？
B: 部係好騷擾，自己就住囉。
Appendix 6

Mrs. F A: 請問當時你有咩時間畏難？
B: 咱們喺鐵塔時間間，呃雙程証出來。係96年12月出來。後來呢邊批準我留低。

3 A: 你係唔係同兩個女一齊來？
4 B: 唔係，細嘅個係度出世，大個個95年出來後來無人照顧，就返咗大陸，96年同我一齊出來。

5 A: 咁你點樣申請來香港？
6 B: 我先生係度過咗身，我申請落來辦理身後事，批咗雙程証，後來批準留低。

7 A: 你先生過咗身差唔多兩年。
8 B: 係，佢過咗身6日我批準落來香港。

9 A: 咁你呢兩年生活點樣過？
10 B: 無咩點過，唔係你而家無唔做，都係大陸好，你返大陸無咩做，無人照顧，d仔女又無書讀嘅。

11 A: 佢而家係咪繼續綜援？
12 B: 係

13 A: 綜援有幾多？
14 B: 五千四

15 A: 綜援有幾多？
16 B: 3個，不過我阿媽剛剛落來探親，雙程啱，落些兜零禮拜。

17 A: 咁你先生又幾時落來？
18 B: 佢細時已經係度，佢4歲已經落來。

19 A: 佢過身時幾歲？
20 B: 佢六十幾歲，過身時好似64歲，63歲幾。

21 A: 佢都落咗來好耐嘅。
22 B: 50幾年

23 A: 咁你落咗來都兩年幾啦，呢兩年點樣過？
24 B: 落來過時佢已經過咗身，佢醫院度，我落來殮葬佢，過咗身先收到申請，佢都無個親人知道。

25 A: 咁你落咗來生活點過？
26 B: 來香港佢事頭婆俾屋我住，來嶺時佢無親人話唔好來，無屋住，事頭婆話來，咩唔來者，我借間屋比佢住，來嶺時佢間屋我住，一個月唔收我租。

27 A: 事頭婆同你地有咩關係嘅？
28 B: 無咩關係，佢落來住係度，都住咗幾十年。

29 A: 咁，係保係先生租佢房住。

30 B: 租間房嚟睇，話就話係房，其實得個床位，住啲一個月佢就收我租。
個房又細又迫，後來家庭服務中心介紹我去揾經紀，租咗呢度。
你都喺呢度都兩年幾啦，過時過節都點樣過，有無去邊呀?

A: 咪叔伯大佬度。
B: 咁咪你親大佬？

A: 唔係，佢係叔伯大佬，即我先生嘅叔伯大佬，過年去一次囉。
B: 唔係，唔係親大佬，佢有個親細佬，親係細佬咪叫我食餐飯，年晚飯，
無嘅話，舊年都無，舊年我地返咗鄉下，返阿媽度。

A: 你同佢地有無聯絡？
B: 有嘅話，電話有聯絡，佢無去佢地屋企，人唔喺叫你去，佢喺呢度去人
地屋企。

A: 即係有電話聯絡？
B: 好少嘅話，佢去拜山，我都唔去，我都唔去，閨屋唔係地要咁去。

A: 佢喺香港你地有無聯絡？
B: 在香港揾食呢個金佢同我做監護人，以前我唔香港身份證，唔可以做監
護人。

A: 做唔係做你D女嘅監護人？
B: 咁。

A: 咁個時間個叔伯大佬呢？
B: 叔伯大佬個妾都有去佢地度住，有一個住呢度南昌咁嘅，即佢新抱同我
差唔多嘅，我都有同佢傾計。

A: 咁另外嘅個呢？
B: 另外個住近D，住秀茂坪，個大靚都冇打電話來啦，一年一次啦。

A: 佢地生活上遇到困難時點？
B: 係嘅，無人問嘅真係。

A: 有無話揾邊個幫過手？
B: 無嘅話，即係同D鄉下嘅朋友，一齊揾佢身份証時傾計。

A: 咁個時間個無擔人幫過手。
B: 無嘅話，係社會部門開會，傾計D細路點樣教。

A: 咁個時間個呢？
B: 即前年係度過，舊年返嚟鄉下返我細佬度，阿媽度。

A: 咁前年有無去D朋友度。
B: 咁前年去阿叔度，食咗飯就返嚟嘅，年初二去個叔伯大佬度，食咗
餐飯。

A: 咁你先生成個細佬同兩個叔伯大佬係香港.....
B: 咁係有D，不過佢無喺，就唔關佢事嘅嘅。

A: 你先生過咗身就...
B: 係呢個D，人都唔放，而家，以前都唔放，各人有各人做啲，都係
返嚟拜山，亦都無咩唧同我講，我都係佢係幾個箇，不過仍返鄉下，
比包餅，比包糠細路食下。

66 A: 飯飽出來之後都食過一次飯嘅。
67 B: 而家都無去。
68 A: 除咗呢幾個人大佬，而家……
69 B: 都有好多同鄉，而家都有打電話，傾下計嘅。
70 A: 係你D同鄉？
71 B: 喺呀。
72 A: 咁你先生仲有無其他親戚？
73 B: 咁嘅D囉，有兩個叔伯家姐，兩個大佬。但人地無叫佢去，你點去去
人地屋，之前我遠程朥來，而家落來兩年幾都無叫過，無見過佢地
D人呢，你又唔識路去，我唔敢去。
74 A: 咁有無打電話嘅呀？
75 B: 電話有傾下計，係好少，一年多都無一次。
76 A: 你覺得你同佢地嘅關係，係點樣嘅？
77 B: 係親戚就係親戚，係親戚係唔親密，我又唔敢喊人地。香港人都係
咁，以前係大陸都唔係好熟嘅。
78 A: 咁你自己有無親戚？
79 B: 我呢度有過叔伯大佬，係上水嘅邊住嘅，我都有打電話，同個嫂傾下
計。
80 A: 之前嘅多唔多聯絡？
81 B: 都有，我之前去佢屋幾年！
82 A: 係係係傾下計。
83 B: 係呀。
84 A: 咁佢地出現幾耐呀？
85 B: 咁大佬嘅來去十年嘅，個大嫂就出咗去幾年。
86 A: 唔，佢係佢係歐洲嘅同鄉去大嫂度。
87 B: 係，而家回返無去，一年多都無一次。係去上水咗唔過，一都無去
過，今年放暑假我唔去，去下啲無去。
88 A: 而家你過年過節，又或者係有咩困難，會唔會복佢地假手嘅？
89 B: 而家過年過節都係係同仔女過，平時亦。
90 A: 咁你平時唔係唔係？
91 B: 無咩人士來往，禮拜五去家庭服務中心開下會，開八堂，傾下計嘅
香港有咩困難，多D同人士溝通啲。
92 A: 咁嘅服務中心？
93 B: 長沙灣家庭社會服務中心。
94 A: 咁你平時有咩困難，譬如要搵人搬下嘅，你搵邊個？
95 B: 咁D朋友，開會D朋友。
96 A: 咁，咁D叔伯……
97 B: 都唔，個個仲有女朋友。我來咁多年，都唔喊佢去，睇佢唔起嘅嘅D人。
98 A: 其實佢都係佢地阿叔，阿伯嘅啦，你對佢地有咩期望。
99 B: 都唔係，期望係自己，唔係人地，啲D阿伯都幾十歲，D阿叔唔係幾
十歲，有幾個細路讀大學，嘅D無希望，你各人一家還一家，無得希望人地。

100 A: 你覺得你同佢地嘅關係係邊點？
101 B: 咻嘅都係幾仔細。
102 A: 咁你同係住時邊個幫手？
103 B: 咁佢嘅，嘅D親人，嘅D阿叔，我未有援助金，D阿叔借住先，後來
104 A: 佢接受過建屋地，有一萬七千蚊。
105 B: 係佢兄弟嘅，係佢大佬，有兩個細佬嘅，係大佬，有一個無咩做，
106 A: 咁你自己係香港有無親戚？
107 B: 無咩，得一個叔伯大佬，住上水唔個。
108 A: 咁在鄉下呢？
109 B: 鄉下有，無細佬有妹大佬阿媽。
110 A: 有幾多細佬？
111 B: 有兩個細佬，一個大佬，一個細妹阿媽，好多人。
112 A: 而家佢係係住邊個？
113 B: 係阿媽度，同細佬住，博羅村邊。
114 A: 點解佢返去會住你阿媽度。
115 B: 呢度無地方住嘅話，佢係羅我間屋，佢話佢起嘅，租咗比人。
116 A: 咁佢係係住邊個？
117 B: 起嘅時話呢間屋係佢嘅，以前係鄉下，佢同阿媽一齊住，佢阿媽80
118 A: 咁佢係係住邊個？
119 B: 係我先生細佬個仔。
120 A: 係唔係佢本身係比阿媽住嘅，佢阿媽死咗，佢個仔就搬咗嘞。
121 B: 咁嘅。
122 A: 咁邊個問你阿媽嘅？
123 B: 我細佬，兩個細佬，各人有一家嘅。
124 A: 佢返鄉下唔唔多？
125 B: 唔多，一年一次，最多兩次。
126 A: 係咩時唔返去多？
127 B: 暑假，玩一個禮拜度落來。
128 A: 返到鄉下去邊度住？
129 B: 咕嘅細佬度同阿媽住。
130 A: 佢阿媽嘅細佬同阿媽住？
131 B: 咁佢，兩個細佬兩家人，兩間屋。
132 A: 還你返鄉下點解唔起同阿媽住？
133 B: 咁，唔係佢返邊度住，佢以前唔係佢阿媽過唔住，佢而定唔得一個都
唔當我屋，佢屋都租住比人。
A: 而家返去有無見下D兄弟姊妹。
B: 即係自己屋吔D?有，我D妹聽我來喺屋唔，連D細路哥來見嘢。
A: 你話自己屋係咩嘅意思呀？
B: 咁嘅，自己屋唔係嘕。
A: 包括邊幾個呀？
B: 包括我細佬，大佬，妹，細妹D。
A: 啥你返去有無同佢地見面嘅。
B: 剉係自己屋嚟D囉，嘅頭我無嘅。
A: 你先生嚟邊佢有咩人係鄉下？
B: 一個，細佬來嘅，出咗兩個細路，佢細佬以前係香港，後來無嘅做，返嚟鄉下。
A: 啥你係鄉下都係返自己屋嘅邊。
B: 唔，我返自己屋，唔去嘅邊，唔去，個個都係嘅，嘅邊有咩意思，又無屋，係佢返阿媽度。
A: 講返係先生過咗邊嘅時，係邊個係唔係辦手續？
B: 佢兩個細佬，係下屋個個出嘅。
A: 你認為係點解佢地會同你一齊嘅？
B: 佢話你係主，其實我都無咩，都唔識，佢地話買嘅同買嘅。
A: 你覺得佢地係咩意思？
B: 嘅時佢地都係手，唔使咩咯係一齊。
A: 佢你睇啲係先生過咗嘅時就來往多D，而家反而少嘅啲。
B: 都係嘅嘅，你初初來佢唔同你做嘅嘅，返返啲人生都係無來啲嘅。
A: 點解呢？
B: 佢返工，佢老婆又做啲，都唔得閒，各人家，都係嘅嘅，我都唔敢希望人家。
A: 啾來緊係會點樣睇你同叔伯同叔伯同佬D關係。
B: 關係唔係不定係下屋，係係無嘅你係，翻年你無屋住都無叫。
A: 你覺得佢地係屬唔係屬自己屋。
B: 都係啲少嘅，無咩嘅計呀，食餐飯都係啲嘅嘅，嘅呢個個佬，睇你唔起，睇你係下D唔起。
A: 佢你自己嘅D細佬係乜？
B: 自己屋嘅D，咩都好特別，屋唔D人咩都係自己屋嘅。
A: 你上水嘅個堂大佬係乜？
B: 嘅個都係咁。
A: 邊個都傾得。
B: 辦到去鄉下啲啲開心。
A: 返到屋開心，又唔使屋地方，呢度又嘅到人傾計，D朋友都返鄉下。
A: 平時細路返學後你做D咩嘅？
B: 咪行下街，搵D朋友傾下計，執下屋咜。
A: 啥鐵朋友？
B: 咪返學嘅D，朋友，大家同鄉，傾下計。
A: 在邊度聚集多？
171  B:  咁返學唔學喱嘅。
172  A:  你自己反而無咩親戚係香港㗎。係？
173  B:  無，得兩個女咁。
174  A:  咁你香港呢邊算唔算自己屋。
175  B:  算，間屋係我嘅，梗係自己屋。
176  A:  香港自己屋係包括邊幾個？
177  B:  咁我地三個 обязательно。
178  A:  過節時點過？
179  B:  咁我地地自己三個過。
180  A:  咁你先生個邊D親戚有無講你。
181  B:  無，食飯都無叫你去食飯，八月十五呀，元宵嘅無，都係自己個。
Consent Form

I ____________________________ (Name) hereby give my full consent to Mr. LAM Siu Keung who is pursuing his M. Phil. study at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University with the title "An Investigation into Widows' Discursive Constructions of Their Families - Using Jaber F. Gubrium's Ethnomethodology" on the following conditions:

a) All information solicited from me will be kept strictly confidential and can only be disclosed to his supervisors, his examiners and persons who in the course of his study have the need to know it.

b) Use and handling of such information must be in full compliance with guidelines issued by the University’s Ethics Committee.

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________
Romanized Translation of Cantonese Terms

chan-chik
chan-chik-pan-yan
chi-kay-yan
chuen
dim-sum
ding-uk
fan-hui
fong
goh-tau
gwoh-kai
heung-ha-yan
heung-kong-chi-kay-uk
ka
ka-ting
koo-chai
lo-dau
lo-ye
mah-jong
naai-naai
neung-ka
ngo-ka
ngo-ka-nui
nogi-sing-yan
soar-tong-dai-lo
suk-chai
suk-pak-dai-lo
sun-po
tung-heung-je-mui
uk
uk-kei
uk-kei-yan
yum-cha

親戚
親戚朋友
自己人
村
點心
丁屋
返去
房
喱頭
過繼
鄉下人
香港自己屋
家
家庭
姑仔
老豆
老爺
麻雀
奶奶
娘家
外家
外嫁女
外姓人
疏堂大佬
叔仔
叔伯大佬
新抱
同鄉姐妹
屋
屋企
屋企人
飲茶