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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Department of Applied Social Sciences

**Conditional Spaces and Infinite Possibilities:
Hong Kong Lesbians and Urban Spatialities**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Hong Kong lesbians have identified multiple spaces in an urbanized environment to assert their lesbian visibility and to negotiate lesbian identity politics. I define Hong Kong lesbians as self-identified women who have had significant intimate relationships with other women and who are living in Hong Kong. One maps her own spaces to survive, to live, to love and to gather one another for emotional well-being. Due to the density in population, the lack of physical land space and the Hong Kong's government high land-price policy, living conditions in Hong Kong do not offer much privacy for lesbians if they live with their families. As a result, Hong Kong lesbians often locate alternate spaces to develop support networks with other women. Some lesbians consider these spaces to include lesbian karaoke bars and cafés located in high-density areas such as Causeway Bay (Tung Lo Wan). Lesbian commercial spaces function as temporal sites of resistance for Hong Kong lesbians to validate their lesbian identities, to form social networks and to question their political subjectivities. Others might choose to reject the notion of lesbian spaces and instead assert their lesbian visibility along the line of everyday life, thereby disturbing the notion of heteronormativity within social worlds. They might have chosen to be who they are no matter where they are, albeit in spaces of intimacy, familial and acquaintance.

Based on life history interviews with 30 lesbians living in Hong Kong, I attempt to map the complex relations between lesbian subjectivities and spatialities as they emerge, develop, interact and negotiate with each other in their everyday lives. Drawing on theories encompassing urban sociology, feminism, queer theory and cultural studies, I

propose to understand Hong Kong lesbian culture through an analysis of spaces, in their multiplicities and ambiguous codings, in their formulas of resistance, and in their everyday affect on Hong Kong lesbians.

Keywords: Lesbians, Hong Kong, urban sociology, identity, life history.

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For you and me,

Le monde est grand, mais en nous

il est profound comme la mer.

- R. M. Rilke

(The world is large, but in us
it is deep as the sea)

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Profile of Interview Subjects

Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Education	Social Class (Natal Family)	Sex Partners	Occupation	Living Situation
Alex	27	University	Middle	Female	Reporter	Grandmother
Kitman	28	University	Middle	Female	Social Worker	Parents
Lik Lik	34	Form Five	Working	Female / Male	Graphic Designer	Own
Felix	40	University	Middle	Female	Café Owner	Grandmother and partner
Jo	27	University	Middle	Female / Male	Financial Advisor	Own
Beatrice	42	Form Six	Working	Female	Manager (Hospitality)	Own
Ku Tsai	21	Form Five	Working	Female	Sales	Parents, Grandmother, Two Sisters.
Elizabeth	51	Form Six	Middle	Female	Project Manager	Mother and Two Aunts.
Bik Bik	20	University	Middle	Female	Student	Student Flatmates
Phil	33	Form Four	Working	Female	Insurance Sales	With Partner
Wai Wai	28	University	Working	Female	Ad. Sales	With Partner
Emmy	33	Arts College	Middle	Female	Performance Artist	With Partner
Ah Lok	15	Form Four	Working	Female	Student	Parents
Yuki	16	Form Five	Working	Female / Male	Student	Parents
Katherine	27	University	Middle	Female / Male	Performance Artist	Parents
Nick	25	University	Middle	Female	Store Owner	Parents and Brother
Leslie	22	University	Middle	Female	Laboratory Assistant	Parents, Sister and Brother
Anne	30	University	Working	Female	Café Owner	With Family and Partner

						(Alternate)
Sandy	26	University	Middle	Female	Café Owner	With Partner
Christie	25	University	Middle	Female / Male	Store Owner	Father
Eileen	51	University	Middle	Female	Librarian	Own
Miki	17	Form Five	Working	Female	Student	Parents and Brother
Julia	24	University	Middle	Female	Designer	Father and Brother
Nikki	34	University	Middle	Female	Reporter	With Partner
Ah Hoi	29	Form Five	Working	Female	Editor	With Partner
Gum Gum	43	University	Middle	Female	District Council Member	Own
Eunice	40	College Dip.	Working	Female	Nursing Home	Mother
Taro	22	Form Five	Middle	Female	Personal Assistant	Parents and Sister
Edith	43	College Dip.	Working	Female	Administrator	Mother and Sister
Napoleon	26	Form Five	Working	Female	Seeking Employment	Parents and Sister

Chapter 1

Hong Kong Lesbian Identities: The City, Its Spaces and Their Effects

In those days, I will follow others to go to those parties. You have to go with someone to attend parties. At these parties, there were people we all knew and thought were lesbians. Actually, it's not really a secret to us but it's not open to others. (Eileen, fifty-one years old)

YY was so much fun!¹ It was like being in our own world. Everyone is lyun (孃). We went there every weekend, met the same people, sang the same songs, sat at the same table and hung out to do the same things. It was like a safety zone to us. We were so happy to be there. It was such a friendly place. (Emmy, thirty-three years old)

I went to my first les bar when I was fifteen or sixteen. I went with a group of classmates. It was no big deal. But it was quite a safe place cos' I won't bump into my family. Not like walking around on the streets. It's a nuisance. I have such a big family. (Bik Bik, twenty years old)

Introduction

Space is a ubiquitous term. The term often conjures up physical images as with actual material spaces and architectural structures. Discussions on queer spaces are not only limited to physical landscapes such as patterns of residential neighbourhoods, work locations, leisure sites or commercial establishments frequented by lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders. "Queer spaces" increasingly take into account various sites such as cyberspace, cultural forums and cognitive mappings.² Theorizing everyday spaces, in particular, meant spaces that we traversed on our daily routines such as supermarkets, bus stops, pedestrian subways, elevators and on the streets. Academic

¹ YY is the short term for a disco called Yin Yang Disco. Located on Ice House Street in Central, YY is popular with gay clientele in the nineties. It has since been closed.

² As Moira Rachel Kenney suggests, "The experience of being part of, and subject to, the life of the city, combined with the search for specific spaces that permit and affirm one's own way of being, are the key elements in such maps" (Kenney, 2001, p.10).

scholarship on the area of sexualities and spaces has been investigated by cultural geographers, ethnographers, cultural studies theorists and sociologists in the past decade (Castells, 1983; Lauria & Knopp, 1985; Winchester & White, 1988; Bell, 1991; Adler & Brenner, 1992; Massey, 1994; Bouthillette, 1997; Stein, 1997; Valentine, 2000; Valentine and Skelton, 2003, Massey, 2005).³ These studies centre on how gender plays a major role in the way gays and lesbians mediate their daily lives in North American and European urban centres. Heterosexualization of spaces is normally naturalized via surveillance and regulated performative acts (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Valentine, 1996; Herng-Dar, 2001; Corteen, 2002). Moreover, there have been discussions on the differences between lesbians and gay men from identity formations to public visibility in urban public spaces (Wolf, 1979; Bell, 1991; Peake, 1993; Rothenberg, 1995; Valentine, 1995; Bouthillette, 1997; Forsythe, 2001).

Much of the discussion on queer spaces has begun to extend beyond Anglo-industrialized nations. Travis Kong asserts that Hong Kong gay men are positioned as active audiences of popular cultural texts that provide queer visibility (Kong, 2004). Deborah Tze-Lan Sang wrote extensively on Taiwanese lesbian activism in the mass

³ Most notably, Castells' research on gay male culture in gay commercial areas and neighbourhoods resulted in his claim on gender differences between how women and men view spaces. He asserts that men have more territorial ambitions whereas women are more attached to personal relationships and social support networks (Castells, 1983). Many scholars have challenged Castells' explanation on lesbian spaces. Adler and Brennar (1992), Linda Peake (1993) and Gill Valentine (1995) argue that lesbian spaces are there if we know where we are looking for. Tamar Rothenberg (1995) poses a different question and asks us to widen our concept of spaces to include what Benedict Anderson would call, "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983, p.15). Affrica Taylor warns us that the terms 'lesbian' and 'space' in itself are unstable political entities (Taylor, 1998). Any attempt to define a 'lesbian space' is indeed an essentialist attempt fraught with territorial tensions and unspoken contradictions. To put it simply, what counts as a 'lesbian space' may distract us from looking more carefully at unlikely places where lesbian subjectivities are assumed to be absent.

media, alternative publications, college conferences and street demonstrations. Sang asserts that the Internet has provided a new public forum for lesbian activists and feminists to come together and to claim legitimacy in the public sphere (Sang, 1999). Glen Elder's study on homosexual activity between men in South Africa brought up the issue of apartheid in a post-colonial state (Elder, 1995). Alvaro Sanchez-Crispin and Alvaro Lopez-Lopez drew preliminary conclusions that gay men in Mexico usually access downtown for social contact. Businesses catering to gay clientele such as bars, cantinas, and discotheques are located in the central area of Mexico City (Sanchez-Crispin and Lopez-Lopez, 1995).

I came to understand Hong Kong and its overall environment as what Rosemary Hennessy refers to as a capitalist project in which "capitalism functions as a complex structured totality" (Hennessy, 2000, p.9). Capitalism is commonly known as an economic system centred on market exchange. Recent scholars have turned to the interrogation of late capitalism as the basis for challenging globalization and class stratification. In addition to our common understanding of capitalism with an already known international division of labour, late capitalism refers to the heightened accentuation of the capitalist mode of production through new technologies (Hennessy, 2000, p.6). As scholars, activists, students and stakeholders living in industrialized societies with a penchant for queer politics, we are constantly caught up in our own game of speeding up in order to make a living and to make sense of our daily lives. It was almost as if time can be an accurate measurement of social progress. Bombarded with

information via cyberspace and news agencies, we have also come to learn of sexual identities in a myriad of forms and spaces.

I would like to put forward three guiding research questions: 1) How did lesbian spaces emerge in Hong Kong? 2) How are lesbian subjectivities played out in these spaces and in the everyday lives of lesbians living in Hong Kong? 3) What is the relationship between lesbian subjectivities and spatialities? I define Hong Kong lesbians as women who have same-sex desires regardless of their sexual orientation and to include women who may not self-identify as lesbians but engage in same-sex relations. I propose that in order to analyse sexual identities in Hong Kong, specifically, lesbian identities, one need to view it as a theoretical project encompassing cultural studies, feminism, urban sociology and queer theory. Whereas each theoretical concept can be recruited, discussed and applied to the understanding of sexualities, I contend that only through an intricate approach that takes into account the spatial element of Hong Kong as a late capitalist city, with its global effects and influences upon lesbians' articulation of desires and acts of everyday resistance can we develop a framework that is constitutive of lesbian subjectivities.

For this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of classical sociology and its macro-analysis to our understanding of urban cities. Then I will illustrate how the Chicago School of urban sociology is critical to bring up a micro-understanding of urban life. Next I will point out the notion of political economy and how it redefines our understanding of modern cities and state institutions. By stating Hong Kong's overall

environment as a post-colonial city inundated with late capitalist and consumerist ideologies, I will attempt to explicate how the city and its ideologies affect the conditional emergence of spaces for Hong Kong lesbians. In conclusion, I will provide a brief overview of my research design and fieldwork conducted for the purpose of this thesis.

Theoretical Background

Classical Sociology on Urban Life

Classical sociology has set out to explain the relationship between society and the individual, in particular the general impact of economic, political and ideological forces on society. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in many Western European countries demonstrated a tumultuous period where traditionally agrarian societies faced the onset of industrialization and modern capitalism. Classical sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber provided the foundation of sociology as a scientific discipline where modern life can be critically assessed against the backdrop of human migration from rural areas to the city.⁴ The comparison between agrarian societies and modern societies was illustrated by Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) in

⁴ Human migration provided the key factor to studying the history of urban development. Ancient cities were known to exist between 4000 and 3000 BCE in Mesopotamia (Iraq), Egypt, the Indus Valley and the Near East (Davis, 1965). Human population in ancient cities was still confined to small numbers where international trade was primarily the function for these first cities. Other common features include the existence of monumental public and religious buildings, military security, the creation of writing, the keeping of records and specialist craftsmanship. Priests, rulers, peasants and craftsmen all perform specific functions for the maintenance and well-being of cities in ancient civilizations (Childe, 1950). The historical shift from ancient cities to urban cities can be explained by the economic reorganization of labour. Capitalism in its oldest form can be traced back to the accumulation of commodities among the merchant class. For the clergy and the aristocratic classes, the rise of the mercantile class as a distinct group has threatened the traditional ownership of land and labour. In addition, cities and its promises of international commerce have changed the way kin relations were structured and hence, the weakening of conventional kin relations as a result of modernisation.

his concept of 'gemeinschaft' and 'gesellschaft'. Tönnies was primarily concerned with the enormous changes within traditional village communities where stability was often achieved through ascribed social status, homogeneity and organised religion.⁵ French sociologist Émile Durkheim considered social order as the most significant factor to the understanding of how rural communities transition into urban cities. In his first influential publication, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim introduced the notion of social solidarity and divided the concept into mechanical and organic solidarity.⁶

Karl Marx puts forth capitalism as an ideology and a mode of production for commodities to be produced, owned and controlled by individuals who are connected to the process through various social relations between these individuals. As a critic of industrialization and its impact on urban societies, Marx contends that capitalism led individuals to base their decisions on economic terms hence implying that all human

⁵ The term 'gemeinschaft' refers to a sense of community where harmonious family members were tied to each other via traditional kinship ties of blood and marriage. In contrast, the term 'gesellschaft' refers to a society where impersonal social relations were present in modern industrial life and most members engage in business for self-interests measurable in economic terms. Therefore, the traditional understanding of community and its amicable relations among neighbours have been replaced by superficial social relations and the emergence of multiple lifestyles. The common good, as exemplified by organized religion, would eventually disappear with the onset of industrial capitalism in modern societies.

⁶ Mechanical solidarity involves people living in traditional societies where the division of labour is often rudimentary. One can expect to remain in a steady occupation for most of one's life. Furthermore, Durkheim used the term 'conscious collective' to describe a common value system that is more prevalent in these societies. Social conformity and a lessened sense of individuality is characteristic of mechanical solidarity. Yet as industrialization continues and as the division of labour diversifies, societies became more complex and heterogeneous in its societal structure and human population. Durkheim observed that collectivism has slowly given way to individualism hence creating an organic society. This notion of organic solidarity is based on the economic interdependence of individuals where the will to survive and to prosper overrides the moral standards imposed by the family and the church. For Durkheim, the erosion of traditional social controls can lead to a state of normlessness termed as anomie. Anomie appears when there is rapid industrialisation and consumerism contributing to the endless desire of needs and wants in modern life. The only solution to re-establish social controls is through integrating individuals back into social groups and to re-develop collective values.

interactions have an intrinsic exchange value to them.⁷ His work influenced many scholars who later worked on capitalist relations and its impact on urban societies.

On the contrary, German philosopher Georg Simmel adopts a social psychological approach in explaining how an individual makes sense of him/herself through one's relations with others. Simmel argues that the city is an 'intensification of nervous stimuli with which city dweller must cope' (Simmel, 1950). Simmel states that 'with each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life' (Simmel, 1950, p.410).⁸ The anonymous nature of urban life can be read as a form of silent approval towards a growing diversity in modern cities.

Literature on early sociological traditions was focused more on urban cities as sites of major social transformations where industrialization changed urban life for city dwellers and migrating workers from rural areas. These early studies are a constant

⁷ Capital is raised by the selling of commodities which have a higher exchange value than its use value, therefore generating capital for the owner more than the producer or the buyer. Indeed, labour is itself a commodity. Marx emphasizes on the mode of production as historical specific. Indeed Marx was writing his influential work, *Das Kapital* (1867) when he was experiencing the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Marx argues that the nature of capitalism would give rise to a bourgeoisie class who reaps benefits from the proletariat or the working class who endlessly toil for the production of commodities as seen in the historical event of the Industrial Revolution. To put it simply, capitalism is the mode of production that allows surplus to be accumulated at the expense of exploiting the worker.

⁸ The individual is left to his or her psychological defense for the complexities of urban life. Apart from a psychological explanation, Simmel also highlights the economic division of labour as indispensable to the metropolis hence leading the modern intellect to rationality. He argues that the individual develops a 'metropolitan blasé attitude' in order to cope with the demands of the metropolitan life (Simmel, 1950, p.414). A blasé attitude, in response to the spatiality of the urban city and the numerous encounters between strangers, is critical to the understanding of anonymity in urban settings.

reminder of how cities as densely populated sites undergoing significant historical changes can lead to the exploitation of the working class. Yet, the exploitation is not only limited to the working classes. It is alarming to note that early sociological studies on cities put their emphasis on men and disregarded issues of gender, sexualities and ethnicities; therefore it is important for me to address this theoretical gap in my research.

The Chicago School of Urban Sociology

Classical sociologists warned us about the risks of modernity and highlighted some of the vast transformations in human life. It was the Chicago School of urban sociology that placed the city, in this case, the city of Chicago, as the key site of investigation for sociological explanations. The Chicago School is commonly used to describe a group of researchers in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago who produced action-oriented research including Ernest W. Burgess, Robert E. Park, William I. Thomas and Louis Wirth. During the 1920s and 1930s, this group of sociologists chose the city of Chicago, Illinois as the site for research into social problems of the modern city. Chicago was an appropriate choice as the metropolitan city grew from a population of 4470 in 1890 to 3.5 million in a matter of four decades. By formally recognizing cities as spaces with large populations, density and socially heterogeneous, the Chicago School scholars proceeded to probe city life as “a mosaic of little worlds” (Park, 1967a, p.40). Their deep interests in studying how cities strengthen social differences, organize them and map them onto specific spaces encouraged the Chicago School sociologists to develop the notion of human ecology as a scientific

reading of modern cities.⁹ Under the influence of scientism in early twentieth-century sociology in the United States, these scholars relied on biological explanations to explain a city and its manifestations. The city was perceived as “an organism” with its growth “as a whole, natural, i.e., uncontrolled and undersigned” (Park, 1928, p.viii).

Burgess’ enthusiasm on the natural explanation of economic activities was also shared by his other colleagues in the Chicago School. Louis Wirth (1928) in his book, *The Ghetto* also used an urban ecological approach to understand different segregations in the city, most notably, the migration patterns of Jewish communities as a model to understand other ethnic minorities.¹⁰ Wirth summarizes that the emergence of the ghetto

⁹ Ernest W. Burgess pioneering 1925 essay “The Growth of the City” was noted for his analysis on urban growth using a series of concentric circles. Borrowing from the “succession” concept from plant ecology, Burgess divided the city into four concentric circles to illustrate the typical expansion processes of a city. The first circle represented a city or town’s central business area and it is the centre where other zones will be grow out of “the Loop” (Burgess, 1925, p.156). The second circle surrounding “the Loop” is a transitory space containing manufacturing businesses and light industries that have left “the Loop”, as well as ghettos and racial slums. The third concentric circle was lived by those who worked in the industries and who have escaped the dire living conditions in the second circle. The fourth circle represented a residential space where exclusive apartment buildings and single family houses were located. Expanding beyond the fourth zone are “the commuters’ zone” where satellite cities and suburbia rest within an hour’s commute to the central district, that is “the Loop” (Burgess, 1925, p.157). Burgess aims to show that urban growth is achieved by the outward expansion of each zone and hence, an invasion of the neighbouring zone. This zonal theory of the city is important for its emphasis on how the division of labour in modern societies have led to a re-distribution of populations and economic activities.

Furthermore, Burgess’ zonal theory is also a spatial map of social differences and ethnic diversity. Human populations who were able to move outwards to a further zone are of a certain ethnic and class background. The inner zone of the city was “the zone of deterioration” where slums proliferated, criminal worlds collide and “immigrant colonies” were found (Burgess, 1925, p.158). For each population to be able to move further away from the centre, it acquires a certain social and cultural eminence. His description of ethnic populations was derived from the Chicago School’s usage of biological metaphors where a person’s race was considered naturally suitable for certain occupations. Therefore, Burgess explained occupational segregation similar to a Darwinist notion of a natural selection.

¹⁰ The American Jewish person was described by Wirth as an immigrant who was bound in European traditions and who lived in close-knitted communities within these crowded spaces known as the ghetto. Wirth’s emphasis on the personality types of the Jewish immigrant was strongly based on an urban ecological approach that fixated cultures and their customary practices as one of the primary reasons why communities congregated and thrived in competing for economic activities. The primacy of economic competition is based on an intrinsic cultural type and personality type that labelled particular groups and assigned them to certain ethnic enclaves for living and for work. Therefore, the social behaviour of the

was economically-driven due to the availability of work and cheaper housing costs. The second key reason was attributed to social connections and cultural institutions that gave birth to the ghetto. A decade later, Louis Wirth in his pioneering essay, “Urbanism as a Way of Life”, further elaborated on an urban personality that is “impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental” (Wirth, 1938, p.100). Being consistent with an ecological perspective, Wirth built his theory of urban life by presuming a city to be spatially large, of high density and cultural diversity. He described an urban way of living as a form of competition between urbanites. The competition was regarded as one of a natural order as each group competes for space and space was to be understood as a place of economic value.

Apart from being known and widely criticized for its naturalist leanings, the Chicago School of theorists were better recognized for its contribution to urban sociology through placing the city and its spaces as worthy of investigation. Through participant observations, oral and life histories, the Chicago School sociologists introduced ethnography as a scientific method to study modern life as a lived experience and in particular, the study of “deviants” in a modern city. They provided a basic blueprint for further sociological studies into the social differentiation and spatial segregations of

Jewish immigrant communities as close-knitted and as distancing to other racial groups was explained as both economically and socially necessary for such segregations.

Wirth argues since urban individuals lived and worked closely with each other, they would “foster a spirit of competition, aggrandizement, and mutual exploitation” (Wirth, 1938, p.101). As a result, formal social organizations were critical to the control of social relationships. To summarize, urbanism is a particular way of life that is comprised of three key aspects: Firstly, a physical spatial structure with a population, a modern technology and ecology. Secondly, a type of social organization including social institutions and behavioural patterns. Thirdly, a group of personalities that exhibit collective behaviour in accordance to various forms of social control.

communities in cities.¹¹ Different from classic sociological studies, the Chicago School sociologists illustrated the importance of ethnography as a valid methodology and mapped out numerous studies on deviance, racial differences, youth and poverty in the context of urban cities. Although their emphasis on deviance and ethnic differences as distinct social worlds allowed me to probe further on how lesbian sexualities are socially constructed to be deviant, the Chicago School sociologists have also portrayed deviance to be comprised of certain behavioural patterns. I have found it disturbing when respondents from my research discussed how their family members, friends and colleagues have categorised lesbians to be deviant and to be of a specific type. The implications of defining deviance in this sense have led to a narrow definition of sexual identities disruptive of common norms and values, thereby assuming lesbians as masculine, societal misfits and perverse.

The Political Economy of Urban Sociology

The Chicago School's early writings of urban sociology invited much criticism from sociologists who later argued that the ghetto was not simply a spatial arrangement that grew naturally out of complex cultural processes. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton in their book *American Apartheid* stated that the urban ghetto "represents the key institutional arrangement ensuring the continued subordination of blacks in the United States" (Massey & Denton, 1993, p.18). Institutions are crucial to our understanding of

¹¹ In Clifford Shaw's (1930) *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*, Shaw used a life history approach to capture the story of a young man who robbed skid-row drunks to make a living. Shaw demonstrated how the young man's relationships to traditional institutions in society become less stable and hence led him to follow a criminal path. In Paul Goalby Cressey's (1932) study on taxi dance halls, he conducted interviews with patrons, dancers and owners of these halls to show these halls as social worlds to themselves with specific local characteristics.

how certain spaces are dominated, controlled and arranged for some and not for others. Political economy theorists locate their query on urban life through an economic perspective by questioning who have access to scarce resources and who is in control of the distribution of these resources. Therefore, urban processes of changes are influenced by political entities such as the government and its policies, as well as those with economic resources. As the growth of cities affect one group more than another and communities are displaced from one area to another, political economy theorists warn us of the contradictions and conflicts between the poor and the privileged, the powerful and the powerless. Urban cities provide significant sites for the manifestation of social conflicts through political actions staged by city dwellers. Recently, we have also seen an increase of protests against public issues such as the lack of a minimal wage, the tearing down of landmarks such as the Queen's Pier, and the urban renewal projects in Wanchai. The heightened awareness of these issues helped to develop a sense of cultural identity and a stronger sense of belonging among those who felt invested in these issues. This is not to say that the respondents in my study empathized with public actions. As a matter of fact, most of them remained apolitical and critical of protests in general (see Chapter 6). Yet, as a researcher, I am drawn to how a wider discussion of these issues in the public sphere can lead to any changes in how one perceive one's roles as citizens or as inhabitants of a city.

French Marxist intellectual Henri Lefebvre (1974) in his book *The Production of Space* offered a triangular approach at how spaces are formed and their meanings are changed in time. Combining analysis in geography, history and semiotics, Lefebvre came

up with definitions of what accounts as abstract spaces and social spaces. Abstract spaces are spaces reserved for political rulers, state planners and economic leaders to control social organization. On the other hand, social spaces are based from practical lived experiences that is acted upon and used by every person in their daily lives. In other words, those who operate in abstract spaces often extend their control to social spaces in everyday life. Bringing a Marxist perspective into the production of spaces, Lefebvre explains that the first circuit of capital is derived from industrial relations of production. He further elaborates on capital by naming “real estate” as a second circuit of capital. Lefebvre states that “real estate” is not merely a piece of land but an accumulation of wealth for multiple parties who are involved in the buying, selling and the development of space. Therefore, Lefebvre raises a key issue to who is in power to have land resources and to allocate its uses in a city. It also sets a new paradigm for urban sociology in general. This is of particular relevance to the situation in Hong Kong where real estate developers and business tycoons dominate the economic and political narratives in the city. Civic politics are closely tied with businesses in the political arena. It is common to see land developers making statements on the media surrounding political issues in Hong Kong. The notion of a stronger economy as beneficial for all classes is often emphasized by the government of Hong Kong, When I began to interview Hong Kong lesbians on the topic of sexual intimacy, the first concern that were raised by the respondents often focused on where to have sex rather than on how to have lesbian sex (see Chapter 147).

Furthermore, geographer David Harvey (1973) in his influential work *Social Justice and the City* calls our attention to the notion of social justice as specific to a

particular time, place and persons involved.¹² An avid writer, Harvey's most important contribution is his central concern of how capital structures all aspects of urban life, politically, socially and culturally. Urban spaces are continually being restructured by the flow of capital from land developers, governments and private investors. Therefore, Harvey asserts that the capitalist state and its apparatus would ensure power be firmly located in spaces they have control over and disempower those who might have access to the same spaces (Harvey, 1989).

Taking a serious note on how the state presides over the oppressed, Manuel Castells' writings focus on the emergence of urban social movements in city spaces and how these social movements are inevitably urban in nature. Known as one of the founders of new urban sociology, Castells (1983) observed urban social movements that rose out of community development were linked closely to the issue of collective consumption in the city. Access to public goods such as public spaces and services, affordable housing and public transport was key to the spatial politics of urban life.¹³ He also illustrated the importance of cultural and sexual identities to the formation of resistance against the capitalist state and its apparatus by highlighting social movements

¹² Harvey focuses on a construction project in Baltimore, Maryland, where a new freeway was being built by the city claiming to stimulate economic growth for Baltimore's deteriorating downtown district. By analysing the conflicting arguments between advocate groups for and against the project, Harvey came to the conclusion that there is no universal notion of social justice. It is a variable factor to many. Harvey's interests in social justice and urban resistance remains consistent throughout his academic scholarship.

¹³ In *The City and the Grassroots*, Castells (1983) investigated diverse urban social movements from the Paris Commune in 1871 to 1960s inner-city riots in the United States. He contends that capitalist relations and class oppression may not be the sole reason for these movements. Instead, he argues that resistance is organized according to three issues, namely, collective consumption, loyalties to cultural identities and the state's production and reproduction of urban spaces. Castells argues that different social groups have different reasons for participating in social movements.

within the Latino community in San Francisco's Mission district and the gay community in the Castro.

This body of work allowed me to understand the intricate connections enacted by the state and its capitalist ideologies on urban spaces, hence facilitating the politicizing processes of these spaces. Lefebvre's work on abstract spaces allowed me to draw on how such spaces are played out in Hong Kong as sites of homogenization and as places inundated of sexual hierarchies. I have been informed by Harvey's insights on the complexities in how the notion of social justice is defined and used in various contexts to fight against the overarching state control on urban life. Similarly, I can utilise his approach to investigate how political mobilization efforts are characterized by everyday Hong Kong lesbians. On Castells, his notion of accessible public goods is significant for my research as I ponder upon the limitations imposed by the state on lesbian visibility.

Postcolonialism, the City of Hong Kong and Its Economics

The city of Hong Kong is often defined by its colonial past. Turning to post-colonialism as the next step to understand the trajectories of political, social and cultural identities, resistant spaces and Hong Kong history seems logical yet also dangerous. Dangerous in the sense that the term "post-colonialism" itself is deeply embedded in contested territories. It is a term that provokes and invokes a long list of concerns from

colonial histories, psychological topographies, social conditions, body politics, regulated desires and fetishes.¹⁴ As Anne McClintock puts it cogently,

“If ‘post-colonial’ *theory* has sought to challenge the grand march of western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, centre-periphery, etc., the *term* ‘post-colonialism’ nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/post-colonial” (McClintock, 1994, p.292)

She argues that post-colonial studies have the tendency to repositioning global history according to the European understanding of time, therefore, reducing many cultures to mark their historical junctures according to colonial axis of power and domination. More importantly, McClintock warns us of the “political differences between cultures” that were taken as being inferior to “their temporal distance *from* European colonialism” (McClintock, 1994, p.294). She points out that colonialism and its effects

¹⁴ On the other hand, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) poses the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in response to “the indigenous elite” group known as the “Subaltern Studies’ group” in India. Speaking as an Indian-born and American-based intellectual, Spivak critically reflects on her own positioning within post-colonial studies and she contends that “in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak, 1988, p. 82-83). Commenting on post-colonial studies being academically institutionalized, male, of first-world, she further calls on post-colonial theorists to “learn that their privilege is their loss” (Spivak, 1988, p.82). Despite Spivak’s rigorous intellectual project to deconstruct the formation and legitimating processes of post-colonial studies, she herself has been criticised by others of capitalizing on the same imperialist project that she was problematizing. McClintock and Spivak have raised a significant inquiry into the field itself and question the objectivity of theories that emerge out of post-colonialism. Post-colonial studies as a subject of inquiry gained its momentous entry into academia through the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s discussion on discourse and Antonio Gramsci’s discussion on hegemony, Said asserts Orientalism as “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philosophical texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains” (Said, 1978, p.138). I quote Said at length because of his thorough investigation of the multifarious implications of Orientalism and also its impact on various disciplines. Said’s widespread intellectual influence has undoubtedly led the path to further questioning of colonial discourse both for and against his arguments among theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai and Aijaz Ahmad.

have been different for various contemporary cultures and some of them do not necessarily refer to Europe as the dominating power.

Postcoloniality in Hong Kong has significantly different characteristics from other British colonies. Thomas W. P. Wong mentions the transitory nature of in the society of Hong Kong. Wong contends that the British colonial government did not have “to standardize, to neutralize or to arbitrate” conflicting racial groups or communities divided by dialects (Wong, 2003, p.228–229). In addition, Wong argues that the geographical close proximity of Hong Kong to Mainland China has resulted in a homogenous society with cultural values aligned with those known as Chinese culture. The transitory nature of Hong Kong society and its manifestation in art and architecture has been examined thoroughly by Ackbar Abbas so much so that he announced the reinvention of a Hong Kong subjectivity in cultural terms would be “a culture of disappearance” (Abbas, 1997, p.7).¹⁵ It is my goal in writing this thesis to understand the intricate connections between postcoloniality and Hong Kong lesbian identities and more specifically, to investigate the applicability of existing postcolonial scholarship on the situation of Hong Kong.

Almost a decade ago, Kuan-Hsing Chen placed a call for cultural studies practitioners to focus on “the histories of world-wide decolonization movements” and to make clear that globalization is a product of neoimperialism and colonialism (Chen, 1998,

¹⁵ Using the film *Rouge* (dir. Stanley Kwan, Hong Kong, min) as an example, Abbas claimed that a new Hong Kong cultural subjectivity is “recontained” by Kwan’s decision to use a ghost figure. Beautifully performed by the late Anita Mui, the ghostly character Fleur gains a re-entry into the present world and proceeds to visit an old neighbourhood in a 1930s Hong Kong where a tragic romance happened in a brothel where Fleur used to work. Abbas alludes to Kwan’s rendering of a ghost character as the signification “of using disappearance to deal with disappearance” (Abbas, 1997: 8).

p.3). What prompted Chen's call was his careful observation of the internationalization in cultural studies and his concern on what does it entail in the academic field. He made it clear that decolonization as a theoretical project would be essential to our continued commitment as "the articulating agents and linking points of decolonization" (Chen, 1998, p.29). Chen puts it cogently,

The decolonization task of a postcolonial / cultural studies would then be to deconstruct, decenter, deform, debunk, disarticulate the colonial cultural imaginary produced in the historical process, and to reconstruct, rearticulate, reconnect a more democratic kind of imaginative lines of flight. In short, decolonization no longer refers to the objective historical movement in structure, but in action, in subjectivity, thought, cultural forms of expression, social institutions, and global political-economic structures. (Chen, 1998, p.29)

The question on decolonization is an urgent one. It ties in with my research since if I take decolonization as an opposition to any form of domination, then the state's suppression of sexual minorities can be conceptualized as a form of colonization. Postcolonial scholars helped me to further understand the impact of colonial histories on the colonized and the colonizer. It is also useful for me to create the necessary linkages between colonialism, postcolonialism and the city of Hong Kong.

If one takes that the official governmental discourse of Hong Kong primarily focuses on finances, the economic way of thinking must have its affect on many Hong Kong lesbians and gay men. In analysing the economic miracles of the four East Asian economies, economist Li Kui-Wai employs a paradigm of economism to trace the post-war capitalist development in these various locales. To put it simply, economism

emphasizes economic growth over any other non-economic concerns, for example, fair distribution of resources or issues of rights and equality (Li, 2002, p.2).¹⁶ Economic growth is the driving force behind East Asian economies which basically compromises activities that are deemed disruptive to society, for example, union mobilizations, strikes and political demonstrations. The economy depends on political stability in order to set consistent investment policies and to develop a viable financial environment. The demands for a democratic government have been put aside in order to ensure economic well-being. Li has described Hong Kong's "economic pragmatism" as a government that favours economic activities and tends to exhibit an impatient attitude towards political affairs (Li, 2002, p.183).

Furthermore, Hong Kong is being recognized as one of the major financial centres in the world with the freest economy. From a political economist point of view, one must pose the question which groups are being marginalized in the accumulation of wealth and resources. It is useful to understand that land is the most expensive commodity in Hong Kong. Land developers in the private sector have been in control of the housing situation since the 1930s (Rooney, 2003). The colonial government was more concerned with public hygiene and safety requirements. When new immigrants began to escape from the

¹⁶ For a government to depend on the notion of economism, it has to fulfill five central components. These components include poverty reduction instead of income equality, maintaining a viable business environment instead of a welfare state, a strong domestic economy to facilitate international investment, political stability and a "capitalistic, market-oriented" economy (Li, 2002: 4). In providing a substantial analysis on the economic successes of Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, Li Kui-Wai also pointed out two weaknesses of economism, namely, the neglect of social responsibility in wider society and a monopolistic approach in establishing industries due to minimal governmental assistance for smaller business enterprises (Li, 2002: 265 – 267). I contend that it is because of the influence of economism on Hong Kong's government that human rights issues have often been seen as an obstruction to economic progress. Furthermore, the lack of government initiative to assist smaller businesses or to establish rent control often made it harder for these businesses to survive, such as lesbian cafés and alternative cultural art spaces.

rise of communism in China in late 1940s, they settled in squatter homes built along hillsides, in alleys or on rooftops of buildings. The Shek Kip Mei fire in 1953 was widely cited as the first governmental intervention into building public housing estates for the community of 60,000 (Rooney, 2003, p.22). The next event that prompted the British government to take up the issue of housing was the riots on working conditions in April 1967. The government felt an urgency to address social inequality and hence it decided on housing as the key area for community development. A new Hong Kong Housing Authority was established to oversee all public housing estates and to strategize on the overall development of low-income housing. In the next two decades, new public housing estates were built as “self-contained towns” and new towns in the New Territories began to be developed (Rooney, 2003, p.37). The government also came up with different home ownership schemes to accommodate the increasing numbers of middle class dwellers. In 1997, Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa pursued a long-term housing strategy that would guarantee seventy percent home ownership by 2007. The Asian economic crisis led to the downfall of property prices among other financial catastrophes and basically led to the eventual resignation of Tung. Even though the increased development of public housing estates helped to alleviate housing problems, Chan Kam Wah pointed out that familial ideology is the dominant ideology affecting the development of housing (Chan, 1997). It was not until 1984 when single persons or two persons household can be allowed to apply for public housing. The demand for these flats often outnumbered the number of flats available. Therefore, heterosexual marriage and nuclear family units are still allocated with the most scores to apply for a public housing flat. Therefore, it remains pertinent that I should take into account housing conditions and its influences on intimacy

in Hong Kong. Moreover, my research data has shown respondents to be daring, resourceful and strategic in how they have defied such limitations. They risked being disowned or thrown out of their homes when they engaged in physically intimate acts at home. As a result, both women would have to come to terms whose family home is more tolerant of their existence and hence resort to being at one place at a time. It was not a given that lesbians have access to a safer place at home, and even if they resort to finding a motel for sex, the refusal of services were common (see Chapter 5). For those who have tested the waters and found their families to be more receptive of their lesbian relationships, they brought their girlfriends or partners home for family dinners.

For many Hong Kong citizens, consumerism is an inevitable part of everyday practice. There seems to be an inherent understanding that political freedom would be compromised in exchange for economic prosperity. Chua Beng-Huat develops this argument further by naming such an exchange as a “covenant” between semi-democratic or arguably authoritarian East and Southeast Asian governments and their people, as an official justification for high economic growth (Chua, 2000, p.9). Yet it is also contradictory for consumption to be taken as a manageable method to establish social control over populations, since the notion of consumption does bring with it a sense of liberal individualism (Chua, 2000, p.13). Market forces as in the supply and demand of goods and services and in this case, lesbian and gay markets have urged governments to consider “the pink dollar” as a marketing concept. This concept is not without its own limitations since governments can control consumption activities or made them illegitimate through tight customs and censorship policies. As noted by many scholars,

state control and policing over such matters would give rise to “sites of ideological contestation and resistance” (Chua, 2000, p.18).

To further my argument, it is commonsensical to explain Hong Kong social, cultural and sexual identities in economic terms since the city defines its legitimacy by its status as the hub of world finances. Cultural critic and an influential scholar on ethnic Chinese communities, Lung Ying Toi (2006) makes salient observations on the far-reaching effects of Hong Kong government and its policies. Surprised by the government’s self-imposed image as an insignificant administrative arm at the whim of the Mainland Chinese authorities, Lung argues that the Hong Kong government seemed to exercise freedom in its policies on how land is utilized despite public protest. More so, she highlights how business tycoons, land developers and other economic interests have been strategically and efficiently placed by the government as the city’s top priority on urban planning at the expense of cultural arts scenes and city living. Lung used the West Kowloon Cultural District and Cyberport as examples of the government’s dictatorial style in matters of urban planning (Lung, 2006, p.50-52). Efficiency and business interests have shadowed any sincere attempts to consult communities on such matters. Using a metaphor in describing Hong Kong as the seed of a Banyan tree, Lung asserts that the government has buried the seed into a pot as to limit the city’s potential growth as a vibrant, culturally diverse, socially integrative and community-involved city (Lung, 2006, p.54). Similarly, noted Chinese literary and cultural scholar Leo Oufan Lee views the lack of cultural space in Hong Kong stems partially from the government’s emphasis

on the marketability of cultural arts, therefore any form of cultural arts would be judged upon its ability to expand public consumption (Lee, 2002, p.108).

Taking Hong Kong's political environment one step further, Agnes Ku explains that the colonial government in partnership with Hong Kong's socio-economic elite and the Chinese government obstructs the path to democracy through their emphasis on "economic prosperity and political stability" (Ku, 2001, p.261). Ku further explains that the government's official discourse created a form of "hegemonic narrative of a miraculous success" (Ku, 2001, p.260). By alarming us to the "hegemonic narrative", one is reminded of Antonio Gramsci's key concept of hegemony where a major social group (to be understood as class alliances and not necessarily one particular class grouping) has been able to impose its ideologies upon civil society through its dominance over social, political and cultural arenas in the name of state unity (Gramsci, 1946).¹⁷ Whereas it is not the purpose of this thesis to give a detailed explanation on how market economies have developed or have been sustained in the East Asian region, the above scholarship illustrated how a regulatory discourse on economic progress can condition the way we came to understand the city of Hong Kong, hence provided me with a more in-depth view

¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci (1946) posits civil society in three dimensions: cultural ideologies, a totalitarian state and an oppressive economy. To Gramsci, the ruling class' perspectives were readily immersed within the workers' consciousness so much so that a cultural hegemony resulted from a successful bombardment of popular culture, mass media and compulsory education. The concept of cultural hegemony can be applied generally to include norms, everyday practices, beliefs and social institutions which form patterns of domination and liberation. According to Stuart Hall, the complexities of hegemony lie in its historical and cultural specificity,

"...the concept of hegemony is elaborated specifically in relation to those advanced capitalistic societies in which the institutions of state and civil society have reached a stage of great complexity, in which the mobilization and consent of the popular masses is required to secure the ascendancy of a particular tendency and in which 'reform' requires an extended and complex process of struggle, mastery, compromise and transformation to reshape society to new goals and purposes" (Hall, 1980, p.97).

on how Hong Kong lesbians subjectivities intersect with their cultural identities. What I want to point out is the “hegemonic narrative” and close interrelations between state and capital have made the development of alternative spaces conditional. Therefore alternative spaces for marginal populations and subcultural communities are regulated by market forces.

Buying Spaces: Pink Consumption

Many scholars have pointed out that gay and lesbian cultures in metropolitan cities have increasingly become more commercial. As a result, it is critical to examine the effects of capitalism on lesbian lives especially in a city that has already been saturated with capitalist ideologies, for its role in shaping many local communities, beyond lesbians and queers, on what counts as personal achievement, civil status and life goals, as well as its role in influencing the way we have come to understand social and erotic relations. John D’Emilio (1983) pioneering essay on how capitalism has made possible for household-based economy to be shifted towards wage labour, therefore enabling men and women to have personal lives beyond nuclear family structures, and develop same-sex relations. Adrienne Rich (1980) essay on “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” points to capitalism as part of the reason for imposing compulsory heterosexuality among women through its emphasis on production and reproduction. American economists and queer scholars Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed observed that the relatively affluent North American economies in the nineties have had a political effect on gays and lesbians, in the sense, that political awareness have diminished especially prevalent among gays and lesbians with more economic resources (Gluckman

and Reed, 1997, p.xv). The positive upturn of the economy also brought gay and lesbian markets into consideration as corporations began to jump on the possibilities of a niche market.

David Bell and Jon Binnie alert us to be cautious about the globalization trends of gay villages and gay tourism as “part of broader urban entrepreneurialism agendas” and yet for city officials to make these urban sites attractive means for them to clean up the undesirable places and its inhabitants (Bell and Binnie, 2004, p.1813). Needless to mention, the voices of marginalized groups within queer communities were rendered invisible such as those who live in poverty, of colour, with disabilities, in other words, those who do not adhere to “normal” standards of success. On one hand, consumerism has the potential to legitimate the notion of the pink dollar. Yet the reliance on consumerism as a strategy for public visibility often renders those who cannot afford it as invisible and further marginalized. Moreover, pink consumerism seemed to cater towards gay men rather than lesbians in general. There have been more visible gay commercial spaces than lesbian ones. Interview subjects discussed the need to open businesses for a lesbian clientele yet expensive rental prices made it difficult to keep businesses lesbian-exclusive (see Chapter 7). It poses more questions for my research in whether market visibility and capitalist consumption can change public attitudes towards gay and lesbian sexualities? How do queer communities make sense of their sexual identities in relation to an environment dominated by consumerism and materialism?

The City and its Sexual Politics

In the past few years, we witnessed Hong Kong government's failure in fulfilling its obligations to uphold human rights and eliminate discrimination for LGBT people. The government actually has become the source of oppression to sexual minorities.

From the artwork at the "Tongzhi art exhibition" by NutongXueshe was judged to be indecent; Home Affairs Bureau permitted an organization that promotes harmful "reparative therapy" into Sexual Minorities Forum; Broadcasting Authority issued warning against an episode titled "Gay Lovers" in a RTHK program "Hong Kong Connection"; to the recent judgement of the student newsletter of the Chinese University of Hong Kong as "indecent"; These proved that sexual minorities are being targeted for oppression, and this backlash against sexual minorities comes from the government.

- 2007 IDAHO HK Declaration

On May 20, 2007, over 300 participants marched in the Third International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) Hong Kong Parade. The IDAHO Hong Kong Committee declared the theme of the event as "Legislation is the Best Education". The route of the march began in a crowded shopping area Causeway Bay with a brief ceremony. Demonstrators walked along Hennessey Road holding placards and yelling slogans. There were at least eighteen organizations involved in human rights, sexual rights, women's issues, health and censorship that participated in the parade. The event in its third year was the most visible public demonstration fighting for human rights among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender persons.

The beginnings of a public discussion on homosexuality can be traced back to a landmark case. The John MacLennan incident sparked off a series of public debates on homosexuality and its place in society (Ho, 1997). In 1980, John MacLennan as an Inspector with the Royal Hong Kong Police Force was charged with gross indecency by

the Special Investigation Unit. Established in 1978, the Special Investigation Unit's mission was to conduct a witchhunt on civil servants and uniformed officers in regards to homosexual behaviour. McLennan was found dead in his apartment with five gunshot wounds. Suicide was provided as the official cause of death but the fact that McLennan himself belonged to the Unit earlier in 1977 and had access to confidential information on a list of high-ranking officers suspected of homosexual conduct led one to question the British government's role in his death.

Although the media coverage on the MacLennan case and the issue of homosexuality has been negative yet it gave rise to a discourse on sexualities among lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the community. It has also provided a discourse for the public to become familiar with general terms on sexual identities and to a certain extent, it has opened the floodgate for a more direct engagement between homophobic forces and the tongzhi organizations. Following the death of John MacLennan, two commissions were set up with a Commission of Inquiry focusing on the MacLennan case and the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong on the revision of laws regulating homosexual conduct. The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong released a report in 1983 putting forth a key recommendation whereby males who are over twenty-one years of age should not be criminalized for sexual conduct held in private. The outcome of the report caused panic among those who were oppose to it that a group titled the Joint Committee on Homosexual Law was formed. The group was comprised of thirty-one organizations including religious personnel, educators and social workers. To summarize,

the Joint Committee on Homosexual Law pioneered by Dr. Phileman Choi asserted that homosexuality as a Western import, aberrant and immoral.

In 1988, the government released a consultative paper on the decriminalization of homosexual conduct for males over the age of twenty-one and asked for public opinion. While the results were never published, the consultative exercise made homosexuality visible and encouraged some to voice their opinions on the issue. On July 3, 1988, a public forum titled (城市論壇) held weekly in Victoria Park chose the decriminalization of homosexual conduct as the issue for its debate. A gay person was hidden behind public view and spoke into a loudspeaker to argue with the panellists on the issue. A statement was also released from the Ten Percent Club to the forum's panellists. On July 11, 1990, the Legislature Council passed the motion decriminalizing homosexual conduct with thirty-one votes in favour and thirteen votes against the motion. The Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance became effective a year later. The decriminalization of homosexual conduct has since been interpreted as part of the wider agenda of the British government to appease to the political environment prior 1997 (Kong, 2000).

In 1994, Anna Wu a legislator and former Chairperson of the Equal Opportunities Commission proposed a private member's bill on equal opportunities including sexual orientation, sex, marital status and pregnancy, race, age and others. In 1996, the government in the end only took note of three areas and drafted its own discrimination ordinances, namely the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the Disability Discrimination Ordinance and the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance. A year later, Legislative

Council Member Lau Chin-Shek once again put forth the Equal Opportunities Bill and was voted down only by two votes on June 27, 1997. Although anti-discrimination legislation against sexual minorities was not passed in the Legislature, the government set up a funding scheme in 1998 to support education activities regarding race and sexual orientation. Ironically, opposition groups were also allowed to apply for funding and one group notorious for its anti-homophobia media campaigns, the Society for Truth and Light, also succeeded in applying for funding. In 1999, the Tongzhi Community Joint Meeting of Hong Kong was formed by fifteen tongzhi organizations and other community groups to address issues of central concern to tongzhis.¹⁸

By September 2004, a Sexual Minorities Forum was established to call regular meetings on issues affecting sexual minorities. Similar to the incident with the funding scheme, oppositional groups can also attend these meetings. On November 14, 2005, a reparative therapy group was invited to attend the forum. Local LGBT and human rights groups walked away from the meeting in protest. In May 2005, the Home Affairs Bureau set up a Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Unit to handle complaints and enquiries on issues of discrimination. A hotline was set up two months later to take calls from the public. In August 2005, the High Court judge, Michael Hartmann, ruled that current legislation prohibiting men under the age of twenty-one to engage in sex with another man as unconstitutional and discriminatory against gay men. Earlier, a twenty-year-old man named William Roy Leung challenged the legislation on the age of consent where

¹⁸ The list of groups include AIDS Concern, Chi Heng Foundation, Civil Rights for Sexual Diversities, F' Union, HORIZONS, Hong Kong Bauhinias Deaf Club, Over the Rainbow, Queer Sisters, Rainbow of Hong Kong, Rainbow Action, The Hong Kong 10% Club, The Satsanga, Tongzhi Conference. Tongzhi Culture Society, SUCUHK, Women Coalition of Hong Kong.

men under the age of twenty-one who engages in sodomy could face imprisonment. The ruling was regarded as a victory for its public acknowledgement of discrimination against men who engage in sexual behaviour with other men.

To conclude, the increased visibility of issues pertaining to sexual minorities in the governmental arena was only part of the larger picture in Hong Kong. I will now turn to a micro-analysis of Hong Kong lesbians and place my intellectual inquiries into the micro-resistance as employed in their daily lives.

Everyday Life

Everyday life is at once ordinary and strange, familiar and distant, transparent and opaque. Beyond the scope of daily routines, tending to everyday life is an ambitious task, as cultural theorist Ben Highmore rightfully asserts, “to invoke an ordinary culture from below is to make the invisible visible, and as such has clear social and political resonances” (Highmore, 2002, p.1-2). The task to disrupt the ordinariness in our daily lives lies in assigning and destabilizing meanings, querying common gestures, demarcate particularity from generality, and to address an issue as early pioneering feminist Betty Friedan cogently puts, “the problem that has no name” (Friedan, 1963, p.59). To seriously pursue everyday life as a research subject is to embrace what Raymond Williams states, “culture is ordinary: that is the first fact” (Williams, 1958, p.93). One might ask, what is there to investigate other than complicating ordinariness and subjecting seemingly mundane activities to our endless scrutiny? How do we pick on life’s particularities and apply to a general picture of the overall schema of things?

As industrialization takes place in parts of Europe, sociologist Erving Goffman attends to a micro-analysis of everyday life by focusing on the presentation of oneself in his study on Scotland's Shetland Islands communities. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman highlights the significance of "social establishments" and their effects on our social behaviour, as in the way we present ourselves according to where we are, who we are talking to, what is the topic of our conversations and how are we delivering our words. These minute details have been captured in his observational study of a hotel's kitchen as the "back region" or "backstage" where activities were performed out of sight to the "front region" or "the audience" (Goffman, 1959, p.53). For example, the hotel front counter versus its kitchen, the undertaker and the workroom, the factory worker and the dormitory. A meticulous observer, Goffman's dramaturgy have also led him to discuss impression management and the notion of social stigmas.

Two French theorists figure prominently in recent debates on everyday life. Although the writings of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau differ in their approaches, they have been influential in establishing everyday life as an academic field. Henri Lefebvre primarily based his critique of modern everyday life using Marxist philosophies, hence problematizing capitalist culture by stating "the criticism of everyday life was in fact *a criticism of other classes*" (Lefebvre, 1958, p.226). By this Lefebvre meant the contempt he held for bourgeois society. In an influential essay titled "Work and Leisure in Everyday Life", Lefebvre asserts that the worker embedded within the socialization of productive labour would look towards leisure activities as a break. Leisure is understood

as a “social need” and hence “appears as the non-everyday in the everyday” (Lefebvre, 1958, p.233).

For Michel de Certeau, everyday life tends to take on a different turn. To begin with, de Certeau’s theoretical essays in the monumental book *The Practice of Everyday Life* does not lead the reader on an easy path. Jumping from a hopscotch of devising “tactics” and “strategies” for experiencing daily life, to developing “the arts of theory” and taking the reader for a walk in the city while finishing his utterances with a lecture on reading as a vital aspect of consumption (De Certeau, 1984). De Certeau’s diverse scholarship is best to be understood as to providing “a grammar of everyday practices” (Highmore, 2002, p.14). By viewing space as “a *practiced* place”, he nonetheless values our potential in altering spaces and their purposes in our lives. (De Certeau, 1984, p.130). Much of his intellectual work focused on taking the act of speech and applying to pedestrians in which he argues,

“The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple “enunciative” function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies relations among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic “contracts” in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an “allocution,” “posits another opposite” the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action). It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation.” (De Certeau, 1984, p.97-98).

De Certeau’s framework of “a space of enunciation” can be used to imply that different spaces emerge out of one’s lesbian identity. As a lesbian appropriates certain heteronormative spaces, she also creates possibilities for other spaces to emerge as

lesbian-identified sites. The inter-relations between these spatial elements can be pieced together as a road map, hence developing temporary emerging spaces for one to participate in “a spatial acting-out of the place” (De Certeau, 1984, p.98). To further this argument is the notion that one appropriates and reappropriates certain spaces so as to actualize one’s identities. Therefore, everyday resistance, in De Certeau’s terms, differs from identity formations as in subcultures, instead he offers a way of thinking that everyday resistance is actively performed alongside oppressive forces that appear to regulate. Resistance has to be understood, contextualized and performed within the complex grid of everyday practices and not opposed to power and discipline.

De Certeau might be hinting at the dismal chance of enacting resistance on one’s own, yet I came to understand his viewpoint, albeit its conservative nature, as positioning one’s resistant spaces amidst grids of power strategically. This approach can be used to describe Hong Kong lesbians whose identity politics may take on a more intimate dimension where being out in public is not a possible option. Hence, resistance is being practiced behind closed doors to the visible gaze but never far from the dominant forces.

To revisit the theoretical strands that informed my research, I chose to study urban sociology because of its insights on the city and its contribution to the political economy of urban spaces. Feminist theories are integral to my research since lesbian issues are indeed women’s issues, thereby any study on lesbian spaces would need to address the feminist critique of gendered spaces. Then I turn to queer theory for its critique on identity politics and its complex formations on racial and sexual relations. Where

feminism might have been regarded to have marginalized sexualities and gay identities are dominant in early writing on sexual identities, lesbian subjectivities emerge out of these areas and hence fill in the gap between what might have been interpreted otherwise as a gay issue or a women's concern. In order to further substantiate my research, I rely on cultural studies scholarship to demonstrate everyday life as problematic and as a form of micro-resistance. It is only with a theoretical project as such can I investigate how Hong Kong's urban environment affects the conditional emergence of queer spaces where lesbian subjectivities are created, negotiated and maintained in resistance to a hegemonic discourse of late capitalism. I will now turn to a brief discussion of my research design and methodology.

Research Design

Qualitative research on sexualities has gradually developed from a clinical approach with classifying and stigmatizing homosexuals to a narrative approach of presenting marginalized voices. Early pathological studies on homosexuality have resulted in the Kinsey studies which pushed discussions of sexualities into a new realm of public interest by trying to normalize sexual practices such as homosexuality, adultery and premarital sex (D'Emilio, 1983; Gamson, 2000). We have also seen studies in the early seventies addressing the homosexual as a stigmatized individual yet nonetheless a strange fellow (Reiss, 1961; Humphreys, 1970). Representations of gay and lesbian subjects and voices of ethnic minorities and women have emerged out of social movements such as the feminist movement, the Asian American movement and the civil rights movement. Qualitative research on gays and lesbians have taken on a political

value and contributed to the emergence of oral narratives as legitimate texts. However, the legitimacy of voices has also faced the postmodern challenge of whether a text can truly represent without contestation or a close interrogation of the researcher's power over the researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer, 2002; Kong, 2004). Feminist methodologies have repeatedly confronted the traditional epistemological stance of research as distant, scientifically objective, apolitical and void of power differentials (Jaggar, 1983; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Fonow and Cook, 1986; Smith, 1987; Stacey, 1988; Reinharz, 1992).

Feminist ethnography appeal to me on many levels (see Appendix A). Based primarily on an inter-disciplinary and integrative approach, feminist ethnography grounds theory contextually in women's everyday lives. It enables marginalized populations to be heard and situates knowledge as contextual and interpersonal. It calls for sensitivity towards gendered behaviour, racism, cultural misogyny and coping behaviours. Struggling against positivism and androcentric beliefs, feminist ethnographers emphasize respect, reciprocity and intersubjectivity between the researcher and the researched (Reinharz, 1992). For key informants to be women, feminist research contributes to feminist theories in general. It is worthy to note that feminist research focuses on empathetical understanding with research participants, hence attempts to build ongoing relationships in communities involved with the study. Besides, feminist ethnography urges researchers to be ground themselves in everyday life experiences of feminists and partake in the transformative process of being a researcher. As a result, I am particularly

drawn to feminist ethnography for the aforementioned research methodological characteristics.

I proposed to use life history as an approach to conduct unstructured interviews with 30 lesbians living in Hong Kong. I define lesbians as women who engage in intimate sexual and emotional relations with other women. Life history allows me to collect data from the interviewer's point of view in addition to adopting a participatory role during the interviews. Sociologist Ken Plummer asserts that a life history approach enables a researcher to question outsider assumptions and instead take into careful account the interview subject's view of life as it happens around herself or himself (Plummer, 1983). Apart from using a life history approach, I am also inclined towards Arlene Stein's notion of "*self stories*" in conducting interviews. A variation under the rubric of life histories, Stein explains, "A self story is literally a story of and about the self in relation to an experience, in this case the development of a lesbian identity, that positions the self of the teller centrally in the narrative that is given" (Stein, 1997:7). Similar to Stein, I was interested in the daily negotiation, mapping and construction of lesbian identities as articulated by the participants themselves, and as situated within their everyday lives. By asking general questions regarding their backgrounds, I followed where they led me in the narratives, be it concerning love, intimacy, work, family, social relations, discrimination, sex, aging, health and outlooks on life.

Research focusing on gay and lesbian communities using interviews has evolved from a traditional clinical approach to diagnose "the homosexual" to modern

psychological and sociological surveys on gay white males. The early days of interviewing “the homosexual” stems from a medical discourse that classified homosexuality as a disease. Feminist research practice has changed the way we think about interviews in general. Self-reflexivity and self-consciousness are brought to the forefront of how we analyse and understand the power relations between the researcher and the interview subject. The interview is no longer an arena of objectivity. Instead, the researcher lays out one’s reasons for conducting research in the hope of developing a more ethical and reciprocal relationship. The research process becomes exposed and becomes part of the analysis on methodology. Similar to my own positioning as a researcher, there have been many feminist researchers who identify themselves as lesbian researchers and conduct sociological research on lesbian issues (Krieger, 1983; Ponse, 1978; Ross, 1995).

In writing this thesis, I aim to use feminist ethnography as the primary methodological basis to collect and analyze data. In particular, I argue that feminist ethnography enables me to gather data for a more grounded analysis incorporating theoretical strands within cultural studies, feminism, urban sociology and queer theory, hence producing much needed investigative scholarship in the area of Hong Kong lesbian spaces and subjectivities.

Fieldwork

I conducted participant observation, informal interviews, and thirty in-depth interviews with Hong Kong lesbians between 2003 and 2006. By snowball sampling,

interview participants were identified through personal contacts and referrals from individuals whom I have gotten to know through my community involvement with local organizations. All interviews were taped and consent forms were signed. Interviews range from one and a half hour to three hours. Interview subjects identified as female, expressed erotic interests or have had romantic relationships with women. Interview subjects range from fifteen to fifty-one years of age. Apart from one subject who is biologically male and in transition to become a woman, all interviewees identified as female. Interviews were conducted in venues chosen by the participants or mutually agreed upon by the participant and myself. These venues include lesbian cafes, restaurants, homes and post-graduate student office. I am fully aware of the fact that my sample of interview subjects cannot fully represent the diverse lesbian communities in Hong Kong.

I have engaged in participant observation through my attendance of social gatherings, political events and community organizing. Upon returning to Hong Kong in July 2003, I have been closely involved with the Hong Kong Lesbian & Gay Film and Video Festival. On November 29, 2003, I delivered a seminar on “Les & the Cities” through a comparative analysis of Asian Canadian lesbian director Desiree Lim's *Sugar Sweet* (dir. Desiree Lim, 2001, Japan, 67 min., Video) and local Hong Kong lesbian director Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* (dir. Yau Ching, 2002, Hong Kong, 87 min., 35mm), and demonstrated how they utilised urban landscapes in the metropolitan cities of Tokyo and Hong Kong. I became the Festival Director of the Hong Kong Lesbian & Gay Film and Video Festival both in 2004 and in 2005, and a

programming consultant in 2006. As a Festival Directory on a voluntary basis, I have met representatives from 19 community organizations serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations. The list of community groups include AIDS Concern, Amnesty International, Chi Heng Foundation, Civil Rights for Sexual Diversities, Freeman, F'union, Gender Concerns, Hong Kong Blessed Minority, Hong Kong Queer Campus, The Hong Kong 10% Club, Horizons, Les Peches, Nutong Xueshe, Queer Sisters, Rainbow Action, Fruits in Suits, Satsanga, Hong Kong Transgender Equality and Acceptance Movement (TEAM) and Women Coalition of Hong Kong SAR. By immersing myself in the local queer scenes, I have absorbed community organizing experiences as evident in community politics, identity issues and community histories.

In addition, I have been a core organizing committee member of a local queer women oral history travelling exhibit titled “Brazen Women: Hong Kong Women who have Same-Sex Desires Oral History Exhibit”, held from January 22 to February 20 with it being first unveiled at Mackie Study, an independent bookstore located on the second floor in a building on Yun Ping Road, Causeway Bay. On February 11, 2005, I co-organized a lesbian day conference with Yau Ching. This conference was comprised of four sessions: Coming out and Relationships, Sex and Desires, Integration of Self and Hong Kong Society, and Film Representations of Lesbian Sexualities and Desires. Speakers range from local activists, scholars, writers and artists to delegates from Taiwan. Thirty-eight participants engaged in a day-long intensive honest discussion on what it means to be a lesbian in everyday life.

Structure of Thesis

In Chapter Two, I will offer a brief overview on sociological theories in the area of sexual identities. Drawing on the interview data, I will show the different processes that interview subjects engaged in identity formations and recognition of same-sex desires. In Chapter Three, I will focus on the social worlds as inhabited by Hong Kong lesbians as in schools, workplaces, family sites and religions institutions. By investigating their coming-out strategies and coping mechanisms within these spaces, I will argue that Hong Kong lesbians resist heteronormativity both covertly and overtly within spatial maps of their everyday lives. In Chapter Four, I will study the performance and body politics of butch and femme representations. I will look at the labelling practices as exercised by the interview participants on themselves and their projections on others. Furthermore, a discussion on how body politics affect the way they view their erotic selves would be included in this chapter. In Chapter Five, I proceed to examine intimate spaces as imagined, identified, created and used. By positioning spaces of lesbian intimacy within an urban environment with dense living conditions, Hong Kong lesbians are constantly seeking creative solutions and building capacity within their own networks to foster relationships with each other, needless to mention the depth of emotions necessary to sustain lesbian relationships in resistance to homophobic forces in society. In Chapter Six, I will make an attempt to trace the development of *tongzhi* politics and its spatialities. Moreover, interview data from activists will be drawn to illustrate the complexities and tensions within community mobilization efforts. As the public visibility of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender persons increased in the last five years, there is an urgency to strategise for a more long-term visionary social movement. For Chapter

Seven, I will focus on Tung Lo Wan and look into its popularity as a lesbian haven and as part of everyday life among Hong Kong lesbians. Tung Lo Wan is both commonplace and particular for its dense concentration of businesses and residences as well as its significance as a site of consumption. Lesbian commercial spaces will be discussed for their critical role as temporal sites of resistance. In Chapter Eight, I will argue that lesbian representation has begun to emerge within independent film and video representation in Hong Kong. Despite the abundance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender characters in Hong Kong cinema, the nature of these characters are often made fun of, belittled or portrayed as deranged individuals. Therefore, one turns to independent media for its potential to create cultural works that are more representative of Hong Kong lesbians and their sexualities. In particular, I will present the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival as a case study to illustrate the close connections between a politics of consumption and cultural representation.

Chapter Two

Sexual Identities: Coming to Terms with Lesbian Desires

Wherever desire flows, *t'ung chihs* will be there.
- Chang Hsiao-Hung, *Taiwan Queer Valentines* (1998, p.296)

If space is the sphere of multiplicity, the product of social relations, and those relations are real material practices, and always ongoing, then space can never be closed, there will always be loose ends, always relations with the beyond, always potential elements of chance. – Doreen Massey, *For Space* (2005, p.95).

Introduction

In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of sociological evidence on various formation processes of sexual identities and secondly, I will draw on empirical data to illustrate the complexities of how one relate to her lesbian identity and their implications. Through the analysis of my interview data, I argue that Hong Kong lesbian subjectivities are immersed in traces of essentialism, social constructionism and to a lesser extent, queer identity formations. Instead, I argue that coming out to oneself is closely related to how one constructs her approach and how one develops a viable mental space to view lesbian sexualities.

To begin with, I asked myself a number of critical questions on the notion of lesbian identities. To begin with, the term “identity” itself is often contested and complex. What makes up an “identity”? Is the notion of an identity necessarily singular? Can it also be fluid, unstable, multiple and embedded in grounds of social, cultural and political struggles? How are identities developed in the discourses of race, class, gender and sexuality? By committing “lesbian” into the discussion of identity, what can I draw from

feminism, urban sociology, cultural studies and queer theory? How does one identify as lesbian through the process of identity formation? Is the Western theoretical framework going to be useful for my analysis of self-identity and lesbian sexuality?

As mentioned in chapter one, for one to feel as part of a city's milieu can be traced back to the self. It is often one's multiple experiences with the city that simultaneously informs and shapes urban life. As I sought out to map out the relationships between a city and its sexual identities, it has slowly evolved to become a project of which in defining the self, it was inevitable to draw in the many faceted spaces surrounding oneself. Yet, the process of identifying as a lesbian for many interview subjects often begins from self-identification or what is more commonly referred to as coming out to oneself. Early clinical theorists on coming out emphasize on linear progression of one's sexual identity from self-awareness to full engagement and finally, social integration (Cass, 1979, 1984; Trolden, 1979, 1988; Fassinger, 1991; Savin-Williams, 1998). The emphasis on oneself tends to neglect other socio-cultural and political factors that affect one's sexual identities, namely, the social construction of sexual identities.

Tracing the “Homosexual” to the Beginnings of a Lesbian and Gay Identity

I began by tracing the sociological development of sexual identity from the “homosexual” to gay/lesbian and the onset of queer identities as described in primary Western theoretical texts. Classic sociology is often understood as a study of social problems that rose from a modern, industrial, class-stratified changing society. Classic sociologists such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim chose to study the issue of labour

organization, the history of modern capitalism and the theory of social evolution (Seidman, 1996; Stein, 1989, 1997). Sexuality and gender differences were not considered as significant variables then. On studying homosexuality, sexologists and social researchers embarked on a genetic journey to discover the origins of one's sexuality (Weeks, 1985, 1986). Being homosexual is perceived as 'the other' and either treated as an emotional or physical defect or a continuum of human sexuality (Ellis, 1920; Krafft-Ebbing, 1965). On another note, American sociologist Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues led a study on human sexuality in 1948 and in 1953, and concluded that human sexuality was distributed across a seven-point continuum.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the development of workers' right movements and civil rights demonstrations allowed for identity politics to emerge across many urban cities in the United States. The contested debates on the Vietnam War brought post-war baby boomers together to lean towards anarchist beliefs and hence, the emergence of various subcultures. One of the most important social movements that came out of this era was the second wave feminist movement. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the fervour and multiplicity of feminisms helped to gather political momentum for women to fight for issues such as violence against women, pro-choice, anti-pornography, lesbian rights and equal pay. The women's movement is not without its own disputes. Lesbian feminists found themselves being marginalized for their sexuality and felt unheard on issues pertaining to lesbianism. Therefore, a lesbian separatist movement came to surface to address such concerns. On the other hand, the gay liberation movement has already begun to mobilize gays and lesbians by emphasizing on assimilationist tactics. As lesbian

feminists and gay activists enter the 1970s, debates on sexual identities began to focus around essentialism and social constructionism.

The Essentialist-Constructionist Debate

The essentialist-constructionist debate in the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to earlier discussions conducted by Sigmund Freud, Albert Kinsey and labelling theorists (Kinsey et al., 1948; Simon and Gagnon, 1967; McIntosh, 1968; Plummer, 1981; Epstein, 1987). Labelling theorists aimed to magnify the differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality. They argued that social stigmatization and labelling of homosexuals serve to maintain small numbers in a homosexual population (MacIntosh, 1968; Simon and Gagnon, 1987). Sexual essentialism depicts sex as “a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions” (Rubin, 1993, p.26). Essentialism is a product of academic study within the disciplines of psychiatry, medicine and psychology. Doctors, psychiatrists and medical scientists summarized sex as an inherent part of an individual. Hormones were taken as a biological condition where sex drives were explained. Essentialists view homosexuality as universal, continuous and genetic.

A new way of thinking emerged to challenge the homogenous view of same-sex desire. Social constructionists illustrate that sexuality may be biologically driven but it has specific social, historical and cultural contexts that affect an individual’s experience of coming out. In other words, sexual identities are constantly shifting and historically contingent. Sexual behaviour is then understood to be a result of social and cultural contexts (Weeks, 1981). Lesbian and gay historical accounts can no longer be considered

as purely linear and definitive of a particular period. Rather, there have been many historical accounts coming from different directions, forming multiple layers and providing us with many perspectives.

As mentioned earlier, John D'Emilio argues that gays and lesbians existed as “[products] of history”, in particular, as direct results of the rise of capitalism (D'Emilio, 1983, p.102). Moreover, the progression of capitalism and the development of a free labour system enabled women and men to claim themselves as lesbians and gay men. Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* may be known as the most well-read, studied and critiqued text on sexuality in modern times (Foucault, 1980). Locating desires in historically specific social practices, Foucault argues that sex is a fundamental social and historical category. These diverse set of practices included “strategies, discourses, institutions, and knowledges that were historically contingent and were played out on a dispersed field of power” (Epstein, 1987, p.11). Heterosexuality and homosexuality can only be understood through their meanings and social positions in particular historical moments. Sex is part of a social organization where new understandings of what constitutes as sex are constantly being produced and altered. This is not to say that there is no biological aspect in human sexuality. Rather, Foucault asserts that we cannot understand sexuality completely through biological conditions.

One critique of social constructionism stems from its denial to engage the personal and to acknowledge personal identity formation. Personal identity is the creation of a continuous self in differentiating, identifying and integrating with yourself and others.

Although the idea of identities being unstable and shifting in meanings upon historical, political, social and cultural contexts are relatively compelling, Steven Seidman poses a key question whether we can realize the enabling effect or the power of one's agency in the claiming of an identity standpoint, as in the basis of an unified social movement (Seidman, 1993).

Queer Theory & Post-structuralism

As mentioned in Chapter 1, queer theory as an academic discipline emerged within prestigious United States academic institutions in the departments of humanities and history. (Fuss, 1991). Yet it would be fraudulent to exclude queer activists and their politics in upsetting earlier configurations of what constitutes a gay and lesbian identity. Queer theorists and activities sought out to disregard the process of assimilation into heterosexual structures and institutions. As queer activist and scholar Michael Warner puts it, queer politics “should take as their point of departure the perspective of those at the bottom of the scale of respectability: queers, sluts, prostitutes, trannies, club crawlers, and other lowlifes” (Warner, 1999, p.ix).

Diana Fuss in her edited collection of essays titled *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* has described identity as a derivative from our needs to reject what it is not, hence the “non-identity” (Fuss, 1989, p.102-103). Therefore, we came to understand heterosexuality in relation to homosexuality, in particular, in our recreation of what homosexuality means and in our rejection of the same definitions we bestowed upon homosexuality. What might have seemed opposing identities are in fact mutually

dependent of each other. Moreover, these two interdependent identities are of a hierarchical relation to each other within a system of meanings. Queer theory provided a political and intellectual framework in destabilising, fragmenting and decentering lesbian identity. For me, it signifies a moment to understand sexual identities as non-normative, ambiguous, uncertain, resistant to heterosexual/homosexual binaries and irreducible.

Poststructuralist and postmodern theories have also lent some scholars to propose butch-femme roles and drag as subversive acts that upset gender boundaries and expectations. Judith Butler's interrogation of sexual identities, in particular, of lesbianism, is indicative of a displacement or a de-emphasis on what we came to understand as identity politics. Instead, she offers drag as a possible solution to illustrate the complexities of lesbianism and the contradictories it occupies, more clearly, the notion of lesbianism being embedded in a structure (read heterosexism) that it reproduces yet at the same time rejects. Butler emphasizes that gender is a performance and identities are constantly being destabilized through cultural performances (Butler, 1990). Gender performance disrupts what we came to know as categories of "woman" and "man". Butler's theory of performativity problematizes these categories and instead, proposes that even though our gendered and sexed bodies are inevitably constrained by dominant notions of gender and sexuality, but at the same time, our bodily performances can disrupt such notions and unsettle the relations between them.

Fuss and Butler's approach to sexual identities alert me to question categories such as labels. Whether one uses it, as Spivak (1988) suggests, strategically, or one is

being labelled. Labels in Hong Kong are manifold: TB (tomboy), G (femme), TBG (a femme who is into tomboy), Pure (neither tomboy or femme, an androgynous position), Les (denotes someone who is interested in woman-to-woman relationships), Member (more commonly used among gay men), Tongzhi (used in literary publications, conferences and community groups), Family or Own People (自己人) (denotes someone who is interested in same-sex relations). By reviewing scholarship on queer theory and collecting interview data, I have come to learn how labels unify, create tensions, categorize, limit or empower lesbians and gay men.

Queer theory caught on among Taiwanese scholars in the 1990s due to the “a-statist” position familiar to those involved in Taiwan’s social movements (Ning, 1998, p.40). The “a-statist” position can be described as one of marginality and alternative resistance as well as a need to move away from victimology to one of empowerment (Ning, 1998, p.40). As a result, the notion of queer has held localized meanings for those working on research in sexuality studies and for activists in various social movements. Notable queer activist and scholar Josephine Ho Chuen-Juei (2005) in discussing queer sexualities and social movements in Taiwan have often raised the importance of including marginal populations such as sex workers and migrant communities in any discourse on progressive sexual politics.

Chu Wei-Cheng (2000) suggested a way to minimize the influence of abiding to a Western framework of coming out is to utilize the theoretical space between the West and its relationship to Taiwan to come up with localized forms of coming out. Cheng viewed

the tensions between the local and the West as an opportunity for to imagine different ways of coming out which can result in a more familial and congenial in the context of Taiwan. In response to Chu Wei-Cheng's proposition, Chen Kuan-Hsing (2000) delivered a potent remark: why does Taiwan focus on the West and its queer movements for our comparative analysis? Chen further asserted that it might have been more liberatory if we focused on Manila, Beijing or Hong Kong in comparing queer movements (Chen, 2000, p.29).

In examining Hong Kong homosexuality, one cannot neglect the proliferation of publications on the topic of Chinese homosexuality written by sociologist Chou Wah-Shan in the 1990s. Chou asserts that the North American queer movement focuses on individual rights which are not applicable to local tongzhis, in particular where social factors such as family relations and Chinese culture are more important to local people (Chou, 1997, p.374). Although Chou is later criticized for his romanticism towards ancient Chinese civilizations as benignly tolerant towards homosexuality, his attempt to delineate the East from the West and his theoretical articulation of the post-colonial tongzhi is widely read by many activists living in Hong Kong in the nineties.

Postcoloniality, its material effects and psychologies, play a crucial part in how we understand sexualities in certain locales. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argued that Third World women's work, as an integral part of the global capitalist system in wage labour, has to be analyzed according to "the histories of colonialism and race, class and capitalism, gender and patriarchy, and sexual and familial figurations" (Mohanty, 1997,

p.28). M. Jacqui Alexander stated that a process of “heteropatriarchal recolonization” occurred when the Bahamian state recolonized its people through the tourist economy and by enforcing heterosexuality in the state under the guise of nationalism (Alexander, 1997, p.67). Gayatri Gopinath described how “a queer female diasporic subject” is rendered antinationalist in governing nationalist and diasporic discourses (Gopinath, 2005, p.19). Yau Ching, in her introduction to a pioneering edited volume of essays on gender and sexualities in Hong Kong, strongly asserted the issue of English language as a desirable linguistic choice in post-colonial education and hence, the urgency to produce locally accessible knowledges on sexualities (Yau, 2006, p.11).

Arlene Stein (1997) in her scholarship on lesbian generations and communities has observed that communities shift as life cycles change for lesbians. Sexual identity often comes first for lesbians in their early twenties, as they asserted their personal identities and looked for communities to socialize or organize around issues. But as lesbians reach their life stages of being thirty, forty and in between, Stein noticed that parenting, careers and biological families became more relevant to their identities. More noticeably, lesbians who felt more secured about their sexual identity became more flexible in reintegrating themselves towards dominant cultures. Drawing from the poststructuralist influences, Stein refers to this phenomenon as a form of “decentering” (Stein, 1997, p.152). She recognizes the potential for priorities and identities to shift accordingly to one’s life cycle and circumstances.

Same-sex desires among various cultures do not necessarily point to the need for self-identification nor the building of a community based on sexual orientation. Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Andre Krouwel (1999), in their introduction to the anthology *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, alert us the lack of gay and lesbian research in many countries and many cultures. As much as limiting is the sociological discussion on gay and lesbian movements to primarily Western urban centres (as in London, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco), the same can be said about social movement theories on gay and lesbian movements.

In Hong Kong, the turning point for the emergence of a gay discourse can be traced back to the 'MacLennan incident' (Ho and Tsang, 2000, p.673). John MacLennan was a Scottish police inspector who was charged with gross indecency and anal intercourse in 1980. Police later found him dead in his apartment. The inspector had sexual relations with young Chinese male sex workers and he was believed to have knowledge of other senior officials who also engage in homosexual sexual activities. Therefore, his death was highly suspicious as a cover up for murder enacted by colonial authorities that wanted to dissolve the controversies around issues of homosexuality and sexual morality (Ho and Tsang, 2000, p.674). Although a Special Commission set up to investigate the case concluded MacLennan's death as one of suicide, the public outcry and media attention has prompted the government to begin the process on decriminalizing homosexuality.

It is not surprising then to find a dramatic increase of gay and lesbian organizations being established immediately after the decriminalization of homosexual acts 1990. Yet, as sociologist Travis Kong pointed out, “decriminalization does not mean legalization” (Kong, 2004, p.10). Kong further states that Hong Kong gay people still faces discrimination in areas of employment, religious organizations and the basic necessity of shelter. Moreover, gay and lesbian organizations continue to face difficulties in trying to find spaces for meetings and workshops (Kong, 2004, p.10-11). To summarize, sexual identities of Hong Kong lesbians and gay men have only begun to gain public prominence in the 1990s.

The women’s movement in Hong Kong can be said to begin in 1947 with the reform of marriage legislation and the fight to eliminate concubinage. From the 50s to the 80s, other important women’s issues include equal pay and the legalization of abortion (Lee, 1997; Lam and Tong, 2006). Lee Ching Kwan has found that women who have been involved with the women’s movement then were primarily well-to-do Chinese women or expatriate women from the Hong Kong Chinese Women’s Club, the Hong Kong Council of Women and Zonta Club of Kowloon. There was a shift in the 1980s from a rhetoric on “familial/maternal welfare and needs to a language of women’s rights and gender equality” (Lee, 1997, p.623). Local Chinese women have also formed women’s organizations such as the Association for the Advancement of Feminism, the Hong Kong Women’s Workers’ Association, the Federation of Women’s Centre and the Hong Kong Women Christian Council respectively (Lee, 1997, p.624). Even though there were more women’s organizations fighting for gender equality, most of them did

not touch on the issue of lesbian sexualities or the rights of lesbians. Local activist and feminist Cheung Choi-Wan mentioned that sexualities and lesbian desires are not on the feminist agenda (Cheung, 2001, p.661-662). Due to the Western influences of gay and lesbian studies and sexology, essentialism ran deep among the women involved in the movement. Therefore, lesbian desires were treated as a primarily biological condition rather than a socially constructed category.

Coming Out Narratives

For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on interview data as provided by the interview subjects during my research period. I have often positioned the issue of self-identification in the first part of the interview if not, one of the first few questions to begin with the interview. By asking a simple question such as when is your earliest memory of having desires for a woman, the interview subject would begin narrating her own coming out story and recalling her earliest memory of having a crush on a girl or being in love with one. In many cases, I took the ease of narration as a positive sign to probe further and to solicit more information on how one would relate being interested in a woman to one's assuming of a lesbian identity. Coming out to oneself may not necessary be a lonely exercise. More often than once, the process involves others such as family members, peers, colleagues or teachers, depending on how one would align with many social institutions or human relations in her everyday life.

I have divided the responses into three subgroups. The first subgroup took an affirmative approach in becoming a lesbian. Interview subjects started to question their

sexuality at a certain stage of their lives and came to “a natural state” of recognizing their desires for other women. Eventually, they proceeded to seek out various ways to affirm their social identity as a lesbian. The second subgroup, on the other hand, was more pensive about their lesbian identity due to factors such as homophobia, religious beliefs and family relations. Most of them struggled with the idea of being attracted to women and hence went through a more arduous process of lesbian identity formation. The last subgroup engaged in a narrative of coming out that could be described as more of a strategic convenience. Interview subjects articulated their lesbian desires in a manner that they almost “stumbled upon it” in their immediate social environments. There is not an urgent need for one to self-identify since these respondents in this subgroup view their identity as “an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (Hall, 1996, p.17).

Subgroup One

Being Affirmative with One’s Lesbian Identity

The first group of respondents is very confident about their sexual identities as lesbians. In recognition of their sexual desires towards other women, these respondents often view their lesbian identities as fixed and stable entities to the extent that they do not recall any significant romantic relationships with men. Some of them cannot even foresee a future situation where men would be involved in their intimate worlds. Being born to be a lesbian is an understatement. These respondents view their lesbian identities as essential to their own wellbeing, as an indispensable form of personal identification, and as a means to find one’s community.

Fifty-one years old, Eileen, a self-identified butch lesbian, spoke without reservations on her identification as a lesbian. She began the interview by stating that “I am a butch, at least appeared to be quite butch, a butch lesbian. But deep inside, I am really soft, very spongy, and there were moments I am weak in particular to matters of the heart and love”. Eileen grew up in a middle-class household during the sixties and seventies. Having attended a local university for a degree in sociology, she later went abroad for a Master’s degree in library science. In 1981, she returned to Hong Kong to look for work. Eileen became a librarian a year later and gradually rose to a managerial level.

Speaking with enthusiasm, Eileen recounted her childhood games with friends in the neighbourhood. She first posed as “a wife” to a boy and when the boy moved away. She felt a bit desolated and an idea came to her where she can be “a husband” instead of “a wife.”

There was this girl who lived right above our flat and she loved to play with dolls. So I ended up playing dolls with her all the time. Then I don't know how but I ended up playing the role of a husband and she became my wife. That's it. That's my childhood. I didn't realize I have this kind of orientation. ... I like to seek attention outside of my home, I like to go out and make friends, I want to find my own sense of security, that is, from outside, therefore from being a wife to my own coming out as someone's husband. It all happened during my primary school years. ... I met a tomboy; she lived in a building in Happy Valley. This person, to a huge extent, is an inspirational figure to me. She taught me a few things, like she is a real tomboy and she is even more tomboyish than me. At that moment, I felt I have to be like her! Maybe it was peer pressure but I soon realized that I was not tough enough before; I have to be like her, like a real tomboy. So I began to imitate her, her actions, to become tougher and to be butcher. Doesn't matter if I don't know how to ride a bike, I'll ask her to lend me her bike, I'd ride on it and hurt my arms and legs. But it doesn't matter!

When Eileen reached around fourteen years of age in 1968, she had a revelation that maybe she ought to try dating men. She began to join the Girl Guides at school in order to be more feminine. The butchiness that was so critical to her identity earlier became a characteristic that required shedding. Eileen had to ‘be less of a butch’ in order to gain credibility as a heterosexual adolescent female. The idea of dating men ended abruptly after she discovered her best friend who posed as her wife before was going out with a young man whom Eileen had a crush on. It did not take long for Eileen to begin dating again, but with a young Asian American woman who joined her Form Five class after her family moved back to Hong Kong. The relationship lasted two years from 1972 to 1974 and Eileen began a string of monogamous relationships thereafter with women she met through school. Yet when she was twenty-six years old in 1980, there was another “interlude.”

Anyway, I had a little interlude that happened, that is, suddenly in that year, twenty-six years old, yup, I started to sense something. ... Because in this world we live in, family members have expectations, the society sets an invisible cage for women. As a woman, you are expected to settle down, to get married and give birth. This is your life. These are very fatalistic thoughts but because they have always stayed in mind. They have never left my mind and especially then, when I felt I had no security because I have just broken up with (Linda) and (Stella) has just returned to Hong Kong. ... To a certain extent, I'm very insecure. Since most people believe that we should do this (getting married and settling down), why not?

Similar to the first experience of having a crush on a man, this “interlude” also ended abruptly when she was “rejected” by another young man. This experience did not leave her with much a scar, instead it only took Eileen a night out with friends where she drank ample amounts of alcohol and realized in the morning that it was not “a big deal”. Soon after, Eileen returned to her “butch self” and “washed off the earlier dirt” from past

courtships with men. Having finished her degree in Canada, she went back to Hong Kong and after a few years, she entered a relationship of 10 years with a woman she met at work. Love and relationships dominated most of Eileen's discussion on lesbian identification. She reiterated her desire to be loved and to find someone who is deserving of her love as well. Despite occasional awakenings of societal expectations for a woman, Eileen worked hard to overcome these obstacles with a steadfast belief in her lesbian identity. She recalled her earliest notion of same-sex desires by reading a news story on two men being arrested after being caught in a public toilet for indecent acts in the sixties. As a primary five student, she related to the news story as someone who believes in social justice. Eileen remembered clearly that she felt adamant about the arrest being wrongful to the two men. She explained, "After I read the news, I immediately asked myself why they were arrested? What is wrong with them? There is no problem at all. Although I don't know the word 'sodomy' then, but I remembered that they were arrested for indecent acts and they were taken away for lock-up. I don't know why as a primary school student. My first feeling after reading the story was why it is a problem for these two men who liked each other".

Similarly, thirty-three years old Phil knew early on that she was attracted to women. Currently working for an insurance company on workers' insurance compensation, Phil left school in 1987 when she was sixteen years old. Having grown up in a working-class household, Phil worked in different jobs in order to support her family members after her father passed away. Her mother worked in a textile factory located in an industrial area in Kowloon. When her father passed away, Phil's other siblings were still attending school

and Phil felt that she was not “good material” for further education, therefore she decided to seek employment instead.

Phil had no reservations about her desires to be with women. Being a lesbian was not a matter of choice. Her lesbian identity was fixed as such that she has no inclination to view men as potential romantic interests. It is in her workplace where she first encountered her first girlfriend in 1990. When asked about her earliest experience of having desires for women, Phil recalled her memories of having crushes on girls during her childhood.

I knew when I was really young. But this society does not allow, how should I say it, this society gave me an illusion, and that there is no future if I'm into girls. I was really young then and I could only see boys and girls getting together. I knew that's the way it had to be. I remembered that I would always blush when I look at girls. I would hide behind my mother. I think I was seven or so. It's so funny now that I think back on it. (Laughter) I really didn't know that I can be with girls. I didn't even think so when I was in secondary school. Unlike a lot of you, I have never seen a B with a girl before in school but I've seen Bs at school. I didn't know they were TBs. I had no idea. It's not until I was 19 do I feel I can be with girls.

Phil articulated her first relationship

I wanted to be in a relationship when I met my first girlfriend. I don't know why but I met this cute girl at work and I started to notice her more. I wanted to get closer to her and I wanted to ask her out. I even tried to hold her hand when I saw a pair of straight lovers sitting in front of us on the ferry ride from Tsim Sha Tsui to Wan Chai. I blurted out and said it would be great if we could be together like them. I have that special feeling, you know, and I never had that feeling with a man before.

The feeling that Phil mentioned was reiterated by many respondents as a form to recognize one's sexual desires towards women. Thirty-four years old Connie also had

feelings for her classmate in secondary school. Connie grew up in a middle-class household where her parents opened a stationary and bookstore. She spent her childhood and adolescence surrounded by Chinese literary classic books as well as many memories of hiking in the countryside with her parents. Connie came to realize her sexual orientation as “*tung sing lyun*” (同性戀) when her secondary school teacher of Form Six described Connie’s relationship with another female classmate in 1988. Instead of scolding her as being perverse as commonly heard from other narratives, Connie’s teacher warned her of the “difficult road ahead” and kindly asked her to “prepare psychologically for the gruelling path”. Prior to her teacher’s cautionary words, Connie was in a relationship with a classmate for two years. Her teacher’s comments came after a traumatic break-up between them, therefore bringing solace to Connie through supportive words. Connie described her first crush on a young woman when she was fourteen years old in 1985.

*I think it was in Form Two. I fell for a girl in the same class. It was a co-ed school. I liked boys before, too. I liked the class prefect in Primary Six and then another boy in Form One who was born in the same year, month and day as I am! But we didn't date or anything, it was only a crush. I didn't know what to do anyway. Then I liked a girl when I was in Form Two. It was silly. I thought she was pretty, polite, quite cute and I had a crush on her. I drew a card for her birthday. ... I didn't do anything special for the boys I liked but I was more proactive for girls. ... She didn't know I liked her. I've never told her that. She might have thought, “This girl is kinda special. She'll draw me a card for my birthday and buy a gift for me when it's Christmas.” That's probably it. I kinda remember that she looked at me weirdly but honestly, I didn't do much because I have no concept of “*neoi tongzhi*” (女同志) and no concept of a TB. Therefore, I just look and act like an ordinary girl.*

School environments have always provided a site for young people to explore their sexualities, to question social relations between peers and to challenge authority figures

in controlled settings. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 4. Connie has known since adolescence that she was different from others. Her perception of difference was primarily based on her sexual desires towards people of the same-sex. Recalling her experience in secondary school, Connie explains her romantic relationships with other classmates as “pure” and “innocent”. She quickly referred the sense of innocence to the fact that her lesbianism was an “unnamed” desire and it was never attached to any “terms” that was known to her at that time. It was only when she became a university student and actively searched for clues that might connect her to other gays or lesbians did she embrace her lesbian identity.

I am aware of my identity but I do not know how or where to find people like me. I thought there is no one like me; they only exist in foreign places, those women who love other women. I thought there are only gay men in Hong Kong in those days... The newspapers only mentioned gay but never talked about women. But when I went on the net, I remembered reading the word 'lesbian'. Also, I read the word 'lesbian' in foreign magazines. So I thought there are no lesbians in Hong Kong. One day on campus, I was just walking around and hanging out, I saw a poster but I forgot where exactly on campus did I see the poster, The poster advertised a function organized by a 10% Club with a contact number on it. I kinda remembered hearing about this association on television or in newspaper. I even know they are gay! So I jotted the number down and called them. They told me that there are women in their group and I immediately thought, wow, there are women! There is even a women's group in the summer and they need volunteers. So I rushed to join them as a volunteer.

The respondents in the first subgroup demonstrated an active choice in identifying as a lesbian. They have pointed out women as their main subject of erotic desire and companionship. There might have been minor doubts, as in Eileen's case on her short-lived attraction to men; these suspicions did not alter their life course on identifying as a lesbian.

Subgroup Two

Being Pensive about One's Lesbian Identity

Respondents in this subgroup often expressed deep anxieties about their lesbian identification. These anxieties as experienced by the respondents often stem from social institutions such as religion and family. As a result, the coming out narratives take on a melancholic note where the formation of a lesbian identity is perceived as one of constant struggles, tireless negotiation and to a certain extent, arriving at a point where one can be comfortable with oneself. Although respondents in this subgroup did not falter on their attraction to women, yet their processes in arriving at a lesbian identification were significantly more difficult for them than for other respondents in this study.

As a devout Catholic and a former student of all-girls' schooling, twenty-seven years old Kitman described the two years of her first relationship as "excruciating" and "struggling". It was primarily an issue of self-identification. Growing in a middle-class household, Kitman's father was a teacher prior to retirement and her mother is a housewife. She has an older brother who is only a year and nine months older than Kitman herself. Both her brother and his wife came to slowly accept Kitman's lesbian identity. Kitman did not tell her parents directly but assumed that they knew about her sexual identity. Kitman's mother has often been alert to any news item affecting gays and lesbians and she would discuss it as if it was a worthy piece of news item. Kitman remembered her first experience in having sexual desires for a woman in the summer of her Form Six year in 1995.

It was my classmate in secondary school. It was perplexing then. I felt it was impossible. Like what the hell am I doing? I felt bad about myself, my identity then. I felt it was improper. The whole matter should not happen on me. I struggled a lot during those times. It was very painful because I'm a devout Catholic. Religion influenced me a lot. It shaped how I see things in life. Since I was very young, I believed that whatever the Bible said, I should follow. I was very naïve then and I thought this thing is not allowed and it should not happen. It should not be happen no matter how old you're. ... It was really excruciating. We got together during the summer of our Form Six year and all the way until the summer of our first year in university. She is not religious so she does not have struggles like mine. ... The relationship itself was conflicting.

Kitman came to see her first relationship as an initial step to explore one's lesbian identity and to confront the struggles between her faith and her sexuality. These challenges made her feel "marginal" to the wider society. Kitman noted with pessimism, "I will never make it to the mainstream. Never." When I asked her how she felt about being in the margins, she replied, "I am used to it. It's like whatever I do I would never make it to the centre." I followed through and posed the next question as to what is the centre for her. She further elaborated, "I don't know. For example, I would think that I have some intrinsic social justice values but I am not as radical as Choi Fung or I am not the type to be out there and be so visible."¹⁹ It would be difficult to imagine how one can resolve issues of religious conflict and lesbian identity without a support network. For her support network, Kitman counts an older university friend whom she met at the Department of Social Work in 1996 as her confidante and peer counsellor. Through many

¹⁹ Choi Fung's full name is Wong Choi Fung (黃彩鳳). As a post-graduate student in cultural studies and a well-known student activist in Hong Kong on women's issues and local politics, Choi Fung is also known for her self-documentary titled *Desire of Egg* (卵子體慾, 2003, 香港, Color DV, 37 min.). Filmed by posing herself naked in front of a camera, then twenty-five years old Choi Fung spoke candidly about her feelings prior to having an abortion in 2002. The short film was awarded the Gold Award by the 9th Hong Kong Independent Short Film & Video Awards 2003.

conversations with this friend did Kitman realize that she can let others know about her sexuality and began a process of coming out to others. By coming out to others, Kitman also learnt to accept herself as a lesbian. In spite of that, she still has reservations disclosure of one's sexual identity.

I will not disclose to them (people at work), they are more conservative. I have hesitation. Actually, I have already been lucky. How should I say it? I have only come out to people who are receptive. I won't open my heart for other to stab a knife in but also maybe I have just been lucky to meet open-minded people in my immediate environment. ... If I knew that the other person is conservative, I won't let it out. For example, there are colleagues in my organization who are Christians. I hate to be over generalized about it but I feel that they won't accept it or they have asked me so many questions before that it made me uncomfortable. So I won't talk about it.

How to say it but I think my identity relates to how I view life and my directions in life. That is, actually my involvement with Hong Kong Federation of Students influenced me quite a bit. It's still a student movement and I have a sense to stand up for social justice. That is, one has to voice out when something is wrong! I think my view on life keeps changing and at the same time, with my identity, it adds on as an extra layer. I think I will instil those social justice values into my identity, and then I can explore which position I can stand on issues affecting my identity.

Different from Kitman, twenty-two year old Leslie articulates her lesbian identification often in relation to her family's expectation on her being a proper daughter, hence implying her social status as a lesbian is jeopardized by her family's desire to have "a normal daughter." Leslie grew up in a household of five with her mother as a housewife and her father's business in trading. Leslie is the eldest of the three children. Her younger sister was seven years younger than her and studying in Form Three. Her younger brother has Down's syndrome and he is eight years younger than Leslie. She talked often of her mother as a major influence in her life and she did not want to burden her mother with her lesbian identity since her mother already had a son with Down's

syndrome. Leslie expressed her fears in identifying as a lesbian as a lifelong process where its severity and pain in being a lesbian stops her from even wanting to be in a relationship. During the interview, Leslie's eyes would well up in tears often when she talked about her family. The recorded silences in the interview were telling of Leslie's sad emotions.

I would think back to those days when I was in secondary school and people around me would just talk about these sort of things. I feel it's really natural then. But when I go home, I knew that my family won't approve of it and they won't like it, I can feel the pressure building up, so I can never allow myself to open up to be in a relationship, this is how I feel. ... It has always been like that, that is, I don't want to affect my family because I don't know how they would really react; therefore it's been a constant struggle for me. I am still struggling now. ... I want to move out if I can. It will be many years from now. Many years. Maybe when I am much older, I can be with someone I love. Then it can make up for all those lonely years beforehand. It will be ideal if this can happen but I doubt it. It's really hard to say.

As a result of family pressures and expectations, Leslie thought frequently about her identity hoping to find a way to resolve the "dilemma" and to find a peace of mind. She questioned her desires for women even though she knows innately that it was not a matter of choice for her. Yet the external pressures she experienced from family members and the wider society compelled her to think of her lesbian identity as a loss to her possibility of gaining freedom and breaking away from social mores.

It includes my family. You can say that I view my life as tragic, quite depressing and to a certain extent, it is because I cannot be the person I am. There is a lot of restriction. I feel very sad about this. People usually suppress themselves because of this kind of restriction. That is why I am such a depressed person. Whenever I think of this issue, I would be really unhappy. ... In the beginning, I will cry a lot and hide in the toilet to cry. After seeing a movie, I will go to the toilet and cry. I am used to the sad feelings already. I told myself to not think too much, to think of something

else, to listen to some songs and to do something else, but I knew the issue is still deep inside me. Whenever I see something that triggers me, I will feel sad again. But after feeling sad for so many times, my feelings are numbed.

I think about it all the time. All the time. I don't know why. But when I think about those days in primary school, I remember vividly how I took notice of girls in particular. I don't think it's all about the environment that I'm in an all-girls' school. But I'm not sure. Maybe half and half. ... But I've never fallen for a guy before. Would that count as biological then? I mean, I hung out with boys before and I really enjoy their company. I used to love playing soccer but I also wanted to grow my hair long and wear dresses. I guess when you're young, you wouldn't think of whether you'll love a girl or a boy. The fact I'm in an all-girls' school also made me notice girls more, I think. It feels very natural. When I got my wits together, I knew for sure I'm into girls! I mean, I'm at City University and it's mixed. I do volunteer work with both boys and girls but I'm never interested in men.

Her feelings of depression can be related to the fact that Leslie did not have any lesbian-identified friends among her network. Although she has many supportive friends, she described them as “straight-identified.” Leslie comments, “They don't understand me very well because they are not “*lyun*” (孿). They will not think of these pressing issues and they will not experience them.”

Forty-three years old Edith has another story to tell. Edith identifies as a male-to-female transgender person and a lesbian. As the eldest child in the family, Edith grew up in a working-class household with both parents and two other siblings. Her father worked as a clerical clerk in the Police Station but he was not considered as a civil servant by the institution. Her mother was a factory worker. Common among households in the sixties, Edith's mother often brought home plastic flowers and beads for assembling at home after work. Her father has since passed away.

Edith described an incident that happened when she was around fifteen years old in 1979.

One time, my family all went out except me. So I secretly took my mother's dress and tried it on. Who knew when I was trying it on, my mother and my sister came back! I was in a panic and I didn't know what to do. I rushed into the bathroom without taking my boy clothes. Dead meat! They came inside the flat and I couldn't come out of the bathroom. Then I realized that my mom had to go to a banquet that night and coincidentally, she needed to wear the dress I was trying on. I really had no solution and my mom asked me why I took so long in the washroom. I said I had no clothes on and finally, I gave them the dress but I still couldn't come out cos' I had nothing on. Anyway, at the end I had to come out and my mother scolded me... I only knew to cry. I couldn't say anything.

Edith recalled other incidents that might have tipped off her parents' suspicions of her gender identity. At the time of the interview, Edith was writing a letter to her mother to explain herself. Edith found it most difficult when she had to lie about her gender identity as a male-to-female transgender person. "Acting to be another person" was commonplace to Edith, "I am unconscious about it. When I face my family members, I am acting like I am another person but that person is not me." Edith described how she felt about gender roles and their influence on her lesbian desires.

I knew when I was young that women were attractive and men were not. So when it came to dating, it is very normal. But after a few relationships, I felt that there was something wrong in being with girls. I didn't know what was wrong. But now I knew. Girls wanted their boyfriends to do certain things. That's how it matches for both. And me, I couldn't deliver on the men's part, for example, it seemed easy to act on the surface and be caring, to be nice to her, to let her walk in front of you, to hold her hand, to pull out the chair, to open the door, it's all easy to do that. But there were deeper things, more hidden ones that I always forgot to do. Like I should please her or pamper her when we had arguments. Then I realized

I was waiting for her to pamper me, actually I didn't know it at that time, that I wanted to be the girl myself! Maybe the rest of society thinks that to like a woman, you should use a man's identity to like her. I don't have a problem on my sexual orientation. I am always struggling I should be a woman. ... I used over ten and almost twenty years to force myself to be a man and I tried so hard to be in a relationship as someone with a male identity. But I failed badly several times until I came to WC;²⁰ I realized I don't have to turn back anymore. I don't have to be a man anymore. The twenty odd years of experience that I have learnt to be a man. Instead, to love a woman, one can use a woman's identity to love a woman.

Edith outlined her personal challenges in unlearning male behaviour, gaining emotional strength as a woman and hence beginning her life path to love other women as a female person. Although Edith's identification as a lesbian did not come easily, she managed to sought out supportive friends in a local community group who can accept her identity as both a transgender person and a lesbian.

Subgroup Three

Being Strategic about One's Lesbian Identity

Julia was twenty-three years old who has been working for a design firm since she graduated with a local degree on design in 2003. She enjoyed her work tremendously since she worked on her own projects or with a relatively small team of colleagues. Currently living with her family, Julia enjoys eating and cooking for her family and her partner. She has no immediate plans to move out on her own or to live with her partner. Julia describes her experiences with women as "passive". When I asked her to elaborate on her notion of passiveness, she replied, "For my first relationship, it was she who approached me first to let me know that she liked me." Julia was sixteen years of age then

²⁰ WC is the short form for Women's Coalition of Hong Kong, SAR (See Appendix D).

and the first relationship lasted for seven years from 1998 - 2004. Julia is often fascinated with why women who used to go out with men tend to fall for her. In particular, her relationships were all initiated by her girlfriends and hence, she considers herself to be “passive.” Julia believes that lesbian identities are common in all-girls’ schools and self-identification as a lesbian may not be as necessary in that environment. I asked her about how she came to recognize her own identity.

I haven't thought of it this way. I am not resistant to it, I know there is such a thing, but I won't think of it much because there are a lot of (lesbians) in all-female schools, that is, a lot of people have this sort of thing going on, a lot of young girls would fall for other young girls, I don't think much of it. I am not conscious of whether I am (a lesbian) or not.

The lack of consciousness does not mean she is not acting on her desires. On the contrary, she displayed a nonchalant attitude towards the importance of sexuality in the larger schema of her life. Sexuality as an issue would come up only in her private realm between Julia and her partner. When asked about whether she believes that lesbianism is inborn or influenced by social environments, Julia proclaimed that it was “an inborn quality.”

It is so. How should I say it? Whether you can fall in love with a woman is biological but whether you can meet someone to fall in love with, it's a different thing. There is an inborn quality or an inborn ability to love a girl but when you begin to start working and to venture out in society, you will be influenced by other factors, it could be one's education or something else like culture, which did not allow you to utilize this ability until you meet a certain someone, then you will know how to use it. ... Some people will only fall in love with women and some will fall for both men and women. I feel it's very natural. That's why I don't like people who act like they're tough. They're not victims. I feel it's unnecessary.

I don't think there is a difference. I don't like it. I don't go to les bars. I don't go clubbing. That's why I won't hang out with a big group of people.

I am not the kind to go out with a group of classmates, colleagues or long time friends. I don't have a community that is lesbian.

Julia does not see having friends who are lesbians or gay men as important nor is establishing a lesbian community necessary. Instead, lesbian identity is treated as more like a tool or “ability” where one can seek another woman for love and solace. It is not a primary identification but a tactical identification.

Articulate and confident, twenty-seven years old Jo worked in a financial management firm. She recalled her early experiences of “spotting the lesbian” by the way a stereotypical lesbian would represent herself. She noticed women who dressed masculine and acted more tomboyish as a possible indication of their lesbian identity. In describing these women, Jo used the words “outgoing” and “cool” to signify the qualities that made them stand out from conventional heterosexual women. With a feminine appearance, Jo was a direct contrast to the women she noticed. Although she possessed a friendly personality and initiated different topics that interested her during the interview, Jo nonetheless depicted herself as someone different from what she would consider as a stereotypical lesbian. Her first relationship with a man lasted for four years and ended on good terms as the relationship gradually became long distance and difficult to maintain. She has since then remained good friends with her ex-boyfriend. For Jo, her first relationship with a woman was “very comforting and very natural.”

I needed to be sure of myself. Do I love her as a woman or do I love a particular personality trait about her? I had a four-year relationship with my boyfriend and I never had any doubts about it. But then I remembered how I felt about many girls who looked like TBs back in university. I thought they were cool but they had nothing to do with me. But I started to feel that she was special because she was a lesbian. Anyway, it was very natural, exceptionally natural. I have never thought

of her as a girl and how my family would think of my relationship with her. I didn't even think of my friends' reactions. I just thought of myself. I felt strongly and confidently that once I'm clear about myself, there should not be a problem and it should not be a problem. ... At least I needed to tell her that I liked her even if I had to run the chance of being rejected. I could not take it back at that moment. I felt, strongly, that since I recognized my own feelings, I needed to let her know. ... Of course, even though we started going out together, at times, I still wonder if I'm really into girls. I still struggle internally from time to time.

Jo's positive assurance about her desire for women was consistent throughout her interview. She established her personal boundaries by first being assured of her lesbian identity by becoming a lesbian "through acts of reflexive self-fashioning" (Stein, 1997, p.89). Identity formation process was a continuous exercise in which one develops a subjective self in response to cultural norms and values reflective of particular social environments. In Jo's case, her self-reflexivity was crucial in her decision to actively pursue the woman she desired for her first same-sex relationship. More often, she downplayed her bisexual tendencies in the interview as she stressed on the importance of believing in oneself and acting upon one's desires, in this case, her desire to be with another woman. The "internal struggle" was only mentioned twice and it was not the focus of the interview in defining whether she would identify more as a lesbian or as a bisexual woman. Instead, Jo's assertiveness in her lesbian desire has rendered such gender markings as insignificant to her current moment of enacting one's sexual desires. Even though her family might not agree with her identity, Jo confirmed that she would not defy her own sexual desires for her family's sake.

Similarly, forty-two years old Beatrice had relationships with men during her teenage years. She has often questioned her sexuality early on but it was not until she approached a gay colleague at work that she became determined to find out for herself.

Actually, I already had those feelings when I was in school. The kind of feelings that you would have when you see someone you like, you wanted to be close to them, like to talk with them. You can feel it. But for me, it's 1993 that made a difference. ... I was dating boys after I graduated from secondary school but I felt something was missing. Don't know how to say it, not just physically, is like everything mentally, you know, intimacy, something is lacking. So I told myself, I needed to find the truth. I went to find this boy who I knew was gay and he immediately said, "Why don't we go to this gay bar in Hong Kong called YY. Then you'll find out who you really are!" So we went! I walked into the bar the first time and I thought, "Wow!" I really belong here and I feel people are friendly there. Right at that moment, I knew, I became quite sure of myself! I became a regular guest and I would go over to Hong Kong every weekend. Later on, I've gotten to know of a group of friends there and then my first girlfriend as well.

The gay bar signified as both of a marginalized space for sexual dissidents and a comfort zone for building up one's social networks. Born in Macau in 1963, Beatrice primarily grew up with her brother and a domestic helper. Her mother left for better employment in Hong Kong and she recalled her childhood experiences as a period of isolation and loneliness. Conventionally beautiful, Beatrice dated men when she first graduated from secondary school and started working as a tour guide for a jewellery shop. She has proud herself of being a daughter of a single mother and being able to climb the corporate ladder as a woman without an university education. Despite significant career success in most of her adult life, Beatrice ascribed her lesbian identity as the key to happiness and being able "to make her own decision and her own life." Recognizing her desires for women when she was twenty-eight years old signify as a departure from a prior life experience described as "depressive" and "pessimistic". Even though Beatrice

did not ascribe her lesbian identity as the major instigator of her routine actions or life decisions, she positioned her self-affirmation of sexual identity as dominant to her future happiness for the emotional aspects of her life. Yet her lesbian identity did not propel her to take up a political position nor did she find it necessary to discuss about it at all times. Her career ambition also increased as she was able to move to Hong Kong and developed her own community of friends including both lesbians and heterosexuals. This is not to say that she did not encounter later difficulties in her relationships with women and in other parts of her life. Yet the emergence of her lesbian identity as a turning point in her life was nonetheless critical and in her words, “That’s what I want! That’s what the life I’m looking for!” Beatrice has since then described herself as a lesbian and had her first significant relationship with a female-to-male transgender person when she was thirty-six years old. She described her current stage of being forty-two years of age as the prime stage of her life. She has no worries about aging and she is indeed keeping herself healthy by going to the gym often and by taking herbal supplements.

Both Jo and Beatrice do not feel the need to assert their lesbian visibility in political forms such as attending protests and being publicly affectionate as part of a political statement. Beatrice replied on whether she was worried about “bumping into” colleagues if when she held hands with her partner.

I won't hold hands. Because I won't do that. I might bump into people but I won't be feet apart from her. I will wrap my arms around hers but I won't hold her hands. You can say we're good friends then. Actually, a few of us are worried and we are very conscious of it. ... I won't promote or be open or sell the fact that I am a lesbian. I won't. If someone asks me

(if I am a lesbian), I won't say no. I will be very honest and tell you but if you don't ask me, I won't tell.

To conclude, respondents in subgroup one viewed their lesbian identities as essential to their overall well-being and hence placed strong emphasis on their sexualities. Respondents in the second group came to become lesbians after going through a more strenuous life course where they frequently mentioned particular obstacles to their identity formation processes. For respondents in subgroup three, they perceived their lesbian identities as part of their lives but not an integral part of their beings. Different from respondents in the first two groups, they came to believe that one's lesbian identity is not necessarily

Chapter Three

Being Oneself in Many Worlds: Lesbians in Everyday Spaces

water out of stone
glass that flows like water
the fluidity of a rock
stopping time

existing not on either side
but on the line that divides
and that line takes on a dimensionality
it takes on a sense of place and shape
- Maya Lin, *Boundaries* (2000, pp.6-9).

We experience a city in a myriad of ways. Multiple spaces in a city provide opportunities for us to experience, to remember, to develop a sense of belonging and to express oneself. It might be helpful to take the cue from Ben Highmore in understanding how a micro-analysis on everyday life would lead to a more informed and macro-understanding of society. Highmore furthers the argument for everyday life studies by proposing a framework of “tendencies” to expose the inherent linkages from the particular to the general in our daily perceptions (Highmore, 2002, p.5). These “tendencies” are laid out as dualisms: “particular vs. general, agency vs. structure, experiences/feelings vs. institutions/discourses, resistance vs. power, micro-analysis vs. macro-analysis” (Highmore, 2002, p.5). Whereas he does not think it is in particular to everyday theorists that such dualisms matter, Highmore argues that by considering the implications of these dualisms and their interconnectedness with each other would help us further comprehend the overall environment in which we experience our daily lives.

These everyday spaces, in Michel de Certeau's words, "are fragmentary and inward-turning histories" (de Certeau, 1988, p.108). They contain "spatial stories" that are not readily available and called up by our memories only when it is necessary to do so (de Certeau, 1988, p.115). For Hong Kong lesbians, the everyday spaces as in schools, workplaces, family and religious institutions are frequently disjointed with their sexual identities. In addition to the discussion on everyday life in Chapter One, Hong Kong lesbians learn to negotiate their lesbian identities by being strategic through "spatial practices" such as holding back their identities at times and expressing them in safer times (de Certeau, 1988, p.115).

In this chapter, I argue that Hong Kong lesbians approach everyday spaces as in schools, workplaces, family and religious institutions with a particular "spatial practice". Respondents constructed and staged various interventions into these institutional spaces which operate under a regulatory schema of heteronormativity. Resistance towards heteronormative values and structural control within multiple institutions can be mapped both overtly and covertly. Respondents often mentioned these institutions as a spatial map of their everyday life.

School Environment as a Regulatory and a Liberating Site

Schools are commonly known as state-controlled environments where pedagogy and power relations are reflected by dominant narratives and regulated by state educational boards and society moral standards.²¹ What is taught inside of the classroom is

²¹ There are currently 669 primary schools, 566 secondary schools and 61 special schools as of 2006.

complemented by disciplinary measures that regulate who we are and how we behave. Secondary school classrooms have different pedagogical implications than university classrooms. Most respondents answered interview questions on schooling by immediately relating to those years in secondary schools rather than university years even if they attended higher education. Secondary school spaces held more significance in terms of first-time experiences with lesbian sexualities. This is understandable since the age range of attending secondary schools often fall within adolescent puberty development and where one would be first aware of physical bodily changes and hormonal variations if not earlier in the last two years of primary schooling. Therefore, the school acts as a gendered- space for one to learn about gender roles in society.

In Hong Kong, there is nine years of compulsory school education where students have to study until Form Three. As a result, young people attend schools and use those spaces to 'act out' their own identities through various tactics. The regulatory nature of schools have led some respondents to be rebellious, truant and in resistance to academic achievement. It is also worth noting that many schools in Hong Kong are operated by the Catholic Church and Christian organizations. As a result, sex-positive education is often non-existent if not banned from most school curriculum. Leung Pik Ki's self-reflexive article on her role as a secondary school teacher coordinating an AIDS prevention education in a Catholic school spelled out numerous obstacles faced by herself and students involved in the education program (Leung, 2006). Through the narratives of students involved in the program, Leung demonstrated how Catholic values and moral

standards are in opposition to any views on sex as positive, as pleasurable, as non guilt-ridden and most importantly, as a subject to be discussed publicly.

Being a Tomboy in the Classroom²²

Fifteen year old Ah Lok ran away from home in Tseung Kwan O when she was fourteen because she got tired of school and was not getting along with her family. Ah Lok described her father as a civil servant and her mother as working in a restaurant's kitchen with her other relatives. In 2004, Ah Lok stayed at a friend's place in the Taipo for a month before she gave in to her mother's pleas and returned home. Then Ah Lok and her mother came upon a school in Causeway Bay that would take her in after being rejected at other schools. Ah Lok expresses her satisfaction at the school, "I can hang out in Causeway Bay right away. The school uniforms are new. I can wear it to go to game arcades without being caught! It doesn't look like a uniform. Also, I can wear a PE shirt and pants. Pants are allowed!" Ah Lok's appearance can be typified as a tomboy (TB) with a trendy short hairstyle. Instead of bowing down to pressure, Ah Lok remained the same and was adamant with keeping her TB hairstyle. She described vividly how a trendy TB hairstyle by using hand gestures to show me the proper length of hair at the sides and on top during the interview. Ah Lok puts emphasis on one's hairstyle and how it relates to one's identity and performance as a B in a controlled environment such as the school.

²² TB is a short form for Tomboy. According to a booklet published by a local gender studies research group and activist organization, Nutongxueshe, TB refers to a woman whose self-identification, behaviour, character or dress resembles a masculine lesbian. As the authors of the booklet pointed out cogently, there are many cultural adaptations of the term, for example, a T in Mainland China or Taiwan would be similar to a TB in Hong Kong. Many respondents have used the terms TB, B and *B Tsai* (B仔) interchangeably to denote a Tomboy identity.

It's like a trend now. Everyone seems to have short hair now. In contrast the ones who are (lesbians) are not so flamboyant. Not so. ... I wanted to make more friends. ... There are very few TBs in my old all-girls school. I can only think of twenty-one even if I counted those Form 1 students and the ones who have left. The school I am in now has about fourteen.

A self-identified lesbian, Ah Lok was in an all-girls school for three years before moving to a co-educational school for her Form Four education. Being in a new environment was like testing the waters for Ah Lok in terms of acceptance of her sexual identity. Ah Lok was frequently being called into the discipline master's room for lectures. She believed that she was being picked up because of her attitude, her TB identity and her tardiness in general.

Switching to a co-educational school means having rumours always being spread by the boys. Lots of people didn't like me in this school. They always say "*sei gei po*" (死基婆). I hate this word so much. "*Gei po*" (基婆) and "lesbian" are two different things. ... I've had a few boys coming over suddenly to hit on me. They suddenly put their arms around my waist. I thought, "How dare you!" So I jabbed them with my elbow. They did it on purpose! They wanted to know. They are curious about TBs. Very curious. ... One time during sex education class, one guy pointed at me and said loudly, "Should Ah Lok sit at the girls' side? She should sit over with the boys. It will fit her more!" So I got all fired up and I threw a temper. I started to yell back big time. ... I think my school environment is perverted. ... A group of Form Five boys just came into my class and picked on me. One of them even punched me in the face but missed. I stood right in front of him and I didn't move. He said to me, "If you were a guy, I would have hit you nine lives over." Then I thought that was stupid. I thought if you dare to hit me in school, I can call the police right away. ... I think it's because I'm a TB. ... I don't know why people like us are usually being discriminated. ... We still hang out with boys but we are just not popular. We get scolded more in class. When we say something in class, we get booed.

Ah Lok's case is not uncommon among many respondents. Cases of discrimination against lesbian and gay students have been documented by the *Equal Rights for LGBT people: Hong Kong Report* (2006). Most students documented in the report were asked by social workers in their schools to think twice on their sexual orientation if not to consult a psychiatrist to "cure" the students of homosexuality. Zhang Qiao Ting's study on ten young lesbians who graduated from an elite secondary school in Taipei and proceeded to enter National Taiwan University also highlighted regulatory controls enforced by secondary school authorities on suppressing homosexuality. Yet, many young lesbians have been able to subvert such disciplining of desires by performing as a T through altering their dress and behaviour (Zhang, 2000, p.5-4).

Being a TBG in the Classroom²³

17 year old Miki is a Form Five student at a school in North Point. She heard of the word "lesbian" when she was in Form One at an all-girls' school. Her mother opened a workshop teaching others how to bake cakes in one of the commercial buildings in Mong Kok and her father worked in a Chinese herbal medicine and dried seafood store in the same area. Miki's older brother went through periods of unemployment and was currently laid off as a cook. Miki learnt how to pronounce the word in English through her cousin who came to visit her from Hawaii. Miki perceived the school authorities as trying very hard to prohibit same-sex desires through regulations and surveillance of students. The surveillance practices are usually targeted towards TBs more than TBGs.

²³ TBG is a short form for Tomboy's Girl. According to a booklet published by a local gender studies research group and activist organization, Nutongxueshe, TB refers to a woman whose self-identification, behaviour, character or dress resembles a feminine lesbian. As the authors of the booklet pointed out cogently, there are many cultural adaptations of the term, for example, a P in Mainland China or Taiwan would be similar to a TBG in Hong Kong. Some respondents have also used G to describe a TBG identity.

When I was in Form Three, there were many of us. There was a couple who were wearing school uniforms and being affectionate at the World Trade Centre. They got caught by alumni students. I don't know why there are so many alumni but anyway they are in their thirties or forties. They told the school principle. The principle gave an order to the discipline head master. And he delivered a speech, "I know as we should be loving and caring to each other as students and classmates. But the level of loving and caring should not extend to hugging, kissing or any kind of intimate behaviour. Wrapping arms, holding hands, hugging and kissing, all these should not happen. Not between classmates. ... Then after a while, they started going after TBs. The school principal stood at the gates and would say, "Come here. You should grow your hair longer if not, wear a wig.

Miki explains that a TBG expresses her desires by having "crushes on older girls in a higher Form." When I asked her about whether TBG's have a hard time being identified as lesbians, Miki believed that "it has to do with which school." Miki elaborates further to describe all girls' school as a potential indicator for TBGs to survive and to be identified as girls who are open to dating other girls.

Some younger respondents felt that being publicly affectionate is the only way for them to express their desires for each other since being home is not often a viable option. School sites became an alternate space of desire. When they get off from school, Ah Lok often spends time "hanging out at game arcades, going to karaoke boxes, watching films, window shopping." However, these activities often require one to have sufficient financial resources. Miki, at the time of the interview, is seeking part-time employment and believes McDonald's as an employer who might consider students in similar situations as herself. For Miki, going to cafés means having to spend money even though a drink of thirty-five dollars translates into an afternoon of hanging out at an upstairs café.

Going to cafés is not a regular activity that is affordable for many younger lesbians like Miki and Ah Lok or working-class lesbians in the lower income bracket. Hanging out at fast food outlets such as McDonald's or Café Coral seemed to more accessible for them since there is no minimum charge and one can take up a place in these restaurants for an extended period of time.

Butch Idol Worship in the Classroom

Twenty-year old Bik Bik grew up in middle-class household in Mei Foo where both her parents are social workers. Talkative and assertive, Bik Bik recalled fond memories of how young girls would express their crushes on other girls through a form of “butch idol worship” that is commonplace among all-girls secondary schools. These “idols” are usually students in older forms who are butch in appearance, physically active and excel in sports such as basketball, swimming, field and track. Bik Bik has a supportive peer group in school which she ascribed to her personal efforts in being “direct” with her peers. Bik Bik views peer relations as significant to one's exploration of sexual identity in a school setting. She emphasizes on “not hiding” her sexual identity and “keeping relationships long and plentiful” by joining various social activities. As a result, Bik Bik described most of her straight-identified friends as “gay friendly.” Elaborating on the practice of “butch idol worship,” Bik Bik narrated the school ritual with enthusiasm.

My first girlfriend was really cute. We had the same idol and we met each other through our activities as fans, like waiting for our idol to show up. Our idols all play basketball. Then I joined the team and started to play basketball with the idols, too. She came to see us practice with another friend of ours in the same class. All three of us hanged out all the time. We would say things like, “Wah! She's so cool! Wei! Take a photo of her! Did you take it? I have her photo, do you want it for a hundred bucks?” We

would sell our idols' photos and they sell well! There are some students who have money to spend in our school. I'm not one of them but others have money. We would a friend who gave a gift that was worth a thousand dollars to her idol!

Apart from the open practice of “idol worship,” sexual intimacy among schoolmates and who is dating who often becomes a hot topic for gossips. Bik Bik told of these rumours as “devastating” if one is not in good relations with the larger group of peers. In other words, these rumours can be interpreted as both an approval of same-sex relationships or as a rejection of the couple being together. The criteria for judging these relationships are similar to those familiar terms whether a TB is good enough for the G or vice versa. News on break-ups is as popular as those who got together. Bik Bik asserted, “Those teachers are even more nosey. There was this friend of mine who was a TB told me that Miss Kong asked her if I was dating that girl. Then I told Miss Kong, ‘You’re so out of it. We broke up a while back.’ The younger teachers are nosey but the older ones will not accept us. They will just pretend that they didn’t see us. The younger teachers often socialize with us, like going to karaoke boxes with us. They are really nice.”

Disclosure in the Classroom

Thirty-four years old Connie also had a similar incident with a younger schoolteacher in secondary school. When she separated with her girlfriend of two years in 1988, she was often very sad in school. Her Form Six schoolteacher noticed her sadness and asked her about it, Connie was frank in telling her that she broke up with her then girlfriend. The teacher was twenty-three years of age and her first response was, “This is called “*tung sing lyun*” (同性戀). You are *tung sing lyun*. Do you know that this is a

difficult path?” That was the first time that Connie heard of the term *tung sing lyun*. She thought to herself, “So this is it. I am *tung sing lyun*.” Connie recalled her teacher as kind and with a good attitude towards the subject. Her teacher asked Connie to psychologically prepare herself for she is different from others and that others may not be in agreement with her.

Twenty-three years old Julia maintained a close relationship with her teachers in the all-girls secondary school as well. Similar to narratives mentioned earlier, the younger teachers were the ones who were more positive in their responses to young lesbians.

Interviewer: How do your classmates react when they knew you're together with her?

Julia: Nothing much. They knew. It was nothing special in an all-girls' school. Even all the teachers knew and some of them are my good friends. They have known about it all along, those sleepless nights, they knew everything. We would talk about it, we were friends... they are straight, all married.

Lik Lik is a thirty-four years old woman who is feminine in appearance and runs her own small business successfully. Recalling her days in school, she had a significant relationship with a classmate.

She was really open about it in school. She told everybody in school that she liked me. She even etched words like “Ah Lik, I love you.” on the sidewalks at the North Point ferry terminal. In those days, we love to hang out at the ferry terminal. After the whole hoopla? Shebang? Was over, I began to fall for another girl and I came up with a crappy excuse and broke up with her. ... Even when I mean being open, I mean being open between students. The teachers never asked about our relationship.

I proceeded to ask her if there were a lot of classmates who were like her then in the school. She replied,

It really depends on certain groupings. I don't think it's in particular to all girls' schools because there were tonnes of girls who were not in my class or in my form / grade. Only one or two in my form. In the lower forms, like my ex-girlfriend's one, two forms below mine, there were a lot more (lesbians). I think maybe it was easier for other to come out if there is one woman to begin with, or maybe it's easier to understand the issue because for example, I will hang out with a group of classmates and I never thought of them as lesbians, then after a while, you heard through the grapevine that some of them later came out as lesbians.

On the other hand, the location of the school can make a difference for some respondents in choosing whether they can be out or not. Ah Lok and Miki found Causeway Bay and North Point to be more accepting of their lesbian sexualities and gender expression. Another respondent, twenty-five years old Nick believed that living in the New Territories meant being isolated from other schools which she believed to have increased lesbian visibility.

You know, I was living in Tuen Mun then, a more backward place in Hong Kong, it was not developed like nowadays Tuen Mun. I didn't feel weird being in school but if you ask me whether there were folks like me in the entire school, it's pretty hard to tell. Even though you identified as one (a lesbian), she might not identify as such. How do you approach someone then? You cannot just ask them blankly, are you a les? I won't do that. Later I enrolled at an all-girls school, there were more les.

To conclude, secondary school experiences for this set of respondents involve being a survivor in Ah Lok's case to combat homophobia from peers and school authorities to feeling supported as a student in Connie's case where a younger teacher assumed the role of a counsellor. Nonetheless, the fact that respondents realized their sexual identities

posed as a challenge to school authorities demonstrated the need to develop pedagogy to address sexualities in school environments.

Religion Institutions as Suffocating for Some and a Solace for Others

The Holy War Against Homosexuality

Currently, there is no issue as contested and as emotionally charged as the issue of religion in Hong Kong sexual politics among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders. The religion at stake in this case is reserved for those factions more commonly aligned with Christianity and Catholicism. To be clearer, evangelical organizations have been at the forefront of propagating homophobia through intensive media campaigns and mobilization efforts. It is important to understand the prevalence of Christianity and Catholicism and its impact on Hong Kong society by looking at its close ties with Hong Kong's colonial past. According to the Hong Kong Yearbook 2005, the number of Christians for both Protestant and Roman Catholic is estimated to be around 660 000 including 105 000 Filipino Catholics. The Christian community has especially strong ties in many sectors of Hong Kong society. In order to provide a glimpse of their many faceted influences, one needs to be aware of the number of institutions operated by the Protestant and Catholic dominations, congregations and parishes. Christianity has retained more privilege socially, culturally and politically since the sixties in Hong Kong. Some scholars have raised the question of how Christianity loses its role as an objective monitor of the government as well as its role in helping to sustain the power of the British colonial government through its vested interests across multiple sectors (Kwok 1994, Chan 1989). The Church of England has been established in Hong Kong since 1949 and

established a Victoria congregation in Hong Kong with its missionary activities extended to China and Japan. The Bishop of the Church was held in high esteem throughout the colonial era, only fifth in official listing after the Governor of Hong Kong, Chief Justice, Chief Secretary and the Commander of the British Forces (Chan 2002: 384). As a result, one can conclude that Christianity has been and continued to be influential in Hong Kong politics. This is particularly true when news report on a typical working day of Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of Hong Kong, often emphasized on his morning visits to a church for prayers.

Apart from its positioning in legal spaces, the Christian communities also extend its influences in educational, social services, media and health sectors.²⁴ The implications for its power and control run deep for those in opposition to their Christian values. Established in 1997, The Society for Truth and Light is a Christian group with its mission to monitor the media, sex cultures and social morals in society. The organization has been able to garner support from legislators, educators, social workers and clinical

²⁴ According to the Hong Kong Yearbook 2005, the Protestant community runs three post-secondary institutions: the Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University and Lingnan University. In addition, it operates more than 630 schools (273 kindergarten, 206 primary schools and 160 secondary schools) and 116 nurseries. In terms of religious organizations, the community operates more than 30 theological seminaries/Bible schools, 30 Christian publishing houses and 70 Christian bookstores. In Hong Kong, there are two Christian weekly newspapers, the Christian Times and Christian Weekly. Currently, there are about half a dozen Christian media agencies broadcasting regular Christian TV programmes and four weekly Christian radio programmes on Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). On the health front, the Protestant community manages 7 hospitals, 18 clinics, 60 social service organizations and 15 campsites. The Roman Catholic Church also operates 313 Catholic schools and kindergartens. On health and social services, the Church runs six hospitals, 15 clinics, 37 social and family service centres, 18 hostels, 13 homes for the aged, 19 rehabilitation service centres and many self-help clubs and associations. The Caritas is the official social welfare division of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church publishes two weekly newspapers — *Kung Kao Po* and the *Sunday Examiner*. On June 3, 2003, then Bishop Joseph Zen put forth his opposing views towards same-sex marriage in a document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled “Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons”. On August 17, 2003, eight Rainbow Action members disrupted a Sunday Mass at the Catholic Cathedral in protest against Bishop Joseph Zen and the Catholic Church’s views.

practitioners, in other words, middle-class professionals, for its media campaign against the legislation of anti-discrimination against sexual minorities. In 2005, six Christian groups coordinated a “one person, one letter” campaign against the legislation prior to any form of public consultation by the government. More than 2000 letters were received by the government as a result of their media campaign. These groups include Hong Kong Alliance for Family, The Society for Truth and Light, Life Education Focus Group, Hong Kong Sex Culture Society, Sexual Orientation Discrimination Ordinance Concern Group, Pastoral Care for Teacher Ministry and a Christian life coach association (Wong, 2007).²⁵

This is not to say that there are no lesbian or gay Christians and Catholics, on the contrary, many of them including their heterosexual allies of lesbians and gay Christians have voiced their opinions on the complicated issues of religion and sexuality. Hong Kong Christian Institute has held numerous seminars focusing on issues on religion, faith and homosexuality. Their seminars were not only held in a format just for the faith community citing biblical passages, instead the Institute’s organizers have been able to hold forums on anti-discrimination legislation against sexual minorities, on the film *Brokeback Mountain* and on a sharing session with Taiwan’s churches on sexual minority issues.²⁶ Established in 1992, a local gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christian

²⁵ Visit <http://www.truth-light.org.hk/sex/sodo.jsp> for more information on the media campaigns.

²⁶ In September and October of 2005, there were two workshops comprising a series on the anti-discrimination legislation on sexual orientation and its challenges for Christians. These seminars were held with the intention to educate the Christian community and the broader public on issues of sexual minorities, and to open up a dialogue between multiple stakeholders. In March of 2006, a seminar was held on the film *Brokeback Mountain* and its significance to gay Christians. In May of the same year, a Taiwanese priest, Brother Tsang was invited to a sharing session held by the Institute to share his experiences on working with sexual minorities in Taiwan. Tsang was also invited as a guest speaker at the 2006 International Day Against Homophobia parade held on May 21, 2006 in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong. For more information on the Institute’s activities, please visit <http://www.hkci.org.hk/index.htm>.

group, Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship has been offering fellowship meetings and bible study groups to support those who identify as sexual minorities and as Christians, as well as those who seek spiritual support in the Christian faith.²⁷

Conflicts between Religion and Lesbian Sexualities

Kitman mentioned her struggles with Christianity in an earlier chapter on sexual identities. There were other interview subjects who have felt strongly that religion played a role in their processes to be lesbian-identified. Twenty year-old university student Bik Bik have been going to church since she was a child until she reached seventeen years of age. Baptized at an early age, she attended Sunday School for six years until her sexual identity positioned her in a bind with her religious beliefs.

Sometimes I don't agree with the church because I think people in the church have done a lot to protect their own rights or to maintain their own status. They used religion as a reason to say you're immoral, you cannot do this and that, but it should be a very different matter. ... I think there is definitely a divine being, or else there will not be life. How we worship the deity is not as necessary as much as how we need to respect others, other human beings and biological life forms. We need to respect the world and not to worship god on the one hand and destroy the world on the other hand. ... I just wondered why it has to be like that. I don't think it's (Bik Bik's sexual identity) a problem. Why do they have to be persistent in making it an issue? What kind of religion is that? Who sets up the religious association as such? ... If I follow their rules and go against my own conscience deliberately to marry a man without ever loving him, am I committing a sin? Can this also be immoral?

Bik Bik has pondered upon the question of marriage for a while now. She wanted to get married since she was a child but when she realized that one can only have marital

²⁷ For more information on Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship, please visit <http://www.bmcf.org.hk/eng/index.htm>.

commitment with the opposite sex, Bik Bik was troubled by its restrictions. Yet Bik Bik knew by the time of the interview that same-sex marriages are legal in certain countries and she has since selected Canada as the country of choice to get married with her girlfriend.

As a devout Christian, forty-three years old Edith has learnt that the church can be both a place for solace and a site of conflict. She first sought Christianity for its supportive atmosphere.

Actually my church is not so bad. The priest and the other Church members treat me well when we don't talk about me. After we started talking about my situation, I felt that our relationship got closer.... Usually, it's because they don't understand much and it is quite difficult for me to explain it. It's horrible but I would break down when I talk about myself. So what can they do? They will say we will still support you. Don't be like this. Although they don't really understand me well, at least they would say some supportive words.

I've been attending Church for a little bit over two years. It is only in the last few months that I've changed a lot. Before that, I looked like or pretended to be a man for Church. Actually, they came to know me as a guy, not a very masculine one, but one that definitely looked like a guy, that is why they have to work harder to accept the change. On the other hand, this girl who has only known me in the past few months cannot tell whether I am a boy or a girl. She has been more accepting of me because I don't think she has a deep impression of me as a guy. I didn't know it can make such a difference. But it does.

Religion is very important to me. I have already adjusted myself to the fact that even if the Church does not accept me. It won't make a difference in my religious beliefs. It is only the people who cannot accept me. Until now, people are not the ones who affect me the most. But of course, I am also an emotional person. I tried to balance myself. I am here for my spirituality and not for those Christians who cannot understand me. I think one needs to be clear about it.

When the Church members knew about Edith's intention to have surgery as part of her transition from male to female, they reacted negatively towards her. Edith's relationship with them has changed as a result of their unacceptance towards her gender identity. Both the Church pastor and the members have voiced disapproval at Edith's refusal to listen to them, and hence they perceived Edith's decision as being in opposition to God's will. It was very difficult for her and she cried many times during the ordeal. Since then, Edith comforted herself by believing that God is guiding her way and God will take good care of her.

Spirituality as a Place for Solace

Apart from discussing the harmful consequences from religious bigotry, I would also like to bring up that spirituality could be used in other ways that might have been healing and comforting for others. Twenty-seven years old Katherine has been influenced by Buddhist teachings for over five years. As an active participant in the local cultural arts scene, she often tried to explicate meanings from Buddhism in order to understand her female sexuality. Instead of focusing solely on the notion of a sexual identity, Katherine tended to emphasize on a wider parameter of what life has to offer in spiritual and metaphysical terms. Katherine has a fiery relationship with her parents. It all began when she was doing performances on gender identity issues where she sometimes displayed nudity. Apart from not understanding the need for such explicit contents, her parents have gone berserk for Katherine's involvement in creative arts. They pulled her hair and cried uncontrollably to persuade her from performing again. At that time, Katherine contemplated about moving out and was going to choose being a sex worker as

a viable occupation. Katherine recalled those days, “It was really crazy. My dad even threatened to go to Cattle Depot and burn the people there.” As a result, her spiritual beliefs became a solace to her during difficult times.

After I started being more spiritual, I changed myself and stopped fighting with them. I started to become more caring towards them. My relations with them became better. But about dating kind of stuff, I didn't tell them. ... I'm not sure whether it will be a boy or a girl. I don't know yet maybe I won't even date again. ... My mother told me once, 'I don't mind if you're a Buddhist nun.' I think what she meant was unless I date a guy, I might as well be a nun.

I don't want to live for money. I don't want to live my life for it. ... I just want to build up slowly an independent life. I don't want to live for others. I don't have to live for a perfect love story. I just want to live a life of my own. I hope that others will also have ideals. I hope people who are lesbians or not, just common folks, to also feel a sense of liberation. Don't play silly games with love. Just admit our kind of love and let's love each other well. Let's also contribute to our society. Don't speak of shallow subjects.

Religion means differently for respondents who came to discover or to choose a particular faith. Homophobia as exhibited by Christian groups in alliance with the Society for Truth and Light have turned many lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people to question faith-based organizations and their agenda in perpetuating homophobia in the larger society. Yet, as the respondents have said, one's personal religious beliefs can be in tenuous relations with the institutional agenda. A lesbian would have to carve out her own space within the religion in order to feel a sense of belonging in the organization.

Family Relations: Intimate Living, Rejection and Acceptance

All respondents allocated family relations as a contested space where familial expectations on what counts as a suitable daughter or a proper son often plays out

adversely against one's sexual identification as a lesbian. Even though some respondents have been able to develop warm and caring relationships with their parents and siblings, many respondents still believe that their families are simply tolerant of their same-sex desires. Key indicators of family acceptance can be summarized as invitations to family events, being asked to join family dinners during important public holidays, and occasional sleepovers if both women are still living with families.

Most respondents have heartrending tales of family rejection and outright disapproval of same-sex relationships. Despite the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians in the public realm, the family as a domestic space still exemplifies traditional notions of nuclear family structures, inter-generational expectations and heteronormative values.

Career Achievement and Family Acceptance

Nick is a very hardworking woman who owns a shop selling lesbian-related books, videos, fashion accessories and clothing. As one of the very few places in Hong Kong where one can find chest-binding vests, her shop is often visited by women who are local customers as well as women who travel from other parts of Asia. At the age of twenty-five, Nick wanted to build up a successful and stable business before she disclosed the nature of her entrepreneurship. Nick's family wished that she could work in an office for a job with steady income. Nick has two aunts of which one works for the government and the other aunt works for a corporate accountant firm.

Nick could not even imagine what her relatives would say about her store. When Nick's family found out about her lesbian relationships, their first reaction was to kick her out of the flat. They did not allow her to come back and they accused her of "meddling with someone else's daughter." In other words, Nick's parents blamed Nick for not knowing better and for ruining the lives of another family and their daughter. Nick described how she felt at that time, "I was really scared because I had no financial resources. Where can I go? I have a little bit more money now. So if they kick me out now, they can do whatever they want. I can take it now. It was very different before."

Facing her family remains as an issue of great consequence when it comes to her sexual identity for Ah Hoi. At the age of twenty-nine years old, Ah Hoi has a steady job with a local media company and she has been able to provide for herself financially by moving out to live on her own. Ah Hoi has been in relationships with both women and men, however, she explained "I feel I can do both but deep inside my heart I wanted to be with girls more." Ah Hoi pointed out her criteria for distinguishing that a relationship with a woman is signified more prominently in her romantic life is based on the duration of the relationship. She appeared to have longer relationships with women than with men in her past. Common to many respondents, Ah Hoi has not been able to come out to her family as a woman who has same-sex desires. Her mother is in her fifties and her father is in his sixties. Ah Hoi spoke of her mother with respect for her personal achievements since she only had an education of primary school and had left China to become an illegal immigrant to Hong Kong then. Her mother worked in a restaurant for twenty years before turning to real estate and video distribution at a later stage. She remembered that her

mother read newspaper diligently in order to learn more Chinese words. Therefore, Ah Hoi's depiction of her mother as an extraordinary survivor of adverse circumstances translates to her own contention of career achievement as a marker of independence and personal success.

My mom knows. My mom knew that I liked girls before. I can sense it deeply recently. For Chinese New Year, I had dinner with my uncles. I used to have dinner with my mom's side of the family more. For these uncles, I was really young, I think we haven't seen each other for over twenty years. ... Then suddenly my older sister just called up a huge family dinner with these uncles and we had two round tables filled. ... I sat there with the whole group. I looked at them then I looked at my own table of people. Suddenly I felt that it is impossible to admit to them I love women. I would die because in the back of my mind, I was the only one without a university education. They care about these things. ... If you're only in (a relationship) for two years and then it's done. What can you say? But if girls can be together for ten years, I can tell my mom, "Ten years. How can you not believe it?" I can say, in these ten years, I have improved. I got more money. I am doing what I enjoy. ... I want to come out, it's just not now.

Despite Ah Hoi's insistence on being successful in both areas of career and romance prior to coming out to her family, she has already invited her family members to attend a screening of which her short video was showing. The video focused on a tenuous same-sex relationship. After the screening, one of her family members asked her if the video was about "*tung sing lyun*" and Ah Hoi replied "yes". Ah Hoi deployed the screening as "one of the ways to come out to them."

Similar to Ah Hoi's notion of her mother as a remarkable woman, Beatrice's mother was on her own most of her life after two failed marriages. Forty-two years old Beatrice spoke of her mother as "one tough lady" who has often sent a message to both Beatrice

and her elder half-brother that one has to be independent and not rely on anyone's good will or support. Therefore, Beatrice believed that her personal career success was deemed more important to her mother than for Beatrice to get married with a man. Her mother's conviction has led her to be able to convince Beatrice's relatives to avoid the issue of marriage. When Beatrice's aunties asked her mother about Beatrice's status as a single woman in her thirties, her mother answered, "What does she need that (marriage) for? Nowadays women can be career minded! Why do they need a man? Sometimes men cannot help you! Sometimes they are not good persons. The most important thing is for her to be happy. She doesn't need to get married!" Beatrice felt that her mother could tell that she is not interested in marriage with a man and it led her to think that she might also have known about her sexual orientation as a lesbian. Even though her mother has always favoured her brother more, Beatrice believed that she was a more caring daughter than her brother was as a son.

When I can make decisions about my life, I don't mind telling my mother (about her lesbian identity). Her life is more dramatic than mine anyways. That's why she would understand. She won't think of it negatively or blame anything for it because from now until her elderly years, I will prove to her that I can take care of her 101%. I love her very much, even better than my older brother. I will prove her wrong for the past thirty years.

Caring in an Indirect Way

Family members show their caring and support in ways that might have been deemed indirect. For example, Lik Lik's mother commented on a pamphlet where Lik Lik spoke openly about her lesbian identity, "You could've worn a better outfit for the photo." Lik Lik's close relationship with her mother helped her to be truthful about her

relationships with women. Being married to a man at an early age and later divorced to be with women, Lik Lik felt that it was time to disclose to her mother that her close female friends are more than friends. Her mother prompted the disclosure by first saying, “You and your friends. Don’t mess around with each other too much.” Lik Lik took up the cue and said directly, “Don’t you know about “*tung sing lyun*”? Her mother stayed quiet and did not say a word. Later, Lik Lik spoke with her older sister and found out that her mother actually preferred Lik Lik to be loved and to be treated well by someone rather than being treated poorly by her ex-husband. Lik Lik explained, “When I was someone’s wife, I used to have a broom on one hand and a watermelon and toilet paper rolls on the other hand. My mom didn’t like it. I think most mothers want their daughters not having to serve someone else’s son.” In addition, Lik Lik strongly believed that respect for her mother is crucial for her choice of partner. In the past, her ex-husband was very disrespectful to her mother for being rude and dismissive of her mother’s challenges after Lik Lik’s father passed away. Lik Lik’s present and past girlfriends have all since been more attentive to her mother’s needs than her ex-husband. Yet her mother was still worried about her future as a woman without a husband, Lik Lik knew early on that she would have to prove to herself and to others that she would be independent and would have sufficient funds to take care of herself.

Calm Acknowledgement: Alternative Strategy to Come Out

Various strategies were used by respondents to come out to their family members. It could involve by placing lesbian and gay materials such as DVDs or books within family collections. Conversely, family members might quietly acknowledge their daughters’

sexual orientation using a similar method. Twenty-seven years old Jo hid booklets from a lesbian workshop and an oral history project only to find them resurfacing on the table after her mother cleaned up her room. Jo did not take it as a threat to come out to her mother but instead, she understood it as a form of recognition. It is important to note that Jo maintains good relations with her parents and have been able to prove herself as a worthy daughter earlier by fulfilling certain markers of career success. First of all, Jo graduated from university and has been working steadily in private companies. Secondly, with the help of her parents for the first instalment, she has been able to purchase a flat and has been able to manage on her own since then. These pre-empted qualifiers have enabled her to be in a better position for her to come out to her family if she decides to. This kind of strategy is commonly seen among respondents and resembled a form of covert resistance against heteronormativity within the institution of family.

Intimate Living Conditions

Twenty-one out of thirty respondents reported as currently living with family members. Some of them expressed their wishes to move out when they have the financial ability or a partner to share a flat. When asked whether they feel living with families make it difficult for them to be who they are, some respondents did not see living with family members as a necessary obstacle. The respondents' sentiments were often expressed as a lack of choice and hence, they have resigned to living with families as a way of life in Hong Kong. The key area that can cause potential upheaval in family relations is when a respondent would bring her girlfriend or partner home to stay over for a night.

Sixteen years old Yuki have had a tumultuous relationship with family. She ran away from home twice after having huge fights with her mother for spending too much time outside of home. Yuki knew that she could not bring any girlfriends home. Her mother told her explicitly, “You are messing with these dirty things! Do it as you wish but don’t you dare to bring it home!” Yuki still brought her girlfriend home by letting her into the flat in the middle of the night. Yuki’s father repairs air-conditioners and her mother works part-time as a domestic helper and in bars. They lived in a Kowloon housing estate with Yuki’s brother.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, fifteen years old Ah Lok also ran away from home a few times with one time being away for more than a month. She ended up staying at a communal household in Tai Po with a group of les friends. She explained that it was her father who chased her away and asked her to never return. Ah Lok returned home after her mother came looking for her and asked her to go back home. She also found a school for Ah Lok to attend. Ah Lok felt that she had more truthful conversations with her mother after this experience of running away. Yet it did not make it easy for Ah Lok to come out to her mother, her mother broke down and cried when she confronted Ah Lok for being involved with “things that are unnatural.” But her father had a different reaction. Her father told her mother that it was better for Ah Lok to be a lesbian because she would not be pregnant at a young age. Ah Lok has not managed to bring her girlfriend into her bedroom in fear of her family’s reaction, “I have only been able to let her into the living room.”

Twenty-one years old Ku Tsai grew up living in a one-room flat with five family members. The cramped living conditions made her go out to bars at least three times per week and she preferred to be with her girlfriends in shopping malls in Mong Kok, Causeway Bay or Kwun Tong. Ku Tsai has always been on the lookout for new shopping malls or cafés to hang out with her friends. But physical intimacy is hard for Ku Tsai and her girlfriend in this kind of situation.

My family treated me like I was a son to them. In the old flat, there were no rooms. My older sister sleeps on the upper bunk and my younger sister sleeps on the lower bunk with my grandma. I sleep on the floor. Why did I sleep on the floor? Because they treated me like a boy already. They didn't want my older sister to sleep on the floor. My grandma has always treated me as if I am a boy. ... I brought my girlfriend home once to stay over night after we moved to a bigger flat in a housing estate and they told me to never bring her over again.

The tight living conditions resulted from a scarcity of land and high rental prices in Hong Kong made it difficult for many people to move out and to live on their own. In addition, many families expect their children to move out only when they decide to get married. As a result, most respondents in the study still live with their families and had to devise strategies on how to co-exist peacefully with each other in a 300 feet room. Younger respondents voiced their wishes to move out, to be independent and to be who they are whereas older respondents, who have busy working lives and hectic social schedules, may not see living with their family members as much as an issue for them. However, it is important to point out that family relations remained to be the most

important area for most respondents in terms of coming out as a woman with same-sex desires.

Work and Lesbian Sexualities

Coming Out at Work

Coming out experiences at work usually take place in different scenarios among the respondents. Some were disclosed by co-workers who happened to see them on the streets holding hands with their partners. Others who have been active in social movements or who are cultural producers might appear on widely circulated newspapers, monthly magazines or specific television interviews on subject matters related to their sexualities. Indeed, some respondents had no intention to attract any form of attention that might put them at risk for being recognized as lesbians.

Twenty-nine years old Ah Hoi works in the media industry and was “outed” by her co-workers after she appeared in an article for a men’s magazine. Androgynous in appearance, Ah Hoi have dated both women and men before and her work colleagues have often cast doubts on whether Ah Hoi is a heterosexual or a lesbian. It was as if Ah Hoi dated men that she would not be considered as a bisexual woman but only a heterosexual woman. Prior to being “outed”, Ah Hoi has often maintained a low profile at work since she was worried that her sexual identity might create an obstacle to further career advancement. She was well aware of the fact that the media industry often relied on personal connections rather than on skills if one wants to step up the ladder. As Ah Hoi puts it cogently, “we rely on people giving us opportunities. If they find out you’re

gay, they can ignore you or they can stop listening to your ideas.” Ah Hoi narrated her experience at work,

At that time this men’s magazine had an annual issue on Valentine’s Day. I think it was a year ago, I think, I’m not sure. Is it Valentine’s Day? I think it is. They had to write an article on forbidden love. They interviewed a scientist and student from Mainland China. There were a few other interviews, too. Then they approached me and asked if I can help them. I thought, it’s only a men’s magazine. First of all, it’s an upper class men’s magazine and secondly, nobody really reads this magazine. So it doesn’t matter and I agreed to do it. Also, my short video was coming up at the film festival so I wanted to promote it. ... Then one typical day at work, someone from the public relations department came over and said, “Ai-ya, Ai-ya, damn! Someone read the magazine and saw you in it!” Then my boss’s secretary said, “Oh! I saw you. The photos were not so good.” Why she picked up the magazine was because she stole it from the plane afterwards and placed it on the reception desk at our workplace. Everyone who walked by can read it. My boss asked if I knew about the interview and I was so embarrassed. ... One of my bosses said to me, “Don’t worry about it. It won’t affect your work. Your sexual orientation will not affect your work.” ... But this sentence was like “I won’t look down upon you but I will still discriminate against you.” I feel deep down inside for him, he cannot deal with it. ... That’s how I came out suddenly at work. I didn’t think of it as a huge deal but I wanted to take that magazine away from the secretary. I wanted to ask her, “Are you trying to help me? Are you serious?” Actually I think they are funny about it. It’s their mindset. They don’t even dare to ask because they treat me like I’m disabled. I won’t ask if you have a blind eye or if you are hard of hearing. I think it’s like that.”

Lik Lik, on the other hand, described her colleagues as having a condition of “hang gei” when they could not deal with her sexual identity. She used this term to give details of their reactions when she talked about her daily activities with her girlfriend or her creative projects in collaboration with a lesbian organization.

I have this group of straight friends in the past seven or eight years. We played mah-jong often and we met through business. But we can really talk to each other. For example, if something happens at home, they would

know. We see each other once a week for a meal, to play mah-jong, or to have a drink. There were times when my mother was ill, they would know and called us up to see if we needed help. Even for money matters, they would offer their help because they're ten years older than me. I'm like a younger girl to them. But when we go out, it's really obvious, for example, when we go to karaoke, have meals and gossiped, I can tell they don't like it. They would talk about Roman and comment on the way he talks. Then another friend would say something about his company's graphic designer as a faggot (sei gay lo). He would actually say that. I just shut up, I don't want to argue with them. But they knew about me, they have often known of my girlfriend. I have always brought my girlfriend along when we go out for meals and other social gatherings.

Like Me as your Colleague!

There were moments when a respondent is aware of how her position at work might allow her more freedom to exercise her choice of coming out or not. Fifty-one years old Eileen has been working as a librarian for many years. As a dedicated team player, a caring supervisor and an intelligent manager, Eileen has been able to steadily rise to her current position as one of the key persons responsible for the government facility. She has often joked about the fact that she did not like reading much but she loved to organize books. Although she did not know whether her colleagues are accepting of her sexuality, Eileen believed strongly that being part of the team would gain their trust which might be of use in later situation if she decided to come out. Yet she also wondered if her desire to be a team player has something to do with her upbringing.

I think they like me as a person. You know, it's just a job and a government job. You can be all arrogant, there's no problem with it. ... I will put a person's individual character first. I am not a power monger. I won't pull off power trips on people. I treasure the fact that you are my staff, my colleague, and we work together as a team. I cannot work without you and you cannot work without me either. We work hard, we suffer and we also become happy together. ... Sometimes I would think if it has anything to do with my childhood. I have always sought for attention.

I always wanted to be loved. I will show my love to others and hope for others to give me love. So I only know to give and not to take.

Choosing to Work in a Supportive Environment

Apart from building up one's reputation in the hope to be accepted as a lesbian, twenty-one years old Taro works in an environment where she can be out as a TB. Taro works with another tomboy lesbian for an entertainment company in event productions and agents for local artists and celebrities. The work nature is primarily on contract basis and a monthly income is not guaranteed. Her mother has complained to her about not giving back to her family but Taro remained steadfast in paying her family after she has achieved career success. Since there have been reports of local artists preferring TBs as personal assistants in the tabloids, Taro explained why musicians and artists would hire TBs as security.

It's normal. It should be this way. I can't say the same about taking care of male celebrities. But for female celebrities, you've got to find a B. Why? What do you think? Imagine three persons, a girl, a gay boy and a B. The B is the most perfect. She would be caring and she is also a girl. She can go into washrooms. It's not that gay men are not caring but he's still a man. A B can take care of a woman better. Also, female artists tend to be bullied more and be troubled more. If a guy pushes away the people bothering the artist and hurt someone, they might get complained. But if a B does that, it's only a woman pushing them away! Bs have a tough side to them but most people won't complain if I push them away. I'm a girl.

Many respondents aforementioned have talked about their experiences at work but for two respondents who have difficulties in finding work, they pointed to their butch appearance and low education as major reasons in securing employment. Thirty-three years old Phil left school after Form Three and have been working in various jobs since

then. Her butch appearance has led her to being verbally harassed at work as well as being put down by colleagues in general.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how respondents navigate different spaces as in schools, religion institutions, families and work. Their processes of navigation within these spaces as well as their processes of negotiation with sexualities render these spaces as overlapping and complex sites. Moreover, the heteronormative forces in these spaces can be different and require multiple strategies to counter them. As the players in each of these spaces vary, respondents have to be inventive and daring in order to survive within these conditional sites.

Chapter Four

Performative Bodies: Are you a TBG, TB or Pure?

“Closed” and “open” are not really very helpful categories when it comes to sex; they tell us nothing about the function or dysfunction of categories. Insofar as sexualities are specific to bodies, psyches, and experiences, all sexualities are both closed and open, repressive and productive.
- Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998, p.128).

babble away adore
I am not this fragile body
laughing as I mourn
mourning as I love
- Trinh T. Minh-ha, *With Curse, or Love* (1994, p.76).

Bodies are corporeal matters that are often understood in the context of contested discourses. The corporeality of bodies as material effects occupy spaces in the city as an everyday pedestrian, a consumer, a worker and a citizen. In Chapter One, I assert my position on that body cannot be read as only physical matter but it is increasingly being coded, represented, disciplined and performed upon its crevices and surfaces. As suggested by Nancy Duncan, women have often been further treated as “not fully capable of independent disembodied political thought and objectivity” (Duncan ,1996, p. 129). Placing lesbian bodies on the geography of the city is to ask critical questions on what kind of bodies can be present, where can they be located and how are they represented on the cityscape.

In this chapter, I would like to investigate the performative bodies of butch bodies and femme representations. I regard TBs to be a form of localized butch bodies and

TBGs to be a form of femme representation with a distinct understanding of one whose desire is only directed towards a butch woman. I will first make an attempt to show the theoretical discussion on dualism and its effects on our interpretation of female bodies. Then I would offer the masculinized lesbian body as the body at stake in public and the notion of passing. Based on my interview data, I will outline various behavioural patterns that qualify a lesbian to be a TB. I chose to highlight the TB body primarily due to the response I have obtained from interview subjects who are TB-identified. During the interviews with TB-identified participants, they have often brought up the issue of public harassment due to their appearances on their own. There was almost no prompting on my part as the interviewer. Therefore, I regard this issue to be of importance. Fourthly, I will look at how the exercise of labelling whether one is a TB, TBG or Pure destabilizes such entities and hence create multiple discourses for the informants.²⁸ I would conclude this chapter with a return to the erotic and summarize how sex is negotiated between a TB and a TBG.

The Impact of Dualism on the Body

Ancient Greek philosophers have interpreted the body and its biological functions as an interruption to the higher level of reasoning (Alcoff, 1996b; Duncan, 1996). Apart from posing as a threat to man's reasoning, the body came to signify "a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind" (Grosz, 1994, p.5). Plato's writings in the doctrine of

²⁸ Pure refers to women who do not view themselves as either feminine like TBGs or masculine like TBs. According to a booklet published by a local gender studies research group and activist organization, Nutongxueshe, Pure refers to women who do not feel the need to be categorized and believed to be within the spectrum of TB to TBG. Pure women do not feel the need to date a TB or a TBG otherwise, as in TB/TBG relationships. This description of Pure is not definitive. Many women have developed their own interpretations on Pure, TB and TBG identifications.

the Forms and in *Cratylus*, positions the body as a form of matter, as a trap to confine man's spirit and as an uncontrollable means. Reason, on the other hand, is necessary to hone in the body's reins (hormones) and to curb its endless cravings. The body is raw, dangerous and full of emotions – the antithesis of rationality. Plato further declares that by engaging reason over body, we can create harmony among individuals, families and on a broader scale, an unified state. The body is then associated with the functioning of a state and its politics, in other words, the body occupied a certain level of significance so as to potentially damage the operations of a state. Aristotle shares the same sentiments and introduces the concept of the mother as a womb bearer and simply as a vessel for the child. He claims that it was the father who bestowed a form and a shape to the otherwise, flaccid nature of the child. In other words, the notion of male and female sex as binary opposites and the patriarchal figure as the giver of life was predetermined in the philosophical traditions of Western reason.

Christian thought advocates the mind/body split by emphasizing the mortality of our bodies and the immortality of our souls. The mind and the soul are believed to be of unity as long as the body is alive. The body of Christ is known to be of human and his soul is given by God. Physical ailments are often interpreted as moral flaws within Christian traditions. Sex as pleasure is forbidden and celibacy is a revered virtue. Sexual desires are interpreted as animalistic and barbaric, which developed into characteristics of native cultures in need of Christian missionaries.

Dualism points at the distinctiveness between mind and body. Classical sociology has also adopted this mind/body dichotomy which resulted in a lack of analysis on connections between knowledge, beliefs and the body (Grosz, 1994; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984). With its origins traced back to Descartes, he proposes an oppositional framework by naming the mind as a thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and the body as an extended substance (*res extensa*) (Grosz, 1994, p.6). Descartes assumed that the body is of a natural and physical matter due to its adherence to nature's laws, whereas the mind gains its consciousness through its separation from the natural realm. Descartes went further to assert his position that knowledge can only be produced through the mind as a separate entity from the body. He treated the mind as an elevated consciousness of being and a disavowal from nature. Dualism, then, contributes to the division of body and mind as independent domains.

Cartesianism left us with three dominant trains of thought: 1) the body as a biological subject, 2) the body as a reproductive vessel, 3) the body as a medium to express our emotions. The first concept of the body as an organic matter originated from Christianity where the body is treated as part of a natural order. Its physical sensations and bodily functions are understood as animalistic and without any psychological consciousness. The mind is hence absent in this discussion. Secondly, the body is seen as a mere instrument to be used and exploited by external forces. For example, Locke views the body as property in the labour market. Anti-pornography feminist theorists such as Andrea Dworkin (1991) and Catharine MacKinnon (1991) argue in their works that patriarchy is the primary reason why women's bodies are appropriated. The third concept

locates the body as a vehicle to convey our private feelings towards the outer world. As a means, the body is responsible for conveying the knowledge it received through the senses. Therefore, the body can be interpreted as passive, transparent, and predictable. It is, by no means, viewed as a medium to process these knowledge and develop its own opinions. On the contrary, the body's function is to maintain a connection between what is natural (as in the body itself) and what is social (as in the external environment) (Grosz, 1994, p.10). In other words, the body exists as an entity both inside out and outside in.

The after-effects of dualism are profound in our current conceptualization of gender codes and behaviour. Liberal and radical feminist philosophies have also fallen into the trap of explaining oppression and political strategies at the risk of silencing others, such as women of colour, poor men of colour, poor women, and lesbians. It is only with the deconstruction of these categories and an inquiry into the sexual specificities on our bodies as subjects can we allow space for sexual differences to emerge. Feminist theorists and philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz (1990, 1994) and Diane Fuss (1991) have turned to Lacan's Möbius strip, a reversed three-dimensional figure eight, to illustrate "the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes other (Grosz, 1994, p.xii)." It signifies the relations of a psychical interiority and a corporeal exteriority that is pivotal and is marked by tensions. On the inside of the Möbius strip, we can imagine the inscription of our senses, corporeal functions, erotic pleasures and lived experiences. The outside would inhabit such notions as legal rights, social norms, traditions and corporeal movements (as occupant of actual physical spaces). Fuss, inspired by Lacan's

Möbius strip and his Borromean knot, derived a three-dimensional four-knot, to illustrate the many possibilities and mirror images of sexualities and their manifestations (Fuss, 1991).

Disciplinary Practices on the Body

French philosopher Michel Foucault uses the framework of disciplinary practices to describe what he called “docile” bodies (Foucault, 1979, p.138). He argues that disciplinary practices used in modern institutions such as the military, the school, the prison, the hospital and the manufactory, are used to produce “subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1979, p.138).” By measuring bodies in utilitarian terms, discipline is used to produce “only signs or products, forms of expression or the result of labor” on bodies (Foucault, 1979, p.153). Citing examples such as student in a classroom, an inmate in a prison and a soldier in a military drill, Foucault demonstrates how a body’s movements, its timing and the space it occupies are regulated by the structures that housed the body. For example, a student is expected to arrive at school before the school bell is rung, to sit upright by the assigned desk, to pay attention in class and to adhere to the rules and regulations within the classroom and the school. The student is being observed, judged, praised and punished accordingly by teachers who have institutional power. These rigid rules and their consequences are understood and followed by the student as a given. Foucault came to the conclusion that the disciplinary control of the body through institutions has a bearing on the mind, hence, the student learns to regulate his own body automatically.

Sandra Lee Bartky (1997) in her essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” offers a critique in Foucault’s treatment of the body as one body without gender markers. Bartky poses a question whether women and men have the same bodily experiences and relationships with modern institutions described by Foucault. Moreover, she asserts that Foucault failed to investigate disciplinary practices in modern society that reinforces notions of femininity for women. For example, dieting and its after-effect, anorexia nervosa, produces a woman’s body that is considered to be feminine and widely perpetuated by media representations as in women’s magazines.

The development of modern state regulations is further exemplified in the works of French philosopher Michel Foucault. In his first volume to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines biopower as the regulatory measures and diverse practices used by modern states to subjugate bodies and thus controlling vast populations (Foucault, 1990, p.140). The disciplinary nature of governments enable these political institutions to exercise control over human bodies and hence giving rise to “a biopolitics of population” (Foucault, 1990, p.140). It is worth noting how the state and its institutions are involved in constructing cultural ideologies in our everyday life. Power is not to be conceived as one of totality since multiple forces are usually at play. Sandra Lee Bartky in her essay “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” offers a critique in Foucault’s treatment of the body as one body without gender markers (Bartky, 1997). Bartky poses a question whether women and men have the same bodily experiences and relationships with modern institutions described by Foucault. Moreover, she asserts that

Foucault failed to investigate disciplinary practices in modern society that reinforces notions of femininity for women.

Similarly, feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young (2005) describes how women construct an imaginary space around them and confine their bodily movements within the space. Women became their own controlling agents of what is feminine, like crossing their legs, softer tone in speech and keeping one's limbs closer to the body. Regulation of women's bodies can be understood as a result of external disciplinarian measures but also it is self-regulation on our own bodies in conjunction with mainstream societal values. Gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer bodies have often tried to transgress such bodily boundaries by being different and by performing our different selves.

Gender Performativity and the Body

Judith Butler posits gender performativity into lesbian identities, and for that matter, queer identities. Butler looks at identities as “performative acts” and are often destabilized by the way we choose to act, dress or speak (Butler, 1990). Meanings of masculinity and femininity are then constructed by ourselves, our understanding of societal expectations and our relations to how others perceive such definitions. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler clarifies and continues on her concept of drag performances as “the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms” by saying,

At best, it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes (Butler, 1993, p.125).

Putting Butler's theory in practice, butch identities and their lesbian bodies are simultaneously an acknowledgement of and a protest against gender norms. Even though a butch may decide to take on masculine traits in terms of toning one's physical appearance to assemble what we associate with being male, she is crossing and transgressing gender boundaries. Being a butch lesbian can be understood as an everyday performance and resistance towards dominance of social institutions and systems as well as through daily activities that enable our survival in society (Foucault, 1980; Evans, 1993). Our daily lives contain many moments where we have to devise what de Certeau coined as "tactics". These strategies are used by many butch lesbians to claim their legitimacy, to occupy their spaces and to assert their differences on "butch" terms.

The Masculinized Lesbian Body

Regardless of whether a woman's body is identified as heterosexual or lesbian, she is perceived as a threat for some and a potential monster if lesbianism is of suspect. Barbara Creed poses the question how does the lesbian body then differ from that of a woman's body? In her essay "Lesbian Bodies: Tribades, Tomboys and Tarts," Creed offers three stereotypical portrayal of lesbian bodies, namely, "the lesbian body as active and masculinized; the animalistic lesbian body; the narcissistic lesbian body (Creed, 1995, p.88)." The animalistic lesbian body points to the depiction of lesbians as natural, as half-bestial, as a form of nightly creature such as the female vampire in popular film representations. The narcissistic lesbian body refers to the popular media representation and male fantasy of two women kissing each other.

The idea of a masculinized lesbian body requires further explanations. The active and masculinized lesbian body can be traced back to the Christianity. John Boswell, in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, explained the term “sodomy” in its application to persons of either sex and to accuse individuals of abnormal sexual behaviour (Boswell, 1980). In the fourteenth century, the term “sodomite” was also applicable to anyone who was in opposition to Christian doctrines and their teachings. Lesbians were not immune to the Christian interrogation of perversity. They were regarded as similar to male homosexuals in their unnatural and non-procreative sexual acts. The attempt to masculinize the lesbian body came later in the Renaissance period. In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur (1990) cites an example of a Renaissance woman who appeared to have her clitoris outside of her vulva. She was then accused of having a clitoris similar to a boy’s penis and hence, capable of penetrating other women’s bodies. Laqueur states that the belief that a woman’s sexual anatomy was equivalent those of a man’s sexual organs inverted was commonly held before the eighteenth century. In this one-sex model, a woman’s uterus was taken as the female version of a man’s scrotum. A woman’s ovaries was perceived as a man’s testicles, so was the vulva as the foreskin and most importantly, the vagina was believed to be a man’s inverted penis. It is not surprising then to understand how an enlarged clitoris would be interpreted as an erect penis, capable of its functions to penetrate and to ejaculate semen. The term “tribade” and “tribadism” has its origins from a woman engaging in sexual intercourse with another woman. A tribade engaging in

tribadism was considered to be “a pseudo man” and to assume an active male role during sexual intercourse.

Freud employs a two-sex model in his theory of sexual difference, yet his diagnosis of the homosexual woman yields a similar answer. The homosexual woman, in reference to male anatomy, was prescribed with penis-envy, therefore, her homosexuality was a result of being castrated. The castration became a justification for women to appear masculine through mannerisms, appearance and to take on masculine, active roles in life. Different from the previous definition of the tribade, the homosexual woman’s position stems from the lack of an organ. As mentioned earlier in this essay, it is not surprising to hear the lesbian feminist response to a masculinized lesbian body as it appears in conjunction with butch identities. A butch was taken as the male counterpart in lesbian relationships and perpetuating the traditional psychological explanation of penis-envy as the cause for lesbianism. Based on egalitarian roles in a relationship, it was very difficult for lesbian feminists to accept butch-femme role-playing in lesbian relationships. But lesbian identities are inherently socially constructed, historically contingent and have the potential to shift in various contexts. Identities were never fixed and stabilized across cultures, generations and economies (D’Emilio, 1983; Fuss, 1991; Stein, 1997; Epstein, 1998).

Lesbian Masculinity

Queer theorist Judith Halberstam eloquently describes how our current theories on lesbian sexualities have not fully address the significance of masculinity and its

influences. Identified as a masculine woman, she begins the discussion on female masculinity with the intention to de-stigmatize masculinity for girls and women. In explaining her research to others, she says,

I am writing about women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine, and I am trying to explain why, as a culture, we seem to take so little interest in female masculinity and yet pay a considerable amount of attention to male femininity...I hope that this book opens discussion on masculinity for women in such a way that masculine girls and women do not have to wear their masculinity as a stigma but can infuse it with a sense of pride and indeed power (Halberstam, 1998, p.xi).

Halberstam uses the term “lesbian masculinity” to “refer to women who perform their masculinity within what are recognizably lesbian relations (Halberstam, 1998, p.120).” Moreover, building on academic scholarship written by Esther Newton (1984) on “the mythic mannish lesbian”, Gayle Rubin’s (1992), Cherríe Moraga’s (1983) and Joan Nestle (1992), Halberstam traces the different definitions of butch lesbians across cultures and histories and demonstrates how new masculinities are continuously being reconceptualized under different cultural influences. Gayle Rubin (1992) defines butchness as a set of masculine gender codes and styles as expressed in masculine style of dress, hairstyles and mannerisms. Rubin continues to demonstrate the multiplicity of butch identities by including butches who strongly identify as male, as transvestites and as people living with gender dysphoria. Chicana writer Cherríe Moraga (1983), in response to white feminists’ claim on butch-femme relations as an inversion of heterosexual relations, claims that Chicana lesbians are rooted in gender roles within Mexican culture. Lesbian feminists’ emphasis on complete egalitarianism was interpreted by Moraga as a form of cultural imperialism. Joan Nestle (1992), through her oral

histories with different butch women, provides us with an increased awareness of butch-femme cultures. In particular, Merrill Mushroom, a white working-class butch, described various kinds of butches: a “strict butch” as one who only dates femmes, a “drag butch” as one who can pass as men, a “stone butch” as one who refuses to be touched sexually by her partner (Nestle, 1992). Antonia Chao’s work on Taiwan’s T-Po community demonstrates how a process of “domestic colonization” marginalizes groups that include sex-workers and working-class Ts (Chao, 2000).

Assuming a gender identity can take many forms. Gender identity as in identifying as a Pure, TBG or TB can be self-imposed or it can be imposed by others. Even though the term Pure includes a range of Pureness from being a Pure leaning towards B to a Pure leaning towards G. One’s gender identity might be told through who you are with, what you wear, how you carry yourself and the way you talk. It can be a form of community membership. The act of assuming a gender identity, in other words, the act of labelling oneself is important for me to understand the relations between labelling and lesbian identities. Being labelled or labelling oneself can be seen as pertinent for some and restricting for others. I will now turn to the respondents and their articulations on lesbian bodies.

Responses from Interview Subjects

The Act of Being Labelled and Labelling Oneself

Twenty-seven years old Katherine identified as bisexual and has been active in cultural arts for the past decade. A Buddhist and an artist, she described her theory on

body politics involving a B (short form for TB) and a G (short form for TBG) using her personal framework of yin/yang. She explained, “The yin yang thing is very fluid. The concept itself is fluid, it won’t stay put and remain unchanged. It’s like it changes constantly like twenty-four hours in a day. A B has more yang on the outside and yin inside. For a G, she also has a bit of yang but with mostly yin.” For Katherine, she felt that there are unspoken rules in relationships with a B and a G..

When you commit to a relationship, you have to be good. You cannot mess around. You cannot talk for long with another B. For example, there was this occasion where I bumped into another B. My partner saw me talking with her and we got into a big fight with my girlfriend because of that. ... When I am with a B, I really liked her B characteristics. I don’t like her being very masculine, not like a man but I like her being a mixture of being strong, firm, determined and a bit of feminine feel. I like it at a certain level of combination. Not too manly and not too girly. That’s why I don’t like Gs.

If Bs has the characteristic of being both masculine and feminine, then TBGs have to assert oneself in order to be recognized as a lesbian and a worthy partner. Although Jo is feminine in appearance and has been in relationships with women who might be considered as “more butch” than her, she had to grapple with these terms in the lesbian community. Part of this process was initiated by her involvement with a theatrical project in coordination with a local lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer women’s group, Women’s Coalition of Hong Kong, SAR.

The creative process for the project was crucial to me because of my character in it. By collaborating with Lik Lik and Connie on the storyline, it made me look at my own issues. From feeling that I can actually be a lesbian to meet other girls a year ago to when we produced the drama a year and four months later, I have been in a continuous process to build up my identity. I’ve learnt a lot from the process. That’s why at the workshop we’re in, I spoke openly about not wanting to be labelled as a TBG. People always like to ask this question on ICQ. I don’t like to be

asked about the labels. I always have to explain a great deal on them. During the drama project, I realized that there are many negative connotations attached to the term TBG.. If I can wipe away those negative stuff or things I feel negative about a TBG, then I can identify as one. Although on the outside, I know I really looked like a TBG, I have to learn to accept myself as one. I have to learn from resisting the label to accepting it. ... I can call myself Pure, too. ... I am more comfortable describing myself as a lesbian than a bisexual. Although I thought about it during the drama project whether I will be with men again, I think it is unlikely. It might be easier for me to be with a woman than with a man. ... Maybe I don't like the term 'bisexual' because of its negative connotations, too. But really, I know I can be with men, too. Sometimes I will look at attractive men when they pass by or I would feel attracted to a colleague, I don't think it's impossible, I can say I'm a bisexual. But at least I will describe myself as a lesbian first and foremost.

One of the negative connotations that is associated with being a TBG is the suspicion of losing a TBG to a man eventually. Jo remembered that her previous girlfriends would be worried about losing her to a man. Chatting online and posting messages on message boards often involve the practice of labelling. There is even a column for identification as a TB, TBG or Pure in the table for 'meet and greet' on websites. This exercise can be perceived as too restrictive for many respondents who prefer not to be labelled provincially as such.

Twenty-five years Christie as a femme believed that "people can sense who I am". But she also voiced her partner's consistent worries that she might be attracted to men eventually. Christie posed these questions in return,

Do you really think I might turn to men? Is she always going to take that into account and worry about me being interested in men? Is she going to avoid me because I look femme and is not safe? I think as a TBG, I am the same as anyone who will notice someone when I am attracted to her. If there is a guy who showed up and is attractive, I don't ignore the possibility of being with a man. But after I have been with my partner now, I feel I am not interested in guys. I don't even think deeply about it. I don't

even think about it anymore. Actually, when you're with someone for a long time, you will change accordingly.

Some respondents felt that there seemed to be a more relaxed attitude towards the labelling of TBs in the community. Long time activist and organizer of Queer Sisters, Eunice observed slight changes in how TBs view their own bodies within the lesbian community. She felt that nowadays TBs take up a more playful stance towards issues of their physical semblance to boys. They liked to be teased and to be praised upon both a beautiful woman and a handsome man. In the past, Eunice said her TB friends might have deemed her offensive if she gave them praises on their feminine qualities.

For younger respondents, being a TB holds more significance. Twenty-one years old Ku Tsai discussed how her B identity was not something to discuss among her peers yet it remained as a revered gender identity. To Ku Tsai, it was a strong gender identity that she did not feel that she will grow out of.

When we got older and started to work, it's more difficult to talk about these things. We (a group of Bs) seldom talk about it, almost never. I'm sure other people at work or at school know that we are Bs and they know that I'm that kind of person. They either accept me or they just don't. You know some of them don't like you. When I was in school or at work, they would say things like "You're just fooling around. You'll grow out of it." I don't hang out with these people anymore. I just keep a distance from them.

Ku Tsai's sentiments on a B identity are also reflected in Taro's description of gender expectations on a tomboy. Taro is of the same age as Ku Tsai and she also views her B identity as important as her lesbian identity. Respondents who have viewed their tomboy identities favourably have indicated that they did not feel comfortable being

viewed as men, therefore passing as men was not an intention of acting butch or dressing up as a butch lesbian. On the contrary, being a tomboy is understood to be a unique category on its own.

Contradictory Expectations of a Tomboy

Twenty-one years old Taro came to the interview dressed in a black shirt and a skinny black tie, she told me that the shirt she was wearing was particularly fitting to her physique. Shirt and tie serves a specific gender codification for lesbians like Taro. Even for the last Chinese New Year, Taro wore a tie to visit relatives. She spoke with enthusiasm, “When I went out for Chinese New Year to visit relatives, I was being indecisive whether I should wear a red or a black tie and of course, a red tie would fare better for Chinese New Year. My mom said to me, ‘Don’t wear red. It’s not that red doesn’t look good for you but you look like a gigolo if you wear a red tie.’ So I didn’t wear a red tie.”

I asked her if she had friends who were lesbian or gay and she asked me promptly, “Do you mean B or G?” Most of Taro’s friends are straight-identified only with two to three friends are B and the Gs in her circle are mostly her ex-girlfriends. Taro recalled that she first heard of the word “*nei tung sing lyun*” (女同性戀) and “lesbian” in Form One. Yet “*nei tung sing lyun ze*” (女同性戀者) was more commonly used than the term “lesbian.” When she was in Form Two, ICQ became more popular and she became familiar with the terms “TB”, “B” and “G.” Taro began dating girls when she was a Form Two student in a co-educational secondary school. When her first girlfriend

dumped her for a boy, she said bitterly to herself then, “That was not fair!” Taro was unyielding to the fact that it would have been more comfortable if her girlfriend dumped her for another girl. Taro explained, “I cannot hate her for leaving me for a boy! I cannot explain. It doesn’t need any further explanation. She just have to shot back at me and say ‘are you sick or what?’ There is no redress.”

Taro confessed that she has a wife and a girlfriend during the interview. Both women meant a lot to her and Taro’s role as a TB often denotes certain behaviours that are prescribed to TBs and expected of them. The way Taro described her relationship with both young women draw similarities to those involved in an extra-marital affair for a heterosexual couple.

My girlfriend and me loves to eat. My wife eats less. Me and my girlfriend have different tastes. So we can try out new places. I have similar tastes to my wife. We would go to familiar places, for example, we both don’t like Thai food so we will avoid that. It’s different with my girlfriend. ... My girlfriend can both be active and quiet. My wife is more troublesome. She likes to sing karaoke, play video games, she’s like a B! Maybe I made her more B. My girlfriend is different. I like to fish but if you ask my wife to go fishing with me, she might as well give up on life. But my girlfriend doesn’t mind. If you make me go shopping, watch movies and go out for dinners all the time, it’s boring. I want to go somewhere else, not Tung Lo Wan everyday, not Mong Kok everyday, not Tsim Sha Tsui. I want to go to Lantau Island from time to time, have vegetarian food and do something fun. What about Cheung Chau? What about going to see model flats? It’s all free. I went to Ikea with my girlfriend the other day. It’s a must to go to Ikea. But I haven’t been to Ikea with my wife. She doesn’t like it. So I end up doing things I like, like hiking and catching shrimps with my girlfriend. ... I have distinct roles with my wife and my girlfriend. I’ve known my wife for many years from fourteen to eighteen years of age. ... I have to take care of her and financially support her. So our roles are very distinct. One husband one wife.

Taro spoke with such confidence about her relationships that she justified it as a relationship model to ensure continued romance with both parties. Although one can argue that both young women in Taro's mind seemed to occupy equal status apart from her language usage of husband, wife and the girlfriend, I came to understand Taro as more of a TB who fully adopted the heterosexual model of marriage uncritically and appropriated the discourse as represented in our everyday life.

Part of being a B also means paying for your G's bills. For Taro, going to lesbian bars may not be an option since each drink is too costly for her. Instead, she gives the following advice to a friend of hers.

Pursuing a girl doesn't mean you have to spend money all the time. You don't have to spend money to make her feel touched. To conduct groundbreaking deeds. To send off fireworks into the sky. No, you don't need to do that. Actually, you only need to make your girlfriend happy through each small moment. She might want something very simple. Just being next to you might make her happy already. You would have succeeded already. No need to give her many gifts. Gifts are only supplementary.

Taro's reflection on the expectation of a TB being financially resourceful as unnecessary can be interpreted as a way of breaking down the gender codes within lesbian relationships. A TB is not expected to "provide" for a TBG. Although most respondents in TB and TBG relationships do not strictly conform to gender roles, some of them did speak of such expectations in gender identities. During her year in Form Four, Connie went on a joint school geological tour to Guilin and became friends with a group of peers from another school. Although she was not attracted to anyone from the tour, a

girl asked her out to see a movie afterwards. Apparently, the girl was “following” Connie and remembered vivid details about her whereabouts during the joint school tour. Connie was simply curious about her and went out to see a movie with her. In conjunction with what a TB would do for a girl, Connie only came to know about the ascribed behaviours for a TB in her later years as an active participant in tongzhi politics. Connie recalled her experience going out with the TB.

I live in Kowloon and she lives on the Hong Kong side. I am not familiar with the roads in Hong Kong and we said we would meet at a movie theatre in Tai Hang, Causeway Bay. I have no idea how to get there and she said, ‘Let’s meet up at the MTR station.’ That’s how it happened. When I got there, she was already standing and waiting. She’s taller than me, wore glasses, had short hair. Of course, I didn’t know what it meant then. But after I got involved with the community later, I knew she was what we would call a TB. ... I thought it was weird then. She would buy things for me. She would always let me walk ahead if we’re walking together. She would open doors for me. Whenever we go out, she would be there earlier. I asked her why. She would say she is always fifteen minutes earlier. ... She asked me out. We had meals, we watched movies, she insisted on paying. She basically did what a TB would do for a girl.

Later on in her life, Connie came to know of what it meant to be a TB after she went to a small group gathering at Club 64. She spoke with passion on how the experience at Club 64 made her first realize that there are lesbians in Hong Kong. In particular, these lesbians were like role models to her. They taught her the vernacular of being a TB.

Why do I end up as a TB? They looked at me and thought I was sporty enough. So I should be a TB. The whole group was similar in age, therefore, there is a peer group feeling to it. I learnt about TB and TBG, also about “queen” and “king”. These group of friends went to same all-girls school. They have a very strong nutongzhi culture. They are not the ordinary type. They are a really tough group of people. That’s why I can

learn so much from them. We would go watch many movies and I remembered one of the character in the film was a TB and that's how I learnt about "the blessed sword" for TB. It meant our fingers! Two girls, when they have sex, will use their fingers. I had no idea before. I thought two girls would only kiss. I have no idea how they do it. Also, I learnt that a TB must chase a TBG. ... Also, TBs have to be courteous and have to be proper. There are rules to being a TB. TBs have to adhere to rules for TBs. Gs have to do that with rules for Gs. ... There are also sayings like "tung sing lyun" (同性戀) does not last. The G will get married eventually. To sum it up, one has to work harder as a TB. Have to make a lot more money. If not, girls will not be with you. You have to be able to financially support her and you have to be stronger than a man.

As a result of her experience with this peer group, Connie realized the importance of having a support network for lesbians. This belief eventually led her to be one of the key organizers in the second generation of community activists. In her words, "I feel strongly that I belong to this circle because I don't have other friends. I belong to this community. I should do more for it."

Twenty year-old Bik Bik declared, "I have always been a TB." Androgynous in appearance, Bik Bik considered herself to be a TB until she studied in Form Six. When she reached Form Six, she realized that she might be more of a Pure than a TB because she has become more feminine.¹ Bik Bik said,

I also don't feel I need to be like a TB anymore. I don't feel comfortable. Why? I don't think a person has to be strong all the time. Sometimes you can be open and talk about yourself, it can be very comforting. Also, I am not willing to do everything now. In the past, I cannot not to do everything. I did everything for my girlfriends! I paid for meals. I made sure they get home. But now and for the last two or three relationships, I'm not like that anymore. ... Although I am still a bit more of a B in relationships and maybe the image of a B matters for others, but I don't really think it is that important. When I was a B, I liked girls with long hair, very feminine girls. ... But actually, I am beginning to like TBs more. ... I can really

appreciate TBs. I think TBs are quite nice and if I am with a TB, I don't have to do that much. (Laughter)

In terms of the emergence of TB and TBG in the local lesbian scene, twenty-seven years old Alex made an attempt to explain the phenomenon.

Actually, I think I can explain its development at least I understand it as such. For example, when I was nineteen or twenty years old when I first came upon these roles. That was six or seven years ago. Same-sex love is really underground then. ... The high profile ones are the TBs and TBGs who came out earlier to establish a kind of culture that requires one to be in distinct roles. Then in these few years, there are more discussion in media or from civic education that it doesn't have to be this way. I can comfortably be the person I am. People have a broader concept about two women in love.

As Alex suggested, the gender identities of TBs and TBGs raised lesbian visibility in public spaces yet such visibility might put them in danger. This is particularly true for butch lesbians who put their bodies in danger when they transgress bodily boundaries on what is expected of a woman in society. Yet at the same time, the role of femmes are minimized in lesbian visibility as women who appear to be more masculine are often relegated as lesbians rather than those who are feminine in appearance (Nestle, 1992; Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Martin, 1996; Munt, 1998; Eves, 2004).

Being in Public as a Tomboy

Thirty-three years old Phil expresses a sense of frustration when she discussed how her gender identity as a TB was continuously a subject of discrimination. Phil's TB identity was essential to her social identification with other TBs and hence, it was both a social marker and a political tool. Phil addresses the performance of butch bodies in

lesbian spaces where gender codifications matter when it comes to a sense of camaraderie between TBs. Bar culture seems to be the most susceptible space to such gender codifications (Kennedy and Davis, 1993). Phil describes what being a “B Tsai” takes on certain expectations and meanings in a bar setting.

Usually, I will try to make new friends but I won't make a move to court others because I like to hang out with Bs. I don't feel as embarrassed. I want to let people know that I am not interested in flirting so please do not assume that I am trying to flirt with you when I am not.

It is as if Phil is implying that a TB will not be romantically interested in another TB, therefore it is safer for Phil to just hang out with TBs. Lesbian bars might have been a safer place for TBs and also for other women who have same-sex desires. Many respondents have voiced their opinions on lesbian bars as one of the few safer places for women. The notion of lesbian bars as safer places will be further discussed in chapter seven. Passing as a man might have been perceived as a safety measure when one is walking down the streets. Yet Phil's experience on the streets of Wan Chai was different. In one incident, she was being pushed around by the police.

Interviewer: I remembered one time you said that a cop asked you for your ID card in Wan Chai and it was really late at night. The cop didn't believe your sex when he looked at your card.

Phil: No. He didn't check my ID card. He just put it away and then started to make the move to search my body. I used my hand to push him away, he immediately accused me, "Are you trying to attack the police?" I said right back, "Take a look at my ID card first!" He said, "I know what I'm doing," and wanted to touch my back pocket on my jeans. Thank goodness I have my wallet there and he's not really touching my butt.

Interviewer: Were you with anyone then?

Phil: No. I was alone. I was leaving from my friend's place. I repeated myself twice to the police and asked him to check my ID first. I even told him straight up that I'm a woman. He then took my ID card out of his pocket and checked. He looked a bit shaken and just said, "Okay. Thanks," gave me back the card and left. I was so tired then that I didn't copy down his number. I remembered this incident vividly. When it happened a second time, I started to disbelieve my identity card as well.

Verbal and physical harassment is not uncommon for butch lesbians. Respondents who identify as butch lesbians aging from early twenties such as Ah Lok and Ku Tsai to those who were older such as Eileen and Felix have experienced negative verbal remarks from family members, peers and strangers commenting on their masculine appearance. Lucetta Kam Yip-Lo (2003) in her Master's thesis on masculine women in Hong Kong, interviewed eighteen women who have often been mistaken as men by the general public. Although not all of Kam's interview subjects identify as lesbians, yet her study shed light on how "masculine women" developed their own agency by taking on culturally available discourses on female masculinity to make sense of their own gender identification, regardless of whether they were intentional on appearing to be masculine or not. In particular, Kam made a salient observation on the cultural acceptance of an ageing woman to be more gender-neutral or masculine in her appearance. This is not to say that negative verbal remarks or any form of harassment will diminish as one ages, yet it is to point out the complexity of cultural contexts in this case. As lesbian visibility continued to increase in Hong Kong, one would hope that public sensitivity towards one's gender expression would be heightened.

Identifying as a TB and Family Relations

Twenty-one years old Ku Tsai described how her identification as B Tsai made her aware of a dress code since she was a child.

For one reason, my dad loves sons more than daughters. After my older sister was born, they wanted another child and out popped another girl and they still wanted to “chase” for another one, and that’s my younger sister. When we were young, we didn’t have long hair because it’s so troublesome for grandma to take care of us. It wasn’t until my elder sister is old enough to wash her own hair could she grow her hair. But I stayed with my short hair like a tomboy and basically continued till now. It’s short hair for me.

My mom asked me to wear a dress for kindergarten as well as on my birthdays. I remembered that we argued about it. My aunt adores me and she used to buy all sorts of girly clothes for me and I didn’t like wearing them at all. Then when I was in primary school, I got into the table tennis team and I got to wear sports uniform to school. No more dresses! For the whole week, I wore sports uniform and when the teacher asked me about it, I just said I had to practice everyday!

Actually, if there is any job that needs me to wear a dress, I won’t go for it! Or those that needs me to wear a uniform like the kimono. I know sometimes Japanese restaurant managers make you wear kimonos for work. My friends told me that the pay is much higher and the tips are good. But no way! No way! Not with those uniforms!

Twenty-two years old Leslie landed a good job with a hospital even before she graduated from university. Despite achieving what was expected of her as a dutiful daughter, Leslie has been in constant arguments with her mother over many issues. Her mother perceived Leslie to be “betraying herself and the family” and to be “rebellious” through her insistence of being masculine in appearance, hence she was worried that Leslie might end up being like Yu Chun (俞琤). Leslie has short hair and wore casual clothing that was common among young men, in other words, Leslie appeared to be a young tomboy. Leslie described, “There were times when we went out and everybody

thought I was a guy. She hated that! She felt she lost her 'face!' She would say things like 'I gave birth to a daughter whom everyone thought as a guy. You don't look like a man or a woman!' Harsh words like that."

As a result of her mother's outright rejection, Leslie felt that she had to "compensate for her identity" by excelling in school and career. In comparison to her mother, her father did not show as much loathing towards her dress code nor did he support Leslie of her choice. Therefore, whenever she thought of her family and her failed expectations as a daughter, Leslie would "hide in the washroom and sob quietly." These bouts of sadness also happened whenever she saw a film or read a magazine that would trigger her guilt towards her family. To a certain extent, Leslie expressed that she "wanted to be numb" instead and "not to be bothered as if it's a matter of life and death." Sometimes Leslie wanted to shout back and to just say it out loud that she is a TB and that is what she is. But those words never came out and instead, she has often explained to her mother that her short hair and boyish fashion was simply worn for comfort, thereby delineating her suspicion of Leslie wanting to be a TB. It was clear to Leslie that there would be less tension with her mother if she had identified more as a TBG and dress more feminine. To a certain extent, Leslie blamed herself for her mother's feelings towards her butchness. She claimed, "I've heard for so long that she cannot accept me as I am. But I have also been wrong in hiding my identity. I should not lie to them but I really don't have the courage to tell it as it is and to hurt them."

Intimate Acts: Sex between a TB and a TBG

“It’s inborn to know how to have sex,” said twenty-two year old Taro, “I took the initiative with my first girlfriend.” She learnt about sex through watching Japanese porn on the Internet. She argued that “it must be Japanese” because of similar body types for Asian women. Taro insisted that her girlfriend has to perform oral sex on her as much as she did on her. She felt that sometimes a B has more strength to hold up the G and “be in many positions during sex.” Taro lamented, “Basically, I might have ‘served’ her six to seven times and I will only get twice.” She felt that it was “unfair situation.”

Taro: It’s unfair because we fight all the time about this. Personally, I feel that if there is love, there is sex naturally but if you want to just have sex, you can go looking for sex only. But if you love me, you should not leave the issue of sex aside. I always say to her, whenever you want it, you always nag me for it, so I would give it to you. But when I nag you for it, you call me crazy! That is, it’s not unfair. If I were a guy, it would be better, no need to think so much about it. ... Most of time, I’m the one to initiate sex with a G.. Very few Gs would initiate sex, it’s a bit embarrassing.

Interviewer: *Why? Are you embarrassed or is she?*

Taro: I feel it’s me who is being embarrassed. Because when I take off all my clothes, you can see everything. When a B takes off a G’s clothes, she really wanted to see it but it doesn’t mean a G wants to see your body. When a B looks at a G’s body, she is bound to be excited. You feel ecstatic! But for a G to take off yours, it might not be so. You have to empathize with her. Even if a B didn’t say she’s embarrassed, there are many Bs who feel that way. In particular, when you’re having sex and the G is flat-chested like the runway at the airport, and the B has a feminine physique!”

Ku Tsai also had a strong reaction.

Let’s put it this way, I’ll be the one to take the initiative not her! I cannot accept that fact that she’d approach me sexually. Anyway, she’s the more passive one in terms of sex. Sleeping is sleeping unless we have sex. I would only have sex with the girl I like.

How does the act of touching come to be associated as a sign of weakness? Much discussed in biology, philosophy, Western religion and psychology, the morality of touching has been seen as sinful, primal and corrupting to one's mind. St. Augustine names it as an original sin in a doctrine. He was adamant that physical sensations, lustful desires and our cravings of hunger originated from external forces. Susan Bordo (1993) explains St. Augustine's idea as one that views his body as completely disconnected to one's mind. The control over one's body is much more important than one's surrender to physical sensations or cravings. Bordo alludes St. Augustine's view to regarding the body as "alienation" and "enemy" (Bordo, 1993, p.145).

It is with the definition of a "stone butch" that I want to explicate the connections between touch and the perception of vulnerability as a feminine trait. Widely known as the first writer on transgender fiction and issues, Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) popularized the term "stone butch" through the main character, Jess. Primarily known as a must-read text for butch lesbians, much of what we came to discuss as butchness stems from Jess' identification of "stone butch" and her relations with many femmes. We drew our conclusions about what stone butchness meant and its rightful place in lesbian cultures. The stone butch came to signify "a kind of impenetrability and therefore oddly references the nonperformative aspects of this butch's sexual identity (Halberstam, 1998, p.123). Even though Jess did have orgasms through a dildo or tribadism from her lovers in the novel, the image of the stone butch as untouchable and impenetrable runs deep in many contemporary lesbian cultures.

In her book *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich explored the relationship and the meanings of touching and being touched in the context of butch-femme sexualities. Cvetkovich made a disclaimer that in linking trauma theories with sexual intimacy can be problematic to some, but she argues that by reframing the notion of trauma, we can come close to understanding bodily boundaries and representations. Cvetkovich explains,

In drawing on images of penetration, discourses of both trauma and sexuality invoke the powerful fears of vulnerability that being affected by sensations or being touched can arouse. Like trauma, touch is a term that has both physical and emotional, both material and immaterial, connotations. To be emotionally touched, like being traumatized, is to be affected in a way that feels physical even if it is also a psychic state (Cvetkovich 2003:51).

When a butch lesbian's reputation and lesbian masculinity is dependent on one's sexual untouchability, public display of emotions or feelings would jeopardize the representation of butchness. The visibility of butch lesbians has made them easy targets for acts of blatant homophobia and physical violence, such as police strip searches, verbal assaults, beatings, sexual violence and trauma. A butch lesbian's response to such violent acts have been stone, as Cvetkovich points out. This public "stone attitude" has been essential as a survival tactic and a form of protection for butch lesbians, whether they are socializing in bars or they are working in factories. Instead, butch lesbians relied on their support networks, such as close friends and partners, to release their feelings and to gain emotional rapport. Butch-femme culture, in other words, alerts us that any public response to trauma is reserved for the privacy of our sexual and emotional lives. But contradictions are common for butch lesbians, whether this came to signify a digression from sexual untouchability or the lack of emotions in public arenas. The notion of touch

is not only physical, it also holds emotional power within butch-femme relations. Being touched is synonymous with being affected.

Butch lesbians were commonly known as part of the “old gay (Stein, 1997, pp. 98-99).” Arlene Stein’s analysis of lesbian identities from the 1970s to the 1990s in *Sex and Sensibility*, as well as Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis’ (1993) research on butch-femme lesbian communities in 1940s and 1950s Buffalo, points out that being butch has strong working-class roots. Although not all butches in Kennedy and Davis’ study declare themselves as stone butches, untouchability was a desirable trait for butches in the 1950s working-class bar culture. Toughness equates a political stance against femininity.

Criticisms against butch-femme culture was vocalized among lesbian feminists. Sheila Jeffreys (1989) wrote in an essay criticizing stone butchness as “internalized homophobia” and “self hatred.” She went on to align role-playing as synonymous to early sexologists’ prescription of lesbians as one masculine partner with another feminine partner. Therefore, if lesbians engage in role-playing, they are following dualistic models: active/passive, dominance/submission, man/woman. For Jeffreys, a genuine lesbian relationship should emphasize equal partnership and not a heterosexual version of lesbian relationships. Jeffreys did not acknowledge the agency of butches and femmes in this situation, instead she assumes a monolithic view of lesbian relationships. Julia Penelope (1983) also uses her own experience as a stone butch for fifteen years as the basis to criticize butch-femme culture. She recalls her own struggles in trying to be in control

through the rejection of sexual touch. Feminism provided her with courage to break through the monotony of being a stone butch. Penelope also depicts stone butchness as internalized self-hatred of lesbians and refers butches as lesbians who are incapable of having emotions and to a certain extent, choices to have sexual agency. She believes that sexual morals within butch-femme culture is one of the primary reasons that led to the denial of sexual experience for stone butches.

On the topic of sex, Ku Tsai summed it up by saying, “Anyway it’s me who makes the move, not her. I cannot accept it if she touches me. I’m more passive that way, I want to sleep.” When I pursued further on what she meant by passiveness since it appeared to be the direct opposite in terms of initiating sex with her girlfriend, Ku Tsai clarified that she remains “passive” to sex and “even if my girlfriend likes sex, I am not as into it, I don’t like it.” I asked if her view on sex has to do with her prior discussion on her B identity, “I think I’m like that but my other friends are not like that. We (friends who identify as Bs) don’t really talk about it.”

In conclusion, this chapter provides an overview on the impact of dualism on our understanding of bodies, in particular to butch and femme bodies. I have also queried the labelling practices of naming a woman TB, TBG or a Pure and how these labels might affect the way Hong Kong lesbians view themselves or others, self-regulate or verify their behaviours.

Chapter Five

Spaces of Intimacy: Being In and Out of Love

For intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and an ideal of publicness. What if we saw it emerge from much more mobile processes of attachment? While the fantasies associated with intimacy usually end up occupying the space of convention, in practice the drive toward it is a kind of wild thing that is not necessarily organized that way, or any way. – Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy* (2000, p.4).

And whenever space is a value – there is no greater value than intimacy – it has magnifying properties. – Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1964, p.202).

One might ask curiously, what does love has to do with spatial relations? Spaces, be it public or private, dominate how we came to conceive of “intimate worlds”. The same spaces that we find work, leisure, intimacy, community and political belonging are the ones that contain heterosexuality as the norm for spatial relations. As explained in my theoretical considerations in Chapter One, the dichotomy of public versus private operates along other binary logic that continued to permeate our everyday life despite its contested nature.

The discussion on public vs. private is not only a matter of the state. It is crucial to understand the public/private dichotomy and its practices as gendered. The idea of privacy is a deep-rooted tradition within Western political theories of autonomy, private property, patriarchal family structures and personal freedom. One particular concern surrounding privacy is what constitutes as personal freedom. Modern liberal concepts of

individual freedom and rights within familial structures situate an individual within state and private households that are heterosexual and depoliticized in nature. Therefore, being private, in essence, is to abstain not only in the public sphere but to be domesticated in a heterosexual reproductive unit. An ideal private realm would point to notions of domesticity, embodiment, nature, family, property, intimacy, passion, sexuality, emotions, unwaged labour and reproduction. On the contrary, an ideal public sphere encompasses principles of disembodiment, rationality, citizenship, justice, economy, waged labour, the state and valour (Duncan, 1996, p.128). As a result, women have been historically treated as belonging to the private realm, and incapable of asserting objectivity through emotional detachment. I have found the critique of public versus private as informative to my understanding of how lesbian sexualities are being rendered as a private affair. What and who is considered as part of the larger public sphere limit the accessibility of marginal groups to claim legitimacy and to assert their voices. In addition, I have learnt how the state can be oppressive towards sexualities and by extension, how the state can suppress lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movements through its multi-faced institutions operating within a hegemonic logic.²⁹

²⁹ Jürgen Habermas (1981) in his theorization of the public sphere argues that economic forces and the rationalization of public life often subject individuals to a form of remote access in society. Economic forces can be interpreted as corporate capitalism and mass consumption whereas rationalization processes point to the agenda of political parties and special interests groups in substitution of participatory democracy. Therefore, the notion of a democratic public life can only exist when political and cultural institutions empower its citizens to act on its behalf. Furthermore, the boundaries between public and private, the individual and the community, the bureaucracy and the self are lessening in its significance to the public sphere. Nancy Fraser in her influential essay, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” challenged the “bourgeois, masculinist conception of the public sphere” and hence women, the lower classes and racial minorities are excluded from Habermas’ conception of the public sphere (Fraser, 1992, p.117–118). Moreover, Habermas envisioned any discourse in the public sphere as towards a common good that is ratified by shared interests and to be differentiated from domestic life. Fraser problematized this notion by asserting that such a public sphere would entail the exclusion of an issue such as domestic violence outside of rational discussion.

As Susan Gal suggests, “community vs. individual, rationality vs. sentiment, money vs. love, solidarity vs. self-interest” are some of the oppositional values that are present in both public and private spheres (Gal, 2002, p.77). One can easily add heterosexual vs. homosexual, gay vs. lesbian, Western vs. Asian, closeted vs. out and the list continues. Indeed these seemingly antagonistic categories are not consistent in its opposition. The boundaries between money as contemptible and love as ideal may not be as far-fetched as one can posit it to be. Nonetheless, the discussion of binary logic seemed to succeed in upholding certain power relations, institutional authority, capitalist agenda and social control.

The difficulty lies in the porous nature of intimacy. As Lauren Berlant puts it cogently, intimacy can be “portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices” (Berlant, 2000, p.4). Lesbian intimacy is regulated by the state to be hidden in private yet it finds a way to reconstruct itself along crevices that have sprang up momentarily and along temporal spaces that lesbians have to build, tear down and to rebuild again. The extremity for conducting these exercises to justify one’s sexual being can be tiring. The survival skills that one uses to sustain a lesbian relationship are dexterousness.

In this chapter, I argue that lesbian intimacy is both an imaginative space and a contentious site. Within Adrienne Rich’s notion of compulsory heterosexuality, Hong Kong lesbians have to be resourceful, creative and daring in order to carve out spaces where they can engage in romance and sexual activities. Through the responses from the

interview subjects, I have been able to gain a further understanding to how lesbian relationships happened, sustained and ended. It also helped me to investigate how different forms of relationships were mapped out cognitively and experientially among the respondents. Being out as a lesbian is not a constant criterion for a lesbian relationship. It is almost ludicrous to suggest it as a form of criteria. Therefore, lesbian intimacy is often labour-intensive where intense emotions are present to sustain relationships as well as to resist heteronormative forces in society. I will begin with the story of Felix and demonstrate how a continuum of caring is developed out of various relationships. Then I will investigate how lesbians engage in different forms of intimate relations through various ways to meet one another.

The Story of Felix: A Continuum of Caring

In her forties, Felix regards her butch identity as limiting to her choice of employment. She believes that a more feminine appearance is more acceptable to most employers and it can help one to advance in her career. In Felix's case, she singled out aging as one of the important factors for her, "The older I get the more I want to be myself. I don't want to wear a mask to work anymore." She recalled those days where she had to put on a skirt for work everyday only to find herself crying when she got home. Brought in a single parent household, Felix came out to her mother when she broke up with her second partner of twenty years, "I was very direct and I told my mother that I am a lesbian and I am a TB." Her mother's first reaction was to warn her "to be careful" and "be wary of who you are making friends with." Felix has significant relationships with women who she met on the Internet. Her first significant relationship was with a teacher

whom they stayed together for twenty years of which thirteen years they lived together. The relationship failed primarily because of “differences” and Felix’s desire to feel in love again. She spoke at length about her second relationship.

Actually, I wanted to break up with her after a month. I mentioned breaking up with her and she refused adamantly. ... It’s like trying to break up every week but she cannot accept it so we are both very unhappy all the time. Until a year ago, I realized that something is wrong and she told me that she thinks she has cancer. She doesn’t want to go to see the doctor. She just wanted to hide and waste away. Of course I cannot allow that. It was difficult. She wouldn’t let me tell my family so it made it even more difficult. Even though there are no sparks between us anymore. ... So finally she went to see the doctor and the doctor said she has depression. ... We went through a lot to find a psychiatrist who would accept a client who is “tung sing lyun” (同性戀). ... I realized if you leave a person when they are most vulnerable, you might as well leave her to die. ... But deep inside, I still want to find someone who I can love and will love me back. I have needs, too!

But because she was hearing things almost four days in a week and she had hallucinations before. She tried buying coal, too. I don’t want to take the risk. Even though there was no romance between us, there is still love and caring. In these few years, it has been me taking care of her and to take care of someone like her is very draining. It can almost make you have a nervous breakdown! ... I believe I don’t have a very smooth life. No luck. For example, some people walk down an easy path, a normal path, but what I don’t understand is I can walk down the same path, and I feel it was much more treacherous for me. Don’t know if it’s my problem or not.

Felix knows sufficiently the importance of having supportive friends to deal with such issues. She establishes friendships with lesbians through ICQ and other friends. She views ICQ as a convenient tool and going to lesbian bars as an alternative way to make new friends. Yet her current situation does not allow her to take much time away from caring for her ex-girlfriend. The topic of same-sex marriage came up in the interview as she voiced her experience with trying to find medical resources for her ex-girlfriend.

Felix recalled those experiences, “During those times when I knew she was ill, what status can I come up with to stay by her side at the hospital? I have to go through her parents but she wouldn’t let them know! I’m stuck in the middle!” Felix was not doing well financially then and the whole ordeal led her to believe that a relationship between two women is more challenging when each partner has a different perspective on coming out. She came to believe that a relationship where both partners are out usually entails in “a healthier feeling for the relationship to develop.”

Felix had to put forth most of her emotional efforts into a relationship that cannot be public. If we succumb to the notion that relationships take work, then it is undeniably intensive labour that we see in these lesbian relationships. Lesbian intimacy generate material effects where affective labour is primarily based on whether one can sustain a relationship through times of hiding one’s sexuality and being clandestine in every moment of your social life. Hochschild (1983) has put forth ‘emotion work’ as a management of one’s emotions in order to produce a public self that can in turn generate an expected emotional outcome from others. She asserted that individuals who work in the service industry will unconsciously put on an appropriate display of emotions so as to adhere to rules and regulations as set by their employers. By adopting a social interactionist stand, Hochschild believed that emotion work is also performed in everyday life situations. Therefore, one can understand Felix’s feelings in facing outside social worlds as a performance of intense emotion work. I might add, the performance of emotion work can also be read as multi-directional. As much as Felix tried to maintain a strong self for her girlfriends and the heteronormative world, one must ask the critical

question, at what emotional cost is Felix subjecting herself to maintain these relationships. At the same time, what about the emotional costs for other lesbians who have to deal with both internalized homophobia and multiple external unspoken enemies?

Nothing renders public spaces more threatening than being caught with one's lesbian lover. There is a sense of physicality to it that a lesbian body must remain invisible to knowing eyes by staying away from touching each other affectionately. For Felix, being out puts in danger her partner's livelihood and health concerns. Even though they have been fortunate to find a medical practitioner who they can open themselves to as lesbians, Felix realized the lack of institutional support as in hospital visitation rights is still an obstacle to their relationship. But putting the issue of practicality aside, the emotional toll that one must take on in order to sustain a relationship is clearly demonstrative through Felix's personal conflict in staying or leaving the relationship. It is unfair to say that her partner's illness contributed to Felix feeling bound to the relationship. It might be more constructive to view Felix as working towards a solution and that her labouring towards a relationship is indicative of creating a model tangible in her situation. As a result, she has to straddle between caring for an ex-girlfriend and being in another relationship with her current partner.

From One to Another: Spaces of Serial Monogamy

Most respondents who have been in love often choose to be in serial monogamous relationships where one relationship might end or overlap with another relationship already nascent in the background. For those who have not been in love or who are

currently not in a relationship, a relationship with one stable partner is often articulated as the ideal relationship.

Twenty three years old Julia had three significant relationships. Her first relationship remained the most impressionable and in her words, “from someone who is wearing a school uniform to wearing a suit to work, to see her being promoted, the way you view a person is completely different.” Julia was a Form Four student and her then partner was in Form Seven. They had an on and off relationship of seven years. Julia had a relationship with a teacher when the relationship was in short hiatus. The teacher was five years older than Julia and the relationship was kept secret most of the time on the teacher’s side.

There is no way to mind it. If it could have been avoided, we wouldn't have been together. But for me, I don't like to close up myself. I like to say what I need to say. But it's different in her position. She has her own boundaries. I feel that's too hard. It's not because we are two girls, it's more because of her position.

Julia has often let her family know about her relationships. She holds hands with her partners in public, except for the second relationship with her teacher. Julia enjoys a certain level of freedom in terms of being open about her relationships to her family. She would bring them home for dinner. Since her mother passed away, Julia feels that she needs to be home for dinner and to be with her father. In spite of this, Julia tells how she spends time with her girlfriend.

I am a very family-oriented person. I can cook, watch videos, play video games. I still go out because my current girlfriend is a colleague of mine

and she is also a designer. So she goes out to check out clothing all the time. ... We would go everywhere, not only in Causeway Bay, we like to go everywhere, like places which sell old stuff, too. Mostly in Hong Kong, I don't like Kowloon. I feel it's very suffocating. Even for Causeway Bay, I would choose times when there is less people out. I always get sick after I come back from Mong Kok. I have nasal allergies, too. ... I really hate taking MTR. I hate it. It's very suffocating and I cannot see out.

It was not always the case with her partner's family though. For her relationship of seven years, Julia knew that her partner's mother is not accepting of their relationship. Her mother did not engage in conversations with Julia while the father would have conversations with her. Julia's second relationship with a teacher was "basically a non-issue" and not to be disclosed at all. Her current relationship was the most satisfying where her partner's family seemed to be "okay" about their relationship. Julia contends that whether her partner is accepted by her family is often dependent of whether the girlfriend "knows how to act", for example, like being sensitive and caring to other family members. She understands her current situation as one of the most successful relationship in terms of being out to both families because of her partner's independence in general. The characteristic of being independent is synonymous to one being able to take care of oneself and to be able to support oneself financially. This is to say that the normative values of success and productivity in a capitalist city also apply to whether one would be considered as a worthy partner. Julia's experiences in relationships illustrates the flow and ebb of coming out in a relationship. It is never a stable route yet personal achievement can overshadow one's less desirable trait, such as one's lesbian sexuality in this case.

Anne is thirty years-old with a stylish appearance. Having lived in Fanling all her life, Anne described herself as a sporty individual, “I wore my school uniform dress and kicked football with the boys.” As a former secondary school teacher, Anne taught for four years specializing in history and later left the education system to open up her own business as an entrepreneur. Anne opened a café as a women-only space and a lesbian space.

Then suddenly one day, there was this one girl, Form Seven girl, she made breakfast for me everyday and added something special, like chocolate (金沙) with it. I thought it was very cute. ... When I was young and hanging out with boys, kinda like dating but not sure if it is really dating, but I would say bye bye when I don't like them. There isn't really a feeling. But when it comes to girls, after I started dating the first girl, I knew, I knew that the relationships before women were not real dating because the feeling is so different. That is, if you love someone, you will feel this way.

Anne has been in serial monogamous relationships since her first relationship in Form Seven in 1992. She met her first girlfriend in secondary school and the relationship lasted two years. When Anne asked her first girlfriend the reason for breaking up, her girlfriend used family pressure as the primary reason for leaving the relationship. Yet Anne doubted the truthfulness in her answer, “Actually I don't sense it because I'm very close to her family. I slept over all the time and so did she at my place. Also, I called her mom “*kai ma*” (契媽). Her mom brought me everywhere. She even told her relatives and friends that I am her “*kai nei*” (契女)!” Thinking back on her previous relationships, Anne had the following reflection,

My character didn't change much, I think, but my views on relationships and emotions did. For my first time, I was a really awful person. I didn't

really care for her much, that is, I was very real and blunt with her. I won't be soft and caring towards her just because she's my girlfriend. I would still scold her like I always do. I know it must be hard for her. I was very self-righteous, that is, I didn't think she wouldn't be with me. That's why I suffered in my next relationship. ... I have learnt to love the other person more, that is, for my first relationship, I didn't love much. I was putting up a front like you're my girlfriend and you should do this and that. For example, when I'm tired, I want her to carry things for me. I won't carry them myself. But now I won't pull this kind of stuff on my current girlfriend. When my first girlfriend saw me later, she asked me how come I'm carrying things now. Then I thought back to who I was then.

Temporal Space of Intimacy: Cyber-Affectivities

Locating spaces for lesbian intimacy is conditional under the rubric of a city's mappings. Most respondents do not meet their romantic interests through lesbian karaoke bars or cafes. Instead, they relied on the Internet by posting messages on lesbian-specific websites and chat online with potential romantic interests. This is not to say that lesbians do not seek romance in other settings such as schools and workplaces. The promises of discretion in "computer-mediated communication" make it easier for lesbians, gays and queers who live in environments not conducive to being "out" to meet each other and to develop online communities.

Upon graduation from secondary school, twenty-one year old Ku Tsai began to work as a salesperson at a chain-clothing store in Mong Kok. Surfing and chatting on the Internet is a daily habit for her. Ku Tsai is a regular customer at lesbian bars such as Home and Oasis in Causeway Bay. But she prefers to go dancing at discos popular with crowds that are younger and more straight-identified such as Cyber in Tsim Sha Tsui and

348 in Jordan. On the topic of relationships, Ku Tsai tells of her numerous relationships with young women whom she met at school and on the Internet.

Over ten, twelve and thirteen relationships! I counted them all. Yes, they are all girlfriends. Although some of them are not long, but still, once you've been together with someone, you've been together. When we are together, we will actually say that we are together. So that's it. Sometimes friends might kiss you but it's not like that. Also, I've met different girls in discos and we held hands but we're not together. Those don't count, only the more serious ones. ... I don't really care. I've been with les but the secondary school I went to is a co-ed one. A girl can say she's not les but she can still be with me. The longest relationship I had in secondary school was eleven months. Isn't that funny? Eleven months! In Form Four. .. I wanted to have longer relationships but I haven't been able to after that one. The others were around three months. I couldn't keep them. I don't know why.

Common among young people in Ku Tsai's generation, chatting on the Internet or using SMS to relay messages are necessary as communicative tools of intimacy. Ku Tsai had no problems meeting young women or dating them. Conducting the interview with Ku Tsai almost means trying to learn a kind of chatting that is familiar to the younger generation. This is not to say that chatting is only dominant among people of a younger generation. Chatting online is a primary way of getting to know someone and in many cases among lesbian women, a safer way to communicate without being exposed as well as an initial step to build up trust. The most popular lesbian website remains to be Blur-F.com where women often post messages and add each other onto their MSN or ICQ. For the younger generation, it is a non-dispensable tool if one can have easy accessibility to the technology.

Twenty-seven years old Jo used cyberspace as a way to verify whether she is truly interested in women and if she can identify as a lesbian. After breaking up with her first

girlfriend, she felt the need to put her own identification to test and to find “a channel” to meet other lesbians. She visited the post popular lesbian website, Blurf.com and proceeded to meet women by posting messages on their message board. Online chatting with women came easy for most respondents. Twenty-eight years old Kitman also relied on chatrooms to develop a support network with a group of lesbian friends. When asked about the accessibility of the Internet, Kitman felt that most of her friends usually have private access at home. They would chat online till late at night on intimate topics that were “closer to their hearts.” Kitman suggested that the primary reason for people to go online was the simple procedure in adding new friends to your cyber network. She asserted, “You can just add a new person to your contact list and then discuss a few things on your love life with a new friend. If the friend is bored, she will leave the conversation but it’s not a big deal. You can easily find another listener.” In addition, Kitman was fully aware that her lesbian identification would lead her to find cyber spaces that would be conducive to having a lesbian audience. Despite the wide accessibility of the Internet, finding net friends who share the same interests as you do remained to be difficult. According to Kitman, she had experiences where her net friends physically met at a restaurant and all they talked about was “where to buy clothes, cars or flat” and she found herself not being able to contribute to the conversation. The experience led her to believe that even for a group of people whose initial identification as women who love other women have brought them together on cyberspace did not guarantee closer friendships.

As of the writing of this thesis, there are currently nine lesbian and queer women websites that are being regularly updated and functioning with active participation on their bulletin boards, forums and chatrooms. Namely, Blur-F.com, Queer Sisters, www.lesgay.info, f'union, Women's Coalition of Hong Kong SAR, Re[L]ez, SamKiLes, HKLesgo and LesPub. Blur-F.com remains to be the most highly cited website by respondents in my study. By no means is this an exhaustive list and indeed, there are many more organization websites, personal websites, Internet radio websites or blog entries that have allowed many women to participate online. One just need to visit a lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender or queer organization's website and click on the links section to view a listing of such websites. Many Hong Kong lesbians also visit websites sited in Taiwan or Mainland China to meet other women or learn of other sexual cultures. Chinese language websites are much preferred by local lesbians than English language websites.

Lucetta Kam Yip-Lo, in her research on Shanghai *lalas* noticed that cyberspace is the most popular gathering site for lala in Mainland China (Kam, 2006, p.90). The increasing visibility of *lalas* in Mainland China is directly related to the accessibility of Internet technology and the abundance of chatrooms and bulletin boards. Through her ethnographic research on the Shanghai *lala* community, she came to know the founder of a local lala website who informed her that her website had a registered membership of 45,000 nationwide in four year's time (Kam, 2006, p.90). Similarly, Yaya Chen and Yiqing Chen also mentioned well-known lala websites such as Lalachat, Lescn and

Aladao as a key gathering site for lalas to gain emotional support (Chen and Chen, 2006, p.123).

Chris Berry and Fran Martin (2003), in their research on Internet lesbian, gay and queer networks in Taiwan and South Korea indicate that accessibility of the Internet contributes to the emergence of the same communities. Meanwhile, political activists pose the question whether the anonymity of online identities can be complicating for public community mobilization strategies. Identities remain discreet and protected, unstable and hard to reach. Activists can call for meetings on virtual space but when it comes to the materialization of direct actions, there are always the risks of plans being stalled and lives being threatened. Oppressive environments, of course, require alternative political organizing strategies. Olivia Khoo (2003) describes how lesbians, gays and queers in Malaysia link up with diasporic Malaysians to build community capacity, to share mobilization strategies and to unsettle marginal positions.

Stable Spaces or Imagined Stability: Marriage

Same-sex marriage also comes up as a topic with younger respondents. Both Ah Lok and Miki mentioned that they have searched on the Internet where the possible places to get married for women are. Miki thought of going to Iceland and Holland. Ah Lok preferred Canada and Iceland. The fact that as young women, they both knew the language of same-sex marriage denotes an increased awareness of the sexual rights discourse. Both of them did not give specific reasons for their choice of countries other than expressing an interest in visiting those countries. But both of them did make a point

about not choosing Taiwan. Although Taiwan does not currently allow for same-sex marriages or registered partnerships, it can be assumed that they brought it up because Taiwan symbolizes a place of tolerance and openness towards homosexuality in Chinese societies. It also points to the wider availability of lesbian writings and lesbian-specific websites from Taiwan. Since Chinese language materials are often in demand, it becomes plausible that the burgeoning Taiwan queer cultural resources would appeal to Hong Kong lesbians.

Deborah Tsz-Lan Sang (2003) in her scholarship on female same-sex desire represented within literary works in modern China noted that same-sex love between women as a categorical matter did not exist in the 1910s and 1920s. Instead, the terms “sisterhood, friendship, and emotion” were used to describe women who are in close relations with other women (Sang, 2003, p.17). Sang pointed out that even though there were descriptions of women-only communities as in “the *zishu nü* (women who vowed spinsterhood) in Canton or the man-despising *mo jing dang* (mirror-rubbing gang) in Shanghai”, these communities were separate cases inapplicable to women living in other locales (Sang, 2003, p.17). These spaces, nonetheless, can be read as alternate stable spaces where women built networks of kinship and intimate relations.

Marriage often stands for a romantic commitment, stability, emotional maturity, a further life stage and to a certain extent, a financial obligation. Since same-sex marriage has no legal status in Hong Kong, most respondents can only speak of it as a distant future option or as an option that exists in a foreign country. Thirty-four years old Lik Lik

decided to get married with a man at the tender age of twenty-one. They have been going out for four years prior to their marriage. The marriage was a practical call for both herself and her ex-husband's parents. They wanted to be in a more prioritized line-up for housing under Home Ownership Scheme. After realizing that a marriage certificate is necessary for their application, they got registered for marriage a few days prior to their appointment to select their flat. Lik Lik recalled, "I got married quick. Fast registration. Then some of my colleagues said I needed to have a wedding gown. So I got it made. I wore the gown, got registered, found a restaurant and had a meal with the family. For my mother, she didn't like it at all. She kept saying that it was not right, it wasn't done in good taste and it wasn't proper." The 500 feet flat was often mentioned by Lik Lik's friends and colleagues as a testimony to the benefits of getting married with a man. Lik Lik, at that time, also believed it that she was "very fortunate". She said, "I really thought of myself as being lucky. Also, I thought once I get married to him, he is the one and only man in this life. I really thought so." The marriage ended after nine months when the relationship turned sour. They had frequent fights and disagreed on many issues. After the marriage failed, Lik Lik's ex-husband stalked her and she was fortunate enough to have family, friends and colleagues who supported her decision to leave her husband. She has not dated men and has been in relationships with women since then. In her current relationship, she would like to get married again but with a woman.

Getting married (with a woman) is like a political action to me. ... My partner said I made it so unromantic. But I said I've been married before. That's why I'm different from others. A lot of girls just want to get married once. That's it. I don't think this way. I was married and I signed the papers. I read the vows. It's not that romantic. I thought it was before, too! But it's not. I just read what's on the paper. I blah blah blah would be willing to marry you blah blah blah as the legitimate wife. ... I did not feel

romantic that day. I just remembered that I needed to get it done so that we can have a flat. We really thought so. But if you ask me now about marrying a woman, I will cry. If I marry my current partner, I will be very touched. I will commit to living with you and to take care of you.

Twenty-two year old Taro voiced the same sentiments in regards to same-sex marriage. She felt that “it’s necessary” and that “we need to fight for it.” But she also had reservations, “Essentially, fighting for rights are the same. What does it matter if we got married? People can still discriminate against you. It’s like that.”

Same-sex marriage is one of the most talked about issue in queer politics nowadays. In North America, the issue has riled up queer activists who viewed any marriage as a grave form of institutional control on queer sexual practices. We have the gay and lesbian commoner who just wants to be normal and ordinary like everyone else on the other side of the coin. The same-sex marriage issue is fraught with contradictions and it is one of the key issues that even a queer political group such as Rainbow of Hong Kong would find it appealing. On March 25, 2002, Rainbow of Hong Kong coordinated a political action titled “Legislating Marriage” and organized two same-sex couples to cross-marry each other. As a result, the lesbian in each couple turned out marrying the gay or bisexual man in the other set. The male couple were dressed in wedding gowns and the female couple were in tuxedo suits with painted moustaches. It was a successful action in terms of garnering much media attention for its costumes and tactics more than what it ultimately stood for, a call for the legislation of same-sex domestic partners.

The popularity of same-sex marriage is not without harsh criticism, most notably, by queer theorist Michael Warner. He spelt out his discontents with many valid reasons for queers not to enter the institution of marriage and reap those benefits as if they were right to claim for us to begin with. Warner asserts that gay marriage is a regressive step towards the oppressive ethics of marriage (Warner, 1999, p.117). Instead, he argued that “marriage is a desirable goal only insofar as we can also extend health care, tax reform, rights of intimate association extending to immigration, recognition for joint parenting, and other entitlements currently yoked to marital status (Warner, 1999, p.146). Indeed the notion of marriage might conjure up idealized romantic love and hence subject ourselves to more sexual regulation from various institutions, yet it still holds as a form of social recognition for many Hong Kong lesbians.

Erotic Zones: Lesbian Sexual Relations

Talking About Lesbian Sex

Most respondents portrayed sex as a “natural” affair. Julia came to see sex as “inborn” and “similar to how boys do it with girls since civilization began.” When asked about whether she meant by “inborn” as something natural, Julia replied, “Seemed like it. But I’m not sure if it really was. I’m not sure if I looked at something and hid it subconsciously and pulled it out when I needed to use that information, but I didn’t do any research or look for any references.” Julia regards sexual attraction as crucial to whether she would have sex with her partners. She defines her ideal type of partner’s body as “thin”, “not too thin but cannot be fat.”

Bik Bik relied on the Internet to find out information on lesbian sex. She finds websites from Taiwan useful in providing such information that is missing from Hong Kong websites. Bik Bik explained, "It's hard to find them in Hong Kong. Those Taiwanese websites also have links on them so that I can click to other Asian lesbian websites. I clicked on each link and I read each one of them. If I don't understand the English terms, I will find out what each term means. It was a very strenuous process but I am adamant about it because I am craving for this kind of information! I even watched a bunch of triple X vcds." Bik Bik's craving for lesbian sex positive information is attested by Nick receiving frequent requests from customers who wanted triple x rated books and digital video discs. As the co-owner of the only store catering to lesbians in Hong Kong, Nick described the profile of these customers as "thirty something", they wanted Nick to find sex-positive dvds for lesbians without actresses donning uniforms or using sex toys.

Comparing the notion of sex between a man and a woman, Lik Lik summed it up by saying having sex with men seemed to be more meditated than with women. She had experiences where men would suddenly produce a condom and proceed to initiate sex. For Lik Lik, she questioned why do men prepare for sexual acts and why do they deliberately plan such a seemingly spontaneous act of sexual desire. In terms of having sex with women, she replied.

Sex with women is so much happier! I'm not saying it's not good with men but I am always tired then. In those days, I usually get home around one or two o'clock from work. The earliest maybe eleven. I have to cook, then to clean up and organize my home. By the time I get to sleep, it's already two or three. You think about it, two or three in the morning! I just think of it as a tiring chore. I actually think of it as troublesome. I remembered we had many fights about it. ... Sex with women contains fewer rules. I don't

know if I should call it rules but there are fewer regulations to sex. ... You have to watch out for the guy's physical reaction. You always have to take care of him. The whole thing seems to centre on him! You cannot decide and there is no orgasm with men. Honestly, none for me.

As a result, sex with women to Lik Lik is considered to be a more equal process where pleasure can be equally shared and unequal power relations is minimized. Lesbian sex also signifies a deeper understanding of women's bodies for both partners and a commitment to have communication on the issue of sex.

For Anne, her parents have been divorced and separated since Anne was three years old in 1978. Anne did not have memories of living with her mother. It was only until she reached Form One or Two when they met once or twice a year. When Anne was in Form Three, she took the initiative to meet her mother more often and after her grandmother passed away, Anne's mother came over regularly to cook for Anne and her father. Anne was caught by surprise when her mother and her grandmother asked her about lesbian sex out of nowhere. Prior to this conversation, her mother knew about her sexual orientation as a lesbian. Anne recalled how she came to know that both her mother and father knew about her lesbian identity.

She did not ask me directly. She spoke to me and said, "Hey! I have something to tell you." And I said, "Yeah. What is it?" "I asked your dad, whether you're messing around being gay (攞基)? Then did you know what he said?" "What did he say?" "He said let her be." At that point, I had no idea they had a conversation about me before because my mother was being mischievous with a smiley face when she told me. It was then that I knew that they both knew about me.

My mother was like a big kid. My ma gave birth to me when she was nineteen. They're young. My pa is now around fifty. Great, isn't it? Quite young, so they're not that traditional. That is, they are both non-traditional parents. Actually, they're hilarious. My friends always laughed

to death when they came to visit us. So there is this trip we went to England. After we had dinner, we were kinda bored. So my aunt, my ma and my grandma sat on the bed and started to talk. After a while, my mother asked, "Hey, how did you two do it?" She asked about the process. ... I described in details and I even told them which fingers I used, where I put them, how I move them, all that!

This form of intimacy with family members is very rare among respondents. Instead, sex as an intimate subject matter can be a bit daunting as well for one of the respondents. Jo remembered "feeling a little bit scared" when she "touched her girlfriend's vagina". Jo described, "I can feel this person is the same as me. Suddenly, I became very intimate with her. I have never tried this before." She later thought that there was no reason for her to be scared of being sexual with her girlfriend and to be surprised of the intimate emotions. She found it comforting to be with a woman and to be able to communicate with a woman about sexual activities. In her previous experiences with men, she has found it "a bit difficult" because of "the feeling of being penetrated." Jo did not sense any pleasure in being penetrated in general. Therefore, she found sex with women as preferable since penetration is not a necessary sexual act.

However, Jo has also experienced bad sexual encounters with an ex-girlfriend who has a mental illness.

It's her emotions that affect her. She sometimes come on forcefully. I totally did not want it. The lucky thing is, I'm very strong. I fought with her. I can fight back. I won't give up and let her have her way. If I let her one time, then there would be a second time for sure. Actually, she has bipolar disorder. When she is upset, she will get all manic and she will want me. ... I know she has a mental condition and an illness. But I cannot let her. It was a very unhappy period for me. ... I tried to communicate with

her. We talked about it, too. But she doesn't understand it. When she gets agitated again, she would forget what we have talked about.

The negative experience did not stop Jo from trying to communicate with her. Instead, she tried endlessly to explain the situation to her then girlfriend in the hope of improving the relationship. Sexual activities among lesbians are not always pleasurable and devoid of complicated issues. It is not to be considered as simply an issue of better sex with women than with men. From the process of locating information on lesbian sex to finding a partner to engage in lesbian sex to negotiating power relations with one's lover, these processes are critical to our understanding of what accounts as same-sex erotic spaces for women. These spaces are not easily accessible as shown by the respondents' difficulty in accessing information on lesbian sex and the feelings of being embarrassed to touch another person's vagina. The next question is, where can one have sex in Hong Kong?

Sex is Costly

The high land price policy has a direct impact on housing conditions in Hong Kong whereby marginalized populations and lower-income families often have to resolve to cramped living spaces with no privacy. As a result, many respondents who were still living at home ended up strategizing on finding spaces to have sex. Going to the outlying islands, such as Cheung Chau or Lamma Island for short trips or renting a room at a hotel is one choice. Lik Lik knew of many friends who had to plan and strategize about their getaways so that they can be together with their girlfriends. She elaborated, "They always have to go for trips. I thought to myself, how many trips can one afford in a year? Even if

they go to Cheung Chau, they cannot go there every week. Also, many hourly hotels don't rent out rooms to couples of the same sex!" Lik Lik further explained that hotels will rent rooms out for same-sex couples only if you can afford at least three to four hundred dollars for each rental. Some respondents have also stayed overnight at hotels such as YMCA in Yau Ma Tei and Hung Fung Hotel in Jordan while others have been rejected by the Hotel Victoria chain. Some respondents resolved to sneaking their girlfriends in when their families are asleep. But this was a dangerous tactic due to certain factors such as limited space in flats and the number of family members sharing a flat.

Critical Factors within Spaces of Intimacy

Lesbians in Transgender Relationships

Not all respondents define lesbian relationships as a relationship between two biological women. Three respondents reported having relationships with transgender persons. Beatrice's first relationship began in her visits to Hong Kong from Macau when a woman approached her at a gay bar. Being elated to be at a gay bar, Beatrice described herself as "having no guts to approach" other women. For her first relationship, Beatrice had many doubts about what it meant to be in a first relationship. She was thirty-six years of age when she became involved with a female-to-male transgender person.

I was scared at the beginning of my first relationship. I was worried that I might not be able to know how to handle a first relationship. It's my first time. I was really scared then! Ai-ya! What to do? And to be practically speaking, the relationship was a bit weird then. Because at that time, she had to take a lot of medications. Those meds made her temper worse. It's not normal so that's why it was quite difficult and I wasn't used to it. For her first operation, she took a lot of hormones, too. Her tempers increased and she became a he, a 101% man already. It became harder to talk about certain intimate stuff. But the relationship still lasted for four years, but

actually the first year was great and the next three years was very really unhappy. Because her mother loves me a lot, therefore she kept explaining to me why he is like this and like that, and I tried very hard to understand but anyway at the end it didn't work. I felt that I should be loved and should be very happy in a same-sex relationship. It's not only about appearance but also about personalities, I feel that it is changed because it felt like I was dating a man instead.

In this relationship, the issue of coming out to her family or friends was not as relevant. Beatrice explained that none of her family members viewed the relationship as one of between a man and a woman. Even though the relationship was fraught with challenges and misunderstandings, Beatrice resigned to the fact that she might not be in the best position to be supportive towards her transgender partner then. Yet she asserted that she has tried her best and she has learnt a lot from her first relationship. She has since been in relationships with women who biologically identified themselves as women. She has found it easier to discuss physical intimacy in such relationships. However, the fact that one is dating a woman who is biologically female does not necessarily insinuate sexual intimacy. Beatrice confessed to the fact that sex does not play a critical part in her relationships. She replied with laughter, "It is not very important." She further explained that her demanding work schedule often made her physically tired, therefore "an evening of watching videos at home after a shower" was an intimate moment for her relationship.

Bik Bik had a brief affair with a male-to-female transgender person whom she met on the Internet.

I was with her for only a week. The whole thing happened because I have just broken up with my girlfriend and I was devastated. I told her that she was too masculine and she had the best of all male characteristics. Then I

met a trans person on the Internet. But actually I wanted to learn more about trans issues myself, I felt that I have a bit of trans in myself as well. I wanted to be a guy so that's why I wanted to meet another trans person. She wanted to date again. She just broke up with her girlfriend. She likes girls. She felt she is a lesbian, actually, so we talked on ICQ for two hours, talked on the phone for another 3 hours, then we decided to go out on date on the next day. We agreed to be together, that is, I'll be her boyfriend and she'll be my girlfriend. That's how we agreed to it. I was in the position of a gentleman but when I held her, I couldn't accept a man's body. So it just ended there.

Age Matters

During her schooling in kindergarten, a four year old Eunice while holding her mother's hand told her mother, "Mommy, that "jei jei" (older girl) is very pretty. When I grow up, I must marry her." Her mother said calmly to her, "We'll wait and see when you grow up." This is the earliest episode that Eunice remembered as being attracted to women. By the time she reached Form Four in secondary school, she was in a relationship with a female classmate for ten months. They "did things that only a couple would do." After this brief relationship, Eunice dated a guy and remained nonchalant about dating men in general. Yet she described herself as "sixty-five percent sure" of her sexual preference towards women. Eunice came up with five criteria for her future girlfriends: "First of all, she cannot be dumb. Secondly, no laziness. Thirdly, cannot be too dependent. Fourthly, cannot be indecisive. Fifthly, cannot look too terrible."

Age can also pose a factor for seeking romantic relationships in the lesbian community. Eunice explained,

Thirty years or older is considered mature. This is what I've heard from others, too. For example, if you're chatting online, I might ask her, "How

old are you?" Then most people will say, "I'm old." I would keep on asking, "How old then?" "I'm already twenty-six!" Then I would say, "You're crazy! Twenty-six is not old!" "Then how old are you?" I would say, "Thirty-nine." Dead silence would sink in. No more messages from the other girl.

Meeting other potential romantic candidates after one has reached thirty years of age is not an easy task. Eunice has heard of a monthly Club 30 for women over thirty. She heard that it was held in Kowloon Tong and operated through word of mouth. Another social space was known as Six Degrees where women were usually older.

Les on the Move

But what is exactly private? Privacy is a conditional space when it means living with your family in a small flat. For Bik Bik, it meant negotiating along the MTR line on where to avoid family members, colleagues or friends and where they can be together in public.

Cannot do Tsuen Wan because her mother goes to work there. Tai Wo Hau is still too close. Kwai Hing is not good either because someone also works there. Mei Foo is where I live. Then the next choice is to go across the harbour. But we always bump into people at Causeway Bay. Central is a no go because someone works there. Also, her mother sometimes might appear at certain neighbourhoods. We have to strategize constantly. We can only go to places that are left for us.

Bik Bik is always on the move, jumping from one locale to another locale, in order to sustain a relationship with a woman and to be safe from others' surveillance. To be out or not remains a key issue for many lesbians in relationships. Going out in public does not guarantee any comfort in visibility. Most respondents had to struggle with the

issue of being in a closeted relationship. Lik Lik remembered that it meant avoiding Tung Lo Wan at all costs because the likelihood of bumping into her girlfriend's family is increased. Therefore, they would end up being in karaoke boxes where they could meet each other in privacy. Holding hands was completely out of bounds. Although one can argue that in comparison with gay men, it is much easier for lesbians to hold hands in public. One can understand this phenomenon by stating that lesbianism is not considered as threatening as gay homosexuality. Also, lesbianism has been perceived as titillating to heterosexual males and has often been sexually objectified. Yet this is not to say that it should remain as such for gay men to be stripped of their rights to be publicly affectionate. When one partner in a lesbian relationship appears to be more butch than the other partner, it also serves as an excuse for a homophobic gaze.

To conclude, I have outlined the complex and multiple spaces of lesbian intimacy in this chapter. Hong Kong lesbians sought out intimate relations on the Internet by posting messages on queer women websites or by seeking parties to go by visiting the same websites. They often engage in serial monogamous relationships and looked towards same-sex marriage in other countries as an ideal political goal. In addition, the living conditions for many respondents prompted them to be resourceful and imaginative in finding physical spaces to have sex. Therefore, sexual intimacy is not taken for granted and much emotional labour has been spent on finding new spaces for intimacy or devising new strategies to cover up their lesbian relationships.

Chapter Six

Politics and Postcoloniality: Hong Kong Tongzhi Movement

Within the spatialities of Hong Kong, whose bodies are being the most surveillanced? Whose sex is derived of any form of subjectivity? How and who have been doing the surveillance? What to do if sexual minorities were to include factors of class and race? When we talk about “citizenship”, are we assuming that some people are not citizens in civil society to begin with, therefore not to be entitled to certain rights?
- Yau Ching, *Sexual Politics* (2006, p.16).³⁰

Hong Kong, as a gateway to modernity via colonialism, is too important to be lost in the Chinese quest for modernity. It is also the fragility of Hong Kong as a teapot that bespeaks of the illusory character and double-edged nature of the national/colonial fantasy held by China. Hong Kong can be of use to China so long as she remains useful as a teapot yet, at the same time, a broken teapot is a nightmarish disaster. Therefore, the current project of recolonization, or in other words, the replacement of the old colonizer by the new, is complicated by the psychologically triumphalist revenging mind ridden with an inferiority complex.
- Law Wing-Sang, *Managerializing Colonialism* (1998, p.120).³¹

Spatial relations in a city can be read as both a means to establish politics or conversely, a way to suppress social movements. The notion of space, politics and social relations are so intricately connected that one cannot discern the other without jeopardizing its meaning. The city and its urban spaces are increasingly politicized as protests are held regularly to demand government attention on social inequality and political issues. The route from Victoria Park in Causeway Bay to the Hong Kong

³⁰ See Yau Ching’s (2006) introduction and the collection of essays for more insights to the current state of sexual politics in Hong Kong. Yau also noted in her discussion of citizenship was influenced by Ken Plummer’s discussion on intimate citizenship in his book titled *Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

³¹ Law Wing-Sang (1998) is referring to the teapot metaphor as spoken by Li Ruihuan, Vice Prime Minister of China prior to 1997. Li referred Hong Kong’s values to a tea stain of the unique taste of the Yi Xing teapot, thereby announcing that only an amateur would clean away the tea stain of a distinctive and rare teapot.

Government Headquarters has been widely used as a corridor to voice one's discontents at government policies. To attend an anti-homophobia demonstration is to make oneself visible and hence subject one's body to be objectified as a potential lesbian and to be under surveillance.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief discussion on how modernity gave rise to social movements. Then I provide theoretical background on feminist, gay liberation movements and queer politics in the West. By foregrounding the movements in the West, I recognize the impact of such movements might have on local community organizers, in particular, for those who have returned from being educated abroad and formed local gay and queer women's organizations. Thirdly, I attempt to outline the beginnings of the Hong Kong tongzhi movement and investigate the role of women in the movement. Fourthly, I use interview data to demonstrate the current attitudes towards the fight for equality among sexual minorities. To further my argument on the conditional spatialities of Hong Kong, I came to understand the Hong Kong tongzhi movement as a liminal and unstable site where gains have been made in regards to public visibility yet its issue-based strategies can be difficult to sustain for a visionary social movement.

Social Movements and the Notion of Modernity

Much discussion on social movements cannot be separated with the notion of modernity. What modernity brought us is the formation of a subjective self, which manifests itself into political and cultural realms both as a collective force and in an individual sense. The founding fathers of sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim,

explained this phenomenon through the historical changes experienced by societies in processes of increased political democracy, industrialization and urbanization. The idea of an individual gained more emphasis as rural communities slowly disintegrate and new economic patterns emerge. Premodern interpersonal relations have depended on kinship and direct face-to-face interactions in the exchange of food and labour as in rural societies. As industrialization and urbanization demand large scale production units, we came to see social relationships becoming more compartmentalized and indirect. This is not to say that there are less direct relationships, but their definitions and impact are less significant and hence, less measurable in the overall progress of modern societies (Calhoun, 1994). Factories and the assembly lines took over Bureaucracy and state power became inevitable to grow new forms of organization and infrastructures, as in transportation and communication.

Modernity, hence, refers to the projection of oneself being enabled as an actor, to forge one's subjectivity and to develop a distinguished individual self. The modern self, under the forces of a rising capitalism, could contemplate the possibilities of moving to an urban centre, developing one's social networks, joining a class-related political party and looking for same-sex intimacies. (D'Emilio, 1983; Chauncey, 1994) More so, modern societies are comprised of individuals and their social interactions as initiated and enacted by themselves. This new found of self extends beyond an individual's past and bestows hope upon an individual's future. Hence, a modern self views oneself as capable of shaping one's future and the society which one is surrounded by. The modern self through increased social interactions outside of traditional patterns began to realize one's

potential to enact social and political changes. The mobilization of individuals for social movements is then built upon the development of a modern self.

Classic approaches to explain collective behaviour that contribute to the development of social movements may be found in “breakdown theories” and “relative deprivation theories.” Breakdown theories point to the inevitable “breakdown”, for less of a better word, initiated by actors whom “after a period of intense stress and social tension, reappear on the stage of history as ruptured collective agents” (Maheu, 1995, p.2). Relative deprivation theories, on the other hand, tend to reduce social actions to a simplistic framework of most deprived social groups as the leading actors of political mobilizations. For example, environmentalist groups are not often led by indigenous and aboriginal communities to make decisions on sustainable development. On the other hand, “resource mobilization theory” as a more current approach “tend to assume that actors behave rationally, maximize their benefits, and minimize their costs by responding instrumentally to opportunities in the environment” (Adam, Duyvendak and Kouwel, 1999, p.3). Comparatively speaking, “new social movement theories” encourage actors to consider aspect of cultural differences and psychological compositions in collective behaviour.

Alberto Melucci, in his observation of social movements in the early 1970s, is often credited with bringing the notion of “new social movements” into foreground of sociological enquiries. New social movements can be briefly defined with the following characteristics: advocacy for own means of participation outside of existing political,

economic and social structures, political actions geared towards more radical methods, decentralized decision making processes, diverse membership that is not primarily concerned with social class issues (Pickvance,1995). New social movements have been known to us for its ability to address social issues that move beyond capital and labour (Eder, 1995). Their purpose is more aligned with changing social norms and values instead of affecting how economic resources are distributed. New social movements seem to be more concerned with issues that involve sexuality, personal identity, living and social environments, to name a few (Diani and Eyerman, 1992).

Critiques of new social movements indicate that the issue of social class may not be as far-removed as one would think. Klaus Eder asserts that new social movements contribute to the rise of a middle class identity politics. Identity issues and culturally expressive social relations among the middle class call for an alternative viewpoint in class discussions. The realities of a largely white, middle-class nature of campus-wide student movements, women's movements and environmental groups in the 1960s throughout America are fine examples of Eder's arguments. Chris Pickvance picks apart the originality of new social movements by charging them with not acknowledging the historical roots of the same social movements. Moreover, the claim of diversity within these social movements did not escape the particular social class milieu that dominated their existence. It is not my purpose to discuss the pros and cons of new social movement theories for this paper. But the implications of new social movement on emerging gay and lesbian movements in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be neglected nor discredited.

The Beginnings of Second Wave Feminism and Gay Liberation Movements

I gave a brief introduction of the early social movements in Chapter One. Here I shall elaborate on how two particular social movements, the Second Wave feminist movement and Gay Liberation mobilizations in the 1960s, laid the groundwork for gay and lesbian movements in the next two decades. The Second Wave feminist movement is supported by the increased participation of women in the labour forces within post-war economies. Young and college-educated feminists brought forward women's concerns such as sexuality, reproduction and bodies into the public sphere. This is not to say that these issues were not under a critical eye before, as in the realities of African American communities and how black women have survived slavery histories, but Second Wave feminists have been able to be in a position to demand political rights in these issues. The terms "sex" and "gender" became popular and resulted in an increased awareness of how social and cultural environments affect the way we allocate women and men's roles in societies. Second wave feminists created, asserted and stabilized the slogan "The personal is political" through their demands "on the struggle on the domestic front for women's control over their reproduction, for parity in household labour, for equal involvement of male and female parents in childcare, and for admission of women's equal sexual needs and rights" (di Leonardo and Lancaster, 1996).

Inspired by canonical feminist texts such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971), Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975), feminists in the 70s developed an essentialist position in order to appear in unity under the banner of anti-

pornography, sexual freedom, pro-choice, violence against women and lesbian rights. More prominent were the anti-pornography crusaders Susan Brownmiller, Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who tirelessly brought to the American public a strong message of feminism equals anti-pornography, anti-sex and to a certain degree, an image of a feminist as a man-hater. While such a limiting and if I can say, militant, analysis of women's oppression is unacceptable in contemporary feminist politics; it did provide a platform for a unified social movement. Battered women's shelters, rape crisis centres and Take Back the Night marches are results of such visibility.

Social movements associated with homosexuals in the United States explicitly appeared in the 1950s with the existence of the Mattachine Society in 1951 and the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis in the 1955. Both organizations represented homosexuality as an inherently fixed condition and adopted an assimilationist approach to integrate homosexuals into mainstream societies, hence sparking off a social movement principle where a particular population (often perceived as deviant or subcultural) is interpreted as a special interest group or minority. The 1960s brought other social movements in alignment with gay men and lesbians, namely, civil rights movement, the Black Power movers and shakers, anti-Vietnam war demonstrators, sexual liberals in Woodstock and the Hippie cultures, all contributed to a more relaxed and sexually expressive social environment. On July 28, 1969, gay men, black and Puerto Rican drag queens and lesbians in a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn, rioted against the police during one of their regular raids on the gay bar. The Stonewall incident was often taken as an important marker internationally and locally in the States for lesbians and gay men to fight back

authorities and to assert their power. The gay liberation movement can be regarded as a Stonewall consequence and shouted out their position with the slogan “Out of the closets and into the streets!” (D’Emilio, 1983). Gay liberationists believed that gay men and lesbians should no longer hide their sexual identities. Instead, the celebratory nature of being gay (no pun intended) was highlighted yet its moment was short-lived as lesbians, gays and lesbians of colour and working-class drag queens mobilized their own movements to protest against the notion that one’s sexual identity presides over other racial, class and gender identities.

Discontents Within Liberationist Politics

Amidst much discontent about gay liberationist tactics, one of the many effects of the gay liberational movement is its ability to create separate gay and lesbian communities, each with their own political agendas. Denis Altman, in *The Homosexualization of America*, has reminded us that it is indeed very American to organize around an ethnic model (Altman, 1982). We have then witnessed the reposition of liberation to a matter of lesbian and gay rights movement in the 1970s. National organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders were created to claim political power in the public arena.

The lesbian feminist movement in the 1970s offered something very different from the mainstream lesbian and gay rights movements. It was the alternative culture, a

space termed as a “social movement community” by Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier that attracted lesbian feminists to open women’s bookstores and coffeehouses under the rubric of collectivism and common experiences (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). These spaces became gathering spots for lesbians and feminists alike. I recall hanging out at cafes, women’s centres and co-op bookstores just to be there, to feel comfortable in not being judged and to feel at ease with one’s sexuality. Indeed, when I and my friends would say, these spaces along with political demonstrations were equivalent to bathhouses and gay bars for gay men. One cruise, pick up and set up a date in the name of politics. It was an old joke to say “the personal is political”.

Life Cycles and Shifting of Priorities

Arlene Stein in her scholarship on lesbian generations and communities has observed that communities shift as life cycles change for lesbians. Sexual identity often comes first for lesbians in their early twenties, as they asserted their personal identities and looked for communities to socialize or organize around issues. But as lesbians reach their life stages of being thirty, forty and in between, Stein noticed that parenting, careers and biological families became more relevant to their identities. More noticeably, lesbians who felt more secured about their sexual identity as lesbians became more flexible in reintegrating themselves towards dominant cultures. Stein describes this phenomenon as “decentered” lesbian lives,

In the decentered community that developed, individuals shift easily from community to society, from social identity to personal identity, and back again. They feel ‘at home’ in the community with which they mainly identify, but also in numerous other contexts in which they participate and with which they feel some sense of identification...They forged a sense of attachment to a

lesbian community that, while clearly important and central in the construction of a new system of personal meaning, was less dominant. The term *decentering* signifies this simultaneous sense of persistence and change, of commitment amid pluralism (Stein, 1997, p.152).

Decentering thus signifies a fluid definition of visibility, as lesbians assert public acknowledgement through the demand for lesbian and gay rights to redefining what dominant cultures have to offer them. Since lesbians and gay men cannot exist within a vacuum, most of them have learnt to adopt strategies to survive and to make their everyday lives easier and more importantly, meaningful and just plain happier. This is by no means in saying that the fight for lesbian and gay rights is over, in contrast, along with Arlene Stein, I am recognizing the potential for priorities and identities to shift accordingly to one's life cycle and circumstances. Yet, it is very important to point out that the privilege of being able to shift priorities and identities are reserved for those with primarily financial and cultural resources. In addition, I argue that the overall political environment and social awareness on gay rights might have attributed to one's ability to shift priorities in this case. Whereas in Hong Kong, the shifting of personal priorities or the non-confrontational attitude adopted by many lesbians and gay men can be traced back to its colonial past and its wider societal values on political interventions. This point will be further discussed in this chapter.

Social Worlds and Schisms

Ken Plummer observes that lesbian and gay social movements are more aptly described as "social worlds" and "schisms." He suggests that a means to understand the lesbian and gay movement in Britain is to view the movement as "composed of explicitly

political groups alongside broader self-help organizations, subcultures and ‘scenes,’ media networks, rallies, and intellectual workers” (Plummer, 1999, p.137). Schisms are defined in two strands: external and internal. External in terms of “the enemy out there” and internal as “the enemy within” (Plummer, 1999, p.141-144).

It is my argument that to maintain vitality, all successful social movements must remain in conflict and struggle. Once conflict ceases, movements are prone to co-optation by the dominant order, becoming institutionalized or even ceasing to function. They need to be moved on through contestation, schism, and conflict: without these, they become static, wither, and often die (Plummer, 1999, p.141).

Therefore, we have to investigate social movements as unstable and volatile in its nature. As activists and scholars, we also have to continuously revisit and interrogate the reasons why we gather and the beliefs that we held collectively. It is only through such stimulating exercises would we be able to respond to changes in political and social environments, hence to formulate better responses against homophobic establishments and in general, oppressive structures in society.

The Power of Not Being Labelled

In “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes,” Steven Seidman raised an issue in “the abandonment or destabilization of identity as a ground of gay politics (Seidman, 1993, p.130).” Using poststructural theory as the major framework in his analysis, Seidman convinces us to remove our emphasis on “the politics of personal identity” and instead, to take on the notion that “identity of an object or person is always implicated in its opposite” (Seidman,

1993, p.130). Hence, personal identity issues become more of a matter of signification and the gay subject's standpoint would be an inevitable position of "a signifying or cultural discursivity" (Seidman, 1993, p.131). Although the idea of identities being unstable and shifting in meanings upon historical, political, social and cultural contexts are relatively compelling, Seidman poses a key question whether poststructuralists realize the enabling effect or the power of one's agency in the claiming of an identity standpoint, as in the basis of an unified social movement. In this sense, Seidman asked a dangerous question:

Is it possible that underlying the refusal to name the subject (of knowledge and politics) is a utopian wish for a full, intact, organic experience of self and other? (Seidman, 1993, p.133)

The word "queer" is used by many to adopt a standoffish position, a marginal stance and an in-your-face attitude. Yet queer activists also use it to be inclusive of marginal populations and those commonly ostracized by mainstream gays and lesbians, such as sex trade workers, hustlers, dyke daddies and trannies. Joshua Gamson, on another level, warns us about labels that were used in identity movements. Citing the example of the San Francisco 1993 Freedom Day Parade's decision to use "The Year of the Queer," Gamson recalls the feverous debates about the word "queer" as insensitive towards generational differences, pretending to be all-inclusive and an abuse of power to name communities as organizers of a community event. But more importantly, what it points out is the impossibility to take sides on embracing a public collective identity as in early gay and lesbian movements, or to embark on a deconstructionist journey to problematize sexual identities and their restrictions. Through an analysis of 75 letters

published in a weekly newspaper San Francisco Bay Times and other U.S. based national publications on the usage of the word “queer,” Gamson delivers a simple message that assuming a new category very often reinforces the “sameness and difference in a different language” (Gamson, 1995, p.403).

Traditionally, the word “queer” suggests eccentricity and strangeness. It is only within the last decade that this word has become a term inclusive of lesbians, gay men, transgender individuals, and bisexuals. Embraced by youth activists, the term signifies “a strategy, an attitude, a reference to other identities and a new self-understanding” (Smyth, 1992, p.20). The term “queer” also signifies a distrust of governments and state institutions. Most queer activists believe in direct-action strategies to convey their social and political message. Queer Nation, a group formed in April 1990 in response to gay and lesbian bashings in East Village, New York, developed these strategies. Members of the group used stencils and wrote on pavements “Queers Bash Back” and “My beloved was queer bashed here. Queers fight back” (Smyth, 1992, p.17). In other words, adopting queerness as an identity means being upfront about sexual identity.

The Beginnings of the Hong Kong Tongzhi Movement

For one to trace the historical emergence of a Hong Kong Tongzhi Movement is to ask a rhetorical question of where to locate one’s search and how to substantiate the search. Earlier in my theoretical chapter, I have posited my concerns on investigating the connections between post-colonialism and the city’s politics. As sociologist Lui Tai Lok has kindly reminds us, the story of Hong Kong is not an easy story to tell (Lui, 2003).

The city's postcolonial history coupled with its strong reliance on world finances has propelled Hong Kong to be known as an economic miracle, or to invoke a recent glorious past, one of the East Asian Tiger economies along with Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. Lui argues that Hong Kong does not owe its financial success to a careful design by the former British government allowing economic freedom for Hong Kong citizens. Instead, Lui proposes that Hong Kong citizens have made the most out of the colonial era by continuously searching and rigorously developing our own ways of living without political interference or government assistance. The survivor instinct and the hard worker's image have been successfully implanted onto our collective memories of the city. Moreover, Lau Siu-Kai (1982) argues that traditional Chinese family values have led Hong Kong people to turn to relatives for help rather than asking the government for assistance. This form of 'utilitarian familism', as exemplified by Lau, was brilliantly reconstructed by Law Wing-Sang in his argument that Chinese filial piety and utilitarian intentions are skilfully picked up by the Chinese government to manage colonialism (Law, 1998). The colonial era of Hong Kong has led to local knowledges being erased, devalued and deemed irrelevant to a more grandiose narrative of economic success for a miracle port city. Civil rights or discussion on citizenship was limited and disavowed by government authorities and various institutions. Law Wing-Sang puts it succinctly, "To Beijing's eyes, one's patriotic devotion is measured not by participation in street demonstrations against Japanese appropriation of Diaoyu Islands, but how much one can teach them the colonial ways to rule Hong Kong (Law, 1998, p. 120).

Yet the disavowal of civic politics in Hong Kong did not end after July 1, 1997, the effects of being non-political permeates to each and individual Hong Kong citizen. It can be said that an apolitical attitude is dominant in Hong Kong where an average Hong Kong citizen may not view protesting in demonstrations as a part of their civic responsibility. To be precise, what is exactly civic responsibility in the city of Hong Kong? What can be gained and what will be lost? Does it concern me or is it about a broader picture of a more diverse city?

Community organizer Mary Ann King mentioned that there was a progressive women's organization formed by expatriates who worked alongside with long-time gay activist and writer under the pseudonym Samshasha (Xiaomingxiong) in the early seventies. This group of expatriate women advocated for the decriminalization of homosexual conduct in collaboration with a gay male group. As discussed in Chapter One, the media exposure on the death of police inspector John MacLennan case contributed to a discourse on sexualities among lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the community. The general public became more familiar with sexual identities and led to confrontations between homophobic forces and the tongzhi organizations. The death of John MacLennan led to the establishment of two commissions, Commission of Inquiry focusing on the MacLennan case and the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong on the revision of laws regulating homosexual conduct. As a result of the investigations, the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong proposed that men who are over twenty-one years of age should not be criminalized for sexual conduct held in private in 1983. The proposal caused moral panic among organizations comprising of religious personnel,

educators and social workers, and resulted in the formation of the Joint Committee on Homosexual Law. On July 11, 1990, the Legislature Council passed the motion decriminalizing homosexual conduct and the Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance became effective a year later.

Visible Women in the Movement

Despite the increased visibility of homosexuality in public, there was limited evidence in including lesbians as part of the discussion. One reason might be that lesbian sex is deemed irrelevant to the decriminalization issue since it was not explicitly stated as a criminal offence for two women to engage in sexual behaviour. But the gaping absence in recognizing lesbian sexuality implied lesbians as non-existent and lesbian sex as invisible, non-threatening and worse still, tantalizing to the heterosexual male gaze. Therefore, it was rendered insignificant and unnecessary for any form of political recognition in the media or in legal space. Yet, the public renunciation of lesbian sexualities did not dampen the spirits of community activists to establish women's groups in the 1990s.

Mary Ann King, also known more affectionately by wider circles as Gum Gum, remembered her early involvement with community organizations since 1992.

During those ten years from the eighties to the nineties, it was more open. I came upon a publication from the Ten Percent Club. I got a phone number from it and I called them up. Then there was this ice-skating activity so I just went by myself. I had to socialize with a group of gay men. I don't know them and it was hard to know what they're talking about. It was tough. ... Then I met Anson Mak through work. I felt that she is a very cool person and I followed her to a few really boring lesbian parties

where I met a group of women. Anyway, there were many arguments in those small circles but as a lonely self in this circle, this group of women are better than nothing. ... Anson introduced two important things to me. The first thing is the concept of bi. Now I cannot even be just a lesbian! The second thing is I get to meet Ah Cook and get to sing! Anson was a famous artist in the band world then. So what I do then was to follow Anson and others to see what I can do to help. I ended up doing some AIDS pamphlets for women. We had meetings all the time but I don't know why we chatted for so long. We collected information for the pamphlets and that's how I became first involved. Later on, I became a member of the Ten Percent Club to do administrative work for them. I remembered vividly my impression. At that time, Helen was doing the Women's Group. The women were very tired from organizing. Also, I felt that there was a lot of sexism in the organization; therefore there was a big gap in communication. Secondly, it's about the issue of sexuality. I remembered when we designed the form for joining the organization, we have to write straight or luen then we put down bisexual. The organizers said no need to put down bisexual. ... After a year later, I cannot stand it anymore so I left the Ten Percent Club. Afterwards, Helen always bumped into women who asked her if there are any activities. So after being confronted for a hundred times, we decided if there is a need for it, we should do something. So I came up with XX gathering.

By 1994, Gum Gum began to attend women's conferences including the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 and an International Lesbian Conference. These experiences led her to be more committed towards social movements and in her words, "to change the mentality of society." By the summer of 1994, Gum Gum approached Grace Ma from Club 64 and discussed the possibility of holding XX gathering in the backroom of the bar in Lan Kwai Fong. The gathering was titled XX because of the female chromosomes. The first gathering drew at least sixty women in the small room. In January of 1995, Gum Gum along with Anson Mak, Lai Ming and San Gwu formed Queer Sisters based on the concept of queerness and therefore, including women of all sexual identities. It is worth noting that Chou Wah Shan, then a sociologist at the University of Hong Kong has published a series of non-fiction books on the identity of

Tongzhi and its theoretical underpinnings. Both Gum Gum and Anson Mak, was in disagreement with the idea of Tongzhi and co-authored a book on bisexuality and the exclusionary nature of the term “Tongzhi.” Both of them questioned the term as all-inclusive and challenged its patriarchal nature by writing numerous articles posting them on the Internet as well as circulating them among community networks. From 1995 – 1997, Queer Sisters anchored itself as part of a larger social movement in Hong Kong focusing on women’s issues and human rights.

In the same era, a volunteer who joined Ten Percent Club by the summer of 1992 named Connie Chan was also crucial in forming community organizations advancing the visibility for tongzhis. Being involved in the community for more than a decade, Connie came to view herself as a veteran of the lesbian community. Connie met many gay men and lesbians during her three years as an active participant in the organization. By the time she left the organization in 1995, she has become the group leader for the women’s group and increased the number of female participants from thirty women to a hundred women. The summer of 1996 was another turning point for Connie. There were a lot of rumours on the government’s effort to blacklist individual lesbians and gays as well as various organizations. Connie was well-aware of the consequences of forming a lesbian organization yet she felt that was a strong need for a local lesbian organization. What she meant by local was to establish an organization that is different from 10% Club. Connie perceived the 10% Club as an organization formed by middle-class gay men who have received their education from abroad and who has internalized Western mobilization strategies. Connie insisted to form a lesbian organization, Lui Tung Yuen, as contrary to

the 10% Club, by using Chinese as the dominant language and by focusing on women's needs and desires. Lui Tung Yuen also grew from a membership of sixty to three hundred within three years of its establishment. Apart from social gatherings, Lui Tung Yuen organized many workshops on coming out, spiritual development, interpersonal relationships, sexual identities, love and romance. During the period of organizing Lui Tung Yuen, Connie went through a break-up with her partner, a search for work after university graduation and an episode of coming out to her mother. These events figured prominently in Connie's decision to leave the organization and resulted in it being disbanded after a period of three years. Connie formed another organization called f' union shortly after and held primarily social gatherings. She explained that period as one of "depressive" and "directionless." Her past successes in community organized seemed to have reached an end as she established this third organization with another group of peers. It was a mixture of failed relationships and being laid off from work that have led her to feel "sunken."

Part of the frustration from the "Tongzhi" movement also stemmed from a conference titled 1998 Tongzhi Conference where one of the core organizers, Anthony made a remark to the media that there were no women involved for the Conference. His remark angered organizers for Queer Sisters and Lui Tong Yuen, and justified the reasons for queer women organizers to feel excluded and dismissed from the Tongzhi movement. As the demands for democracy and universal suffrage becomes more of a recurrent theme, the language of equality and anti-discrimination also urged some community activists to change tactics and adopt a more confrontational attitude. Wai Wai joined Rainbow

Action in 1999 and later formed a women's group titled Lui Lok with another group member Franco. Rainbow Action is known for its queer tactics such as staging an SM demonstration where one of its core member Tommy chained himself to the gates.

Wai Wai recalled her first involvement with Rainbow of Hong Kong in 1999.

I am really functional. Right when I came out, I got involved with Rainbow of Hong Kong, that is, involved with a community organization. ... I love to organize. It provides a goal for me. I wanted to achieve one goal after another. Also, it is very personal and it affects my being. ... When I first started in the movement, I set a goal for myself. I hope I can work towards the legalization of same-sex partners in my life. I'm in my twenties now maybe when I reach sixty years old, it can be done! That's already thirty years from now! Actually it's all about claiming a sense of equality. I am not the kind to believe in marriage but it is so inconvenient without it. For example, when my partner fills out a form for IVE, she has to fill in a section on emergency contacts. I'm really worried if she suddenly passed out at school, they should call me right away since I have been the one who has been living with her on a daily basis! Why bother calling her sister who she only calls once every three months? ... It is necessary for me to find work that can be accepting of my sexual identity. If you cannot accept me, then you are asking me not to do any community organizing. Community organizing is my real job! Although there is no pay, I cannot stay away from it! ... I am in the advertising field now and I see clients everyday for work. I want to switch back to working in more political arenas. For example, being an assistant to an elected official. Maybe doing work for government councils. But it is hard in Hong Kong where there are not many choices and it is a narrow field. I want to go back to work for social movements.

Most respondents replied favourably for supporting the enactment of an anti-discrimination legislation but did not support political actions that are too confrontational. It can be understood in the historical context of Hong Kong where the colonial conditioning limited civic participation and hence, there was no civic education on how one can demand for equality through political involvement. Similarly, Travis Kong, in his

interviews with 34 Hong Kong gay men, also found that they displayed a “non-institutional attitude” towards gay politics as a consequence of “the centrality of the family institution under the colonial administration, and of spatial constraints” (Kong, 2004, p.12). Interviewees identified the factors of family and culture as their primary concerns instead of sexuality and politics. Community-based organizations also exhibit a comparable approach towards gay politics where hotlines, social support groups and cultural events seem to be more acceptable for their members. The recent controversy of Rainbow Action members disturbing a mass at the Hong Kong Catholic Cathedral to protest Joseph Zen, Hong Kong’s Roman Catholic Bishop, for his opinions in opposing same-sex marriage rights published in a church newsletter (Kong, 2004). This direct action was met with mixed responses from both the gay and lesbian communities, as well as the general public, for being too confrontational.

It is critical to point out that there have been significant cultural interventions in asserting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender visibility. Early publications from Xiaomingxiong (1984) and Chou Wah-Shan (1997) have been mentioned by respondents that these works were significant to their understanding of Chinese homosexualities. Yet more importantly, writings by Anson Mak, Mary Ann King and Yau Ching which have appeared in newspaper columns, independent media websites and books have a profound impact on how Hong Kong lesbians and bisexual women view their sexualities as women and as queer women. Anson Mak (Kam, King and Wong, 2000) wrote on bisexuality and bisexual politics within the Hong Kong tongzhi movement in a book titled *Bisexuality*. Prior to this publication, Anson Mak co-edited a book with Chou Wah-Shan and Kong Gin-Bong

in 1995 on Hong Kong tongzhi stories where she wrote a chapter on bisexual tongzhis. Lucetta Kam Yip-Lo's (2001) collection of essays on women's first love stories attest to the increasing demand of local knowledges on queer women's sexualities. Established in 2005, Nutongxueshe, a local community-based group has been coordinating creative workshops for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community members which resulted in a groundbreaking arts exhibition on same-sex desires. With its opening at the Hong Kong Cultural Arts Centre, the exhibition titled Hong Kong Tongzhi Art featured photographs, collages and drawings from community members. As mentioned in Chapter One, the exhibit has been deemed indecent by the censorship authorities.

Changes in the Movement: Public and Personal

One of the key themes that came up for public visibility is the evident changes in the Hong Kong lesbian scene as mentioned frequently by most respondents. Not only did respondents allude to their observations that there seemed to be more openness about discussing the topic of sexuality and there have been younger lesbians who would express their sexualities through fashion codifications and public intimate acts. Although such visibility is achieved and recognized through a simultaneous exercise of categorization and qualification in who counts as a lesbian, one must remember other lesbians who might not fit into easy classifications and hence ask a crucial question on where are those who remained invisible and untraceable. Cyberspace opened up a space for those who wanted to remain anonymous and for those who had limited choices in coming out as a lesbian.

The “fortunate conditions” can be interpreted as a form of privilege for those who can be out to participate in social movements. One respondent named another privilege for those who can have access to visible lesbian and gay communities. English proficiency can become both an obstacle and a stepping stone to learn more about social movements. It can be an obstacle if some activists feel excluded from others who might have returned from abroad and have been well-steeped in “western” gay and lesbian thought. On the other hand, it can be a stepping stone for those who viewed English proficiency as an access point to understanding sexual rights movements in other English-speaking countries.

A long time activist, Eunice came into contact with her first queer women group, Queer Sisters, in 1997.

In 1997, Queer Sisters (QS) held a party and advertised in Hong Kong Magazine. I met my first group of tongzhi friends through Hong Kong Magazine. I knew foreigners first! I can learn English and they can learn Chinese. So nice. I saw the advertisement and knew that there will be Chinese and Westerners at the party. So I went there and a volunteer asked me if I can leave my contact number for future events. When there is an event, I will call you, good? So I left them my number.

Afterwards, Eunice was contacted by the organization and she went in for an interview to be a volunteer. She joined the three months training session and became a volunteer on the hotline. She has remained a volunteer and organizer of Queer Sisters since then. When asked about how she felt after being ten years with the organization, Eunice shared her community organizing experiences.

First of all, you gain a lot more friends in this circle for a change. Good ones and bad ones. You get to meet a lot of people, the network gets wider, and you get to know people in other tongzhi organizations. You know what human rights are, what sexual rights are. Another thing is you will grow up a lot. ... At certain events and forums, you have to expose yourself to a certain extent. Maybe because I'm used to it and I've been doing for a longer period. I have more guts now. Coming out is not a big deal to me anymore. ... Of course the period in the past ten years is not as political as these ten years. In those days, I don't really know what it means to be political. But when you face this circle, you'll learn quickly. The learning process can be troublesome because there is so much information. Communication between organizations tends to be in English. I cannot read all of it, not all of it, so I cannot understand it all. Sometimes when you go to meetings, I would feel stupid when I cannot follow. Even for now, I'm still quite slow at it.

Apart from the issue of language, Eunice also mentioned other criteria for someone to be involved in queer organizing. Many concerns include being disclosed of one's sexual identity, sacrificing one's personal time and privacy, and the impact it might have on one's family members. Both of her parents knew of her sexual orientation and they responded without major objections. Working long hours at her previous job in social services and being the key organizer of Queer Sisters has taken a physical toll on her health. Diagnosed with a clinical condition, Eunice had to take medication everyday in order to go about her daily activities. But one advantage for having to attend regular forums representing Queer Sisters made her more articulate on issues regarding her sexual identity. Training sessions for volunteers also helped her to clarify the knotty gritty details of lesbianism and in a way, forced her to be in the forefront of social and political issues. Eunice often used “*neoi tung sing lyun ze*” (女同性戀者) or “a lesbian” when she spoke at forums. But personally, she identify as “a woman” to signify all the intricate folds within the word itself.

Eunice observed noticeable changes in the nature of phone calls from the hotline since 2000. Prior to the year 2000, most callers were concerned with relationship issues such as breaking up with partners and how to “hook up with others”, queries on when the next social activity is or whether homosexuality can be cured. From 2000 to early 2003, most callers had a very different set of concerns and anxieties. Eunice commented,

The nature of the calls changed. The age range changed. The Internet is already so developed! For basic and minor cases, just log into a chatroom or message board for emotional relief. There is no need to call us. Those who called are usually older. For example those who are married or those who are over forty and they wanted to know how to meet others. Or maybe their husbands found out they are lesbians. These are more common cases.

When asked about her future outlook of life, Eunice gave a commonsensical respond.

Maybe because I'm getting older. Getting closer to retirement age. I am a bit anxious about retirement. I worried about if I'll have enough savings to last in my old age. Although I can stay in an elderly nursing home. But I've been working there, I know how “great” these places are. Also, when you get older, your parents will get older, too. There is a kind of pressure to take care of one's parents. There is the money issue, too. Thirdly, there have been so many changes with work. The salary was half of what it used to be. I can change the way I spend money but my family's expenses are still the same. For me, work and money are the most important things now. Then it's relationships with friends and family, then health concerns and tongzhi organizations being the fourth. Although community organizing was once number two in my life. I think it's normal that it dropped to number four now.

Lik Lik, being an active organizer and avid observer of lesbian scenes, commented on the changes in the attendance of lesbian social gatherings.

Of course I think it's very different from before. The atmosphere in the wider society. The most obvious thing is that many people would come when we used to organize activities. It's common to get thirty to sixty

persons for a barbecue. Everyone would come out to have fun. Before 1997, tonnes showed up at events. People would come just to hang out with a group of friends. But now you don't need to join activities to know people. You can a net meeting! It's so obvious. In those days, people would come as couples and participate in activities. But now, to be honest, those who join the activities usually come by themselves. ... To say it with a mean edge, I mean, only those who are single would come. In the past, we used to value those monthly gatherings so much more.

Being an activist often comes with personal transformations that might conjure up many emotions. Lik Lik perceived her participation in social movements as an eye-opening experience that left her with more questions than answers.

Actually I was a bit confused. It's about my sexual orientation and my religion. But since I don't think of myself as an active Christian per se, that is, I don't go to church regularly, therefore I don't feel much pressure but I cannot help thinking about it. When I go out to forums, students always ask me whether I have any religious beliefs. So I started to think more about these issues and also, community organizing allows me to touch on so much more. ... Organizing keeps me in contact with others that are in very different situations than mine. Then I start to see things differently. ... I want to (continue being a community organizer). The reason is, as my friends said, I'm lucky. Love wise and family wise, in terms of coming out. Being out is the biggest issue. I feel I'm lucky in my situation. It is because of my fortunate conditions that allow me to be able to organize for the community. I feel a need to continue doing it but we also need more people with more energy to do it. My boss always say if I put the same energy into the company, then the company would be on the stock market!

Similarly, Connie observed significant changes among the younger generation in their ways of comprehending sexual identities and body politics. For herself, she used the term “ingenuous” to describe her early experiences with girlfriends. She remembered that she did not know of any terms on sexual identification nor has any discussion on discrimination during her secondary school years. Therefore, she felt “fortunate” about

her early relationships with young women. She noted the differences in the present generation of younger lesbians.

I think it's very different now. In my situation, I feel it's like Adam and Eve, very naïve, we ate the forbidden fruit. But for this generation, they only need to take one look and they can see a lot of things and learn a great deal. They know the differences between TB and TBG. They can surf the net. I think the younger generation has more complex love stories because they are fully aware of their identities as lesbians. They can see more clearly when they are being discriminated. They don't mind if their teachers or their classmates know that they are les. On the other hand, not everyone knows how to deal with these issues, so they still will encounter many difficulties. But in the past, I don't even know what I am. People just think you're an ordinary girl.

The Current State of Affairs

International Day Against Homophobia Parades

On May 16, 2005, the first International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) Parade attracted more than three hundred fifty people to attend this groundbreaking march on anti-homophobia in Tung Lo Wan. The parade was held in response to The route for the march took off from a pedestrian-only space behind the Japanese department store, Sogo, and went along Great George Street towards Victoria Park where the contingent would turn around and return back to the pre-march gathering place. Although the march took only forty-five minutes, it attracted extensive local media coverage including twelve reports from local news publications. As one of the participants, I remembered the overall excitement felt by the crowd as people greeted one another and joined in for the historical march. The media attention was heightened as reporters kept snapping shots here and there, in particular, photographers rushed towards any display of public affection among same-sex couples. Masks were provided by the organizers for

those who felt safer to be behind masks during the march. Listing seventeen community groups and businesses on its organizing committee, the first IDAHO Parade demonstrated the readiness for local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities to be physically present and to be vocal as a group for political reasons. It was also a first time for the organizers to test the waters and to see who would show up for the event. The location of the pre-march gathering place was highly visible and publicly accessible. The area, as an everyday shopping area, is always packed with pedestrians on both weekdays and weekends. Therefore, the event is not planned for participants who might be fearful of being “outed” or being associated as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender persons. But the openness of the public space itself allow for onlookers who can choose to remain anonymous in the background. There were two official slogans for the march. The first one is “Eliminate Hate, Respect Diversity” (消除仇恨 尊重多元) and the second one is “Whether you’re a Tongzhi or not, you’re still a part of Hong Kong” (同志不同志 都係香港一分子). The official declaration of the parade is “to raise public awareness towards society's unequal treatment of its sexual minority populations”. The organizing committee also declares: We believe that Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals or Transgendered (LGBT) persons deserve to be treated as equal citizens of Hong Kong. We are against the denigration and discrimination of sexual minorities”.

The second IDAHO parade took place on May 21 in the following year starting off with a spiritual blessing ceremony. It was raining heavily that day with a rainstorm warning delivered by the Observatory. Yet, organizers estimated around 300 people came out in the rain to march in the parade. The message was “Stand Up Against Prejudice”

and the primary difference of the march from the previous year was its emphasis on including religious organizations as part of the contingent. Dr. Fernando Cheung Chiu-Hung, as a Legislative Council member, opened the ceremony and spiritual blessings were offered by three different queer-friendly religious organizations, Spiritual Seekers Society, Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship and Hong Kong Christian Institute. Participants also observed a minute of silence to remember victims of homophobia globally and locally. Group representatives from Beijing, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Taiwan also came to support the event. I remembered that I was impressed by the number of people turning out for the march despite the dreary weather. Moreover, I felt that there was a sense of warmth and belonging when people gathered together and greeted each other for this annual event. Most of the participants also came last year for the march. The route for the second year was a bit longer taking marchers a few more streets into the busy shopping area of Tung Lo Wan and eventually making the loop back to the pre-march gathering place on East Point Road. The march took about a full hour.

By May 2007, the third IDAHO parade was expected by many who have been previous marchers to carry on as an annual event. As discussed in Chapter One, the organizing committee for the third parade was much more ambitious than before. First of all, there were a total of 18 non-governmental organizations as part of the IDAHO 2007 committee. Secondly, there were more private companies or businesses that joined the march such as Durex and Ziz Skincare for Men, not to mention gay bars such as Propaganda and Works. Thirdly, two legislative councillors, Emily Lau and Leung Kwok Hung, also endorsed the event. Leung Kwok Hung was already at the first march in 2005.

Fourthly, there were two media sponsors with Fridae.com as the official gay online media and Dim Sum magazine as the official media sponsor. Both media outlets are highly commercial businesses even though they are gay-owned and operated. Last but not least, the route for the march was significantly more symbolic since marchers left Tung Lo Wan and marched towards Chater Road in Central as the final destination. In essence, the route was structured to get closer to the heartland of the Hong Kong government. The Legislative Council Building was located next to Chater Garden on Chater Road.³²

My experiences at all three events informed me of progressive changes on the political front. In the past decade, I have marched in annual Take Back the Night marches, an anti-violence against women's march as well as the Valentine's Day march held yearly in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, British Columbia, to remind the government and the public that thirty-one women went missing in the area with many of those being sex workers. The growing numbers and diversity in the attendance of the IDAHO parades are a testimony to the increased visibility of sexual minorities and their allies. Since there are no Pride events in Hong Kong, the IDAHO parade often carried a mixed message of being both anti-homophobia and a celebration of sorts. It is an anti-homophobia march but at the same time, it is so rare to see a group of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people and their allies together in public. The spectacle was in itself stunning, to say the least. But to regard the IDAHO parade as the Hong Kong Pride Parade would be a wrong step to begin with. Maybe it is more important to position the IDAHO parades as part of the larger schema in emerging social justice issues such as the

³² Public demonstrations usually end up at the Central Government Offices on Battery Path, a five to ten minute walk from Chater Garden.

preservation efforts of Star Ferry Pier, Queen's Pier and Wan Chai, anti-globalization activism, labour rights as in pushing for minimum wage legislation and environmental groups. Key to the third IDAHO parade is the demand for anti-discrimination legislation against sexual minorities, as reflected in the slogan "Legislation is the Best Education". At the time of my interviews with some of the respondents, thirteen respondents have been to at least one IDAHO parade in the past. All of them responded positive to the event and have expressed their wishes to continue attending the annual event. Those who attended tend to fall within the age range of late twenties to thirties with one participant at the age of fifty-one. Younger respondents did not express interest in attending any political demonstration and did not speak much about sexual politics during the interviews as well. Yet this situation might soon change as more student groups get involved with IDAHO and become active participants of the event.

Lack of Structural Support

Fighting for equality is not only a case of asserting public visibility but also to highlight the discriminating experiences of sexual minorities. Published in 2006, the Equal Rights for LGBT people: Hong Kong Report compiled thirty discrimination incidents selected from cases solicited by four community organizations, namely, Hong Kong Christian Institute, Blessed Minority of Hong Kong, Civil Rights for Sexual Diversity and f'union. Consequently, the following incident is only one of many discriminating experiences that are documented in this thesis. My intention to include this incident in the chapter on social movements is to ensure that there is widespread discrimination among sexual minorities; therefore, the primary goal of a successful social

movement is to address the inequalities as experienced by those who were at stake. When Bik Bik talked about her experiences of being harassed, she was very candid with her feelings of being stared at regularly in public areas.

I have always been stared at on the streets. Anywhere I go I get that. There was this incident that happened on the beach in Stanley. Actually, I was on a date with a girl and we went to Stanley for a stroll. I think it was a stupid incident but anyway, it was a very cold night and we were really cold, that's why we started to drink to get warmer. We had a lot of clothes on that night but we thought a bit of drinking might get us warmer. So we're just a little bit tipsy. Then a group of teenagers came over and some boys realized that we're girls and then they yelled, "Go home if you're rubbing tofu!" They said more horrible things as well and it was really awful. Then we pushed each other about but did not break any bottles. There was a group of girls among them who asked the boys to stop harassing us. So we left afterwards. I can't fight and my girl can't either. How can we fight? ... It was a really bad experience. I don't go to Stanley anymore. ... The place makes me sad.

Consumerism as Visibility

Opening a lesbian speciality carries significant meaning for Nick as she perceives her business as part of an overall effort to raise lesbian visibility. The same belief was also echoed by the lesbian café owners in this study. Nick strongly believed that there are not enough public visibility and the lesbian community seemed to be fragmented along various issues. Nick's store is a testimony to her contribution for the lesbian community as well as a site of disclosure in terms of her sexual identity. Nick asserted that "a good community requires a leader because a leader can lead many." Yet at the same time, a local group such as Women's Coalition of Hong Kong SAR which appear to be a leader in the community encountered resistance from the community itself. Nick recalled friends who thought negatively of the group and who even went to the extent of perceiving the

group as profiteering in its social activities. Despite such views, Nick emphasised on the importance of solidarity by stating that “if we are not unified, we will never be able to fight back at the straight world.”

Views from the Other Side

Even though most respondents agreed on the fact that Hong Kong society is being more openly accepting of homosexuality and expressed a sense of optimism in the fight for equality. Fifty-one years old Eileen felt otherwise, she did not agree with the notion that Hong Kong society has been increasingly tolerant of homosexuality.

I don't know why but on the streets, you can always hear those teenagers say “Sei Gay Lo or Sei Gay Por!” These kind of words are so humiliating! How can they take it as a joke? For young people to take it as a joke means the society has not improved at all. ... So I truly believe that there are still a lot of people who are against homosexuality. The religious groups have strong resistance. The government, too. Chinese people are conservative. There are also those supposedly intellectuals or those who like power. ... The Chinese government is not accepting of it. You can say there are a lot of tongzhis in Shanghai, Beijing or Guangzhou but can they be open like the way we have Women's Coalition of Hong Kong SAR or Rainbow Action? ... Some people are very proud of themselves being Chinese. Sorry, I am ashamed for being a Chinese because of the government and the deep rooted belief that gays and lesbians are sickening and they are a burden to our society. ... The society does not even think they are taking away our rights. It's like we are exaggerating our experiences of being discriminated. They pretend to be tolerant of us. ... I think today's society is becoming more and more oppressive towards sex and towards gays and lesbians. Even if we fight for anti-discrimination legislation, the chances are slim for it to be passed. I'm very pessimistic about it. Maybe it's my character. I'm not optimistic. Sorry.

Reflecting on the wider views held by Hong Kong society, forty-two years old Beatrice stated,

I think Hong Kong's mentality may not change much. But at least there is recognition. I always say this. Do you think people will not stare at you? Do you think your family will not object to you? Of course they will. This is not only about legislation. It's the people. It's a lot about our mentality. ... I think it will take a longer time for people to accept this. That's why I sometimes think it's easier in foreign countries. Maybe people will be more open-minded there.

Beatrice's response revealed a pessimistic attitude towards the enactment of any form of anti-discrimination legislation.

On the other hand, Eunice offered her opinion and posed a strategy in moving forward with our fight for equality.

I think we'll get there in ten years in our fight towards equality in regards to sexual orientation. We now have to fight for racial equality first. By signing the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Hong Kong government will have to establish legislation. There are only two articles left now for us to fight with our lives. Let's make sure the racial equality article is passed and then there will be one left for us to fight. The government cannot adopt an ostrich policy on it. Sometimes I think back in the last twenty years fighting for sexual rights, it's hard to ask for a huge change. It's like packing Chinese medicinal herbs at a doctor's clinic. You pick some here and some there. Same-sex marriage is a big one, hard to pick, then move to domestic partnership first, fight for domestic partners to have the right to donate organs or hospital visitation rights. Move a little first, push for smaller issues surrounding the big item first.

I feel that the most critical issue now is on domestic violence in same-sex families. Even same-sex families are not paying enough attention to domestic violence. After the issue has been recognized, then the status of same-sex families is recognized. It's like circling around a prey and then biting it suddenly. After the status is recognized, then go for same-sex marriage, go for civil partnership. The Social Welfare Department might put you in refuge housing for abused women but how can social workers follow your case? Others were beaten by their husbands and you've been beaten by your wife. The support for social services is not there. Another friend told me that her partner went to emergency services because she took the wrong medication. Hospital staff asked who she was and they

refused to let her visit her partner and asked her to contact her partner's relatives instead. It is really hurtful. Therefore, we need to work on hospital visitation rights and domestic violence first.

Sometimes I think that Hong Kong lesbians are quite self-centred. We care about ourselves more. Short term vision, not long term investment. We care about our own affairs but I think it is a Hong Kong issue. Not a tongzhi issue. It's about our society.

To conclude, I made an attempt to outline how the onset of modernity enabled social movements to emerge in industrial societies. Afterwards, I discussed social movements on feminism and gay liberation in order to highlight its limitations on explaining the current state of affairs. Through my interviews with selected activists in the movement, I have come to learn the beginnings of the Hong Kong tongzhi movements, its challenges and achievements, as well as the increased number of spaces for tongzhi politics to play out in the public realm. Currently, the political agenda of the IDAHO parades have been leaning towards a reactionary politics against religious groups, thereby limiting the possibility of a more long-term strategy. Instead, it might be timely for organizers to gather support from social movements on other marginalized issues in society and to work towards a form of coalitional politics.

Chapter 7

Tung Lo Wan: A Lesbian Haven or Everyday Life?

Lesbian spaces as sites of resistance have been studied in the last decade with social geographer Gill Valentine urging geographers and urban sociologists to map lesbian neighbourhoods “from nowhere to everywhere” (Valentine, 2000, p.1). As I have introduced in Chapter One, notions of resistance has taken on multiple meanings within major theoretical strands such as postcolonialism, feminism, cultural geography, postmodernism, Marxism and queer theories. A mapping of resistance points to the interrelations and competing influences these theoretical strands have on each other. In this chapter, I will investigate how lesbian commercial spaces function as temporal sites of resistance for Hong Kong lesbians to validate their lesbian identities, to form social networks and to question their political subjectivities. I define lesbian commercial spaces as businesses that cater to lesbians through their marketing strategies such as posting on lesbian websites or passing out flyers at lesbian events. These spaces include lesbian bars, upstairs cafés catering to lesbian customers and a lesbian specialty store.

Geographically, resistance can be charted at a particular place over a period of time in overt terms such as protests, marches, riots and candlelight vigils. But resistance is also present on cyberspace such as guerrilla websites and online petitions, or with other forms of new media as in film and video. Resistance can be practiced through our daily decisions when lesbians choose to meet friends at a lesbian bar or log online to chat with other lesbians. Minute as they seemed, these decisions signify a need to bond with other

women who have same-sex desires. A space of resistance points to a critique of structural relations of power manifested through spatialities, be it global or local places.

To speak of resistance is to acknowledge the nature of power. Structural relations of power affect the way we live our daily lives as gendered bodies, social beings and political subjects. Steve Pile asserts that resistance is not as easily pinned down to “political subjectivities which are opposed to, or marginalised by, oppressive practices; whereby those who benefit from relations of domination act to reproduce them, while the oppressed have a natural interest in over-turning the situation.” (Pile, 1997, p.3). In other words, marginalized groups have more vested interests in engaging themselves as political subjects fighting “over access, control and representation” (Tonkiss, 2005, p.59). It is not surprising that most informants have stressed the importance of lesbian businesses being lesbian-owned and operated.

When power is defined through the spaces it aims to occupy, architectural design of buildings or public spaces come quick to my thoughts. Government buildings, streets, housing, schools, prisons, parks, shopping malls, just to name a few, signify institutional power both in and out of the spaces. In the context of Hong Kong lesbian spaces, ones need to look at the nooks and crannies between buildings or walk up the narrow stairways leading up to cafes to make sense of how hegemonic power enacts itself through marginalization of lesbian spaces. Not only am I concerned about the physicality of spaces, but the human aspect of who has access to these spaces is critical in the analysis of power relations. Michel Foucault, by bringing up the notion of “heterotopia”, suggests

that heterotopias are “counter-sites” that challenges spatialities and social arrangements by inverting the common order of space (Foucault, 1986). Fran Tonkiss further suggests that “women-only spaces” can be read as a modern version of the heterotopia, “as heterotopias of separation that escape the eyes and the order of men” (Tonkiss, 2005, p.133).

On the notion of multiple discourses, Marxist geographer David Harvey links postmodernism with Marxism through his analysis on urban issues and his notable observation on a contested public space such as the Tompkins Park in New York City. Harvey believes in order to understand the composition of park users adequately, one must take into account the “multiple discourses” and “contradictory codings” among park users, be they students, young artists, yuppies, squatters or motorcyclists (Harvey, 1992, p.201). Harvey’s study on the Tompkins Park reminds us to view public spaces as a field of rendering discourses in its own positionalities. He also points out how park users have used the Tompkins Park as space of protests against various notions of power as defined by themselves. Similarly, lesbian spaces can also be a gathering place for women with different class backgrounds, levels of education, occupations, health status, ethnicities, gender and sexual identities. Although lesbian spaces in this case, are not public arenas comparable to open spaces such as parks and streets, the reasons for lesbians entering into a lesbian space can differ from curiosity to familiarity, offering a myriad of explanations specific to each person.

Moreover, lesbians have been marginalized in the wider discussion of women and spaces due to a heterosexist bias in the field that leads to more emphasis on nuclear family units. Earlier women's liberation movements in the West starts to problematize the notion of women as housewives and private subjects, yet it fails to recognize working-class women, women of colour and lesbians. In addition, the discussion on sexualities and space has not often included lesbian spatialities. As mentioned in Chapter One, Manuel Castell's (1983) explanation on lesbians not having sufficient financial resources to own property and hence, not being a vital part of San Francisco's urban landscape in the early eighties have drawn criticisms from others, most notably, Maxine Wolfe (1992), who asserts that lesbians do play a major role in the city by renting homes and going to other places, like social gatherings or commercial establishments. Mapping lesbian spaces require "social contacts and insider ethnography, rather than via the architecture of cultural and public life" (Tonkiss, 2005, p.107).

Tung Lo Wan: a Les Hub

One of the basic premises in arguing for the existence of lesbian spaces is the demand for visibility and in essence, the enactment of a space of resistance (Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis 1993; Valentine 1995; Ingram et al. 1997). Lesbian-only spaces can be defined as spaces reserved for women who expressed interests in same-sex desires. Entering a lesbian space does not presume one's identity to be a lesbian per se, but imply an interest in same-sex relations. Lesbian commercial spaces in Hong Kong are best recognized as bars and cafes, primarily in Tung Lo Wan and followed by Mongkok and

Tsim Sha Tsui.³³ Established in 1990, two lesbian bars, H2O and Red, also known as Circus, were located in the upper floors of commercial buildings in Tung Lo Wan. H2O, in particular, has often been mentioned by informants with fondness and a sense of nostalgia. Both bars have since changed ownership and do not function as lesbian exclusive sites. FrancoYuen-Ki Lai's thesis on lesbian masculinities and tomboys in Hong Kong highlights three bars in particular, Virus, Oasis and Chatroom. Lai describes the setting of these pubs vividly,

Inside the pubs, the light was dim and the environment was very noisy. Customers had to speak very loudly. The size of each pub was not large (about 700 sq. ft.), and each could accommodate 80 customers. There were around ten tables, and each table could hold eight customers. The pubs were almost empty on weekday nights. Friday night and Saturday night were the golden times, especially on Saturday night. A set of Karaoke equipment was placed in a corner, and customers could take turns to sing Karaoke. Pub games such as *chàai mùih* and *sìk jùng* were very common (Lai, 2003, p. 41-42).

Lesbian cafés, on the other hand, have gained interests recently through the popularity of an upstairs café culture. Rents are usually lower compared to ground level businesses and licensing regulations tend to be more relaxed. Upstairs cafes have sprung up in virtually every possible trendy location in both Hong Kong and Kowloon. At time of writing, there are approximately six cafes and six bars consistently listed on lesbian websites. Although the area adjacent to Tung Lo Wan known as Happy Valley is also a common place for lesbians to hang out in Hong Kong, its significance as a lesbian neighbourhood remained pale to that of Tung Lo Wan.

³³ An oral history project comprised of local community members, academic scholars and members from local groups, namely, Women's Coalition of Hong Kong SAR, Rainbow Action and F'Union. A booklet collecting women's stories on their same-sex relations and desires has been published. The booklet provides a map of existing and closed down bars and cafes. The booklet is available online at www.wchk.org.

Tung Lo Wan is one of the areas frequently mentioned by informants as a neighbourhood for everyday activities.³⁴ These everyday activities may take on a leisurely nature such as shopping and dining, watching films in cinemas, singing in karaoke boxes, purchasing street food off corner kiosks or hanging out at cafés. Putting activities aside, the everyday spaces tend to be ordinary establishments that we pass by without any particular observation. If Tung Lo Wan is constructed to be an everyday location where ordinary citizens engage in common activities, it is by no chance also a place of convenience and an attractive location for businesses. It is not surprising then to find an emergence of lesbian spaces such as bars and cafes in the same area.

Jean-Ulrick Désert points to the shifting nature and erotic possibilities in queer spaces,

Queer space is in large part the function of wishful thinking or desires that become solidified: a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments, dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape (Desért 1997: 21).

Translated onto a project to queer Tung Lo Wan, same-sex couples can hold hands and display physical affection to disrupt heteronormative social relations (Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter, 1997).

³⁴ Tung Lo Wan is located on the northern shore of the Hong Kong Island including parts of Wanchai and Eastern districts. Tung Lo Wan used to be a fishing village with most of its land sitting on silt. Land reclamation has pushed the area's boundaries further into Victoria Harbour and has seen shopping areas and hotels sprang up in the area. For this chapter, I am mostly referring to streets popular with lesbian spaces such as Gloucester Road, Jaffe Road, Lockhart Road, Tung Lung Street Yiu Wa Street and Yee Wo Street.

On the political front, local lesbian and gay activists have chosen Tung Lo Wan as the site for the International Day Against Homophobia March in two consecutive years. March organizers have chosen a pedestrian area behind a Japanese department store, Sogo, to assemble march goers and to put up tents for community outreach activities. It points to visibility and to the queer use of space for asserting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights in an open space (Ingram et al., 1997). Although I am fully aware of the fact that an anti-homophobia march is inherently different than a pride parade, at least the intention of the IDAHO organizers differ from those of a pride parade, the primary aim to take up public space for visibility is achieved through these events.

There have been a number of pride parades being held in Asian cities since 2000. Progressive Organization of Gays in the Philippines organized the first pride parade in Manila in 1994.³⁵ For the city of Tokyo, pride parades have been held discontinuously since 1994 and the sixth parade was held in August 2007.³⁶ Other cities such as Bangkok, Columbo (Sri Lanka), Seoul and Taipei have held pride parades in recent years to fight for public visibility. Other cities have resorted to hosting film festivals, parties and social gatherings as evidence to emerging lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Since 2002, Q! Film Festival has been held in Jakarta, Indonesia despite death threats faced by organizers in the predominantly Muslim country.³⁷ In Singapore, a community group called People Like Us have been organizing an event titled Indignation, which is comprised of seminars, poetry readings, art exhibitions, film screenings and parties since

³⁵ For more information on ProGay, visit http://members.tripod.com/~progay_philippines/intro.html

³⁶ For more information on Tokyo Pride Parade, visit <http://parade.tokyo-pride.org/6th/english/>

³⁷ For more information on the organizing group Q-Munity, visit <http://q-filmfestival.tripod.com/id1.html>. The 2007 news report by Reuters on the film festival can be accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/filmNews/idUSJAK20438920070826>

2005.³⁸ In Hong Kong, Reggie Ho of Horizons made an attempt to coordinate the first pride parade on October 15, 2004. I attended the event at Lan Kwai Fong where a small group of participants marched up and down the block in front of a bar, Club 97.³⁹ The parade was often dismissed as a one-time only event with mainly gay men as participants, furthermore the selection of its venue in Lan Kwai Fong limited participation from lesbians, bisexual and queer women as well as those who felt that Central is more reserved for upper middle-class or middle-classes.

Spaces for Everyday Resistance

Cultural theorist Ben Highmore suggests,

The everyday offers itself up as a problem, a contradiction, a paradox: both ordinary and extraordinary, self-evident and opaque, known and unknown, obvious and enigmatic (Highmore 2002:16).

In the case of Tung Lo Wan, it is both known as a shopping mecca and yet also a lesbian hub for the number of lesbian establishments both past and present within its gridlines. Can it be summarized as a lesbian enclave or is it better understood as an everyday space with queer possibilities? The area conjures up an imaginary landscape where families would go about their normal business along with lesbians holding hands freely without fear. Yet, it is also the same area where many respondents work to make a living and for those who are younger, they selected to go to school in this area rather than other districts. To use Highmore's words, it can be "both [an] ordinary and extraordinary" place. As a message from the Hong Kong Tourism Board, there is

³⁸ For information on People Like Us, visit <http://www.plu.sg/society/>

³⁹ For a brief report of the parade, visit <http://www.fridae.com/newsfeatures/article.php?articleid=1336&viewarticle=1>

something for everybody when one shops or dines at Tung Lo Wan. By appropriating the area, lesbian spaces can be read as sites of consumption and function as a part of the formula that fits into the Hong Kong capitalist ideology. Yet the nature of the businesses and the clientele they strived for denote their resistance to normative values embedded in gender and sexuality. Lesbian spaces and the socialization processes that happen within constructed the cultural identities of Hong Kong lesbians. As I asked the informants questions related to what they do as leisure, I have come to understand more about the conflicting meanings of lesbian spaces within their own interpretations of what accounts as a Hong Kong lesbian.

Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, in his foreword to *Critique of Everyday Life*, asserts that a worker looks to leisure for “the non-everyday in the everyday” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.40). Everyday life to a worker is the mundane daily grind of labouring for the capitalist. Leisure holds an illusive nature similar to an escape from both work and family life. As labour becomes fragmented in modern times, the worker becomes alienated from the production process and hence becomes part of an industrial process. Whereas labour is an unfinished project, the worker develops “a new social need” for leisure (Lefebvre, 1991, p.32). Therefore, Lefebvre calls for a commitment from sociologists to study the interrelations between work, family and leisure as a “totality” of “the concrete individual” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.31). Similarly, my study on how Hong Kong lesbians view lesbians spaces as both sites of consumption and places for socialization points to their resistance towards heteronormativity in their everyday life. It is this notion of everyday resistance that is present in the way they negotiate their

lesbian subjectivities, transform dominant narratives, and assert their temporal claim on spatialities.

Lesbian Bars & Cafés

Lesbian bars have a long history in many women communities. Lesbian bars and cafés provide physical spaces for women to gather, to develop friendships and to seek potential erotic interests. These experiences may not be the only place to assert one's lesbian subjectivity yet lesbian bar cultures have continued to exist in many cities within different countries. Through the gathering of lesbians in public places, lesbian identities were formed and communities were developed to foster these identities. A shared identity slowly emerged among women who frequented these bars. The bar, then, is a space not only for gathering, but a space for public interactions. The lesbian bar became symbolic for public lesbian lives. The reasons were simple, and one might say, these same reasons can still ring true currently in many urban centres. It was difficult for lesbians to meet other lesbians in their own neighbourhoods. Public streets, parks, beaches and street corners were more dominant of a heterosexual and homosexual working-class male presence (Chauncey, 1994). Kennedy and Davis were quick to point out that,

The concentration of lesbian social life in bars derives from the danger lesbians faced as women in a patriarchal culture based on the sexual availability of women for men (Kennedy and Davis, 1993, p.65).

Antonia Chao in her influential work on Taiwan's T/Po communities has shown that lesbian bars are crucial to our understanding of "queer histories, identity formations, and body politics" (Chao, 2002, p. 369). Chao traced the existence of the first T-bar, Wang You Gu (Forget-sadness valley) to be opened back in 1985 when Martial Law was

lifted in Taiwan. The bar was opened by a T-Po couple in the red-light district (Chao, 2001, p. 192). Scott Simon, in his research on lesbian entrepreneurship in the city of Taipei, Taiwan, notes that lesbian bars provide a safe and free space for women to socialize and to develop intimate relations. He further suggests that lesbians have a harder time to establish selfhood beyond family constraints and the pressure to marriage is still prevalent among lesbians in Taiwanese society. Therefore, lesbian bars provide an alternate site for women to exercise their sexual freedom as lesbians in a non-judgemental space. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis' pioneering study on lesbian bar culture from the 1930s to 1950s demonstrated that bars "were truly the only places that lesbians had to socialize; but it was also more dangerous, bringing lesbians into conflict with a hostile society – the law, family, and work" (Kennedy and Davis, 1993). As Maxine Wolfe puts it, lesbians have been "active creators of their own identities and environments, rather than mere bearers of dominant social relations or passive absorbers of dominant ideology" (Wolfe, 1997, p. 302).

In the 1920s and 1930s, many women who have desires for other women entered the public sphere to socialize and to find potential lovers in Western cities (Faderman, 1991; Wolfe, 1997; Kennedy and Davis, 1993). George Chauncey (1994) in his research of urban culture among gay men in New York during 1890 – 1940 has shown that lesbians were also a part of gay men's drag balls. During the years of Prohibition in 1919-1933, lesbians and gay men went to Harlem where the prohibition laws were lenient, and congregated publicly in illegal drinking establishments.

The importance of lesbian bars has been clear throughout American lesbian histories. The existence of these bars are crucial to many lesbians who have just come out or who are in search of a community. These designated lesbian or gay spaces can be perceived as “safe” spaces for many (Rothenberg, 1995; Valentine, 1995) Sheila Jeffreys (1993), writing as a lesbian feminist scholar, recognizes lesbians’ attraction to “seedy” lesbian bars. The emergence and social significance of lesbian bars have been documented in ethnographic studies and oral history scholarship on lesbian lives in U.S. cities including Detroit, Colorado, Boston, Buffalo, Massachusetts, Montreal, New York, San Francisco and Indiana. Much discussion on lesbian bar culture points to the complexities of lesbian visibility, public lives, social and cultural experiences in the past and in our current times. Lesbian bar space is not exclusive to lesbians, bisexuals and queer women. Kelly Hankin (2002) prompts us to take note of heterosexual voyeurs, hate bashers and police officers that are also present in these spaces. Many scholars have also challenge the perceived “homogenized myths” of lesbian bars. Butch-femme identities are embraced by some and endured by others (Lorde, 1993; Nestle, 1987; Kennedy and Davis, 1993). Rochella Thorpe (1996) problematizes the “whiteness” of lesbian bars in Detroit.

The existence of lesbian commercial establishments can be best summarized as temporal sites. High rental rates and unstable income forced bar and café owners to close down and to relocate to other commercial buildings. Histories associated with physical spaces are often erased and customers proceed to the new bar or to find other places for socialization. Yet, I continue to find lesbian bars and cafes hovering around commercial

buildings in Tung Lo Wan, Wanchai and to a certain extent, Mongkok. Kennedy and Davis suggested that lesbian bars used to be located in more seedy areas, such as red light districts since women were traditionally not allowed entry into male territories such as bars. Going out alone at night for women was dangerous enough. Similarly, I have been to lesbian bars and parties in Vancouver and San Francisco where their locations are not exactly the best parts of town. Lower rental rates can be one explanation but also “moral permissiveness” within these particular locations leads to an easier emergence of lesbian and gay bars (Kennedy and Davis, 1993). Police authorities have been less controlling in these areas, and in some cases, accepted bribes for smooth operation of these businesses. This is not to say that police raids are not common but maybe lesbians were not the main targets in this case.

Responses from Informants

I have asked informants to describe how they feel about lesbian spaces and what concerns them the most in these spaces. Their responses centre on their past experiences in visiting bars and cafes. Most informants found the locations of these businesses on lesbian websites such as Blur-F.com and relez.net or through word of mouth from friends. During my research period, tabloid magazines have also started a barrage of coverage on sensationalized topics such as where *les* girls hang out, why do young women become lesbians, or tomboys as the assistants to teenage bopper music artists.⁴⁰ More than once, these magazines publicized the locations of les hangouts such as bars and cafes. Although

⁴⁰ The term “*les*” is commonly used by informants to describe their sexual identities as well as a term commonly seen in news media to denote lesbians.

such media coverage tended to be sensational at best, and a peeping tom to say the least, it made lesbian spaces seemed real, tangible and local. The range of responses from the informants can be divided into the following themes: the issue of comfortability in women-only spaces, a sense of camaraderie, gay bars as an entry point, to have or not to have lesbian spaces, and a matter of accessibility.

The Issue of Comfortability in Women-Only Spaces

Informants often mentioned the issue of comfortability in their choices to be in lesbian spaces. This comfort zone is characterized by being first and foremost, women-only and secondly, by its identification as a lesbian space. Comfort is often linked to the absence of men hence a lesser chance of being sexually or verbally harassed. Safety is a serious concern for lesbians who came to these spaces as an affirmation of their sexual identities and erotic desires.

Ah Lok is fifteen years old and attends a secondary school in Tung Lo Wan. Her tomboyish looks have often attracted unwanted attention from boys in schools as well as in other social environments. Smart, articulate and quick on her feet, Ah Lok divides her time up by attending school, hanging out in video arcades and upstairs cafés. She has no qualms holding her girlfriends' hands in areas such as Tung Lo Wan and Mongkok. I asked her how she felt about having heterosexual men in a lesbian space, in this case, a lesbian bar.

If I sat together with my friends and we keep to ourselves, it's fine. There were times when I was with other friends and some of their young male friends came and I felt okay about it. I don't like those who hit on you, it's

easy to have this kind of situation. But if they are brought in by my close friends, I don't have a problem with that. The other kind of situation is embarrassing. Don't know what to do when they come over and hit on you. At Home [a lesbian bar], there are men in the upper and lower floors. I've gone up to use the washroom on the twentieth floor and had men hitting on me a few times. He would say, "you're chilling out downstairs? Which floor?" "Eighteenth floor" "I'll come by to find you." "Oi! Downstairs is only for women." "Ok. Have fun." Then nothing happened. Some men has class.

Being stared at or under “the homophobic gaze” is one of the many reasons for women to seek out lesbian spaces for solace (Corteen, 2002, p. 260). These sites function as a buffer zone from homophobia in the wider society. Karen Corteen (2002) investigates how lesbians define and perceive safety in two public spaces, one is a visibly gay village and the other one being a small local town. Her findings have shown that lesbians internalize homophobic violence and hence experience a kind of “interior harm” from their “localized management of their sexual representation and demeanour” (Corteen, 2002, p. 276). In other words, homophobia takes a daily toll on their everyday lives and lesbian spaces can help to alleviate some of these painful reminders temporarily. Eileen, a butch lesbian in her fifties, opened an upstairs café in Wanchai not exclusively for lesbians, but for community groups to hold meetings or workshops. The place resembled a queer-friendly environment where people from all genders and sexualities are welcomed. Eileen believed that starting up a café is a result of her own lesbian identification.

If I opened up a space like this one, for people who are like me, we can go to a very relaxed place. You don't have to be all tensed up, don't have to be stared at by people who think you're odd. One can just be relaxed at my place. One can be flirty, can talk about love, just anything, approach someone you like, even cruising, anything goes.

As a twenty year old student, Bik Bik is politically active and well-versed in social issues that affect marginalized groups in Hong Kong. She started going to the bar, Virus, when she was around fifteen or sixteen years old. Bik Bik did not think of going to the bar as a particularly exciting experience which might be indicative of how the younger generation perceives such spaces. For example, Bik Bik and her peers pick and choose between various social spaces and change their preferences in accordance with their social activities.

The first time I went with my classmates...er...it was nothing special, that is, I expected what it's like to go with my classmates. It's heavy drinking, it's not like I haven't drank before and it's not like I haven't smoked before. Nothing special, really, but it's a relatively safe space because I will not bump into my family, you will if you're on the streets. You also won't bump into people you don't want to see, for example, family friends or your relatives. It's really troublesome. These networks are huge because of my extended family.

Yet it can be uncomfortable for some lesbians to enter lesbian bars whether it is a first time for them or a regular night out. One might feel intimidated entering a public lesbian space for the first time not knowing what to expect. Even though the location is more obscured and less likely to be of interest to most heterosexuals, the possibility of heterosexual peeping is not unheard of in both gay and lesbian bars. Therefore, it is still possible for lesbians to run into colleagues or friends. Moreover, the particular culture of a bar can make one feel anxious and hence, deter one from entering the space again. Kitman is twenty seven years old and works at a non-governmental organization. She started logging onto the Internet to make lesbian friends and to hang out at lesbian bars

when she was nineteen years old. She recalled her eagerness in going to lesbian spaces and her level of comfort in different sites,

At that time, I really wanted to go [lesbian bars]. But when I got there I didn't know what to do. Everyone there was playing and drinking hard. I don't like approaching others or chai mui. I feel I cannot fit in. But still, lesbian bars are considered to be a form of tongzhi space, sometimes I do have the urge to go to these spaces even though I don't feel comfortable there. But I still want to go. ... There is no place like Joca then. If there was such a space, I would like it better but I would still feel a bit weird. That is, if you go to a bar for tongzhi, it's like going to yum cha. It's odd to go just with the two of you but if a whole gang goes for yum cha, it's okay.

The age factor figures prominently in the discussion of lesbian bars with most of their clientele being younger women from late teens to mid-twenties. Most informants who are older mentioned how they felt disconnected from the younger generation when they were in these venues. Their comments on the younger crowd tends to take on a negative approach where they described them as “rowdy”, “heavy drinkers” and “with attitude”. At first I had doubts whether it was associated with class background, however, my interview data did not allow me to make a general claim as such. It occurred to me that a disapproving reading of these spaces have more to do with the physical environment of these bars such as the location, the décor, the karaoke music and the people who work there. Regardless of their negative assessment of lesbian bars, all informants except for one respondent have been to either a lesbian bar or café.

A Sense of Camaraderie

Some informants have expressed feeling a sense of camaraderie in exclusively lesbian spaces, such as bars and cafés. This sense of solidarity can be associated with the need to find solace and as one informant have said, “a common language”. This “common language” denotes an imagined community and refers to customers who are in the lesbian space regardless of whether they knew each other at all. Essentialist as it might seems, the assumption that each woman in a lesbian space is potentially a bisexual or a lesbian is already enough to conjure up notions of commonality. As Alison Eves puts it cogently in her study on butch/femme negotiation of spatialities, “the strongest expression of essentialism took a spatial form and involved defending the boundaries of ‘lesbian space’” (Eves, 2004, p. 486). Alex, who visited lesbian bars occasionally, witnessed a marriage proposal among women,

I go with friends, that is, they like to go everywhere [lesbian bars]. It's very common now to just approach the people sitting at the table next to you and say something like “hey, let's play together.”... Some people will suddenly propose [at the bar]. One person will come over and say “I'll propose marriage later, can you come over and be the witness?” I said, “Sure! Sure!” Then I'll hang out with another new group of people.

A night of hanging out at the local lesbian bar turned out to be a group affair where Alex took part as an observer for a marriage proposal. The fact that they were in the same space at that particular moment already bodes possible moments of casual camaraderie among strangers. Since same-sex marriage is forbidden in Hong Kong, lesbians find other ways to enact marital vows for each other. The lesbian bar then becomes a space to “validate the reality of their world and their lives as social and sexual beings” (Wolfe, 1997, p. 315). The bar becomes a safe space where forbidden acts were

performed to subvert dominant heteronormative narratives in public settings, for this instance, a marriage proposal between two women. The marriage proposal, as a precursor to a same-sex marriage, if they indeed choose to proceed, is a temporal matter. Once they stepped outside of the bar's door, their status as a lesbian couple is challenged by heteronormative social relations.

Easy bonding among women in a safe space is a primary criterion for Hong Kong lesbians to venture into these spaces. Phil, thirty three years old who identifies as a tomboy, left school by sixteen and have worked at various jobs, enjoyed the casual atmosphere in lesbian bars.

I like going to les bar because I would approach anyone and doesn't matter what identities they have. That is, I can just stand around or when I see someone coming back from dancing on the dance floor for a sip of her drink, we can chat casually to see if we click. I go to les bars two or three times in a month. I went with my friend for the first time to a les bar. I thought, wow, there are bars just for les!

Needless to mention, socializing at lesbian bars or cafes requires one to have some sort of financial resources. There are many possible connections between a consumer subject and a social subject (Pellegrini, 2002). A consumer subject, let's say, a lesbian consumer subject can purchase visibility through participation at queer-friendly cultural events (as in film festivals, theatrical productions and concerts) and through sipping a drink at the local hangout. A social subject might push for political and social rights, in pursuit of social acceptance via market visibility. Both subjectivities intersect and rely on each other to establish an effective relationship for queer visibility. But this

form of queer visibility is class-stratified and not affordable for all. Seventeen year old Miki is a secondary school student who mentioned spending money as a deterrent factor, “hanging out at cafes usually takes money.” Instead, Miki often hung out at video arcades or walk around in shopping areas such as Mongkok and Tung Lo Wan.

Gay Bars as an Entry Point

Lesbians have continued to seek out bars and cafes as community “anchors” symbolic of physical spaces that offer a certain degree of safety and comfort (Herrell 1992: 231). The lack of visible lesbian businesses have prompted others to find gay bars as a possible venue to meet gays and lesbians for the first time in their lives. Two informants went to gay bars specifically for this purpose. When Connie was a first year student at a local university, she remembered how lesbians were not often mentioned in the media. Now in her mid-thirties, she could still remember her quivering experience in entering a gay bar.

I thought there are only gay men in Hong Kong because the newspaper only mentioned gay men. Did not mention women, but I checked out some foreign magazines on the web, they are written in English and contains the word 'lesbian', that is why I thought lesbians only exists as foreigners. I thought there are none in Hong Kong. Then one day at the university, I was bored and was walking around then I noticed a poster advertising a group called Hong Kong 10% Club with a contact number on it. Then I suddenly remembered that I have heard of this group on television or in newspaper. I know it's a gay group. I copied down the number and called them up and found out there are also lesbians in the group.

Before I noticed 10% Club, I don't know whether it's from television or from magazines, that there are a lot of gay men in Lan Kwai Fong. ... There is a night club called Yin Yang, I've heard that only gay men enter

the club. But I still went there by myself once. ...It took me a long time to find out where it is. I have heard of a YY Disco and don't know where Yin Yang is. I found out that YY means Yin Yang when I got there. I did not know how to "po" [Cantonese slang for clubbing] then and I went there at 9. The guide I was reading said there would be more people later at night, so I went at 9. I waited for almost an hour downstairs from the club, almost 45 minutes.

There isn't anyone there. It's quite expensive. 50 to 60 dollars per drink. I went on a weekday as well. I didn't know much then. I just know it's a well-known place, so I went. I was very nervous. I kept asking myself like what to wear, will people kiss with each other freely, will someone [a girl] come over and flirt or talk with me, what should I do? I thought about these things for a very long time downstairs. Then I drum up my courage and walked in. There wasn't many people there. Many of them are men, so I got scared and walked over to the bar to buy a beer because I don't know what else I can drink. [Laughter] Then I hid by the bar and just watched what's going on. ... I drank very slowly, looked around and stayed there till around 10. Nobody came over to talk or flirt with me, then I left by myself. At that time, I thought so this was it.

Beatrice, on the other hand, travelled from Macau to Hong Kong for Yin Yang Disco as well. Born and raised in Macau, she described the adventure as a significant experience in finding out whether she was attracted to women.

I told myself, I need to find out the truth! Then I approached a gay male friend, who is working in the hotel and he said, "Let's go over to Hong Kong for that gay bar called YY. Go there and see how you feel, then you'll find out for yourself!" So I went with him and when I just walked in, wow! It felt like I belong here and then when I saw the people there, it felt great and very compatible. Just that moment, I was quite sure of myself. I became a regular guest going there every weekend. Then I made more friends and met my first girlfriend. ... Macau doesn't have the same market and it's too small. I don't know a lot of people in Macau but some people are closer to me. There isn't a place I know of. Hong Kong is much better, then I think it would be better for me to go over to Hong Kong and see how I feel. ... YY is very nice then, it's a place to see and to be seen, I felt very comfortable there.

Gay spaces have always been easier to find since gay consumption has been a primary driving force in gay male culture (Bouthillette, 1997). Indeed, this aspect of consumption is not limited to gay men but is indicative of a more established economic status than women in general. One can easily pick up a gay magazine or newspaper and find out which bar to go to or which area is more dotted with gay businesses. In most cities, there have been longer gay publications than lesbian ones especially where advertising and marketing is concerned. So it is not surprising at all that both Ah Wing and Beatrice would locate a gay bar prior to finding a lesbian one even though Beatrice was introduced to Yin Yang Disco through a gay colleague.

In a comparative study on a lesbian neighbourhood and a gay male enclave in the city of Vancouver located within the Pacific Northwestern part of Canada, Anne-Marie Bouthillette finds that the blurring of boundaries between these two cultures have been occurring as a result of changing material realities that led to spatial choices. For example, middle class lesbians can now afford to live in the gay area, the West End. At the same time, gay fathers and their children have been attracted to “the leftist political street culture” of the Commercial Drive, also known in the queer community as the Dyke Drive for its affordable family housing (Bouthillette, 1997, p. 231).

To Have or Not To Have Lesbian Spaces

Most informants have different opinions on whether there is a need for lesbian spaces. There seems to be a general agreement that these spaces are necessary for a political reason such as lesbian visibility or a social reason such as a space for building

support networks or socialization. Yet the need for lesbian exclusive spaces is often translated into a question of whether these same spaces isolate lesbians and hence, prohibits the normalizing of lesbian identities into broader society. Beatrice echoes the same concern about the need to just be yourself and most of all, “to behave”,

When I go with a large group of friends to a restaurant, any restaurant, I think the people know who we are. You can tell. I don't feel ashamed of myself but the point is, I won't tell people that I am one [a lesbian]. I don't need to say it. We're not 15 or 16 years old, taking drugs and drinking too much. We are normal people and we behave. As long as we act maturely, we don't need to say it.

When asked about whether there is a need for lesbian-specific places, twenty-seven years old Jo expressed her opinion on the irony of these spaces in comparison to straight-identified sites,

There is a need for lesbian-specific places. But for myself, I may not go there. What I mean is that there should be, I mean, on a societal level. I think there should be spaces for sexual minorities, but I also think that these spaces isolate us. For example, if I go out with my girlfriend or lesbian friends for dinner or for a drink in a straight space, I think it is important to show them that we exist. If we only go to lesbian spaces, we are isolating ourselves and confining ourselves to our own spaces.

What the respondents meant by normalizing often point to positive representations of lesbians in everyday situations, a visible consumer culture and an affirmative discourse on sexualities. It is as if when one talks about lesbian and gay politics, one needs to think of assimilation tactics in order to be a part of the social milieu. I have asked myself whether a ground-level business would facilitate more visibility or would it be contrary to its purpose, limiting the number of lesbian-identified women

entering such a visible space. Thirty-four years old Lik Lik has been very active in organizing social events through local lesbian groups. Always dressed impeccably for the occasion and sociable beyond description, I have often found Lik Lik to be the perfect host and event organizer. She offers a political way of looking at lesbian spaces, she questions whether ground level businesses would make a difference in terms of visibility.

Does not seem to make a difference for me. It is more about the culture whether it is located upstairs or on the ground level. It is different to conduct business either way. I think it is more important for it to survive financially. There is no point if the business cannot survive even if we have ten similar establishments. I have friends [lesbians] who asked me why we have to support them, why we are boxing ourselves in, why I cannot be more like the mainstream. I don't think the same way. I learnt from community organizing that there is a thing called pink money. I think there is a value for these [lesbian] businesses to survive. We [the organizers] do when we pick the venue for events. We would pick a business to support in order to build up its value as part of the community. I'm making it sound like it is very political...I know there are gay streets in other countries but Hong Kong does not have one...I feel that if Hong Kong has such an area, it will prove that the society pays attention to this community.

It doesn't matter whether it's boys or girls but it has to be a non-heterosexual space. This is very important. It is also important for it to survive as such a space, for people to enter freely and for others to know that such a space exists! Also for people [lesbians and gay men] not afraid to be seen. Hong Kong does not have such a space for long time.

A Matter of Accessibility

At the point of the interview, Nick was twenty-five years old and the owner of a specialty store selling products catering to lesbians. These products included DVDs, books, pride souvenirs and TB vests.⁴¹ The store is not easy to find as one has to wander through a maze of small shops within an underground shopping mall. Most shops sell

⁴¹ TB vests are sports bra vests that function to flatten one's chest or bosom. Commonly used among tomboys or butch women in Hong Kong and Taiwan, these vests cost from HKD 300 to 500.

street fashion which has made Tung Lo Wan a magnet for young shoppers and trendsetters. This particular shopping mall has been known for its specialities in finding limited edition sneakers. Commenting on various spaces for lesbians, Nick has much to say in regards to how these spaces function as lesbian sites.

Actually when I was studying in Australia, I thought I may not be able to afford continuing my studies; I thought I should come back and open a les café. When I returned, others have done it. Then I don't want to compete with others by doing the same thing, so I started to think what else I can do. I have just been to Taiwan and saw how well Jing Jing [a well known queer bookstore in Taipei] is doing. A big shop would be too expensive, so I opened a smaller one. It's not enough of a gimmick if I open another les café. There are already three cafes in Tung Lo Wan, four cafes if I open another one! I think that might be too many cafes.

On why she chose the specific shop location,

Because Mongkok is too expensive, I'm afraid I cannot afford it. Have to open one that I'm okay with and if I cannot afford it, I cannot. ... It [the rent] is about ten thousand. Actually it's considered cheap in Tung Lo Wan. ... I like Ginza Plaza. People might think it's hot to open a shop like mine and I worry that people won't come in. Ginza Plaza's environment is darker or more low-key, customers will come in more easily. ... I have a friend who is also a les opened another shop there. ... [Tung Lo Wan] is nui gai Girls' Street!⁴²

Similarly, café owners like Felix and Anne, also chose Tung Lo Wan as the prime location for their businesses. Other contending locations are usually Mongkok or Tsim Sha Tsui with high rental rates and the kind of customers as primary criteria for choosing business locations. Felix, aged forty years old, reinforced the notion of Tung Lo Wan as the central location for young lesbian socialization. Her café, Restricted Entry, has since

⁴² Nick has since closed the store at Ginza Plaza and expanded her business to include a restaurant exclusively for women, T-Studio@Mate. As of November 2007, Nick has renamed her business as Mercury / T-Studio to include a small-screening room for women to watch films.

been closed shortly after my interview with her. I have been to the café many times for community meetings, social functions and research interviews. Regular clientele tends to be younger in age and wearing school uniforms. Unlike chain operations, it is much harder for lesbian café owners to break even not to mention making a profit just by selling cups of coffee or fruit tea¹. Therefore, café owners are caught in a dilemma where situating one's business in an attractive physical location in order to capture a wider market is often the reason for generating higher rental costs, hence leading to temporal sites. The owner of Restricted Entry explained her struggle with choosing a physical location to open up her café,

It's not a bad idea to group them together. The chances increase for people to come up [to a lesbian café]. ... Yes, I actually wanted to try it out in Mongkok but my partner did not want Mongkok. She wanted Tung Lo Wan. Sometimes I am not the only one to call the shots... I felt that Mongkok is better because there is less competition and also, those lesbians, they also go to Yau Ma Tei or Tsim Sha Tsui or Mongkok! They are also hubs.

For Anne, aged thirty years old, her choice of location denotes another concern that involved stereotypes of customers who frequent different neighbourhoods.

I thought of Tsim Sha Tsui at the beginning because I live in Taipo. To come all the way everyday is a deadly chore! That is why I thought of Tsim Sha Tsui but there is no available spaces and it's expensive. You think about it, we are not opening a bar for pek jao [a Cantonese slang for binge drinking], we will not lose money if everyone puts down over a hundred bucks once they walk in. But we are not [opening that kind of space] and that's why it's difficult. That's why if we don't look for upstairs space and cheap spaces, we cannot operate. That's why we cannot find a space in Tsim Sha Tsui.

When I posed the question of whether she has thought of another location apart from Tsim Sha Tsui or Tung Lo Wan, Anne exclaimed,

Not in Mongkok! So disgusting! Those people are not appropriate. I mean I feel they don't drink, that is, I feel for those who knows how to drink coffee or want to find a quiet place to have a cup of coffee are not the kind of people you'll find in Mongkok... Because there are lesbians everywhere in Tung Lo Wan, and lesbians usually hang out in Tung Lo Wan. ... Yes because it's very central. Les bars are all in Tung Lo Wan. It makes sense for them to like coming to Tung Lo Wan.

Apart from the overall emphasis on Tung Lo Wan as a lesbian enclave, other informants have felt similar for other districts in terms of lesbian visibility. Ku Tsai, in her early twenties, worked in a trendy clothing store within a shopping arcade located in Mongkok.

I feel it's true in the past. In the last few years, I still think it's more visible in Tung Lo Wan, that is, you will not see as many [lesbians] in other areas but now there are a lot, actually. Mongkok, Tsim Sha Tsui has a lot!

For two younger informants like Ah Lok and Miki, hanging out at Tung Lo Wan became an issue with their parents. Ah Ying's mother has expressed disapproval at Ah Ying loitering in Tung Lo Wan similar to parents chiding over their young teenage children on what is appropriate.

I'm used to going out at night. My mom asked me why I go out at night all the time. Where do I go? What kind of troubles am I into? Are you hanging out with improper folks? Because she knew that I'm always in Tung Lo Wan.

Ah Lok interjected and laughed at the matter,

Tung Lo Wan, improper (laughs) the impression, for parents, the impression is that people in Tung Lo Wan is improper just like those people in Mongkok.

I tend to read the obvious split between Tung Lo Wan and Mongkok that resonates among many informants to take on a class dimension. Tung Lo Wan tends to be more of a trendsetting shopping area and undoubtedly more expensive in product prices, whereas Mongkok is considered to have cheaper products and ideal for finding pirated goods. The extent of Mongkok as a shopping mecca for bargain hunters and a place for cheap entertainment has even contributed to the creation of a slang term “MK look” referring to young people who dressed in cheap, tasteless clothing with gangster dyed hair. Mongkok often appears on news media as a troubled area with plenty of police raids for illegal gambling activities in bars, underage drinking and prostitution in bars or upstairs flats in both residential and commercial buildings. Eric Kit-Wai Ma in his study on “the hierarchy of drinks” observed that Mongkok bars are generally considered “inferior because they only sell draught beer and ‘simple cocktails’” (Ma, 2001, p.128). His informant was concerned about his personal safety as a customer in Mongkok drinking holes. The negative reading of Mongkok can also be taken as a post-colonial thought since Mongkok is associated with tourists from Mainland China and South-east Asia. Therefore, it is rendered as an inferior part of town and substandard in moral values. Recently, the area has been gentrified to include condominiums and a luxurious shopping mall, Langham Place. Informants have also mentioned going to a lesbian bar in Yau Ma

Tei, a few blocks down from Mongkok, and have complained about the bar charging them extra to clean up the mess they made. Instead, the young informant cleaned up the mess that her friend vomited and saved them five hundred dollars.

Lesbian Spaces as in Lesbian Use of Spaces

Apart from lesbian exclusive spaces, many informants have hung out at spaces otherwise known to be more straight-identified such as video arcades and billiards. There is also lesbian use of spaces in every facet of their lives, for example, like going to any common restaurant with a group of lesbian friends who on the outside might look suspicious for being ambiguous, androgynous and slightly queer, yet as insiders would know, as one of our kind. Lesbian use of spaces is prevalent in Hong Kong as a sense of lesbian community is not often aligned with political causes; therefore, social networks are often built around lesbians and their friends which translate into queering everyday spaces for their own use. In addition, the Internet has created other ways for women to meet other women and to organize net meetings. Lik Lik, a veteran lesbian event and party organizer, offered insights into lesbian organizing.

I feel that now is very different than before. The social atmosphere. What is most obvious is that there used to be a lot of people coming out for events, anywhere from thirty to sixty for bbq. Everyone would come out to play but it's different now. I mean before 1997, before the handover. When we used to organize activities, people would all come and they don't come to know people [potential romantic interests]. They would come to have fun with a group of friends. It is obvious now that you don't need to organize these events since people can meet others by themselves. One can meet others on the net. It's really obvious...honestly, those who come to join these activities are good friends. For others, they won't feel that there is a need to join activities, to join events [organized by lesbian groups].

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how lesbians have been marginalized in the field of gender and space and how notions of resistance can offer a theoretical framework to understand the spatial decisions made by Hong Kong lesbians. I attempt to position everyday resistance in the city of Hong Kong as lesbians negotiate with capitalist ideologies as entrepreneurs or as customers to lesbian spaces such as bars, café or a specialty store. Informants have pointed to Tung Lo Wan as the hub of lesbian activity yet lesbians are increasingly visible in other locales such as Mongkok and Tsim Sha Tsui. They have also raised concerns about the comfortability of lesbian spaces, accessibility and whether there is a need for such spaces. Moreover, lesbians have also used gay bars as an entry point to learning about the lesbian and gay scenes.

Chapter Eight

Demand for Cultural Representation: Emerging Independent Film and Video on Lesbian Desires

A discussion of queer spaces often implicates further questions such as what counts as a queer space, how do they emerge and who has access to these spaces?⁴³ The emergence of queer spaces in the last decade can be traced back to a number of incidents that occurred in Hong Kong in the post 1997 era. Many scholars have noted the uncertainty of the period, in terms of the change of government from the British colonial administration to Mainland Chinese authorities, as one of the primary reasons for the urgency of a lesbian and gay activist agenda. Lesbian and gay activists were fearful of the consequences of a return to China including a possible crackdown on lesbian and gay organizations as well as a declining of commercialized queer spaces. As we step into the tenth year of Hong Kong's handover to China, it becomes evident that a discourse on sexual minorities and anti-discrimination has resulted from both a public interest in democracy and a resurgence of conservatism enacted by Christian groups. As a result, multiple spaces of resistance have emerged in response to the lack of government leadership on anti-discrimination legislation and the rise of Christian conservatism in the broader society.⁴⁴

⁴³ Although the notion of queer as an identifying category is not commonly used among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people in Hong Kong, it is useful to borrow the theoretical underpinnings of queer theory to understand partially the fluidity of sexual identities and its effect on locating emerging spaces.

⁴⁴ Since July 2005, The Society of Light and Truth, a local Christian organization has published large scale weekly advertisements in Ming Pao Daily highlighting the perils of letting anti-discrimination on sexual discrimination pass in legislature. The advertisements provide a negative picture of homosexuality equating it to promiscuity, AIDS, moral corruption and religious impiety. They also encourage reparative therapy

Throughout my thesis, I have discussed how lesbian spaces came to emerge in a city dominated by capitalist ideologies and material consumption. I define such spaces as both visibly queer spaces as in lesbian cafes and gay bars, as well as invisible spaces that may not fall under a general mapping of queer spaces yet are present in the everyday lives of Hong Kong lesbians. Specifically, I want to use the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival 2004 (HKLGFF) and HKLGFF 2005 as a case study to bring forth a discussion on contesting relations between a politics of consumption, the claim for queer visibility and the emerging representation of lesbian desires in Hong Kong independent film and video. I have mentioned in Chapter One how the festival enabled me to gain further understanding of the overall queer scene in Hong Kong. In particular, it helped to comprehend the marginality of women's works in the context of a lesbian and gay film festival.

Queer Spaces as Sites of Resistance

Notions of resistance have taken on multiple meanings within major theoretical strands such as postcolonialism, feminism, cultural geography, postmodernism, Marxism and queer theories. A mapping of resistance points to the interrelations and competing influences these theoretical strands have on each other. Geographically, resistance can be charted at a particular place over a period of time in overt terms such as protests, marches, riots and candlelight vigils. But resistance is also present on cyberspace such as websites and online petitions, or with other forms of new media as in film and video. Resistance

and highlights cases of past successful clients who have turned from being queer to becoming heterosexual again.

can be practiced through our daily decisions when lesbians choose to meet friends at a lesbian bar or log online to chat with other lesbians. Minute as they seem, these decisions signify a need to bond with other women who have same-sex desires. A space of resistance points to a critique of structural relations of power manifested through spatialities be they global or local. As social geographer Gill Valentine puts it cogently, lesbian spaces can be found “from nowhere to everywhere.”⁴⁵

To speak of resistance is to acknowledge the nature of power. Structural relations of power affect the way we live our daily lives as gendered bodies, social beings and political subjects. Steve Pile asserts that resistance is not as easily pinned down to “political subjectivities which are opposed to, or marginalised by, oppressive practices; whereby those who benefit from relations of domination act to reproduce them, while the oppressed have a natural interest in over-turning the situation.”⁴⁶ In other words, marginalized groups have more vested interests in engaging themselves as political subjects fighting “over access, control and representation.”⁴⁷

When power is defined through the physical spaces it aims to occupy, it becomes important to consider the architectural design of buildings and public spaces. Government buildings, streets, housing, schools, prisons, parks, shopping malls, just to name a few, signify institutional power both in and out of these spaces. In the context of Hong Kong lesbian spaces, one need to look at the nooks and crannies between buildings or walk up

⁴⁵ Valentine, Gill, editor, *From Nowhere to Everywhere: Lesbian Geographies*. New York: Harrington Park Press, 2000, 1.

⁴⁶ Pile, Steve and Keith, Michael, editors, *Geographies of Resistance*. London: Routledge, 1997, 3.

⁴⁷ Tonkiss, Fran. *Space, the City and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, 59.

the narrow stairways leading up to cafés to make sense of how hegemonic power enacts itself through the marginalization of lesbian spaces. Michel Foucault's notion of "heterotopias" suggests "counter-sites" that challenges spatialities and social arrangements by inverting the common order of space.⁴⁸ Fran Tonkiss further suggests that "women-only spaces" can be read as a modern version of heterotopias, "as heterotopias of separation that escape the eyes and the order of men."⁴⁹

Politics of Consumption and Hong Kong Identity

The politics of consumption in Hong Kong can be directly linked to the city's housing policy and land use allocation. High density living has encouraged many people who live in 300 square feet flats with their families to seek leisure by venturing outside of their homes. The practice of entertaining at home is not a feasible choice and the lack of privacy at home provides another reason to be out in public. Much of Hong Kong's cultural identity is associated with consumption as a key practice of everyday life. It does not mean there is a wider and more even distribution of material resources where most people can take to enjoying the shopping experience. It is more appropriate to say that the mentality of consumption as in buying things, eating out at restaurants, going on travel tours, seeing films or attending cultural events has permeated every class level and becomes a measuring gauge for the overall well-being of the city itself. I view the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival as an example of assuming such an identity by using the local understanding of consumption as the basis for a successful event. To extend this argument further, I want to point out how tight the connections are

⁴⁸ Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* (1986): 22-27.

⁴⁹ Tonkiss, Fran. *Space, the City and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, 133.

between state, capital and spatialities which have made the development and sustainability of alternative spaces conditional. As lesbian businesses start up and close down frequently, they build a landscape of temporal sites of resistance in Hong Kong. Moreover, as I shall explain later in this essay, the HKLGFF also signifies as a temporal event with no guarantee of funding or human resources for it to be operational every year. As Chua Beng-Huat puts it cogently, “where consumption activities are subject to direct policing by the state, such as in censorship of movies, reading materials and popular music, these activities can emerge as sites of ideological contestation and resistance.”⁵⁰

Hong Kong’s Cultural Identity

Part of the reason for the popular demand for queer independent Chinese film and video can be traced back to the search for an appropriate cultural identity to represent the city itself. In tracing the development of popular cultural forms in Hong Kong, sociologist Agnes Ku described how Hong Kong’s films and pop music began to develop its own cultural meanings different from the rhetoric of a traditional Mainland Chinese culture since the sixties.⁵¹ Ku suggests that the Cantonese language plays a major role in situating Hong Kong as the primary locale for cultural production as well as for capturing the minute details in the everyday life of Hong Kong people, regardless of where they come from.⁵² By the sixties, Mainland Chinese populations who had migrated to Hong Kong began to regard Hong Kong as a place of residence as well as a place to foster a sense of belonging.

⁵⁰ Chua Beng-Huat. “Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues” in Chua Beng-Huat, editor, *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyles and Identities*. London: Routledge, 2000, 18.

⁵¹ Ku, Agnes S. “Culture, Identity and Politics ” in Tse Kwan-choi, editor, *Our Place, Our Time: A New Introduction to Hong Kong Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 359.

⁵² *Ibid*, 360.

Hong Kong cultural products such as pop music, magazines, television and films have largely benefited from the surveillance of cultural development in Taiwan and Mainland China.⁵³ As a result, Hong Kong cultural products became a primary source of entertainment and cultural information for many Chinese living in cities with significant Chinese populations, such as overseas diasporic Chinese communities. Furthermore, the wide accessibility and availability of these products have developed the cultural identity of Hong Kong as the centre for popular entertainment. It is worth noting that a thriving economy combined with a stifled political environment has led to the emphasis on material consumption within Hong Kong society.⁵⁴ Since the British colonial government effectively limited civic participation, this encouraged Hong Kong people to find other available spaces to express feelings of distress and vulnerability. Popular media and material consumption became a comfort zone for people to project their hopes and desires for a better future. As distinguished scholar and cultural critic Leo Ou-Fan Lee suggests, the collective and cultural identity of Hong Kong is built on the influences of popular media and consumption.⁵⁵

In the last decade, there have been urgent calls for a discussion on Hong Kong identity and what it means for various communities including activists, scholars, migrant workers, ethnic and sexual minorities. This resurgence of querying Hong Kong identity is timely as the city copes with post 1997 conditions by negotiating its position with

⁵³ Ng Chun-Hung, Ma Kit-Wai Eric and Lui Tai-Lok, editors, *Xianggang Wenhua Yanjiu*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lee, Ou-Fan Leo. *Festival Walk Rhapsodies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mainland China and repositioning itself as a gateway to China. This chapter is concerned with the vocalizations on Hong Kong identity by sexual minorities in particular.

Mainstream Representation of Lesbian Desires on Screen

To begin with, there is no shortage of lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender characters on film in Hong Kong. Film and cultural studies scholars Helen Leung, Travis Kong and Yau Ching have all written extensively on same-sex, queer and transgender subjectivities in Hong Kong cinema. A preliminary list of contemporary films that include lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters is as follows: *Full Moon in New York* (Ren Zai Niu Yue) (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1989); *Swordsman II* (Xiao'ao jianghu II zhi Dongfang Bubai) (dir. Ching Siu-Tung, 1992); *The Days of Being Dumb* (Ya Fei Yu Ya Ji) (dir. Ko Sau Leung, 1992); *I Wanna Be Your Man!!!* (Shen tan mo lu) (dir. Cheung Chi Sing, 1994); *He's a Woman, She's a Man* (Jin Zhi Yu Ye) (dir. Peter Chan, 1994); *Suicide* (Si ge zi sha de shao nu) (dir. Law Shun Chuen, 1995); *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man* (Jin Zhi Yu Ye II) (dir. Peter Chan, 1996); *Hu-Du-Men* (dir. Shu Kei, 1996); *Love and Sex Among the Ruins* (Yan gaan sik seung) (dir. Cheung Chi Sing, 1996); *Four Faces of Eve* (Si mian xia wa) (dir. Gan Kwok-Leung, Eric Kot and Jan Lamb, 1996); *Top Banana Club* (Jin zhuang xiang jiao ju le bu) (dir. Anthony Wong Chau-Sang, 1996); *Intimates* (Zishu) (dir. Cheung Chi-Leung, 1997); *Portland Street Blues* (Hongxing shisan mei) (dir. Raymond Yip, 1998); *Peony Pavilion* (Youyuan jingmeng) (dir. Yonfan, 2001); *Heroes In Love* (Lian ai qiyi) (dir. Stephen Fung, Wing Shya, GC Goo-Bi, Nicholas Tse, 2001); *Butterfly* (dir. Yan Yan Mak, 2004).

In an attempt to differ from Chou Wah-Shan's broad notion of "films about tongzhis", Helen Leung uses "queerscapes" as a more appropriate term to include sexualities that are "not definitive habitats, but rather emergent sites of possibility, the potential of which cannot yet be properly articulated" (Leung, 2001, p.426). Leung's meticulous reading of *The Intimates* as "a nostalgic vision of love" and Wong Kar Wai's *Happy Together* as "a utopian vision of intimacy" gave insights into how both films failed to provide a sense of presence in particular, with the comparison of Stanley Kwan's *Hold You Tight* where its location in Hong Kong determines "the postcolonial city as a queerscape" (Leung, 2001, p.436 – p.440). Leung's optimism about the potential for a dazzling display of "queerscapes" in Hong Kong popular culture is significant especially when she suggested that looking elsewhere at unexpected crevices might be a more fruitful task.

Yau Ching, as the director of the first lesbian feature-length independent film, *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* (See Appendix D), has been influential in curating film programmes on queer women's desires, organizing theatre arts festival and producing short videos on the cultural identity of Hong Kong and sexualities. Yau (2005) classified the representation and the reinvented visibility of lesbian subjectivities into five categories. Firstly, there is the changing of characters from being lesbian to heterosexual as in *Full Moon in New York*. Secondly, the intention to freeze lesbian desires in time as shown films set in historic periods such as *Intimates* and *Peony Pavilion*. Thirdly, lesbians as perverts and criminals in the triad film genre as in *Portland Street Blues*. Fourthly, the depiction of lesbian desires by heterosexual male directors in pornography.

Last but not least, borrowing Chris Straayer's notion of a "temporary transvestite" type, Yau observed the portrayal of women characters donning male garb in films such as *Who's the Woman, Who's the Man* and independent film director Doug Chan's *Love Is Not a Sin* (2003). Yau's useful categorization of films point to the lack of representation for lesbians by lesbians in Hong Kong. I shall now turn to the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival for a further discussion on local lesbian representations.

HKLGFF Organizational Structure and Background

Since its inception in 1989, the HKLGFF has evolved from being an event sponsored by the Hong Kong Arts Centre to an independent organization with non-profit status. The history of the festival has been incomplete due to the constant changing of festival organizers and the physical absence of a festival office. Documents have been scattered in various organizations with no centralization. The first gay film festival was initiated by Edward Lam, a locally renowned scriptwriter for television, film and theatre and an author of gay-themed literature. The festival was held at the Hong Kong Arts Centre with an emphasis on educational documentaries and art-house cinema. Lam organized a second festival three years later. In 2000, filmmaker Raymond Yeung, acclaimed Hong Kong director and film critic Shu Kei joined with film sales agent Wouter Barendrecht to re-establish the festival as a commercial venture.

My initial involvement with the festival began in 2003 when I was invited to present at a seminar comparing the relationship between lesbian sexuality and urban

landscapes within two lesbian films, Desiree Lim's *Sugar Sweet* (Desiree Lim, Japan, 2001, 67min) and Yau Ching's *HoYuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* (Yau Ching, Hong Kong, 2002, 87min). Afterwards, I was approached by Raymond Yeung who was the festival director from 2000 to 2003 to consider being a co-festival director along with Karl Urich. When we both began volunteering for the festival, we began to document logistical details, to record financial transactions and to create a database for future reference. On a personal level, I joined the festival with a commitment to bringing international and local lesbian works to local audiences. I have positioned myself as a token lesbian programmer but also as a researcher on Cantonese-speaking lesbian communities in Hong Kong. I have vested interests in soliciting local queer films and videos for the purposes of both my doctoral research and the festival in general.

It is worth noting that the core identity of the festival has often been perceived as a primarily upper middle-class gay male event. In other words, the festival positions itself as a cultural product for consumption at an upper middle-class level. The early screening venues at Shouson Theatre and Lim Por Yen Film Theatre at the Hong Kong Arts Centre have been known to host programmes that are typical of subcultural, avant-garde and alternative genres. By not being a part of the mainstream theatre circuits, the location of the screening venue limits the kind of audiences that might otherwise attend the festival. Whereas it would be difficult for the festival to be held at a popular theatre due to high rental costs, it nonetheless created the notion of the festival as alternative and exclusive for cultural and intellectual types.

Since 2001, the screening venues have gradually been replaced by Broadway Cinematheque and Palace IFC.⁵⁶ Broadway Cinematheque is located in a poorer part of town where it is also known as art-house cinema. But its accessibility to local transport routes has certainly made it easier for festival audiences. Palace IFC, on the contrary, is a mainstream theatre situated within a luxurious shopping mall located in the financial district. Known for its extravagant name brands and expensive restaurants, IFC, known as the International Finance Centre symbolizes corporate wealth and global consumerist ideologies. Inevitably, the screening venues have predetermined the target audience for the film festival.

Similarly, the festival has become increasingly commercial since Fortissimo Films became an official sponsor in 2000. Its participation has allowed the festival to obtain internationally renowned films yet it further constructs the identity of the festival as a foreign import, an expatriate hobby and a middle-class gay male event.⁵⁷ In the past, the festival featured films distributed by Fortissimo Films if there were accidental programming lapses. The problem is most of these films tend to be gay and without Chinese subtitles. This is not unlike early film festivals in North American cities where people of colour, disabled communities, working class and transgender communities have

⁵⁶ This strategic relocation of the festival has been prompted by the joining of Gary Mak on the festival core committee. Mak occupies a high-level directorial position at Edko Films Limited where both theatres are owned and managed.

⁵⁷ Founded in 1991, Fortissimo Films is an international film, television and video sales organization specializing in the production, promotion and distribution of feature films from independent film makers. Wouter Barendrecht, the Co-Chairman of the company, has been involved with the festival since 2000 as a member of the core committee. He is also the signatory for the film festival's registration as a non-profit society. Not only does the festival uses Fortissimo Films' address as the festival address, the festival's bank account is also managed by the company's administrative staff. Based in Amsterdam with offices in London, Hong Kong and Sydney, Fortissimo Films is widely regarded as the leading film company that is quick to invest in high profile or emerging Asian directors such as Wong Kar Wai (*2046*), Pen-ek Ratanaruang (*Invisible Waves*), Khoa Do (*Footy Legends*) and Zhang Yang (*Sunflower*).

felt excluded in festival programming. The language of choice for the festival has often been English in terms of its operation as well as the screening language for most films.⁵⁸ The fact that there have been very few films or videos with Chinese subtitles results in fewer Chinese-speaking audiences. The festival has been, in essence, a product of the post-colonial era.

Being aligned so closely with the film industry can also take a festival and its meaning easily away from what is happening on a community level. The pressing issue facing the HKLGFF is its difficulty in building and sustaining community relations. For years, the HKLGFF has presented films and videos that are devoid of local content or of Asian context, and without Chinese subtitles. Certainly, the festival still attracts audiences because it is by far the most widely publicized gay event and the only event of its kind in the city. Lesbians have continued to be a part of the festival hoping that programming would get better. Chinese-speaking gay men and lesbians have only a few titles to choose from, not to mention the inattention to transgender people. What I would like to assert is that the HKLGFF can play a part in local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender politics if the festival re-situates itself in a local context by actively soliciting local productions. It is only by actively pursuing local representation can we overcome the structural barriers imposed by the organization of the festival itself.

If being cosmopolitan has anything to do with being gay, the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival has promoted itself as the typical glamorous gay annual

⁵⁸ It is a requirement that anyone wanting to participate on the festival programming committee is bilingual, however if they can only speak one language it is preferable that this be English.

event.⁵⁹ Not being immune to the expanse of market forces, it tried to appeal to corporations and gay-friendly businesses who can afford to sponsor community events since government funding is often reserved for more traditional understandings of education.⁶⁰ The festival aims to attract both out-of-towners to attend its festivities and to attract festival vultures to view film/video screenings. The HKLGFF is in a unique position as a lesbian and gay film festival situated in the region. It has relatively minimal government interference and censorship requirements other than submitting each year's programming to the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority.⁶¹ It can act simultaneously as a gateway to international queer cinema and a platform for emerging queer Asian cinema produced in the Asia region. Its commercialization in the last five years have propelled its image to a level of extravagance that is actually illusive as a mostly volunteer-run organization.

Hong Kong Lesbian Shorts for HKLGFF 2004

For the purpose of finding more local lesbian films and videos, I solicited the help of local lesbian independent filmmaker and a close friend of mine, Yau Ching, to take on

⁵⁹ In my capacity as festival director, I have proposed to selective committee members the possibility of changing the name of the festival to the Hong Kong Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Film Festival, but my attempts have failed. Some members feel that the festival's identity is more aligned with being lesbian and gay rather than succumbing to a form of political correctness.

⁶⁰ The HKLGFF has applied for government funding to assist in programming expenses for the year of 2005 under the Equal Opportunities Funding Scheme, Home Affairs Bureau. The grant application was turned down. Home Affairs Bureau staff explained that there were many submissions for that year. I have asked around various community groups and found out that funding was given to online projects and print publications focusing on anti-homophobia, which might have appeared to be safer and less racy.

⁶¹ The committee was taken by surprise when the censorship board allowed the festival to screen the works of Bruce LaBruce in 2005. His films have often been banned in many festivals for its pornographic content. This is not to say that the censorship board is lenient in Hong Kong since the poster of *Better Than Chocolate* (Anne Wheeler, 1999, USA, 102min) was banned in 1999 for depicting two naked women in embrace. It was then deemed as offensive to the public. Rather, I want to point out that the censorship procedures are arbitrary.

the role as a guest curator.⁶² The Hong Kong Lesbian Shorts program came to represent an archive of Hong Kong lesbian images. By juxtaposing earlier works like *Song of the Goddess* (Ellen Pau, Hong Kong, 1992, 7min), *Gu Nui Gei* (Fion Ng, Hong Kong, 1997, 3min) and *Suet Sin's Sisters* (Yau Ching, Hong Kong, 2000, 8min), with more recent videos *Stay...Escape* (Ng Wing Ki, Cheng Yee Man, Hong Kong, 2003, 28min) and *We Dyke, Therefore We Are* (Yuen Fun, Au Hoi Yan, Hong Kong, 2004, 35min), Yau put together a programme that closely represents a timeline of lesbian representational practices.⁶³ This collection of works first begins with three videos suggestive of experimental aesthetics and imaginative preliminaries. The last two videos differ from the first three as a drama piece and a documentary drama. These videos have never been shown in the context of a Hong Kong lesbian and gay film festival. I want to point out that it is not as though there were no independent videos that have dealt with gender and sexuality, rather, the recent phenomenon speaks to a wider interest in making videos that reflect the life situations of living as lesbians in Hong Kong.⁶⁴ If we look closely at the content of these videos, it is clear that they represent a flow of experimentation that repositions the spectator from iconic practices to everyday life. *Song of the Goddess* and *Suet Sin's Sisters* both engage with the omnipresent iconic worshipping of the Cantonese

⁶² Yau Ching is the writer, director and producer of *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* (Yau Ching, Hong Kong, 82min), an independent film on Hong Kong lesbian desires that have been critically acclaimed international festival circuits. Yau has produced many short videos on marginal and political issues prior to the making of a feature-length film. She is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

⁶³ Fion Ng's *Gu Nui Gei* has no available English title. Literally translated, the title can be taken as a mechanical game that plays on cruising using a colloquial term, *gu* in Mandarin or *kau* in Cantonese.

⁶⁴ Since late eighties and throughout the nineties, video artists such as Yau Ching, Anson Mak, Ellen Pau and Ellen Yuen have dealt with issues of gender and sexuality, as well as political matters such as the handover of Hong Kong in pre and post 1997 era. To a certain degree, these pioneering artists have pushed the agenda of gender differences through videos and art installations in both local independent media arts scene as well as international circuits. Fion Ng, whose work was included in the Hong Kong Lesbian Shorts, has since become a program manager for Microwave Company Limited, a digital arts organization that hosts the annual Microwave Video Festival with Videotage since 1996.

Opera duo, Yam Kim-Fai and Pak Suet-Sin, where *Gu Nui Gei* pokes fun at the inherent gender dimensions of Chinese characters. *Stay...Escape* brings us on an emotional journey to experience a couple's handling of mental health issues in a relationship. As the final video in the line-up, *We Dyke, Therefore We Are* documents the daily life for a couple living in a quiet secluded neighbourhood in Mui Wo, Lantau Island.

I would like to discuss the last two videos at length for their relevance in depicting Hong Kong lesbian desires and the challenges they pose for local audiences. *Stay...Escape* is a tug and pull between two women where one partner suffers from mental health illness and eventually seeks medication with the support of the woman who takes on a caregiver role. The caregiving partner has doubts about leaving the relationship and often found herself returning, leaving and returning again. The constant negotiation, the psychological insecurities and the onset of an illness might have triggered a bitter reminder of “the homosexual” as pathological and in need of clinical treatment. In the discussion that was held after the screening, a group of local audience members were engaged in a heated debate on whether medication was necessary for the character in the video. This space that she inhabits, a space of uncertainty, can be easily read as someone trying to commit to a lesbian relationship being fully aware of what it brings and how the broader society will view such a relationship. In short, a lesbian relationship comes with a set of undeniable consequences. As much as one can argue the visibility of lesbian couples in busy shopping areas such as Causeway Bay and Mongkok, being a lesbian still embodies a multitude of anxieties, a myriad of practical concerns and homophobia.

If *Stay...Escape* brings an audience to a sombre mood on lesbian relationships, then *We Dyke, Therefore We Are* subjects us to an exhaustive world of two women's daily chores, social gatherings and self-reflections. Filmed as a documentary of their everyday life, the beautiful and pristine rural background of their video seemed almost remote from the daily humdrum that most people in Hong Kong are familiar with. The village, indeed, is very much a part of Hong Kong, and the indigenous population that lives in these villages and their histories have been documented in government tourist guides and history museums.⁶⁵ Even though the setting may not register as a familiar setting, the ongoings in the documentary are a depiction of daily routines. Festival audiences watched Yuen Fun and Hoi Yan bantering with neighbours and harvesting vegetables from their garden. There are scenes where their friends came over and played games guessing sexual innuendos embedded within the Chinese language or reciting excerpts of philosophy where same-sex relations have appeared in a negative light. There are also intimate moments where both of them engage in silly bedtime games as well as serious talks on relationships. Here are two women going about their daily life for public viewing. As much as it has been rehearsed, recorded and edited, the banality of their everyday life sits right in front of an audience. It is precisely this banality, this figuring of ordinary life that might prompt us to view lesbian representation as commonplace. In the end, what this cluster of works results in is a slow progression of facing one's lesbian sexuality, from abstract to documentary, from past to present, from being invisible to a form of everyday existence.

⁶⁵ Ironically, village life has not been of topographical significance apart from weekend hikes for city dwellers and occasional television programmes on Hong Kong heritage. Village life may not be what the average Hong Kong middle class consumer would aspire to live since there is always Bali, Cebu and Krabi to satisfy those momentary cravings. Nevertheless, it fosters a community of artists, public intellectuals and community activists who choose to live in these villages in the New Territories and outlying islands.

Under the Lion Rock for HKLGFF 2005

The momentum caught on as the festival prepared for the section titled Asian Lesbians' Kung Fu 101 for the HKLGFF in 2005. Earlier in August of the same year, Yau Ching has been involved with the Asian Lesbian Film and Video Festival (ALFF) held in Taipei, Taiwan.⁶⁶ She put together five programmes on lesbian desires by reorganizing and contextualizing the works screened earlier at ALFF with specific careful consideration for local Hong Kong lesbian audiences. For the purpose of this paper, I will only focus on the programme titled Under the Lion Rock which featured four short videos by local directors.⁶⁷

The first video *Oneself* (Cam Cheng and Ng Wing Ki, Hong Kong, 10min) was written, produced and directed by the same crew for *Stay...Escape*. Instead of depression, this time the directors take on being a "recluse" as symbolic of being in the closet. We watched the tomboyish protagonist walking along Hong Kong streets alone, with her head held low and seldom making eye contact with anyone. She imagined herself being interrogated by an angelic young woman and eventually faced "herself" to come to her

⁶⁶ It took ALFF over two years to solicit films and videos, to mobilize local queer communities and to coordinate the festival as a community-oriented event. Organized by the Gender/Sexuality Rights Association Taiwan, the ALFF sets a historical precedence in the Asia region as the first Asian lesbian film and video festival. The organizers presented films and videos from Canada, China, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and the United States touching on common issues facing Asian lesbians. The festival is currently on tour in other parts of Taiwan.

⁶⁷ The entire Asian Lesbians' Kung Fu 101 series is comprised of five programmes: *Home Sweet Home*, *Yummy Yummy*, *Cloud & Rain*, *Under the Lion Rock* and *Rainbow Society*. *Home Sweet Home* focuses on family relations and coming out issues. *Yummy Yummy* features recent Japanese lesbian videos and *Cloud & Rain* showcases works that explore lesbian erotic desires. *Rainbow Society* is a collection of works that focuses on homophobia in a wider societal context.

senses. *Oneself* is a coming out narrative that situates itself firmly as an individual journey.

Just Love (Fung King Long, Hong Kong, 30min), on the other hand, presents a story on two young women getting to know each other through boxing classes. One of them falls in love with the other and eventually a confession leads to a simple acknowledgement of same-sex love. Interspersed with personal interviews on local lesbian community activists and friends who are willing to be exposed on screen, this documentary drama aims to present a drama narrative of same-sex romance and situate it within the realities of being a lesbian in everyday life. Indeed, there is nothing extraordinary about the way the director inserts personal interviews within an otherwise simple story of a young woman's crush on another woman. But in the context of Hong Kong and its lack of appropriate venues to view such representation, it is still considered to be of significance to the ongoing efforts in building an audience, and hence building the capacity of queer spectatorship.

The next video in the line-up is a six-minute satirical statement on local politics, religious bigotry and the fight for equality. Using rap to deliver its message, the *Devil Like Me* (Ktour and Nutongxueshe, Hong Kong, 6min) production crew protests against the religious Right's attack on sexual minorities in Hong Kong. *Devil Like Me* is a community project of Nutongxueshe, a group of individuals formed in response to rampant homophobia expressed in recent news media and who are committed to anti-homophobia efforts through organizing cultural activities such as study groups and

workshops.⁶⁸ The rap lyrics in the video are a dialogue between the Devil and the Saint. Roughly speaking, the Devil represents a queer person and the Saint speaks from a morally righteous point of view. The dialogue centres on the Devil confronting the Saint's condemnation of homosexuality. The Devil, in essence, symbolizes what the Saint would believe a queer person to be, a monstrous being that requires taming, control and eventual conversion. This video project aims specifically at challenging the dominant heteronormative institutions such as Christianity and nuclear families, which is timely in the current climate of political conservatism in Hong Kong.

As the last video in the Under the Lion Rock program, *Ground Walk* can be easily taken as a light-hearted piece on courting and flirting via a travelogue of Hong Kong tourist attraction sites. The video depicts lesbian desires as being normalized and coming out as a matter of individual courage and pursuit. *Ground Walk* features two women, Fiona and Ann Marie, who go on a date pretending to be tourists in Hong Kong. Featuring two young, androgynous and attractive women as the lead characters, the original music composition and editing style of the video is a basic setup for a crowd pleaser in popular terms. As we watch them roaming around town and eventually falling in love with each other, *Ground Walk* prompts us to ask where are the support systems that empower or enable one to make such a choice? How can we develop feasible support networks and social resources to further lesbian visibility? Moreover, how do we address

⁶⁸ For more information on *Nutongxueshe*, visit www.leslovestudy.com. Their website also acts a clearinghouse for primarily Chinese resources on coming out, sexual orientation, family and peer relations, sex, intimacy and media representation on same-sex desires.

institutional barriers that by and large silence discussions on sexualities such as government agencies and mainstream media outlets?

The Stakes of Representation

When there are so few lesbian films and videos to choose from and so much to expect from existing films and videos or those in the making, one cannot help but question the degree of responsibility for filmmakers, video artists and festival curators to visualize, tell and represent lesbian stories with integrity. This degree of responsibility as to what counts as a “good story” is often based on shifting criteria. A lesbian filmmaker might attempt to tell a common story about everyday lesbians and face the difficulties of getting funding. She might have to rewrite the script so that the final product would appeal to critical audiences who expect something different, something that not only focuses on identity politics. The filmmaker might worry about how true can she remain to the depiction of lesbian lives without selling out or overly dramatizing. Realistically, there might also be stakeholders with commercial interests in the finished product. These are responsibilities that stretch beyond creating a cinematic piece of work.

One of the reasons for the lack of lesbian programming in previous years is whether it would generate revenue for the festival. If the pink economy is not a reason to market HKLGFF as a glamorous affair, then the Festival would have remained more low profile and arguably, a more community-oriented event. Materiality and what it represents in Hong Kong gives way to a form of gay capitalism where corporate sponsorship for the festival is often taken unquestionably as a form of public recognition.

Having brand names as sponsors purports a capitalist mentality that appeals to the average Hong Kong consumer. Who would have forgotten the program catalogue put together so beautifully yet illegibly by the design team at Agnès b, a French clothing company and a major sponsor for the film festival in 2002? It is still fondly remembered as the Agnès b program by many audience members. Dangerous as it might seem, corporate sponsorship spells business for both private and public institutions in endorsing an explicitly gay and lesbian event.

In the neighbouring city of Singapore, Venka Purushothaman contends that emerging gay representation in Singaporean theatre is a result from the material culture bestowed upon gay men and lesbians by the Singaporean government.⁶⁹ Global businesses such as Absolut Vodka and American Express have targeted the gay consumer as a marketable profile. Yet the government's recognition of the gay market as a viable economy contradicts the social stigmatization and political silencing on critical issues facing Singaporean gay men and lesbians. What is more urgent at hand is a critical engagement with how consumerism and capitalist ideologies affect the way cultural productions are funded, produced, distributed and received by local audiences.

Yau Ching, in her book *Sexing Shadows: Genders and Sexualities in Hong Kong Cinema*, contends that one needs exceptional financial resources and social capital to produce film contents that deviate from mainstream markets in the Hong Kong film

⁶⁹ Purushotaman, Venka. "Redeeming Qualities: State, Sexuality and Asian Boys." *Forum on Contemporary Art & Society* (2001): 15-28.

industry.⁷⁰ Commenting on the international acclaim of Wong Kar-Wai's *Happy Together*, Yau reminds us that Wong Kar-Wai has been given full creative control over his projects due to the financial backing of Fortissimo Films. Fortissimo Films is responsible for the international distribution and promotion of Wong Kar-Wai films. Therefore, he has been able to produce films that do not rely on box office sales. Similarly, if marketability is not a major concern and financial support is guaranteed, we would be able to see more films projects with provocative subject matters. One can even extend this argument to experimental filmmaking and emerging female directors to a certain extent. Maybe the Hong Kong film industry does not need another film on triads, cops, action and teeny bopper light-hearted comedies; it can certainly diversify its resources into more substantial topics that traverse cultural boundaries and break through gender conventions. Perhaps a lesbian director can finally get a chance to make a film that would not be deemed too personal, too serious and political for local audiences.

The State of Independent Film and Video in Hong Kong

One needs to look at the funding structure of the Arts Development Council in order to understand the limitations of arts development in Hong Kong. Established in 1995, the Arts Development Council is the only government funding source for local independent films and videos. Filmmakers and video artists can apply under a Project Grant for up to a maximum amount of \$100,000 to \$150,000 per project.⁷¹ Full-time students in film, communications and electronic arts are not eligible to apply. Former

⁷⁰ Ching, Yau. *Sexing Shadows: Genders and Sexualities in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Critics Society, 2005.

⁷¹ In a 2003/04 financial report released by the Arts Development Council, \$800,000 was given out as project grants under the category of Film and Media Arts. There were only eight recipients listed for this category.

Arts Development Council member, renowned video artist and curator May Fung comments on the lack of long-term vision for policymakers in regards to the development of cultural arts in Hong Kong.⁷² Current council members on the Arts Development Council tend to be from an older generation and have stayed in their positions as members for many funding cycles. The election of director Johnny To Kei-Fung as the Chairman of Film and Media Arts, according to Fung, is a detriment to local arts community as she questioned To's commitment to independent media arts.⁷³ As a prominent filmmaker with commercial success, To may not devote much of his time in developing long-term vision for media arts, needless to mention the nurturing and promotion of independent film and media arts.

On a similar note, video artist Ellen Pau echoes the same sentiment by criticizing the government for failing to recognize trends in contemporary art and hence, continues to categorize media art practices into rigid classifications.⁷⁴ As a result, Hong Kong based artists cannot apply for funding if one works within alternate practices such as performance, photography and video art. It is not surprising that one often resorts to self-financing when it comes to making independent films and videos.

⁷² Information was obtained from an interview published in the winter of 2004 by *E+E*, a quarterly magazine on arts criticism and cultural development published by Zuni Icosahedron, an independent cultural collective founded in 1982. Moreover, artists, community activists, cultural critics and academics have been debating on a recent government proposal to promote local arts in a project known as the West Kowloon Cultural District. The government has proposed to establish a cluster of museums, exhibition halls, performance venues and theatres in an area of 40 hectares. The project has been under attack for its lack of local participation in its conceptualization and implementation, and for allowing land developers to bid for commercialization of the project through residential and commercial ventures.

⁷³ Johnny To Kei-Fung is one of the most prolific and commercially successful Hong Kong directors with over forty films to his credit. His film company with veteran director/writer Wai Ka-Fai, Milkyway Image, has produced many films including *Election* (2005), *Running on Karma* (2003) and *PTU* (2003).

⁷⁴ Interview with Fion Ng published in *dye-a-di-a-logue with Ellen Pau* (New York: Monographs in Contemporary Art Books, 2004, 204).

The accessibility of digital technologies has enabled many aspiring filmmakers, video artists and young people to pick up a digital camcorder, record images and tell stories. Although digital camcorders still carry a price tag not affordable to all, they have prompted many stories on marginality and subcultures to emerge in the last decade nonetheless. Stories that have normally been under-represented in mainstream film productions and perhaps even rejected by independent film festivals can now slowly gain public attention. By no means are the floodgates open, yet it is promising to see an increasing number of interesting works coming from unlikely places. The ease of recording, erasing, re-recording and the accessibility of editing on personal computers has also caused some curators to question the quality of the films and videos.

Commenting on the outlook of local independent media, Gary Mak, as a core committee member of the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, is concerned with the emphasis on images versus text in media productions.⁷⁵ Mak claims that many Hong Kong independent filmmakers and video artists minimize the importance of a good script in lieu of cinematic experiments. Moreover, there is an urgent need for more substantial media and art education that urge artists to develop a long-term vision on Hong Kong arts.⁷⁶ Jonathan Hung of InD Blue, a non-profit independent film and video organization, noted that even though there are more independent works being

⁷⁵ Phone interview with Gary Mak on February 23, 2006.

⁷⁶ Currently, there are many short courses offered by self-proclaimed artists or cultural critics that continues to reproduce a homogenous vision of what accounts as Hong Kong culture and art. This scenario is worsened by the fact that few artists have obtained successful grants and subsidies by the only major government funding source, the Arts Development Council, and hence limits the chances for emerging artists to pursue a career as an artist.

available now, it is not reflected in the quality of these productions.⁷⁷ Hung even went as far as describing the future of independent filmmaking as dismal. He also echoes Mak's concern with the poor quality in media arts education as a one of the primary reasons.

Getting the community involved often means showcasing works produced by the communities themselves. As such, local representations are essential and particularly significant for the festival. But are there many films or videos to choose from? Why has it been difficult to solicit submissions? Are we looking in the wrong places? The festival's disconnection with the communities might be an easy answer. There have also been other issues at stake that stifles the notion of individual creativity in Hong Kong and hence, limits the choices for aspiring artists and minimizes the overall importance of non-commercial cultural arts.

To conclude, the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival has only just begun to understand the needs of local lesbian communities. Apart from continuing and expanding its lesbian programming, it should also partner itself with community organizations and media arts groups in order to facilitate innovative programming. By first showcasing works that reflect the everyday lives of gays and lesbians living in Hong Kong, it can also begin to invite works on marginality such as transgender issues and topics that have been hitherto been difficult to market to mainstream gay audiences. The

⁷⁷ Phone interview with Jonathan Hung on February 24, 2006 and March 15, 2006. Established in 2003, InD Blue provides production and distribution services for independent filmmakers. There are only two staff members who financially support InD Blue through their work as freelance writers. The HKLGFF have screened two of their programmes, *Space of Desire* (David Chow, Hong Kong, 2005, 109min) and a collection of shorts *Here Comes the Rainbow.1* (Various Directors, Hong Kong, 2004, 90min). For more information on InD Blue, visit www.indblue.com.

festival itself, being a cultural product for consumption, has slowly evolved into a more local affair.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

I have come to realize that one way to conclude this study is to pose a question to myself on why I have begun it in the first place. I left Hong Kong in 1989 right after the Tiananmen Massacre where my parents decided that we have to proceed with our immigration to Canada quickly. Since then, I have often wondered what my life would be if I had not left and more pertinently, how my own identification as a lesbian might have evolved and materialized if I had stayed in Hong Kong. Simple questions such as where can I meet other women? Would I be as involved in community organizing or would I have chosen a career that is more professionally recognized in society? Where would I stand politically on issues of social justice? Does the place where I live matter? These burning questions have led me to return and to conduct an investigation on the everyday lives of Hong Kong women who identified themselves as lesbians. Primarily, I wanted to find out how the city and its cultural politics render marginal spaces conditional. Through my research, I have identified five areas that are particular to the lives of Hong Kong lesbians.

First of all, twenty-one out of thirty interview subjects lived with their families, which meant that they have to either hide their sexualities or to integrate their lovers and partners strategically into family settings. The reason for living with families highlight two specific reasons; the importance of familial networks among Hong Kong lesbians and the access to resources since renting a flat is not affordable for most of them. This

points to the scarcity of land and the familial ideologies that influence the allocation of housing units that is particular to Hong Kong. That is why I turn to urban sociology first to understand the connection between communities and places, and how the physical environment of a city actually affects the way identities are constructed. Moreover, it also demonstrates the lack of gender analysis in this theoretical strand.

The second theme that was commonly brought up by the interview subjects was how they would assert their lesbian subjectivities in everyday spaces. For example, one would bring her lover or partner to Lunar New Year dinners and other family events or one would actively choose a school for its uniform and the possibility in altering the way it looks or one would struggle through their religious beliefs in an oppressive environment. But what is specific to Hong Kong lesbians is on how they resisted the heteronormativity within these everyday spaces by performing micro-resistance in their everyday lives. Hence, the spatial environment that might have pushed them to live with their families or to feel suffocated by what society expects of you has also forced them to think of creative ways to assert their lesbian subjectivities, and that in itself is political. My intention to utilize theories from cultural studies stems from this notion of how one appropriates and reappropriates certain everyday spaces so as to actualize one's identities.

But one might ask, what is so specific about the lives of Hong Kong lesbians that might differ from those living elsewhere? Here I argue that the postcolonial history of Hong Kong limited the ways Hong Kong lesbians articulate their identities both as someone living in Hong Kong and as a lesbian. I am aware of the differences in

postcoloniality and it is my intention to point out that Hong Kong's postcolonial conditions are specific in its proximity to Mainland China, both geographically and in terms of cultural values. The third theme that I have found in my study was the apolitical attitude demonstrated by interview subjects towards social movements. For example, their reluctance to join the International Day Against Homophobia March (IDAHO) and their disapproval of Hong Kong Rainbow's radical politics. I suggest that this is a result of the postcolonial conditioning in Hong Kong, which meant that public visibility is not often a preferred political practice. Therefore, the notion of political resistance takes on a different form than that of North American mobilization efforts. The idea of a pride parade may fall on deaf ears here yet community groups have made themselves visible by joining the Tongzhi parade in Taipei. My purpose in pointing this out in my thesis is based on my own observations of how political activism in another Asian city has had more impact on local activism. Part of it is the closer geographical distance between Hong Kong and Taipei, but a more convincing reason for it is also cultural similarities between these two cities. This is also indicative of how popular cultural products from Taiwan as in film and music seemed to be able to establish more rapport from Hong Kong lesbians than that of North American popular culture.

This brought me to understand how consumption then became a strategy to assert one's visibility. To be able to consume also means having the money to consume. This is the fourth area that I have found particular to Hong Kong lesbians is a strong sense of career achievement as compensation to one's lesbian identity. This is clearly supported by the hegemonic economic narrative imposed by the authorities and carried out

diligently by political and educational institutions. Yet my interview data have shown that resistance can be mapped in the area of consumption as well. Interview subjects started up their own businesses despite high rental prices for spaces in Tung Lo Wan or Mongkok. At the same time, some businesses failed to remain open as lesbian exclusive spaces due to expensive rental fees. As a result, spaces for consumption are temporary in its nature. I made an attempt to analyze Tung Lo Wan as both an everyday location where ordinary people engage in common activities, yet it is the same area where an anti-homophobia march was held. Interview subjects mentioned being publicly affectionate in Tung Lo Wan and hence, disrupting and subverting heteronormative social relations by asserting their queer use of these spaces.

My last chapter dealt with the cultural representation of lesbian desires, in particular, the demand for films and videos that are both Asian and lesbian. I argue that the Hong Kong Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival as a colonial cultural product of its time. The recent changes in its programming of which I have been a part of reflects the challenges for the festival to remain commercially viable and for it to be responsive to lesbian communities. I want to assert that the festival also mirrors the hegemonic economic narrative that pervades our daily existence in Hong Kong. When civic politics remained as an uncontrollable and discouraged site, then consumption offers a particular kind of freedom to be different.

In my thesis, I drew on diverse theoretical traditions to make sense of the research problem. Indeed, there are risks and limitations in the approach but I contend that as a

preliminary sketch of what I hope to achieve later in my academic growth, I had to first develop an interdisciplinary approach. I am aware of the tensions between theoretical traditions. For example, feminism and queer theory may not go hand in hand together. Even though I was first trained to be a feminist and then rightfully confronted by queer politics, my intention to use queer theory is to pose queries on why adopting the queer way might not be applicable to Hong Kong lesbians.

I would like to point out that my interview sample is by no means definitive of the lesbian community in Hong Kong. I am aware of the fact that I did not include women who are of a different ethnicity but who have made Hong Kong as their residence. In addition, my interview sample may not have reflected the diversity of life experiences and social backgrounds among women who have same-sex desires. In addition, the oral narratives were representations of what interview subjects would reveal in the prescribed length of the interviews. Therefore, I realized that the narratives were restricted in its contents and hence, limited in its applicability to the wider communities. Another limitation might have come from the over-representation of tomboy bodies in my thesis. My leaning towards this discussion comes from the interview subjects themselves where those who appear to be tomboyish tend to discuss their bodies directly in their interviews. This is not to say that other bodies do not matter and I do think this is an area that I hope to discuss more in further research. Similarly, I hope to be able to involve more women who have less cultural capital in my later studies.

Through this theoretical exercise and the data collected through interviews and observations, I argue that the conditions of how certain spaces came to be lesbian spaces come from diverse factors but the circumstances surrounding the identification processes of Hong Kong lesbians are particular and local, and these are the stories that I want to tell.

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Appendix A

The Research Pendulum: Multiple Roles and Responsibilities as a Researcher

Research can be a lonely exercise. No matter how serious I swore my loyalty to feminism is, no matter how astute I claim my participant observations to be, no matter how intrigued I have been with my interview data, I remained in solitude with interview data that I have collected. I have come to believe that any intimate engagement with research methodology strips oneself down to the bare bones. It questions a researcher's basic intentions in conducting research and holds the researcher accountable for data collected. It puts a researcher's position under scrutiny and to a certain extent, exposes the study for closer investigation. It is an inevitable step and an urgent matter.

This chapter presents a discussion on methodological issues that are concerned with research processes, representation of marginalized voices and multiple positions embodied by the researcher. My current research project involves interviewing Hong Kong women who identify as having same-sex desires for other women. I sought out to collect life stories with interviews ranging from one and a half hours to three hours. Twenty-four women were interviewed for the first set of interviews. Participants were identified through personal contacts and referrals from individuals whom I get to know through my community involvement with local organizations. All interviews are taped and consent forms were signed. I used sociologist Arlene Stein's notion of "*self stories*" to conduct the interviews. Stein explains, "A self story is literally a story of and about the self in relation to an experience, in this case the development of a lesbian identity, that positions the self of the teller centrally in the narrative that is given" (Stein 1997:7). Similar to Stein, I am interested in their daily negotiation, mapping and construction of their lesbian identities as articulated by the participants themselves, and as situated within their everyday lives. By asking general questions regarding their backgrounds, I follow where they lead me in the narratives, be it concerning love, intimacy, work, family, social relations, discrimination, sex, aging, health and outlooks on life.

Qualitative research on sexualities has gradually developed from a clinical approach with classifying and stigmatizing homosexuals to a narrative approach of presenting marginalized voices. Early pathological studies on homosexuality have resulted in the Kinsey studies which pushed discussions of sexualities into a new realm of public interest by trying to normalize sexual practices such as homosexuality, adultery and premarital sex (D'Emilio 1983; Gamson 2000). We have also seen studies in the early seventies addressing the homosexual as a stigmatized individual yet nonetheless a strange fellow (Reiss 1961; Humphreys 1970). Representation of gay and lesbian subjects, voices of ethnic minorities and women have emerged out of social movements such as feminism, Asian American movement and civil rights. Qualitative research on gays and lesbians have taken on a political value and contributed to the emergence of oral narratives as legitimate texts. However, legitimacy of voices has also faced the postmodern challenge of whether a text can truly represent without contestation and a close interrogation of the researcher's power over the researched (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; Kong, Mahoney and Plummer 2002; Kong 2004). Feminist methodologies have repeatedly confronted the traditional epistemological stance of research as distant, scientifically objective, apolitical and void of power differentials (Jaggar 1983; Stanley and Wise 1983; Fonow and Cook 1986; Smith 1987; Stacey 1988; Reinharz 1992).

The Insider/Outsider Discussion

Similar to many scholars engaged in queer studies, my research interests are closely tied with personal politics and community involvement with marginalized populations. It may not be a purely academic affair for many who are also involved in gay, lesbian and queer movements. My early interests in queer studies originated by participating in university student politics and more specifically, a commitment to feminism both in academic and activist circles (Gamson 2000). Feminist ethnography has alerted us that research processes are laden with power differentials and subjectivities. Self-reflexivity can be perceived as a way of minimizing the power imbalance. The debates on insider and outsider positions are not new to feminists, sociologists and ethnographers alike (Smith 1987; Collins 1990, 1991; Naples 2003). Researchers have heated discussions about whether being an insider with common experiences can provide deeper insights into the researched community. Commonality can be defined by racial/ethnic, class, health status, sexuality, age and other social backgrounds that might help a researcher to develop a closer understanding of the researched.

For instance, feminist theorists Dorothy Smith (1987), Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Sandra Acker (2000) have been concerned with issues that deal with the insider/outsider discussion. Dorothy Smith (1987), in her groundbreaking feminist project on problematizing our everyday lives, claims that women have historically been excluded from sociological discourse. As a result, Smith suggests that women's standpoint is "designed in part by our exclusion from the making of cultural and intellectual discourse and the strategies of resorting to our experience as the ground of a new knowledge, a new culture" (Smith 1987: 107). Positioning women back into the sociological discourse is not to take a woman's standpoint as the origin for all analysis. It is more about filling a gap where women's voices have been neglected and situating these voices within the context of their everyday worlds. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) developed an "outsider within" position to describe Black women working as domestics within White families. Placed inside families as domestics yet exploited by the dominant society, Black women have a distinctive view of how power and authority is manifested. Similarly, Collins described Black academics as "outsiders within" since they operate within an environment where Black feminist voices have often been excluded in scholarship yet they are situated within academic institutions.

Oscillating between Roles

So I found myself oscillating between positions, a researcher, a friend, a festival director, a peer counsellor, a workshop organizer and a foreigner as in a person who have just returned to Hong Kong. The oscillation may not be from a complete left or right, but maybe a sense of straddling in-between, not sure of how to present myself as or what roles do the participant allocate for me. At times, I have also picked a certain role during the interviews.

Janice L. Ristock (Ristock and Pennell 1996), in her research on abuse among lesbian relationships, have often taken on a role as counsellor in her interviews. She describes,

"But tensions often rose between my role as interviewer and the temptation to take on the power of the counsellor's role. This was a fine line to walk. Women were telling me stories that many had never told anyone before" (Ristock and Pennell 1996: 75).

I recalled an interview where the participant's eyes would swell up with tears often when she talked about her relationship with her parents. She would repeatedly apologise while I handed her tissue paper to wipe her tears. I found myself consoling her

and feeling the need to allow her as much space as possible to release her emotions. By including the importance of her silence in-between responses and her sad emotions, I run counter to positivistic values of emotions and subjectivity as detrimental to research, hence in opposition to the scientific understanding of reason. As feminist philosopher Alison Jaggar (1989) argues, “far from precluding the possibility of reliable knowledge, emotion as well as value must be shown as necessary as such knowledge (Jaggar 1989: 157)” Jaggar further asserts that whereas we cannot treat all emotions as uncontested knowledge, feminist researchers can develop a “critical reflection on emotion” (Jaggar 1989: 164). By taking emotions seriously, we can justify self-reflexivity as theorists and turn our critical eye towards ourselves. More so, Jaggar urges us to “examine critically our social location, our actions, our values, our perceptions, and our emotions” (ibid).

Identifying as a lesbian researcher, I was expecting interview participants to ask me about my own coming out processes. True enough, I was asked a number of times on my personal experiences and in return, my views on their accounts. Participants might have assumed that I have had similar difficulties with family, peers and colleagues as a lesbian. On another note, they also want to hear if I have positive experiences of coming out. There are many differences in social factors and political beliefs, and relations to systems of oppression between myself and the participants. Sherry Gorelick (1996), in her research on Jewish feminists’ responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shares a similar story. Using a Marxist framework on oppression as “complex of many determinations” (Marx 1970:206), Gorelick comments:

“That might be because I am myself very much like them and subject to some of the same social forces, some of the same distortions and limitations. There are hidden determinants in my life also, and I am both the worst and the best person to uncover them.” (Gorelick 1996: 39)

She reminds us that since as researchers, we are also embedded within oppressive structures, we are prone to forget that we have various relations with oppression as well. I would have to be continuously aware of my class assumptions in everyday world. The fact that I have been educated abroad also points to a privileged economic status. What do I have in common with the participants other than self-identifying as a lesbian? Apart from a common language, what other traits would help to facilitate the research process better? Even if my Cantonese conversational skills can make up for these interviews, I still have a lot of catching up to do in terms of local knowledges.

In an interview, a participant described her university life in Hong Kong and how excited she was being involved in student organizations.

Participant: Think of it, when you first got into university, it’s really exciting with many new things and new friends that attracted you right away. But for the first entire year, I went home right after class to Sheung Shui to be with her. I did that for the whole year everyday. When I got into second year, it was time to “*sheung chong*”, right? “*Sheung chong*” made me super busy. I think it’s after orientation camp, we as “*chong yuen*” have some misunderstandings. But actually as “*chong yuen*”, we are pretty close friends but...
Interviewer: What are “*chong yuen*”?
Participant: “*Chong yuen*” refers to committee members! Are you a foreigner? You don’t even know these terms?
Interviewer: I really don’t know. I left Hong Kong fourteen years ago.
Participant: Really? I see. Anyway, we were happy at that time to organize student activities together but it was not a good thing when it turned out to ruin our friendships...

Being a Cantonese-speaking lesbian who was brought up in Hong Kong might have granted me some insights into the local culture, yet I remain in motion somewhere between an insider and an outsider. I have certainly used it to my advantage when I asked for clarifications from participants on unfamiliar issues or community politics. As a result, I find myself learning about the place and its people with a renewed sense of interest. My departure from Hong Kong for most of my life has proved to make me more concerned to what actually goes on in this city. I have relied on being a lesbian as an introductory warm handshake I can give to participants. As Sandra Acker (2000) puts it aptly,

“Our multiple subjectivities allow us to be both insiders and outsiders simultaneously, and to shift back and forth, not quite at will, but with some degree of agency” (Acker 2000: 205).

Wary of Approaching a Sensitive Topic

Asking questions about sex in the interview may not be the easiest thing to do but stepping on tiptoes around it does not help either. Identifying as a lesbian researcher might have been more convincing for participants but yet I cautioned myself against treating sex as a uniform practice. As a former safer sex educator for HIV/AIDS organizations and feminist groups, discussions on sex, let alone safer sex, has never been a priority among government-funded organizations for lesbian populations. Since governments rarely give out funding on lesbian health research to community organizations, it is common for lesbian health to be second priority for mainstream health organizations. Therefore, my community and work experience in discussing lesbian sex is nonetheless limited. Similarly, researchers have slowly ventured into areas of sex and erotic matters but not without certain wariness. Travis Kong, Dan Mahoney and Ken Plummer (2002) offer the following insight on approaching sex,

“Here we turn to the hidden dimensions of romance, passion, and sexuality that must impinge on some, maybe much, research, even if rarely spoken about. It is curious, not to say disingenuous, to find that most research is written as if such experiences quite simply never happen in people’s lives. From fieldwork to interviews, as people come and go, nothing much ever appears to unfold in erotic mold. Just where is it?” (Kong et al. 2002:251)

The key questions remain: How far should I go in asking about their sex lives? How different should I imagine a participant’s sexual experience from mine? Am I ready if a participant discloses abuse and traumatic accounts? Would I be responsible for the consequences afterwards? How personal should I get from my end? Would a disciplined amount of self-disclosure necessary for a conversation of certain reciprocity? How should I proceed?

The following interview demonstrated some of the difficulties I had in approaching a sensitive topic with a participant I have met for the first time.

Interviewer: How are your sex relations with your girlfriends? Sex life?

Participant: It’s ok.

Interviewer: What do you mean by ok?

Participant: I don’t know how to answer you if you don’t ask more specifically.

Interviewer: Let me rephrase the question. In your first relationship, your girlfriend came over to give you a hug and then she kissed you. You mentioned that you were much younger then. After she initiated her kisses to you, did you initiate to have sex with her?

Participant: No.

Interviewer: Did you have sex with her eventually?

Participant: Yes, I think my first experience with her should be after three or four months into the relationship. I initiated having sex with her that time.

Interviewer: Can you recall how you know what to do sexually?

Participant: I cannot really explain it. It's inborn, similar to how boys do it with girls since civilization began. I didn't take anything for reference. I really don't know.

Interviewer: Do you feel that it's very natural?

Participant: Seemed like it. But I'm not sure if it really was. I'm not sure if I looked at something and hid it subconsciously and pulled it out when I needed to use that information, but I didn't do any research or look for any references.

Interviewer: I see. What did you exactly do when you initiated sex?

Participant: Used my hand at that time.

Interviewer: Do you mean using your hand to insert?

Participant: No.

Interviewer: Just to caress?

Participant: Yes, mutually.

Our conversation continued along the lines of sexual practices and the participant volunteered more information on specific sex acts as the interview continued. Although the participant has struck me as abrupt in her answers, I have also found myself not coping well with being as direct as I could have been. It only dawned on me later that I should have noticed my own discomfort in the interaction. If I had actually been as direct with her as she had been with me, the interview process might have been more participatory. Interviews are not guaranteed to be cordial and open if rapport is not easily established in the first place. Kong, Mahoney and Plummer (2002) remind researchers,

“There are times during the interview process when subjects do not respond well to an empathic, interactive process, or are not be willing to explore feelings and emotions. There also may be clashes of personalities between the interviewer and interviewee, making the construction of an interactive context impossible” (Kong et al. 2002: 253).

In another interview, I was being cross-examined by a participant.

Interviewer: Is talking about sex embarrassing for you?

Participant: Embarrassing? It's okay to talk about it.

Interviewer: You seemed fine talking about it but it's hard for some people. No matter how I tried or use examples, they still will not talk about it or cannot talk about it but you seemed fine.

Participant: I can talk about it but maybe slightly embarrassed. And you?

Interviewer: Me?

Participant: Will you talk about...

Interviewer: Will I be embarrassed? I think I won't be.

Participant: Two things, do you think it's because you're not embarrassed about it, that is why you can talk more about it or do you think it's the more you talk about it, you've become less embarrassed?

Interviewer: Can you say that again?

Participant: That is, you are open to this topic but not because you have to talk about it all the time?

Interviewer: Yes, I think so. It depends...

Participant: Do you not mind talking about this topic or is it because you have to deliver seminars and share with others all the time that led you to become less embarrassed?

Interviewer: I think it's interesting because if I talk about it during seminars, it feels like work. When it's work, I feel less embarrassed about it.

Participant: But when you are in seminars, you can talk about yourself, too.

Interviewer: Yes, but I can also treat it as work but if maybe I'll be different in private conversations.

Participant: So are you in a private conversation now or are you working?

Interviewer: This feels more like work.

Participant: So wait till next time when it's off record. Because I can feel that you are a bit different, so let's find another day to chat.

I was a bit caught off guard by the participant when she asked me about my level of comfort in talking about sex. I remembered looking down and then after having caught myself doing that, I immediately looked back up at her and answered her questions at point blank. This exercise of cross-examination was evident of my attempt to distance myself from further discussion on sex by blaming it as work. In hindsight, it is a poor methodological endeavour to pull the participant closer for a more in-depth interview which runs contradictory to my own feminist and queer sensibilities. Maybe the personal/research divide became deeper for me when it came to a topic such as sex.

Responsibilities and Representation

Many feminist scholarships have emphasized the importance of women's oral narratives in providing accounts of what it means to live as marginalized subjects (Anzaldúa 1990; hooks 1990; Reinhartz 1992; Kennedy and Davis 1993). Filling the missing gap in historical and intellectual discourse, women's voices emerged both in academic scholarship and within community activism. Narratives of sexual minorities, racial subjects, poor people and the disabled, on the other hand, challenged the traditional epistemological understanding of research as objective and impartial. Joshua Gamson comments,

“The lesbian or gay itself, given voice through interviews, ethnographies, autobiography, and historical re-creation, while plainly resting on claims of authenticity, gave the lie to objectivity” (Gamson 2000:351).

Although lesbian and gay voices have started to gain sociological interests in the seventies and early eighties, other scholars have started to question the essentialist lesbian or gay subject embedded within such research. Authenticity has its own set of limitations. Just whose voice are we representing and whose voice did not make it to the table so as to speak?

Michel Foucault (1978) reminds us sternly in *The History of Sexuality* that sexualities are socially constructed discourses with political relations attached. As the late eighties approach, the influences of poststructuralism and queer theory have come forward to challenge sexual identities as fixed categories or categories that reflect a homogenized gay subject who is urban, middle-class, European and able-bodied. Although these theoretical strands have their own differences, they have pointed out sexual identities as fluid, unstable, diasporic and incongruous at times. Therefore, our search for marginalized voices have to include those who we might perceive as ambiguous, undefined and unexpected.

Reflecting on the research I am conducting with lesbians living in Hong Kong, I have also struggled to find a diverse pool of participants in the name of representation. Like a hawk's eye, you're always hunting for the best story. Apart from community activists or lesbian group founders, I was also trying to locate “everyday” women for interviews. I was looking for women who do not have the lesbian banner all over their

foreheads and those who I might have missed in my own partiality. By no means do I think my sample is representative of the Hong Kong lesbian population but my goal is to bring up issues that are relevant for Hong Kong lesbians. My urge to capture good accounts led me to performing an impatient moment as a researcher, where I was caught for rushing to my own agenda. During the beginning of an interview with a participant, we were chatting about her career and when did she start to think about opening a lesbian café. After her brief description of why she wanted to open a lesbian café, I jumped right into asking her a question of her attraction towards women.

Interviewer: Let's see. You said you've wanted to open up a café since you were very young. Did you then want to open up a café in general or a lesbian café?

Participant: It wasn't a trendy thing to open up cafes during those days. Not like nowadays. Actually I've thought of opening up a coffee shop, not like an upstairs café. But if I told my family about this idea then, they would say that it'll be closed down. It's not a fashionable thing to do then, no one have thought of it, which is when I was in Form 4 back in the year of eighty something, around early nineties, no one have thought of opening cafes in the upper floors of a building. Realistically, how can a street level café make do just by selling coffee? Think of how many cups of coffee you'll have to sell? So this is not easy.

Interviewer: When do you know you that you have attraction for women?

Participant: Wow, suddenly jumped to this question?

Interviewer: (let out a nervous laugh) Ha

Participant: When do I know? Actually I was quite a bit older when I started dating girls, actually I was already in Form 7, but how did I know? I don't know how I knew, I did not do it on purpose, and it feels like a natural process.

Fortunately, I reckoned that the participant knew me earlier from being a regular patron and a festival organizer. In return, she was willing to answer my question without many qualms. I cannot imagine the response I would get if I had done the same thing with other interview participants who have not met me before. I wanted to get to the core of the interview so badly that I was not listening. What it meant to have a worthy account of being a lesbian in Hong Kong is in itself overloaded with many assumptions. I remain troubled by the fact that conducting lesbian ethnography in Hong Kong bears a more heightened responsibility. Since there is limited scholarship in this area, I felt responsible to present findings with honesty and to a certain extent, validity. This paper as an English text would also mean globalizing queer research (Altman 1997). This is not to say that validity does not have its own problems but it is more about being aware of the research that one produces have far-reaching potential, both positive and negative. I find Gayatri Gopinath's theorization of a queer diasporic useful in describing current emerging queer scholarship outside of Euro-American geographies,

“A queer diasporic formation works in contradistinction to the globalization of ‘gay’ identity that replicates a colonial narrative of development and progress that judges all ‘other’ sexual cultures, communities, and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity” (Gopinath 2005:11).

If academic research is nonetheless a demonstration of power and privilege, what can we do as researchers to minimize the power imbalance? Susan Krieger (1983, 1991) advises us to acknowledge a researcher's responsibility to situate oneself in the research process. Almost a decade ago, Judith Stacey warns us of the potential exploitative nature of feminist ethnography and even summarizes her engagement with feminist ethnography as a “loss of ethnographic innocence.” Feminist ethnographers have stressed the

importance of research as a reciprocal process, an emotional encounter and a learned experience for both the researcher and the researched. Stacey suggests that such intimacy with research objects can potentially places research subjects at “grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer” (Stacey 1988: 23). Representation of subjects and interpretation of data in research findings remain those of a researcher’s text. Self-awareness and downplaying of idealism inherent in feminism might prove to be useful for a feminist ethnography (Stacey 1988).

Conclusion

I have brought up many methodological concerns in this paper. Many of those have been dismissed, contested, partially resolved but nonetheless taken seriously by feminist researchers, ethnographers and sociologists alike. What is important for me is to take up social responsibilities of a researcher, to cross-examine my multiple positionalities within structures of oppression and to present findings with integrity. The solitary exercise of data interpretation and theorization may well be done in a quiet corner. As Jewish peace activist and scholar Sherry Gorelick’s puts it, “thus our relationship to oppression, as either privileged or oppressed, has implications for the quality of our research, but our relationship to it is contradictory, complex, and, to some degree, up to us” (Gorelick 1996: 40).

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Appendix B

Interview Guide

Background Information (includes date and place of interview):

Name, Age/Date of Birth, Sex, Place of Birth, Nationality/Ethnic Background, Marital Status (Date of Present or Past Marriage(s)), Present Address, Telephone Number, Education, Religion, Occupation(s), Father's Occupation & Education, Mother's Occupation & Education, Siblings, Place Where Family Members Live.

Sexual Identity

Have you always been in relationships with women?
When did you first become attracted to women? How did it feel to be attracted to women?
How would you describe your sexual identity? Is there a term for you?
What does that term mean to you?
Have you used this term to describe yourself to friends and family members?
Have you heard of terms like les, TB, TBG, Butch, Femme, Pure, FTM, queer?
Is being a lesbian a choice for you? Do you see it as a political act?
Why do you think you are a lesbian?
Have you been in relationships with men?
Do you see yourself being primarily with women, men or both in the future?
What do you think about bisexuality?
Have you heard of the term coming out?
How do you define coming out? Is it important to you?
Are you out to people who are significant to you?
Did you have emotional support when you came out? If no, what kind of support would you like?
Have there been important persons that helped you in your life?
Would you describe them as role models? Do you have any role models?
What is a typical Hong Kong lesbian?
Do you think of yourself as a typical Hong Kong lesbian?

Family

How many siblings do you have? What are your parents like?
Which area did you grow up? Did you grow up in Hong Kong?
Where do you live now? Do you live with your family/friend(s)/partner(s)/lover(s)?
Can you tell me more about your relationships with individual family members?
Do they know about your sexuality?
Do you feel stressed about being a lesbian?
Are there any family expectations that you need to fulfil? For example, financial obligations, career paths, giving birth, getting married to a man?

Religion

Do you have a religion?
If no, do you feel the need for it? Do you believe in spirituality?
Would you describe yourself as pious?
How has your religious background affected the way you view your sexuality?

Have there been any conflicts?
If yes, how do you resolve them?
Has your religion been useful to help you understand your sexuality?

Work

Can you tell me the type of work you do?
What is your main job? Do you have another part-time job?
Have you always worked in this field?
What is your level of income or how much are you getting paid?
Do you get along with your colleagues and your boss?
Are you out at work?
If yes, what have their reactions been?
If no, would you like to let them know? What reactions do you think you will receive?
What are the consequences?
Is this job the kind of work you want to do?
If no, what kind of work would you like to do?
Does your family upbringing affect the kind of work you do?
Do you like to work? Why?
When do you think you will retire? What are your plans for retirement?

Education

What is your level of education?
Where did you study? Same-sex or co-ed? Hong Kong, Mainland China or abroad?
Which period of study do you miss the most?
Have you ever been harassed or bullied in school? Or did you harass others?

Community

Would you say that you are part of a lesbian community?
What does community mean to you?
How does a community look like to you? Is it social, political, cultural or an overlapping of these areas?
Do you have close friends? Are they around the same age like you?
Do they know about your sexuality? How did you let them know?
Do you have close friends who are lesbians?
If no, does it matter to you that they are not?
How do you meet women to build friendships or romantic relationships?
Has your social circle changed overtime?
Where do you usually hangout?
If there is a women-only space, would you hang out there? Does it matter?
How have these places changed overtime?
What are your expectations of women-only spaces?
Why do you think there are so few lesbian spaces?
What about going to gay specific establishments?
Do you have access to the Internet? If yes, where?
What do you do when you go online? Which websites do you go to?
Are there particular areas/neighbourhoods that you feel more comfortable?
Have you faced public harassment? For example, verbal remarks or shoving by strangers, etc.
Is safety a concern for you (and your lover/partner/girlfriend)?
Have you experienced hate crimes? (Explain what a hate crime is.)

What do you think about human rights and equal opportunities for same-sex relationships?
Are you involved with any community organizations? Can you say more about your involvement?

What is aging to you?

What are your primary concerns about growing old?

Relationship & Intimacy

Can you describe the kind of women that you are attracted to? Is there a physical dimension to it?

Do your romantic interests or sexual attractions change overtime?

Does your lesbian identity change according to who you are dating?

What is your take on life partnership?

Have you been married to a man before? Or are you still married to a man?

Do you believe in same-sex marriages or commitment ceremonies?

Are you in a same-sex relationship now?

If yes, how long has it been?

Do you live with her? How has it been living with a lover/partner/girlfriend?

How would you describe your current relationship?

How did you meet your current lover/partner/girlfriend?

If no, are you looking for a relationship?

Where and how are you looking for a lover/partner/girlfriend?

Can you tell me more about your past relationship(s)?

Does physical intimacy/sex equals love for you?

Where do you usually have sex with your lover/partner/girlfriend?

Have you booked rooms at local hotels? Which ones?

Have you experienced any problems with finding hotels?

What have been your sexual experiences like?

Where and how do you receive information on lesbian sex?

Do you go for regular physical check-ups or gynaecological examinations?

Do you think it makes a difference if it is a female doctor? Or a lesbian-identified doctor?

Have you ever visited a sex worker?

If yes, how and where did you locate the service?

If no, would you like to?

Do you want to have children?

Do you like your body?

Are you satisfied with being a female?

What is your understanding of transgenderism?

Popular Culture and Karaoke Culture

Do you look for lesbian representations in popular culture like comics, books, magazines, movies, music?

Do you have a lesbian icon?

How do they help you understand your sexual identity?

Do you attend lesbian and gay specific cultural events?

What do you do for leisure? What do you think about the costs of going to events, movies, concerts, etc..?

Do you go to karaoke bars/boxes regularly? Which ones in particular? Are they lesbian-specific? Do you like karaoke? What do you like about it?

Who do you go with? Do you meet people there? When do you usually go? How often?

How much do you usually spend?

Do you sing alone? What are your favourite songs/artists? Why do you like them? What are your favourite MTVs? Does it matter how well does one sing? Do you feel it is a different kind of self-expression?

Do you sing local or foreign songs? Have you entered any competitions?

Why do you think people like karaoke?

Do you think of karaoke as part of Hong Kong culture? Or as part of lesbian culture?

What do you think of the karaoke box/room/bar? Is it an intimate space?

Identity

Are you happy with your life?

Are you happy with yourself?

How do you see yourself in five years, ten years or beyond?

What has been the best thing that happened to you? What has been the worst thing?

Appendix C

An Intimate Dialogue with Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong*

State of emergency. Don't let the battle break out between our bodies. Let the connection happen somewhere else. So that our bodies won't be mutilated immediately by the clasp of hands, by the warm embrace.¹

There is always one body too many in one's life.²

It is very rare for a film that resonates within me as much as Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong*, so much so that it called for a slightly different response³. A counter script perhaps, to encounter the imaginary lesbian bodies, voices and desires on screen. Or are they imaginary? Chan Kwok Chan (Wong Chung Ching), Zero (Erica Lam) and Nicole (Colette Koo), as female protagonists of the film, are intricately connected and disconnected in a setting described as a not-so-distant future. A future that awaits us.

I imagine if I begin to unravel the mysteries of *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong*, I would begin to understand the contradictory lesbian desires and intimacies amidst an urban enclave. It is contradictory because lesbian desires are visible in everyday life if you look hard enough, but they remain invisible within public discourse. You see, I am constantly perplexed at what Hong Kong can offer in its 1,000 square kilometers. Boundaries are created amongst those who live within. Distances are short but the vastness is felt inside us.

Chan Kwok Chan, when translated into Chinese, means "Made-in-China Chan", is a cyber porn sex worker/performer who walks very slow in contrast to the pace of Hong Kong. Nicole is an upper middle-class career woman, with money at her disposal and fancies Chan only through a porn website called 'Let's Love'. She masturbates to the image of Chan, changes her costumes and manipulates her actions online. A typical tomboy or "TB" in Cantonese-English, Zero, works at odd jobs and chases Chan after seeing her in the same flat that Zero is trying to sell to another customer.⁴ Chan lives at home and has a close relationship with her mother (Maria Cordero) who does not know what Chan does for work, or the fact that Chan visits a sex worker (Wella Cheung) for pleasure. Zero lives in a deserted theatre that has been turned into single seat living cubicles. Zero follows Chan around the city. One day by looking over her neighbour's notebook computer, she discovers that Chan is a cybersex worker. She proceeds to talk Chan out of her work by offering her mobile phones to sell.

The audience, including myself, follows their lives and come to understand Chan's disconnection with the city, Nicole's insomnia and Zero's loneliness. We witness the characters' strengths in navigating and mediating their lives in a fast-paced city as the title "Ho Yuk" suggests.⁵ Agency and self-empowerment is well-demonstrated by the characters through their desires for women and their strategies of resistance towards lesbian invisibility.

Allow me to be direct. I want to discuss how intimacies between female characters are negotiated, rejected, imagined and taken as refuge. It must begin with the protagonist, Chan Kwok Chan. Precisely because Chan Kwok Chan is the centre of where notions of intimacy are created and relations are defined. She has spun the web and held it tight

through her multiple roles as a cyber sex worker, an object of desire, a daughter and a client of a sex worker from the Mainland. She has demonstrated the search, the yearning, the reluctance and the materialization of what intimacies mean for women who have same-sex desires. Indeed, I have projected my definitions of intimacy upon the film and the characters involved. I absorb, lament and ponder upon their strengths and their adamancies. I want to grasp how their intimate relations fall into place. Like frayed edges on a piece of linen, I let loose threads run through my fingers in order to make sense of their being. We shall begin with the relationship between Chan Kwok Chan and Nicole.

But may I call her Kwok Chan instead?

Object of Desire

‘Welcome Nicole!’

A male voice announces Nicole’s return to the ‘Let’s Love’ website. Nicole fancies Kwok Chan as a cyber object of desire. She masturbates and changes her costumes constantly to arouse Nicole. The costumes range from traditional Chinese “cheong sam” or a nun to a policeman’s uniform or a bimbo. Her flirtatious and seductive attitude stays consistent, just as much as being a cyber porn performer is a job for Kwok Chan. Can she even imagine the room where she would appear on a screen? The room is dark with monitor screens stacked on top of one another, placed in the middle, as well as to the left and right of the room. Its sole purpose is for Nicole to enjoy her private frissons. What is it about cybersex that appeals to Nicole? It is a safe, confidential and secret affair. Nicole can navigate on-screen and project her own fantasies upon Kwok Chan. She performs and aims to please Nicole in a vacuum. Intimacy is mediated by communications technologies and lesbian desires are confined between the user and the cybersex object. How ironic it is, to fantasize about a cybersex object as if she is only yours to manipulate! Being a digital image, Kwok Chan is accessible to all through new media and communications technologies. A Nicole in Los Angeles can have a transnational sexual connection just as much as the Nicole in Hong Kong. Our understanding of sexualities as represented on digital landscapes have been destabilized and problematized. Identities remain fluid online and digital encounters provide sociability. Geographical boundaries become blurred.⁶ Nations and cities aspire to become “technopoles”.⁷ Convenience is all that matters, let me tell you. As Maureen McLane summarizes,

Intimacy appears to be an affair (or a technology, or a discourse) of near and knowing bodies. Inasmuch as this intimacy might speak, its utterances would be elemental, economical, pure: the language of the body brought to rare and perfect speech.⁸

Cyberspace has been increasingly popular among lesbians, gays and queer cultures in urban areas. The promises of discretion in “computer-mediated communication” make it easier for lesbians, gays and queers who live in environments not conducive to being “out” to meet each other and to develop online communities.⁹ Chris Berry and Fran Martin, in their research on Internet lesbian, gay and queer networks in Taiwan and South Korea indicate that accessibility of the Internet contributes to the emergence of the same communities. Meanwhile, political activists pose the question whether the anonymity of online identities can be complicating for public community mobilization strategies. Identities remain discreet and protected, unstable and hard to reach. Activists can call for meetings on virtual space but when it comes to the materialization of direct actions, there are always the risks of plans being stalled and lives being threatened. Oppressive

environments, of course, require alternative political organizing strategies. Olivia Khoo describes how lesbians, gays and queers in Malaysia link up with diasporic Malaysians to build community capacity, to share mobilization strategies and to unsettle marginal positions.¹⁰

Moving away from social movements, I always query how trust can be established so easily online, as if a few visits to the Fridae chatroom would presume a relationship being formed between me and a virtual friend/mate.¹¹ E-mail messages have the same effect. The motivations in reading between the lines and interpreting words have never been so ordinary but curious, immediate yet enduring. Photographic images on the Internet can be fabrications of what we want to be seen as. We can make choices of how we want to be visible. In this sense, personal safety is of particular concern to lesbians, gays and queers. Discrimination has material effects on many. If my identity as a lesbian is exposed without my choice, I run through my list of fears: losing employment, being evicted from my apartment, not receiving adequate healthcare, sabotaging friendships and family relations, and various forms of hate crimes. Although Nicole's desire for Chan Kwok Chan is more of lust than trust, one cannot neglect the role that new communication technologies has played in how we have come to define intimacies.

But if I picture Kwok Chan to log-on and to be a part of the lesbian, gay and queer cyber communities, that would have been straining to imagine. For one thing, she lives in a 200-foot room with her parents and privacy is a privilege in a city like Hong Kong. Where and how does a computer fit in such a small room? How can she afford to be online? Also, it is quite difficult to surf the net on queer sexualities without someone watching over your shoulder in internet cafes and other public venues. Noticing the room where Kwok Chan lives as well as many others in Hong Kong, the impossibilities are real and tangible. Fred Dewey's notion of "cyberurbanism as a way of life" may turn out to be an inflated statement.¹²

One might need to be at a social and public urban space to connect. One's identity as a woman who desires another woman might be exposed. Others might have to enter what Nina Wakeford suggests, a hybrid space like an Internet café. One can leave one's urban gendered body to log-on and travel without "material/biosocial realities".¹³ Wakeford notices how our bodies consume material and imaginative spaces in order to create technological landscapes. These landscapes stretch across urban centers, global economies and national boundaries. Our bodies do not abandon us when we log-on, instead we multiply them through imaginative pronouns and descriptive body parts. Truly, we can succumb to many bodies in one's life in cyberspace.

But if physicality is a concern and visibility is a must, Kwok Chan would have to be real and that by itself, would have been threatening to her.

Chan Kwok Chan: (faces mirror that was placed on the upper level of bunk bed, and sprays perfume on)The only requirement for this job is. I'm not allowed to let anyone know what I actually do for a living. (puts on jacket) (next scene shows Chan leaning on railings in housing estate and looks thoughtful)My agency doesn't want my clients to realize I'm flesh and blood, that I walk the same streets they do. Even my mom's not supposed to know because my agency says my mom's friends, even my mom herself may very well be our customer. What they least want to happen is to run into me, the real person.

But she does not have to worry about this in her relationship with Nicole. She can have Kwok Chan whenever and however she wants to. Intimacy can be so arranged and predictable sometimes, isn't it? Programmable lust, that's what it is, only to be disrupted by the snapping of a cybernetic cable.

Commodification of Intimacy

The conversations between Chan Kwok Chan and her lover are intense and full of immensity. We catch a glimpse of her desires for another woman. A solitary being as she is represented, her comfort zone is established through paying for the services of a sex worker. There are no big surprises here. It is not hard for me to understand why she chooses to engage in sex work and to visit a sex worker for pleasure. Appointments are regular. Time slots are filled and utilized perfectly according to her requests. Payments are agreed upon. She gives her consent to a service that is performed with skills and integrity. Control over such a situation is her forte.

Josephine Ho's research with sex workers in Taiwan, alerts us to the potential agency exercised by sex workers in their negotiating process with clients. Professionalization of services is maintained by allocating monetary amounts to each service. This is not to say that sex workers do not encounter violence or oppressive conditions as a result of their occupation. But we need to acknowledge the professional wisdom and negotiation skills employed by sex workers to protect themselves and their own interests. In other words, sex workers redefine gender dynamics and body politics during their business transactions.¹⁴

Kwok Chan's lover wants to be intimate with her beyond the prescribed services. But she insisted on paying for them.

Chan's Lover: (both Chan's Lover and Chan are on bed, Chan is running her fingers along her lover's thigh, Chan's Lover touches Chan on her arm) Wei, I won't take your money this time, okay?

Chan Kwok Chan: You're crazy!

Chan's Lover: (pushes Chan's arm softly) Please, just this once, please.

Chan Kwok Chan: (touches her lover's thigh) If I don't pay up, how do I know you're mine?

Chan's Lover: (takes Chan's hand and touches her thigh, breasts and stomach) How do you know if this part's yours? And this part? Here? And here?

Chan Kwok Chan: (pushes her lover's hand away and points at her thigh, breasts and lips) Because I paid for this part, this part. This and this, I paid for them. (lies back down and looks up at the ceiling) Even this room and the time, I'm paying for it, too!

Chan's Lover: (looks directly at Chan) So, who do you belong to?

(Chan gets up on bed and jumps on her lover. Chan's lover giggles.)

There are tacit rules, in the end.

Intimacy for Kwok Chan is a commodity, just as commodities are highly valued in a society such as Hong Kong. Sex with her lover in the hourly hotel room is gratifying. She enters into conversations with her lover about her own future plan to buy a house in one of the outlying islands for both herself and her mother. In return, her lover describes her son in details and her future plans. The exchange is endearing and warm. The giggles and the playfulness are all seemingly genuine, as if money has nothing to do with it. I want to know, how are the grey areas defined between Kwok Chan and her lover? Are there

moments where she would rather know her as a lover, or am I asking the wrong question and making the forbidden assumption? A lover to me does not preclude monetary exchange. Romance is constructed at my expense. Maybe she is her lover and the few hundred dollars that she gives her only serve to validate the relationship as well as to validate Kwok Chan's own profession as a cybersex worker.

Scenes of giraffes appear often in the background or as an illustration of intimacy. Giraffes seemed to function as a source of inspiration for Chan Kwok Chan. She described them with affection in her conversation with her lover. She verbalized the intricacies of their behaviours. She even acted out how giraffes display affection towards each other. Their living habits fascinate her in a most peculiar way.

Chan Kwok Chan: (talks to Chan's Lover who is in the washroom) Do you know how giraffes drink water? (stretches her own arms out and imitates what she knows of giraffes) They stretch their arms and bend down to drink. Since they can die from brain hemorrhages. They stick out their tongues when they eat.

Chan's Lover: (interrupts, scene shows her sitting on the toilet.) You think giraffes are funny? Giraffes think you are funny, too. You know how to make money. You spend it by having sex with me. You spend it by watching me take a shit. Who is funnier than you?

Giraffes are graceful, noble and at the same time, funny creatures. Tall as they are, they still needed the camouflage of evergreen trees. Fran Martin describes them as possessive of "other-worldly air and lofty demeanor" in juxtaposition of Kwok Chan's aimless drifting in the cityscape of Hong Kong.¹⁵ Even Kwok Chan's monologue on giraffes was met with her lover's ridicule and off-screen laughter. This scorning moment tells me that she is very much real, in a sense that her earnest relationship with her lover is elemental for surviving in a city like Hong Kong, where lesbian desires can be so isolating and ambiguous at times. Her lover's ridicule can be perceived as a token of intimacy. The off-screen laughter can be heard as a warning bell to remind both herself and film audiences of hostile worlds outside of the hotel room.

I cringe. I knew that we are just like giraffes, stretching our necks out to take in the highest view and to feel safe. I feel the urge to tear down what I have imposed on myself and what others have expected of me. The silence that engulfs me in terms of lesbian invisibility.¹⁶ The environment that is so painfully reticent.¹⁷

Rejection of Intimacy

Zero: (sits very close to Chan and leans over to talk to her, Chan appears uncomfortable) I've been following you around for a long time. My name's Zero. [I saw you] That time in that apartment. I work in real estate.

Chan Kwok Chan: (keeps looking at the opposite direction, away from Zero) My name's Chan Kwok Chan.

Zero: I know. Why are you so slow? You're so cute.

Chan Kwok Chan: Cute? I don't even know you.

(Chan keeps looking down, then looks away, shifts her body and plays with her hands)

Zero: (sarcastically) Do you know a lot of people?

(Next scene shows Chan on website, dressed like a showgirl making sexy moves, a cursor manipulates her moves, Nicole starts to undress. Next shot moves back to Zero and Chan on the subway. The following scene shows Chan on the monitor screen as a sex worker hitchhiking. Nicole continues to undress.)

Zero: What do you like to eat?

(Nicole looks at monitor, turns on vibrator and starts to masturbate.)

Zero: I like to eat turnip cakes. (Zero smiles at Chan) Which station are you getting off?(Zero looks attentively at Chan. Zero starts to look slightly sad.)

Chan Kwok Chan: And you?

Zero: Whichever station you get off, I'll get off, too.

.....

Zero: How come your forehead always look like there is thunder and lightning on it? (Zero falls backward to touch Chan on her neck)

(Next scene shows Chan on website masturbating. Nicole masturbates.)

Do you know, when I look at you this way, your neck is a bit longer than other people.

(Next scene shows the long neck of a giraffe behind a tree.)

(Chan appears distressed and moves away from Zero)

Chan Kwok Chan: You're always following me around. What do you want?

(Shots of Nicole masturbating and her sounds.)

(Zero proceeds to touch Chan and massages Chan's foot. Chan stares at Zero with disbelief.)

Nothing is more explicitly painful and vulnerable as in the relationship between Kwok Chan and Zero. I become weary of vocabularies and what they cannot articulate. Riding on the Mass Transit Railway, Zero touches Kwok Chan on her forehead and her neck, unexpectedly and nonetheless, affectionately. Kwok Chan displays such discomfort that she physically moves away from Zero.

Kwok Chan personifies an intense fear of intimacy. The fear stems from the proximity of Zero. The encounter is not prearranged like her usual meeting with her lover. It is too threatening, too easily recognized and without doubt, attainable. Then what is there to betray? What is there to be excited about?

But alas, our tragic heroine, Zero pursues Kwok Chan relentlessly. A lonely soul with a cheerful front, Zero follows her from where she lives to the Star Ferry Terminal and finally gets to sit down beside her on the subway train. Still, the touch is traumatic for her. Back on the platform, dizzy spells and earthquakes quash her aching comforts to be desired. The most ridiculous thing is that she develops a fever out of it! It is almost as if Zero's touch represents something very foreign, something so immensely unknown in Chan Kwok Chan's zone of intimacy. The sense of not wanting to be touched is so deep and strong that it exhibits a kind of "stoneness" that is necessary for her survival. To survive, in this case, is to be ruthlessly cold.

Does it make Kwok Chan more desirable?

Linda Holler brings the discussion of touch to another level, she asserts,

Touch is the sense by which our contact with the world is made most intimate, and it is therefore home to both our wisdom and our neuroses. Boundaries blur as self and not-self meet. In any touch, we both touch and are touched; we give and receive.¹⁸

Touch is recognized as a basic sense that we can easily relate to, physically and psychologically. Its erotic nature cannot be denied nor can we ignore its potential in healing. We look for a warm hand, a heartfelt hug and an ankle to tingle. We express our emotions towards others through touching. The longing is there for us to hope for.

Kwok Chan peeps through the window sleeves to look at Zero and to hear Zero sobbing after being rejected by her. How Kwok Chan consciously swallows her own emotions in the next frame! It must have stirred up some emotions, momentarily, but only enough to resist any surrendering of feelings.

A butch lesbian's reputation and lesbian masculinity is dependent on one's sexual untouchability.¹⁹ Public display of emotions or feelings would jeopardize the representation of ultimate butchness. The visibility of butch lesbians has made them easy targets for acts of blatant homophobia and physical violence, such as police strip searches, verbal assaults, beatings, sexual violence and trauma. A butch lesbian's response to such violent acts has been stone, as Leslie Feinberg and Ann Cvetkovich points out. This public "stone attitude" has been essential as a survival tactic and a form of protection for butch lesbians, whether they are socializing in bars or they are working in factory assembly lines.²⁰ Instead, butch lesbians relied on their support networks, such as close friends and partners, to gain emotional rapport. Butch-femme culture, in other words, alerts us that any public response to trauma is reserved for the privacy of our erotic lives and emotional experiences. But contradictions are common, whether this come to signify a departure from sexual untouchability or the lack of emotions in public arenas. The notion of touch is not only physical, it also holds a poignant grip within butch-femme relations. Being touched is synonymous with being affected.

Butch lesbians were commonly known as part of the "old gay".²¹ Arlene Stein's analysis of lesbian identities in the U.S. from the 1970s to the 1990s in *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation*, as well as Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis' research on butch-femme lesbian communities in Buffalo, New York during the 1940s and 1950s, points out that being butch has strong working-class roots. Although not all butches in Kennedy and Davis' study declare themselves as stone butches, untouchability was nonetheless, a desirable trait for butches in the 1950s working-class bar culture.

What do we make of all this through the character of Chan Kwok Chan? She is being addressed as Mr. Chan to the receptionist at the hourly motel and the real estate agent. Strategic as she is, gender expectations have outgrown the character. She is a bit queer and tastefully transgender, but if I want to say more, I would dedicate a full dialogue on this matter.

I am not trying to say that the majority of butches or transgender dykes, or more appropriately, TBs (acronym for tomboys in Hong Kong), are inherently stone butches. Instead, I want to highlight the way butches utilize this "stoneness" as a coping mechanism to hate crimes and other forms of violence in their everyday life. In Chan Kwok Chan's case, she adopts a stone attitude to cope with living in Hong Kong, an environment that is, in essence, strange to her.

So, I ask myself, what is so urban about untouchability? What is it about urban environments that position Kwok Chan as desirable through her untouchability? How can we define such a position as an accepted meaning of urban intimacy? I turn to Gaston Bachelard and his usage of Jules Valles' quote "Space has always reduced me to silence."²² The silence is so deafening that I would retreat into a corner. There I would bear the silence of my thoughts. I would feel the pains of reticence, of not being able to voice my lesbian desires. In one scene, when she stood over the railings in the housing estate, I felt her silence. When she kicked the soccer hard into the railings, I can sense her frustration in being immobile and being cornered in a city that is too often measured by speed. Ackbar Abbas warns us that Hong Kong is "at the intersections of different times or speed."²³

Urban environments have the potential to smother our sexual desires that are termed as deviant, as in queer desires. But Kwok Chan, Zero, Nicole and myself do, as women who desired other women in our own right, exercise our agency and display our resistance towards everyday life by transversing emotional boundaries, negotiating gender identities, mapping physical settings and destabilizing psychological topographies. Yes, queer desires command us to claim a certain degree of autonomy over our bodies and desires.

Embrace of Intimacy

And whenever space is a value – there is no greater value than intimacy – it has magnifying properties.²⁴

Such is the case with Kwok Chan's mother and herself. So closely is Kwok Chan tied to her mother, she folds Kwok Chan into her embrace. Turnip cakes, crabs, chicken legs, Coca Cola all connect Kwok Chan to a form of nostalgia that is reminiscent of home and intimacy.²⁵ Everyday objects inhabit this 200 feet room. The electric fly swap, the bottle of face cream on the TV, the stool on the ground, the thermal flasks and glasses in the brown cupboard.

Chan's Mother: (stirs with the spatula, then puts arm on the shoulder of Chan, proceeds to stir the mixture vigorously while Chan holds the pot) You have to remember 5 parts turnip to 1 part flour, do you know? Are you okay? Then I'll put the rest in. Remember, when I'm gone you should know how to make it yourself. 5 parts turnip to 1 part flour.

Kwok Chan cannot forget.

(Chan sits on a stool, opposite her mother. Chan's Mother is eating chicken feet, making slurping sounds.)

Chan Kwok Chan: Ma, you look happy when you eat chicken feet.

Chan's Mother: (looks at Chan, looks away, then looks back at her) Should I eat it with a long face? There is only one way to eat chicken feet. I'm not smoking marijuana. (waves the chicken feet at Chan) You used to look happy when you eat chicken feet. When you're a kid, I bought you an orange coloured chicken feet, you held it with your mouth from one end of the street to the other. (Chan shifts her body and plays with a can of Coca Cola in her hands) You're not like the way you're now. Now you look like as if your whole

family has been massacred. (Chan's Mother continues to eat chicken feet while she talks.)

Her mother knows her well, to a certain extent that Kwok Chan feels comfortable with. What does it matter anyway, for her to know what she does for a living? She has reached Kwok Chan's familiar self through childhood stories. She grounds her and provides her with a refuge from worldliness.

When Helen Hok-Sze Leung brings up the notion that intimacy is achieved only when the space is small and "closed-up".²⁶ The effects are a form of "intimate immensity."²⁷ No longer are we looking for a large space in two dimensions, we are instead looking up at the heights of ceilings in order to dwell in depth. Kwok Chan kept looking at old apartments with high ceilings and old staircases. She has always hungered for depth, in intimate relations and in living spaces.

Housing estates built from the 1950s resemble factory-made parts constructed together for cost and efficiency reasons.²⁸ Repetitive blocks line up across each other in minimal distance. As hyper-dense apartment buildings spring up along newly developed MTR stations and emerging KCR stations, they are rested on a podium where shopping malls, theme parks, sports and entertainment complexes are part of the development package.²⁹ Developers sell "collective fantasies" now.³⁰ Not unlike the city of Los Angeles, where the references to a Hollywood dream is so salient and necessary for its representation. The calling of the American dream is just as significant as what Hong Kong signifies for Chinese living in the Mainland. Even though Shanghai and Beijing has their current share of glitz and glamour, Hong Kong remains to be the jewel of capitalism.

This room and the bunk bed Kwok Chan shares with her mother, tight as it is, magnifies simple expressions of intimacy. At moments, her relationship with her mother reminds me of the relationship of Arnold (Harvey Fierstein) and his Jewish mother (Anne Bancroft) in Paul Bogart's *Torch Song Trilogy*.³¹ Tenderness is sometimes expressed with ferment, accusations and sharp tongues. More than words, love is encountered through her mother's breath on Kwok Chan when she was stirring the flour with a spatula and her arm hanging over Kwok Chan in bed.

As if the warm couch of a mother kangaroo can rival a giraffe's neck!

In *Torch Song Trilogy*, there was a scene between Arnold and his mother where her mother accused Arnold of hiding secrets from her. Arnold did not tell his mother that his lover, Alan, died from a gay-bashing incident. He also did not inform her that he adopted a gay youth, David.

"You cheated me out of your life!" Arnold's mother yelled.

I wonder, does Kwok Chan feel the same? What would disclosure mean? Coming back to an earlier question, maybe it does matter for her mother to know what she does for a living or who she desires. Maybe it would speak of a kind of love that would bring schisms together. Ruptures might have been imagined and secrets might not be secrets after all.

Still, she might have already been exposed. Zero's sudden visit to where she lives might have triggered her mother's suspicions. All it takes is one glance and one gesture.

Parting Words

Chan Kwok Chan dreams of the grandiosity of lesbian desires. Curiously, we know, it could be difficult to arrive at, but not impossible. We just need to carve our own space in hyper-density. Queer desires are to be reckoned at. For Chan Kwok Chan and for us dwellers, gentility may not fit in this city.

I would like to thank Colette Koo, Erica Lam and Wong Chung Ching for their interviews. My gratitude also goes to Olivia Khoo, for her insights and her suggestions to the first draft.

¹ Nicole Brossard (translated by Barbara Godard), *These Our Mothers Or: The Disintegrating Chapter* (Montreal: Coach House Quebec Translations, 1983), 15.

² Ibid.

³ *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong/2002/35mm/87'* Director: Yau Ching Cast: Wong Chung Ching, Erica Lam, Colette Koo, Maria Cordero, Wella Cheung, Fung Manyee. Contact: Ph (852)2792 4697 Internet: <http://members.aol.com/hoyuk> E-mail: yauc@aol.com

⁴ A 'TB' is similar to what we commonly understand as a butch identity in popular gay and lesbian scholarship. The term is used to describe women who appear masculine by wearing men's clothes. A TB is usually expected to date feminine women and would refer them as her 'G'. Recently the term 'TBG' is widely used to denote feminine women who desire tomboys. Being androgynous has a different term: 'PURE.' I have often queried the boundaries between TBs and Female-to-Male transgenders. This area of research remains to be investigated and documented.

⁵ "Ho" in Cantonese denotes "very" and "Yuk" means "movement." When both words are put together, they mean "a strong vibration" or "strong movement."

⁶ For analysis on cybercity economies, read Vincent Mosco's 'Webs of Myth and Power: Connectivity and the New Computer Technopolis' in *The Cybercities Reader*, ed. Stephen Graham (London: Routledge, 2004), 199-204. Urbanist Anne Beamish's 'The City in Cyberspace' in the same edited reader provides discussion on how urban cities are represented in virtual spaces (Graham 2004: 272-278). She argues that online participants create virtual cities in order to be sociable, creative and to develop alternative identities. Using urbanism as a framework, she questions the viability of these virtual cities in the real world and investigates the makings of physical cities.

⁷ See Manuel Castells and Peter Hall, *Technopoles of the World* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁸ Maureen McLane, "'Why Should I Not Speak to You?' The Rhetoric of Intimacy," in *Intimacy*, ed. Lauren Berlant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 435.

⁹ Chris Berry and Fran Martin, "Syncretism and Synchronicity: Queer 'n' Asian Cyberspace in 1990s Taiwan and Korea," in *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, ed. Chris Berry, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 87.

¹⁰ See Olivia Khoo, "Sexing the City: Malaysia's New 'Cyberlaws' and Cyberjaya's Queer Success," in *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia*, ed. Chris Berry, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 222-244.

¹¹ Apart from the Fridae website (www.fridae.com) that is popular among Hong Kong lesbians, gays and queers, websites listed in www.yahoo.com.hk under the category of same-sex relations are often used by those who read and input in Chinese. Some of these websites have their own chatrooms and bulletin board sites. ICQ and www.gaystation.com.hk are still used by many to access other lesbians, gays and queers living in Hong Kong.

¹² See Fred Dewey's "Cyberbanism as a Way of Life" in *The Cybercities Reader*, ed. Stephen Graham (London: Routledge, 2004), 291-295.

¹³ Nina Wakeford's "Gender and Landscapes of Computing in an Internet Café" in *The Cybercities Reader*, ed. Stephen Graham (London: Routledge, 2004), 265.

¹⁴ I have found Josephine Ho's "Self Empowerment and 'Professionalism': Conversations with Taiwanese Sex Workers" in *Sex Work Studies* (Taoyuan: The Center for the Study of Sexualities, 2003) very useful in problematizing certain feminist perspectives on sex work and gender relations. The Center for the Study of Sexualities (<http://sex.ncu.edu.tw>) sited at the National Central University of Taiwan publishes a series of edited volumes on sex work and queer sexualities. For research on the working experiences of Hong Kong's female sex workers, see report published jointly by Zi Teng and the Centre for Social Policy Studies (Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Dr. Travis S.K. Kong) at www.acad.polyu.edu.hk/~sscsp. See a joint publication by Zi Teng and Step Forward Multimedia, titled *Asian Sex Workers' Stories* (2002) and *Sex is Bread and Butter* (1999). Visit www.ziteng.org.hk for more information.

¹⁵ Fran Martin, "Floating City, Floating Selves: Let's Love Hong Kong" in *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong: Script & Critical Essays*, Yau Ching (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Book Store, 2002), 43-49.

¹⁶ There have been very few film and video representations of lesbian desires and sexualities in Hong Kong that are created by lesbians and/or queer women themselves. Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* is the first lesbian feature film. Ching has produced many short videos and short films integrating queer desires, political and social issues, gender issues, sexualities and popular culture. She has written on these issues in magazines, film festival guides and news publications. Apart from Yau Ching, independent video artist Ellen Pau has produced short videos and video installations from the perspective of being a lesbian feminist. I am not only referring to lesbian invisibility in terms of popular representation. Invisibility also applies to lesbian spaces, in particular, gathering spaces for lesbians, bisexuals and queer women to socialize and to access support. Whereas gay spaces are available commercially and on street levels, lesbian gathering spaces tend to be more obscure and located in the apartments or rental floors of commercial buildings. Class and gender differences are crucial in any analysis of lesbian and gay spaces.

¹⁷ On reticence, I am inspired by Ding Naifei and Liu Jen-Peng's article "Reticent Poetics, Queer Politics" in *Working Papers in Gender/Sexuality Studies*, Nos. 3 & 4, September 1998, published by the Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University, Taiwan. Through my conversations with Yau Ching, I came to understand the notion of reticence as possibly violent, especially in the use of reticence as a means to silence lesbian and queer desires in intimate relations as well as within a broader context of social movements.

¹⁸ Linda Holler, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ See Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), Lucetta Kam Yip-Lo "TB Identity" at (http://www.hku.hk/hkcsp/ccex/ehkcss01/issue2_ar_lylk_01.htm), Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madelaine Davis' *Boots of Leather and Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993), TRANS conference proceedings from the Fifth International Super-Slim Conference on Politics of Gender/Sexuality (the Center for the Study of Sexualities, National Central University, Taiwan).

²⁰ See Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel* (New York: Firebrand, 1993) and *Transgender Warriors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). In my struggle to draw emotions (both positive and traumatic feelings) into sexuality theories, I have found Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) very useful. By analyzing trauma discourses in clinical psychology theories and by tracing how trauma is represented in lesbian public cultures (sexual acts, butch-femme discourse, queer transnational publics, incest, AIDS and AIDS activism, grassroots archives), Cvetkovich takes a bold step to connect acute trauma with everyday emotions. *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong* has been criticized as a film that depicts negative emotions (loneliness, isolation, suppressed desires), but I strongly argue that the protagonists demonstrate strength and agency in their survival mechanisms as women, as women with same-sex desires and as women who cross gender

boundaries in Hong Kong. It is by looking at both sides of emotions and everything that falls within the gap can we come to understand desires as complex, contradictory and transient.

²¹ Arlene Stein, *Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 98-99.

²² On poetic notions of space, I have found Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) very thoughtful and insightful. This quote is taken from page 183 in Chapter 8 on Intimate Immensity. In this chapter, he draws on poetry, nature, daydreaming, solitude and tranquility to describe the depth of emotions within ourselves.

²³ Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 202.

²⁵ I found the scenes between Chan's mother and Chan Kwok Chan, and the scene with Chan Kwok Chan putting on face cream as nostalgic partly because the domestic space signifies a form of stillness that is comforting and a past that holds Chan Kwok Chan emotionally intact. I want to clarify that I am not using nostalgia in the usual sense of material things since most certainly, those things and settings are still very much commonplace in working class homes and domestic spaces for people who live on poverty levels.

²⁶ Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Loving in the Stillness of Earthquakes: Ho Yuk – Let's Love Hong Kong", in Yau Ching's *Ho Yuk: Let's Love Hong Kong: Script & Critical Essays* (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Book Store, 2002), 59.

²⁷ I borrow the term from Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 183.

²⁸ Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix, *Mapping Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Map Book, 2000), Chapter 3-12.

²⁹ Properties along new KCR and MTR lines have boasted attractions such as artificial lakes and beaches, Japanese style hot springs, grass plots for growing plants and luxurious spa facilities.

³⁰ Laurent Gutierrez and Valerie Portefaix, *Mapping Hong Kong*, (Hong Kong: Map Book, 2000), Chapter 3-12.

³¹ *Torch Song Trilogy* (dir. Paul Bogart, USA, 120 minutes) features Tony Award-winning actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein as Arnold Beckoff in the film adaptation of the Broadway play *Torch Song Trilogy*. It chronicles Arnold's life as a drag queen, his romantic relationships with a teacher (Brian Kerwin) and a young fashion model (Matthew Broderick) and his decision to adopt a gay youth (Eddie Castrodad). Arnold's relationship with his Jewish mother (Anne Bancroft) is the core of this very emotional and touching story.

Appendix D

Profile of Hong Kong Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, Queer-Friendly Organizations

「關懷愛滋」 AIDS Concern

「關懷愛滋」是一個非牟利的慈善團體，為愛滋病病毒感染者提供支援服務，及為男男性接觸者、性服務行業、中港邊境旅客與弱勢青少年社群提供預防愛滋服務。AIDS Concern is a registered charity that provides support services to people living with AIDS/HIV, and HIV prevention education to men who have sex with men (MSM), cross-border travelers, workers and customers in the local sex industry and out-of-school youth. Website: <http://www.aidsconcern.org.hk/>

國際特赦組織 香港分會 Amnesty International

國際特赦組織是一個以推廣《世界人權宣言》及其他國際人權標準為己任的國際人權組織，目前在全球已有超過一百八十萬會員，其香港分會於一九八二年正式成立。

Amnesty International (AI) is a worldwide human rights movement with over 1.8 million members. We work to promote the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. AI Hong Kong Section became part of the movement since 1982.

Website: <http://www.amnesty.org.hk>

智行 Chi Heng Foundation

『智行』主要服務:同性權益、愛滋防治及資助內地愛滋遺孤學童。

To promote AIDS prevention and eliminate discrimination against minorities, including sexual minorities, through organizing and funding meaningful projects in the Greater China region.

Website: <http://www.chihengfoundation.com/>

性權會 Civil Rights for Sexual Diversities

性權會乃一非政府組織，為性異議人士爭取權益，特別因其性傾向／性別認同／性表達及 HIV 狀況而承受到法律及政策上的不公平對待者，皆為服務對象。

Civil Rights for Sexual Diversities is an NGO working for the rights of people who may be disadvantaged by the law, policies and social prejudices in Hong Kong because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual expression and HIV status.

Website: <http://www.cr4sd.org>

「逍遙派」Freemen

「逍遙派」透過藝術、康樂及學術性活動來聯繫各男同志的朋友，並希望彼此能共同建立一個讓同志享有自由及平等的社會環境。

Website: http://freemen_1.tripod.com

Email : hongkongfreemen@sinaman.com

Fruits In Suits

Fruits in Suits is a gay professional, business and social networking private function held every 3rd Tuesday of the month in Hong Kong. Wearing a suit is NOT necessary! For further information email hkfins@yahoo.com or visit <http://www.geocities.com/hkfins>

f' union

f' union 多年來致力於拉闊多元性取向女性的生活空間，讓愛上女人的女人們互相鼓勵支持；透過與傳媒及其他社會人士的正面對話，增加社會人士對同志的認識與了解。本會深信，透過外展教育，才是消除歧視的良方。

Website: <http://hk.geocities.com/funionhk>

Email : funionhk@yahoo.com.hk

GenderConcerns(性? 無別!)

於 2005 年成立,透過每星期兩晚的熱線服務及互聯網絡為任何對性與性別有疑問的人士而設。我們有社工或研究有關心理學的人士願意為您解答有關問題。一切資料,絕對保密。

Website: <http://www.genderconcerns.org/>

Email: genderconcerns@yahoo.com.hk

「基恩之家」 Hong Kong Blessed Minority Christian Fellowship

一個不論宗派及性取向，真正歡迎所有人的基督信仰教會。

A Christian Church that truly welcomes everybody disregarding your sexual orientation or denomination.

Website: www.bmcf.org.hk

Email: blessedminority@mail.hongkong.com

香港十分一會 The Hong Kong 10% Club

香港十分一會 Hong Kong Ten Percent Club

成立於 1986 年，是首個正式註冊的本地同志組織，現主力同志平權教育 established in 1986 as the first registered local Tongzhi group, actively advocating and providing equal rights education

Email: hk10news@yahoogroups.com.hk

啓同服務社 Horizons

以性傾向為服務主題的機構，提供熱線輔導，轉介及相關資料。

Provides information, reference, education, counseling and referrals concerning sexual orientation and gender identity issues in Hong Kong. Provides support services to family members and friends of sexual minority people.

Website: <http://www.horizons.org.hk>

Email: horizons_tongzhi@mail.hongkong.com

女同學社 Nutongxueshe

女同學社為一性別文化研究社，由七位創校同學創立，於 2005 年 9 月 1 日正式開學，服務對象包括同性戀/雙性戀/跨性別社群及其家人等。本社旨在進行學術研習、透過網站發表文章，舉辦工作

坊、研討會及其他文化教育活動音等，致力在同志社群內外推動自學互學，鼓勵同志發表心聲及生活故事，展現香港同志的立體多元面貌。

Website: www.leslovestudy.com

Email: contact@leslovestudy.com

姊妹同志 Queer Sisters

促進女性對自身的性權意識，與及在各方面爭取女性的性權。

Queer Sisters is a non-government organization (NGO) advocating for human and women's right, and has been offering hotline services and community education in Hong Kong since 1995.

Website: <http://www.qs.org.hk/>

E-mail: qs@qs.org.hk

香港彩虹 Rainbow of Hong Kong

宣揚平等機會意識，推廣性教育。改善基層的生活空間及質素。以義工發掘的社區需要為本，並與之籌辦多元化的服務和活動。

Website: <http://www.rainbowofhk.org/>

Email: rainbowofhk@hotmail.com

同志健康促進會 The Satsanga

We serve mainly the gay and lesbian and related populations in Hong Kong.

Our missions: to convey correct messages about same-sex love and to work hand in hand with comrades to develop a healthy way of living.

本會的服務對象主要是本地同性戀及有關人士。本會旨在傳遞有關同性愛的正確信息；以及和有志之士攜手合作，開拓健康的生命之道。

Website: <http://www.satsanga.org/>

Email: info@satsanga.org

TEAM - Hong Kong Transgender Equality and Acceptance Movement

A local organization set up in 2002 to allow transgendered/transsexual folk to meet and discuss issues of interest. We are particularly interested in equal rights for the TS community and seek equality in such things as ID documents and relationships. Mutual support and discrimination cancellation is our goal.

Website: <http://www.teamhk.org>

Email: enquiry@teamhk.org

香港女同盟會 Women Coalition of Hong Kong SAR

香港女同盟會旨在從女性性小眾的角度出發，致力捍衛性小眾人權、消除因性傾向及性別身份的歧視及壓迫。

Women Coalition of HKSAR aims to defend the human rights of sexuality minorities facing discrimination due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Website: <http://www.wchk.org>

Email: email@wchk.org