

## Copyright Undertaking

This thesis is protected by copyright, with all rights reserved.

**By reading and using the thesis, the reader understands and agrees to the following terms:**

1. The reader will abide by the rules and legal ordinances governing copyright regarding the use of the thesis.
2. The reader will use the thesis for the purpose of research or private study only and not for distribution or further reproduction or any other purpose.
3. The reader agrees to indemnify and hold the University harmless from and against any loss, damage, cost, liability or expenses arising from copyright infringement or unauthorized usage.

### IMPORTANT

If you have reasons to believe that any materials in this thesis are deemed not suitable to be distributed in this form, or a copyright owner having difficulty with the material being included in our database, please contact [lbsys@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:lbsys@polyu.edu.hk) providing details. The Library will look into your claim and consider taking remedial action upon receipt of the written requests.

**MASCULINITIES AT RISK? LIFE EXPERIENCES  
OF EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT  
AMONG WORKING-CLASS MEN IN HONG KONG**

**TAM KIN YUEN**

**Ph.D**

**The Hong Kong  
Polytechnic University**

**2013**

**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**  
**Department of Applied Social Sciences**

**Masculinities at Risk? Life Experiences of  
Employment and Unemployment among  
Working-class Men in Hong Kong**

**Tam Kin Yuen**

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

**December 2012**

### **Certificate of Originality**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signed

TAM Kin Yuen Name of Student

## **Abstract**

Although men as a group enjoy the structural benefits in our society, not all men are enjoying the structural benefits especially for a group of working-class men who are situated in a marginalized position. Even though working-class men find it difficult to maintain a stable job, work is still reported important in their life. To find out how men's work is important in influencing other aspects of life, this study has a dual focus. Firstly, it explores the ways employment and unemployment are affecting men's masculine identities. Secondly, it highlights the ways men construct their masculinity in relation to work. In exploring these issues, the study draws on insights from the literatures on masculinities especially on the typologies of masculinity, gender relations, men's breadwinner roles, fatherhood, men's gender habitus and capital theory. This study contributes to the knowledge in the fields of the interrelationship among Chinese working-class men's work, family life and social life. The knowledge is derived from the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the stories of nine informants living in Hong Kong. The findings of the study suggest that working-class men place specific importance to work in constructing their masculinity. When they experience unemployment, they try various ways to enhance their employability. They are holding a traditional belief in masculinity and that work means everything in their life, and they see that unemployment emasculates their masculinity. Men's work has also affected their beliefs and behaviours in family and social life. These men demonstrate that they are holding a traditional outlook of

masculinity, and they tend to emphasize their breadwinner status in household and they are instrumental in social relationship. Although the findings suggest that these working-class men are holding a traditional masculinity, they are constructing an alternative masculinity which is shaped by their experiences and responses to the challenges they are encountering and the specific Chinese context they are situating. Findings in this study also shed light on the implications of social policy and social services for men.

## **Acknowledgements**

There are several people whom I would like to thank for the assistance they have given me in preparing this thesis. First, I have to thank my supervisor Dr. Chan Kam Wah for his inspiration and support since the beginning. I am grateful that Dr. Chan has been supporting me throughout the process, his words are encouraging, his ideas are inspiring and critical. All these have assisted me to go through the long process of writing this thesis. Dr. Chan is also the one who encouraged me to start my career in University and his advice benefits me a lot. I still remember that the first day I met him, I handed him only a four-page document consisting of my initial ideas on the topic. Without his encouragement and guidance, this thesis would not come into being.

There are other colleagues in the University I would like to thank, they are Dr. Chan Yuk Chung, Dr. David Ip, Dr. Patrick Law, Dr. Cheng Chung Tai, Dr Shae Wan Chaw, Dr. Ben Ku, Dr. William Chu, Dr. James Lee, Dr. Amy Ho, Dr. May Tam, Dr. Lee Tsor Kiu, Dr. Leung Chi Yuen, Dr. Fernando Cheung, Dr. Syrine Lam and Mr. Kenneth Lo. All of them have given me support and have exchanged their ideas with me. I have learnt much from them.

Two other very important persons have also been with me all through the journey, without their support, I might not be able to complete this journey. They are my wife Louisa and my son Chi Hang. When I first started the journey, Chi Hang was still studying in kindergarten. He is now eleven years old. Looking at him, I feel that I am growing with him, and this

is encouraging. Although I try to balance among the various aspects in family, study and work, it is not easy for me to spend meaningful time with him. Louisa is a wonderful wife, not only because she could take care of Chi Hang on her own when I started my writing, she has kept reminding me the timeline I have to meet. On the other hand, she also reminded me the importance of resting. Whenever I was upset with my progress, Louisa would encourage me. Their support is definitely a force for me to continue the journey.

Lastly, I have to thank the nine male informants who have shared their stories with me. Their stories are important in helping me understand the situation they are experiencing. What I did and what I wrote was an interpretation of their life experience, without their participation, I would not be able to complete this thesis.



## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	xii
List of Appendices	xiii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1. Introduction	1
2. Masculinities at Risk? What are the Risks?	3
2.1 Why Focusing on Working-class Men?	4
2.2 Work and Changing Labour Force Participation	4
2.3 Changing Roles in Family	9
2.4 Men's Social Life	11
3. Research Questions	13
4. Structure of the Thesis	14
Chapter Two: Masculinity, Employment and Men's Life	16
1. Men's Experience in Work, Family and Social Life	17
1.1 Men's Commitment in Work	17
1.2 Men and Family	19
1.3 Men and Social Life	24
1.4 Men's Work, Family and Social Life	25
2. Theory of Masculinities	27
2.1 Are Masculinities Socially and Culturally Constructed?	27

2.2 Masculinity or Masculinities	32
2.3 Hegemonic Masculinity and Power	35
2.4 Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity	40
2.5 Chinese Masculinity	44
2.6 Men and Class	47
3. Habitus, Capital and Men	50
3.1 Men and Habitus	50
3.2 Men and Capital	53
4. Reconceptualizing Work	56
4.1 Concepts of the Breadwinning Role	56
4.2 Men and Work	58
4.3 Men and Post-work Society	63
4.4 Impact of Unemployment	66
5. Framework of Analysis	67
 Chapter Three: Research Methods	 70
1. Introduction	70
2. Rationale for Using Constructivist Paradigm	71
3. Use of Qualitative Research Methods	75
4. The Informants	78
4.1 Overview of the Informants	78
4.2 Recruiting the Informants	80
5. Logistics of the Interviews	82
6. Content of Interview	84
7. Issues Arising from Interviewing Men	85

7.1 Considerations on the Masculine Self	85
7.2 The Power of Interviewer and the Informants	87
8. Analysis of Data	89
8.1 Organization of Data	89
8.2 Analysis of Narratives	90
 Chapter Four: Men and Work	 93
1. Introduction	93
2. Informants and Their Work	94
2.1 Work History of the Informants	94
2.2 Mid Age and Poor Health as Hindrance to Look for New Jobs	102
2.3 Restricting Job Opportunities Due to Limited Education	104
3. Creating a Meaning to Work	109
3.1 Dignity	110
3.2 Capability	112
3.3 Responsibility	116
3.4 Sense of Achievement	118
3.5 “To have work is to make a living”	120
4. Differentiating Paid Work from Volunteer Work	125
5. Adopting a Work First Principle	130
6. Views on Women’s Work	137
7. Living on Welfare	146
8. Discussion	151

Chapter Five: Men and Family	156
1. Introduction	156
2. Responsibilities in Fatherhood	159
2.1 Supporting the Family Financially	160
2.2 Being There	166
2.3 Teaching and Shaping Values	169
2.4 Care Giving and Physical Interaction	175
3. Constructing a Division of Household Labour	180
4. Making Decision in the Family	185
5. Maintaining Family Bonds	188
5.1 Engaging in Family Gatherings	189
5.2 Taking Care of Family Members	190
6. Making Sense of Family and Fatherhood	193
7. Decline of the Male Breadwinner Image	199
8. Discussion	205
 Chapter Six: Men and Social Experience	 212
1. Introduction	212
2. Friendship and Social Networks	213
2.1 Maintaining Friendship	213
2.2 Changing Friendship Resulted from Unemployment	216
2.3 Sensing the Importance of Social Network	221
3. Sense of Brotherhood	226
4. Men and Health	229

4.1 Employment and Health Issues	229
4.2 Deteriorating Health conditions and Daily Life	230
4.3 Overlooking Risks to Health	234
5. Doing Gender in Everyday Life	236
5.1 What a Man Should Be	237
5.2 Formulating an Alternative Masculinity	248
6. Discussion	257
 Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications	262
1. Introduction	262
2. Research Questions Revisited	263
3. Men's Work and the Negligence of Family Life	268
4. Men's Work and Social Life	272
5. Implications of the Study	274
5.1 Understanding the Diversity of Working-class Men in Hong Kong	274
5.2 Implications for Theoretical Discussions	277
5.3 Implications on Social Policy and Social Service	281
5.4 Limitations and Implications for Future Research	288
 Tables	293
 Appendices	295
 References	302

## **List of Tables**

Table 1	Labour Force and Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPRs) by Sex In 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2011	293
Table 2	Unemployment Rate by Sex and Age (40 and over) in 1982, 1992, 2002, 2007, 2011	293
Table 3	Underemployment Rate by Industry from 2008 to 2011	294
Table 4	Unemployment Rate by Previous Industry from 2008 to 2011	294

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix One	The Interview Guide	295
Appendix Two	Brief Description of the Informants	297
Appendix Three	Consent Form	300

## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1. Introduction**

The traditional male breadwinner model prescribes that men should go out to work and to make a living for their families. In such a model, men are also expected to take the financial responsibility for all family members. Pascall (1997) further describes that the role of men as breadwinners has pinpointed men's responsibilities and has legitimated men's patriarchal position. Such a position enables men to enjoy the social privilege not only because of their economic contribution, but simply because they are 'men'.

Paid employment which enables a person to earn wages is, therefore, a means for men to go into the public sphere and to maintain the family's living. Paid employment then, is considered important in sustaining the traditional masculine identities of men (Morgan, 1992), and, as such men are brought up to identify themselves with work (Seidler, 2010).

Unemployment, on the contrary, deprives a person of the ability to earn wages, and therefore hinders men's ability to earn a living for their families. Unemployment also implies that men have no work place to go to.

Unemployment therefore, affects how and where men spend their time (Morgan, 1992). Undermining the ability to provide a living for the families and affecting men's use of time, unemployment is challenging the traditional masculine identities of men (Willott & Griffin, 1996). While most of the studies on men's masculine identities are done in Western societies,



there is a need to investigate how employment and unemployment are affecting the masculine identities of men in the Chinese context. As such, this study has focused on investigating the lived experience of employment and unemployment among men in order to understand how they construct their masculine identities as well as to reconstruct an alternative meaning of masculinity in relation to work.

In studying a man's lived experience, the focus is on one's subjectivity, as well as the "physical, political, and historical context of that experience" (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992: 1). Lived experience is also seen as "an interpretive rather than a causal story" (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992: 5). An interpretative story should have the capacity in "embracing the power of language to make new and different things possible" and to "recounts improvisations, changes, contradictions, ambiguities, and vulnerabilities" (Bochner, 1990: 5-6).

The goal of studying subjectivity is to arrive at an understanding of lived experience that is both "rigorous and imaginative" (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992: 5). We can achieve the goal by rigorously observing an individual's lived experience systematically. In other words, to study subjectivity, we have to blur the distinctions between scientific and humanistic modes of interpretation (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992), and that is to put aside the said objectivity. More importantly, through studying lived experience, we can understand how one interacts with other social structures, and gives meaning to self (Brickell, 2006). As a researcher, what I have done is to interpret the way men construct their masculinity through daily lived experience and the meaning they have given to masculinity.

This introductory chapter will discuss how men's conception of

employment has affected their work life, family life and social life. This description will pave the way for a deeper understanding of the situation working-class men are experiencing. The chapter will then conclude by mapping out the structure of this thesis.

## **2. Masculinities at Risk? What Are the Risks?**

In his book *Cultures of Masculinity*, Tim Edwards (2006) raises several areas of concern that are related to the crisis men are experiencing nowadays. These include work, education, family, health, sexuality, crime, and representation. In concluding whether or not men experience crisis, Edwards (2006) argues that the said crisis is based on an outdated understanding of the roles of men, and that the burden of misunderstanding is not shared evenly among men. Edwards explains that men of different social classes, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds may experience crisis at different levels. It is, therefore, significant to address diversity among men, and thus, not all men share the same riches and resources. Working-class men are considered to be the group of men who do not enjoy the riches and the resources that men of higher social classes are enjoying. Instead of covering all the areas suggested by Edwards (2006), I have focused on certain areas that are considered to have the greatest effect on working-class men's masculine identities. As I have mentioned in the previous section, these are work, family life and social experience. In this section, I will sketch the general phenomenon that working-class men are experiencing in relation to these three areas.

## **2.1 Why Focus on Working-class Men?**

The focus of this research is on working-class men, and that as will be seen in the coming sections, working-class men represent a sub-group of men who may not enjoy the structural privileges that men enjoy as a whole. They also represent a group of men who do not have as many forms of capital as men with higher socio-economic status. Working-class men are predominantly working in jobs that require manual skills where physical labour is especially emphasized. This differs from the middle-class men in that they are not required to use much physical labour in their work. Instead, middle-class men are required to use their knowledge either in technology or in management to handle their work. It is becoming prevalent to use this knowledge in most industries, something that many working-class men lack. When talking about the work that working-class men are occupying, it is important to consider that these are jobs but not careers. In addition, as will be illustrated in the next section, with the restructuring of the economy, the manual-skilled jobs that working-class men have dominated are becoming fewer, and this has limited the job opportunities of the working-class men. If work is important to a man's masculinity, limiting one's job opportunity will have an adverse influence on a man's masculine identity, and this will at the same time affect one's position in the family and other aspects of life.

## **2.2 Work and Changing Labour Force Participation**

Work has always been considered a man's sphere, especially for those men who are considering themselves as the breadwinner in the family. In Western society, men are dominant in the public sphere of

employment, whereas women are staying in the private sphere of domestic and caring work (Crompton, 2006). In a Chinese society, this form of division of labour is also a common social practice. Actually, not all men are able to earn a wage that is sufficient for the living of the family. It is rather common that women have to take on part of the breadwinning responsibility. Such changing social structure is challenging the traditional Chinese gender division of labour as the traditional dichotomous division of labour in a household was “public men, private women (*nán zhǔ wài, nǚ zhǔ nèi*)” (Lu, Maume & Bellas, 2000). This traditional belief describes the division of labour in a Chinese household. Chinese men are supposed to participate in labour force in the public sphere while women are to be responsible for the caring work in the private sphere, and that is the household. However, as the economy is going through a restructuring process, the proportional participation rates in the labour force in the past thirty years show a notable increase in women’s participation rates and a dramatic decrease in men’s labour force participation rates. With the change in labour force participation, it is questionable whether or not the traditional male provider role can still be sustained.

Statistics show that both men’s and women’s populations in labour force participation were gradually increasing in these thirty years. Men’s labour force participation has increased from 1,600,300 in 1982 to 1,942,700 in 2011 (Table 1). The comparable figures in the same years for women were 897,800 and 1,760,000 (Table 1). Even though men’s labour force population has increased, the participation rate has decreased from 81.3% to 68.4% (Table 1) in these thirty years. Men’s employment decline is also noticed in other western countries since the 1980s (Juhn, 1992;

Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003; Nixon, 2006, 2009). Juhn (1992) and Nixon (2009) argue that the pattern in the decline in men's labour market participation is mostly concentrated among those who are less-educated and low-earning. It is further argued that there is a growing tendency that job market opportunities are declining for the less-skilled male workers (Nixon, 2006, 2009), and that men's declining labour market participation is in line with their wage decline (Juhn, 1992).

At the same time, the women's labour force participation rate has increased from 47.5% to 53% (Table 1) during the same period in Hong Kong. Juhn (1992), in his study, also notices a rising trend in women's labour market participation in western countries. Nixon (2006, 2009) argues that the trend in the change in employment structure is related to de-industrialization, the decline of manufacturing industries, and the increase in service work. He argues that male manual workers have traditionally dominated employment in heavy industries, but that, the growth of the service sector has led to an increasing demand for female workers. Nixon (2006, 2009) also finds that male manual skill workers and those with few skills and lower education attainment are more likely to face unemployment. The studies of Juhn (1992) and Nixon (2006, 2009) suggest that working-class men are encountering a less favorable situation under economic restructuring.

Local studies also show that Hong Kong has been experiencing economic restructuring since the 1980s; de-industrialization has taken place, and there is an obvious growth in the service economy (Chiu and Lui, 2004; Lee et al., 2007).

Instead of working full-time, quite a number of working-class men are

working as part-time employees. The largest proportion of male part-time employees in the second quarter of 2005 and 2009 were engaged in the construction sector, where the percentages were 82% and 31.4% respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2006, 2010). It seemed that there was a sharp decrease in the number of part-time employees in the industry mainly occupied by men. Instead many of the part-time employees working in certain industries are forced to change their employment status to become self-employed. The Census and Statistics Department (2012) reveals that 96% of the self-employed were previously employed. Self-employed persons can be referred to as those whose main employment is to work for profit in their own business and are not employed by someone else (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). This definition cannot represent clearly those who are forced to change their employment status to self-employed. Women are dominating in part-time employment, with 64.4% part-time employees are women in 2009, while men are dominating in self-employment, as 73% of the self-employed persons are men (Census and Statistics Department, 2012).

The above discussion shows that the alteration in the gendered labour force participation rate has resulted in narrowing the difference between the male and female population in labour force participation. The increase of women's engagement in paid employment has challenged the traditional male breadwinner model. Thus, the 'sex-based constitution' of the labour force is changing (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003), and has led to the transformation to an adult-worker model (Lewis, 2001). However, this is not to suggest that women enjoy advantages in this labour market.

Though it seems that women have more chances in this service economy, the salaries women are able to get are still at a low level, and the jobs they are occupying are mainly low-skilled service jobs, which are predominantly part-time jobs.

Apart from the declining men's labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate is another indicator showing the erosion of the male breadwinner model. Men's unemployment rate in 1982 was 4.5%, and in 2003 was 9.2%, and the percentage dropped to 4% in 2011 (Table 2). Women's unemployment rates in the same periods were 3.1%, 6.2% and 2.8% (Table 2) respectively. Although there is not a remarkable difference in the unemployment rates between men and women, with the change in the nature of job market, men are less able to find a job than women are (Juhn, 1992; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Nixon, 2006, 2009). From government statistics, industries that working-class men are engaged in, have seen a fall in labour force participation. Industries such as construction, manufacturing and transportation have a recorded percentage of 7.6%, 1.3% and 2.2% underemployment rate in 2011 (Table 3), while the overall underemployment rate is 1.7% in the same year (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Unemployment rates in the same industries have a recorded percentage of 5.6%, 4% and 3% (Table 4). The overall unemployment rate in all industries in 2011 is 3.4% (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). These figures indicate that as the industries in which working-class men are more likely to be engaged in are dropping in their employment rate, working-class men are more likely to experience underemployment and unemployment.

The changes in the increasing labour force participation of women

and the increasing unemployment among men challenge the patriarchal assumptions of men as breadwinners (Giddens, 1991). With this change in labour force, as in the argument of Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003), the 'feminization of work' has taken place. Employers are increasingly hiring women because costs of employing women as part-time, temporary, and casual workers are lower than employing men as full-time employees. Chiu, So and Tam (2008), in their study, have found that the employment pattern in Hong Kong is employer-driven, and that there is a trend in the increase of part-time employment, irregular working-hour employment, and temporary employment. Such flexible employment patterns have become prevalent in Hong Kong. One of the implications of this trend is that there is a gendered difference in the level of wages. Women are more likely to engage in these types of employment because they may find the flexibility in employment enables them to take care of the family. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) further argue that with the changing nature of work, men's position in society is also changing. The increasing rates of employment for women in comparing to the overall drop in men's labour force participation have led to the decline of the male breadwinner model (Warren, 2007). Warren (2007) also states that such decline is supplemented by the end of secure, full-time jobs for many groups of men.

### **2.3 Changing Roles in the Family**

Apart from the increasing numbers of women entering the labour market, Lewis (2001) articulated that family change was another factor for the decline of the male breadwinner model. Lewis (2001) argued that "family breakdown, more fluidity in intimate relationships, and a large



increase in single-person households, has also contributed to the erosion of the male breadwinner model at the behavioral level” (Lewis, 2001: 153). As discussed previously, the shift to the adult-worker model is another factor leading to the decline of the male breadwinner model. Whether working part-time or full time, there is an increasing number of women participating in the labour market. A reason for this is caused by the erosion of family wage. Men may not be the main provider for the family, and women have to enter the labour market to share the breadwinning responsibility. Another reason for the formation of the adult-worker model is the trend toward individualization (Lewis, 2001). Both men and women are looking for economic independence from their respective partners, and thus more women entering the labour market. Even though women have participated in paid work, however, they still perform the unpaid care work. Therefore, the gender division of labour in caring duties has not changed significantly (Lewis, 2001).

In considering the changing gender relations, Crompton (1999) has suggested variations in the gendered division of labour. These variations are arranged according to the possible transformations in gender relations. The arrangements ranged from the traditional male breadwinner/ female carer model, dual earner/ female part-time carer model to the less traditional dual earner/ dual carer model (Crompton, 1999). It is observed that the traditional model is one that can protect patriarchy but it is the least gender equal. While the dual earner/ dual carer model is considered as one promotes gender equality; disrupting men’s patriarchal privileges. These arrangements show that gender relations have been changing with reference to economic and social changes. Crompton’s model is useful in

understanding how gender relations change. Changing women's labour force participation would inevitably affect the traditional gender relations, and this would also affect men's breadwinning role in a household.

In addition to the changing family structure and work pattern, fathering is another aspect that may frustrate men. In addition to fulfilling the role to provide for the family, men are also expected to spend more time to take care of the children, and most of the time, men do spend time in playing with children but not necessarily taking up the caring duty. Arrighi and Maume (2000) argue that the expectation of men's increased participation in caring duties has been conflicting with their perceived role as a breadwinner. They also suggest that when men's masculinities are challenged in the workplace, they will cease to commit more time in household duties.

## **2.4 Men's Social Life**

Men's social life is always considered to be more instrumental than their female counterparts (Walker, 1994b). Women are described as more emotionally involved in a relationship and are more eager to engage in expressive interaction. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as emotionally unexpressive, and are more likely to engage in health risking activities. Men's behaviours in social life, especially friendship, have been described as closely related to performing their masculinities, and that such behaviours are to be matched with the socially expected masculine behaviours (Migliaccio, 2009). This means that men have to present themselves to be tough, not worry about being hurt, able to take control of one's life, and are more likely to share activities than to emphasize

expressiveness in interaction. As such, men are not keen to develop intimacy with others, as developing intimacy is associated with abnormal male behavior (Walker, 1994b).

Studies show that in western societies, men of different classes will define meanings and functions of friendship in different ways (Walker, 1995). Working-class men do consider that friends should be able to provide needed material and services, and they rely on friends to get information for paid employment. Reciprocity is stressed as a good friendship pattern among working-class men. Working-class men like to meet their friends in public spaces, and such activity has financial implications. Whereas according to Walker (1995), middle-class men are more financially independent, and will share leisure with their friends. In addition to dining outside, they also have shared activities like going on trips, to concerts or other forms of cultural activities. All these activities allow them to gain access to and accumulate their cultural capital, and to reaffirm their middle-class status (Walker, 1995).

Given the difference of friendship and social life between working- and middle-class men and the instrumental nature of friendship among working-class men, it is assumed that if working-class men are unable to secure themselves with paid employment, they will be unable to spend leisure time with their friends in public spaces, and that they will be unable to treat their friends in kind if they have received material or financial assistance from others.

This section has aimed at depicting the risks that men, especially working-class men, are experiencing. Such risks can be observed from the areas of work, family, and social life that have been discussed. Discussion

so far supported the argument that paid work is important to men in maintaining their expected social roles, privileges in the family and their social life. The argument of paid work is central to a man's masculine identity and is also the focus of this thesis. Whether a man has paid work or not seems to affect his status in the family and in society.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study examines the lived experience of working-class men, and develops an understanding of the relationship between working-class men's status of employment, masculine identities, and perspectives on work. The overarching research questions are therefore:

***In what ways are the experiences of employment and unemployment affecting the masculine identities of men? And, how do men construct their masculine identities in relation to work?***

To answer these main questions, four objectives will be used to explore the topic in greater depth.

- i. To find out in what ways the experience of employment and unemployment affect working-class men's life;
- ii. To reveal in what ways working-class men locate themselves in relation to the discourse of masculinities;
- iii. To understand how working-class men construct their masculinity;
- iv. To deconstruct the meaning of masculinities in relation to work.

In addition to the status of employment, there might be some other

aspects that are affecting how a man constructs his masculine identity. Answering these questions will help open up discussions on the interactive aspects in the relationship between men and work, masculinity and other aspects of life. If men are able to change their views on masculinities, they may expand their choices and life chances.

#### **4. Structure of the Thesis**

The central focus of this thesis is on paid employment and masculinities, in Chapter 2, the relations between these two aspects according to theories on masculinities will be discussed. Chapter 2 therefore, is the foundation of the discussions in the three analytical chapters which follow the chapter on research methodology.

The first analytical chapter deals with men and work. The analysis in this chapter is crucial in understanding how men construct their masculinities in relation to work. In this chapter, areas such as men's health conditions and work, how men construct the meaning to work, in what way men differentiate paid work from volunteer work, and their views on living on welfare are covered. The second analytical chapter focuses on men and their family life. In this chapter, issues of men's role as a breadwinner and as a care giver are discussed; this leads to the discussion of whether working-class men are unwilling to relinquish their breadwinner status. The third analytical chapter discusses the social experience of the working-class men, issues in relation to men's friendship, other forms of social network, and the way they perceive what a man should be.

In the concluding chapter, the main findings of the study will be

examined in relation to the discussion among men, work, family and social experience, in order to explain how the interactions of these aspects have affected working-class men's construction of masculinity. Implications of this study, suggestions for future research and the limitations of this study are also covered in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Two**

### **MASCULINITY, EMPLOYMENT AND MEN'S LIFE**

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the relationships between men, masculinity, paid employment and life in general. First, I examine the various studies on men and employment issues. These studies inform why paid employment is always considered important to men. Next, I discuss the concepts of masculinity, among which, I have used as a foundation, Connell's (1995, 2002a, 2005) theories of masculinities and the dimensions of gender relations in examining the various forms of masculine identities. Such discussion is important in understanding the masculine identities working-class men possess and their relations with dominant masculinity. Men's social class and Bourdieu's theories of habitus and capital will be covered in the later part of this chapter. By including these themes in the discussion, I am able to map out why men of various social classes are adhering to expected social roles. The discussion can as well clarify the forms of capital working-class men are possessing and this can give insights on why men are unwilling to relinquish their breadwinner status. In the final part of the chapter, the concepts of breadwinning and work will be discussed. As Lewis (2001) has argued, the changing employment pattern has been one of the reasons leading to the decline of the male breadwinner model in western societies. This position will be linked with the rationale that paid work is a blessing to some men.

## **1. Men's Experience in Work, Family and Social Life**

This research has focused on the life experiences of working-class men, and thus, discussion in this section will deal with men's experience in work and other aspects of life. Work experience is important in formulating a man's masculinity, and it influences the various aspects in a man's life. This section will examine the previous studies that have covered the three specific aspects of men's life – work, family, and social life. To begin with, the aspects of men and work will be discussed.

### **1.1 Men's Commitment in Work**

A number of studies have addressed the relationship between men and work, and with an emphasis on how the status of work has affected a man's masculinity. In studying the masculinity of a group of Peruvian men, Fuller (2001) suggests that work is a key dimension in a man's life, and that work represents different things at various stages throughout. For the younger generation, work represents autonomy, while for married men, work means capability, supporting the family, and accumulating one's respect from others. In Fuller's interpretation, work does not carry fixed meaning, but it is crucial to men as work creates a masculine space for men (Fuller, 2001: 111).

In their study of working-class men, Willott and Griffin (1996) interviewed a group of adult working-class men who had been long-term unemployed in West Midlands in the UK. The purpose of their study was to explore the relationship between long-term unemployment and masculinities. They find that long-term unemployment emasculates "the basis of hegemonic forms of masculinity" (Willot and Griffin, 1996: 89). But,



the informants in their study resist feeling powerless and commit themselves to casual work, so as to re-establish their masculine identities. Their study also indicates that unemployment does not necessarily lead to shared household responsibilities or a shift towards “more pro-feminist alternatives” (Willott and Griffin, 1996: 90). The study demonstrates that men, especially the working-class men, are not eager to give up their breadwinner role.

Men’s unwillingness to give up their breadwinner role is based on three reasons. First, the breadwinner image offers greater symbolic capital to the group of working-class men and this may be the only type of capital to which they can access. Second, no one could guarantee that they can resume their breadwinner image in the future. Third, the limited availability of capital and the type of capital available reduced the tendency to change. Willott and Griffin (2004) suggest that working-class men are unwilling to relinquish their breadwinner role because they consider the breadwinner role as a form of symbolic capital and a social status for them.

In the previous section, I have argued that with the re-structuring of the economy and the increase in the service industry, working-class men are encountering limited chances to get employment. Based on interviews with 35 unemployed low-skilled men in the UK, Nixon (2009) argues that the male informants in his study show reluctance to shift to service work. He argues that working-class men have embodied a masculine way of behaving and belief in their manual work, and they find it difficult to adjust to emotional labour and service work. Even if they have to enter the service industry, they still tend to join driving work and security work which are male-dominated. Nixon has used Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to

argue that “class and gender are internalized in the subconscious as dispositions to act or think in particular ways” (Nixon, 2009: 310). As British working-class men have internalized their perceived gender identities, Nixon (2009) argues that change is not an easy process, and service work is “antithetical to the male working-class habitus” (Nixon, 2009: 318). Thus, working-class men are not willing to work in service employment sectors. Even if they do, they would choose the jobs that will display less emotional labour and more masculine identities. That is why these men will choose jobs such as security guards, delivery workers, and truck drivers.

## **1.2 Men and Family**

Several local studies have addressed employment issues and men’s gender identities. These studies have indeed pointed out men’s status of employment do affect their household commitment. In researching single fathers’ perspectives on men’s gender role, Chan and Yu (2005) interviewed 10 single fathers in Hong Kong and found that most single fathers had to perform full time child care duties. This results in experiencing conflict in their traditional male gender role and their care giving role. These single fathers still prefer maintaining a breadwinner role.

In a study on men's living situation, the Caritas Community Development Service (2003) surveyed 80 local working-class men, and found that informants perceived ‘good men’ as those providing quality care to the family, being the breadwinner, and having the competence to solve one’s own problems. Men have chosen to perform the traditional male gender roles. When they cannot meet these demands however, they feel

distressed. The way for these men to achieve caring for the family is to make more money for the family.

In a later study, the Caritas Community Development Service (2005) surveyed 100 local working-class men to explore how they define their breadwinning role. Men in the study expressed their identification with the socially constructed breadwinning role for men. Regardless of whether they are capable of earning a living for the family or not, they still choose to maintain the provider role.

Leung and Chan (2012) surveyed 547 men and interviewed 10 men who were living in Hong Kong. Men in their study show that they experience work-family conflicts. This is largely related to men's belief in their role as the family breadwinner but not as the family carer. These responses demonstrate that traditional values towards the division of labour and gender roles remain prevalent. When men are unemployed, their masculinity is challenged, and they worry that they cannot fulfill their responsibility to the family.

Choi and Lee (1997) interviewed 14 Chinese families to explore the basic patterns of housework arrangement, and found that men in these families do not necessarily increase their participation in domestic labour even if their wives are also engaged in paid employment. Men in their study tend to limit themselves to heavy-duty cleaning of electrical appliances or repair work, and women still take on the majority of domestic duties. They argue that men take a more rigid stance in sharing household duties, and they adhere to the traditional gender ideology.

These local studies have reinforced the view that men in Hong Kong are socialized to meet the demands and expectations of their traditional

male breadwinning roles. Once they fail to meet the demands and are unable to take care of the family, they will encounter role conflict. These studies also bring about the argument that men's perception on their familial role is largely related to their breadwinning role and the ability to bring home money. Men in these studies did not talk much about their domestic duties. Family life is however, an important aspect in men's lived experiences, and understanding the domestic duties in which working-class men commit can contribute to the knowledge of how men construct their masculinity.

In addition to the local studies, other overseas studies have also been focusing on men's familial role and the issues of employment. Doucet (2004) studied 70 stay-at-home fathers in Canada with the purpose of exploring how work and family interact for fathers who are ready to earn less and to spend more time with families. Doucet's findings show that although the group of fathers stayed at home, they still maintained their masculine identity by engaging in paid employment or in unpaid community work that was related to traditional masculine interests. The men in Doucet's study demonstrate that they are trying to keep their 'masculine identification' and are attempting to 'carve out their paternal and masculine identities within spaces traditionally considered maternal and feminine' (Doucet, 2004: 293). Even though the fathers in the study try to maintain their masculine identities and to keep distance from femininity, they have inevitably incorporated some aspects of femininity into their caring work. Thus, Doucet argues that the men are 'creating new kinds of masculinities that join together varied configurations of masculinities and femininities' (Doucet, 2004: 293). While some of the fathers are engaging

in unpaid community work, Doucet also suggests that the meanings of work should be reconstructed and expanded. Doucet's arguments have pointed out that men are actively constructing different masculine identities in their daily experience.

Some studies discuss men's views on women's work and whether they will adopt a more egalitarian view on division of household labour. Zuo (1997) has used longitudinal data to examine a group of married men who were living in the USA on their changing beliefs about gender and the impact of men's breadwinner status on men's change in beliefs. Zuo's findings are somewhat different to the findings of Willott and Griffin (1996, 2004). Zuo finds that 'men whose wives are earning income close or equal to theirs are more likely to hold egalitarian beliefs' (Zuo, 1997: 813). In other words, if a man holds a relatively low breadwinner status, as his previously sole breadwinning responsibility is shared by his wife, he is more willing to hold egalitarian beliefs. Zuo argues that by sharing the breadwinning duty with their partners, men can free themselves from "primary economic responsibilities for the family", and can protect them "from an insecure labor market" (Zuo, 1997: 804). Although the men in Zuo's study show their tendencies to let women share their breadwinner role, they want to earn more than their partners, and that they still consider that women should have the primary responsibility for housework. Thus, making money for the family is still a prevalent contribution men think that they should do.

Kan, Sullivan and Gershuny (2011) found that there is an upward trend for men in 20 countries in Western society to increase their time spent on domestic work in the last decade, but men still spend less time in

routine domestic and caring duties. This implies that when doing domestic work, men choose duties that they think are associated with masculinity. In a recent study in Hong Kong, the Women's Commission (2011) found that men do not participate in most of the domestic duties that are traditionally performed by women. Taking care of family members, doing the washing and cleaning duties, and buying family items are still mainly performed by women. The findings in the study review that 70.6 % of the female informants will take care of the children while only 14.8% male informants will participate in this caring task. In addition, the report found that 64% of the women informants will do the cleaning and washing duties, but only 25.9% of the male informants will do similar household duties (Women's Commission, 2011).

In addition to the above discussions, it is noticed that change in family structure is also a challenge to men. As seen from the government statistics, the divorce rate is exhibiting an upward trend. In 1981, the number of divorced cases in Hong Kong was 2,062, whereas in 2001 and 2011, the number of divorce cases had a remarkable increase to 13,425 and 19,597 respectively (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). The increased number of divorce cases has led to the increase of single parent families. In 2011, the number of male single parents was 17, 665 which was around 21.6% of the total number of single parent (Census and Statistics Department, 2012), and there is a rising trend in both male and female single parents. Increase in male single parents means that men have to take on a more active role in domestic work, further challenging men's perceived role in the family.

### **1.3 Men and Social Life**

In a cross-sectional study, Waters and Moore (2002) collected self-completed questionnaires from 201 Australian unemployed men and women. The purpose of their study was to examine the contribution of the factors of financial status, alternate roles, and social supports to the self-esteem of unemployed people. Their study also examined if gender has any effect on the relationship between the three factors and self-esteem. Their findings demonstrated that men's identity is heavily based on the employee role. Unlike women, when men become unemployed, they are less likely to 'expand their identity by engaging in alternate roles' (Waters and Moore, 2002: 182). Waters and Moore (2002) also found that unemployment has a stronger negative association with men's self-esteem than with women's. In addition, unemployed men are less engaged in social support than unemployed women are. Waters and Moore (2002: 184) explain that the action to seek for social support 'reduces masculine competence by demonstrating that the man cannot act independently'. This explains why some men are less eager to seek help when they encounter problems, as such help-seeking behaviour is seen to represent one's weakness and dependence.

In a study examining the self-reported emotional intimacy among same-sex friendships among students at the University of Texas in the USA, Williams (1985) found that male informants reported having a lower level of emotional intimacy in same-sex friendship than female informants did. Williams (1985) suggested that this happens because the traditional gender role expectation compels a man to avoid behaving in an expressive way with their same-sex friends.

In her study on male and female friendships, Walker (1994b) interviewed professional and working-class men and women in the USA, and found that there are specific meanings for men's use of public space to meet friends. Men do not only treat the public space as a place where they can talk about jokes, family and work, they can, at the same time, make use of the occasions to meet friends to ask for services from their friends and to find some jobs in the public space.

Migliaccio (2009) in his study examining men's friendship among a group of male military and teacher informants in the USA finds that men, in general, report to be higher in instrumentality and lower in expressiveness. In other words, men tend to avoid what is perceived as 'the feminine side', and he further argues that in interacting with friends, men are performing their masculinity. This means that they are behaving in the way that they consider will meet the social expectation about how men should behave.

A commonality can be drawn from these studies: in daily interactions, men tend to behave in a socially expected way and that their behaviors reproduce their masculinity. As West and Zimmerman (1987) have commented, the construction of gender identities results from social interaction. In this sense, men are formulating their masculinity in their daily lived experiences.

#### **1.4 Men's Work, Family and Social Life**

Amongst the findings in the studies discussed, one common theme is observed. Men in these studies are not willing to relinquish their traditional masculine identities—having work and not only staying at home. Some will engage in paid employment, but in the form of casual work (Doucet, 2004;



Willott and Griffin, 1996). Some will engage in unpaid community work which is still related to male interests (Doucet, 2004). Some choose not to take action to seek help because they are afraid that such behaviour implies that they are lacking the competence to handle problems on their own (Waters and Moore, 2002). The findings of these studies have demonstrated that employment, breadwinning responsibility, and masculine identities are interwoven.

The studies cited (Willot and Griffin, 1996, 2004; Fuller, 2001; Nixon, 2006, 2009; Leung and Chan, 2012) provide the support that men's gender identities are largely developed from work. Whether men are occupied in paid employment or in community work, they still choose to work on something that is related to traditional masculine identities. When taking care of their family members however, men will inevitably incorporate some aspects of femininity (Doucet, 2004). Thus, it is reasonable to question if masculinity can only be displayed in paid work, and if only paid work should be defined as work.

Work is fundamental to a working-class man's life, and as can be seen from the cited studies, work is important in sustaining a man's breadwinning role, and this is men's expected contribution to the family. Therefore, when relating to family, working-class men tend to fulfill the expected breadwinning role first, while other aspects in family life are neglected. Men's social life faces similar situations as men tend to focus on the instrumental aspects while emotional expressiveness is undermined. Seidler (2010) argues that work is supposed to give meaning to life, but men are brought up to identify themselves with their work rather than on their needs and wants. Working-class men can develop other

interests and other forms of relationships in life, but they are dominated by their work and have to struggle to work to earn a wage. These studies demonstrate that men, especially working-class men, treat meeting with friends as informal resources to look for jobs. If men are not able to have any social activities in public spaces, they are limited in their chances to gain access to jobs.

The present research in studying the lived experience of working-class men in Hong Kong has explored the subjective experience of this group of men. This study contributes to filling the gap in existing literature in that the majority of studies in relation to work and masculinities are located within a western cultural context. By listening to men's narratives, the current study is an attempt to look into aspects of working-class men's life with the emphasis on the interactions of work and aspects of family life and social life.

## **2. Theories of Masculinities**

### **2.1 Are Masculinities Socially and Culturally Constructed?**

A fundamental debate on the shaping of masculinities has been split into two perspectives—"nature" and "nurture" (Connell, 1995). As an attempt to retreat from feminism, essentialists insist on the nature and instinct of men and women, and argue that masculine identity is acquired naturally. Essentialists propose that biological sex determines one's behaviour (Cheng, 1999). With this position, essentialists believe that only men are able to perform masculinity, while femininity can only be performed by women. In the essentialists' perspective, men are to comply with some naturally acquired roles and behaviours. Men must perform in

specific ways so as to demonstrate their masculinity, and the attributes of real masculinity are always linked with risk-taking, aggressiveness, dominance and getting rid of the association with femininity. In other words, there is no difference among real men, as real men should behave in the same way. Therefore, the masculinity of men who are unable to perform the socially expected roles and behaviours will be questioned. Schwalbe (1996) argues that essentialists treat “gender, masculinity, and the category ‘men’ as if they were primitive constituents of the universe” (Schwalbe, 1996: 66) rather than social constructs. With the stance that masculinities are naturally acquired, essentialists contradict the works of social scientific research on the social construction of gender (Messner, 1997); especially that gender identities should not be limited to the bi-polar male-female categorization.

Although masculinity is considered as a man’s gender identity, this is not naturally acquired. Gender identity is an attributed gendered self-image, and such identity develops in relations to one’s experiences in social interaction and cultural surroundings (Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö, 2003). Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö argue that gender identity is not something given, but develops in relation to “our experiences of social interaction and cultural surroundings” (2003: 17). This notion highlights the importance of social interaction in developing gender identity. Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö argue that men and women are not born with an identity. We acquire an identity when we have experiences in localizing ourselves into social reality. However, Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkkö (2003) do not agree that we have a static gender identity throughout our lives. Instead, gender identities should be in a process of constant

transformation.

In asserting that masculinities are culturally constructed, Beynon (2002) has identified some key factors that shape masculinities. These are historical location, age and physique, sexual orientation, education, status and lifestyle, ethnicity, religion and beliefs, class and occupation, and culture and subculture (Beynon, 2002). Beynon (2002) suggests that when a man changes his geographical location, he encounters upward or downward movement in social mobility, and that he will modify his experience and the enactment of his masculinity. Beynon (2002) calls this “masculinity-on-the-move” (p. 10); thus, this phrase can summarize Beynon’s view on the changing pattern of masculinity, and even for the same man, he will still experience such changes when he is in a different social position.

The origin of the argument on gender identities as socially constructed can be traced back to the 1970s, when social scientific research showed that our assumption about the naturalistic gender differences are socially constructed (e.g. Connell, 1994, 2005; Messner, 1997; Zuo, 1997). This discourse is supported by other interdisciplinary works. Freudian psychoanalysis described that “the adult character was not predetermined by the body but was constructed, through emotional attachments to others, in a turbulent process of growth” (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell, 2005: 5). Although many take psychoanalysis as a theory of the individual, Connell (1994) suggests that it is indeed a social science. Connell (1994) argues that psychoanalysis is about “the relationships that constitute a person, the prohibitions and possibilities that emerge in that most extraordinary and complex of social processes, the raising of one

generation of humans by another” (Connell, 1994: 33-34). Connell offers a detailed description on the position of psychoanalysis in the discussion of formation of masculinity. In recognizing psychoanalysis as a social analysis of masculinity, Connell states, “[l]ong before social constructionism became influential in discussions of gender, psychoanalysis had offered a picture of adult character as constructed through a long, necessary conflict-ridden, process. This process produces a layered and contradictory structure” (Connell, 1994: 33). In brief, Freudian psychoanalysis demonstrates that the formation of people’s gender identities is associated with their interactions with others.

Connell (2000) argues that masculinity is not acquired by biology. Instead, masculinity is “a configuration of gender practice”, and is necessarily “a social construction” (Connell, 2000: 29). Saying that masculinity is socially constructed means that it is formulated through the social process between the interaction of gender and other structures (Connell, 1995, 2000).

Connell’s argument that masculinity is socially constructed has highlighted the importance of configuration and structures. Connell (1995) suggests that even though configuration is a static term, its importance is in “the dynamic processes of configuring practice through time” (Connell, 1995: 72). In this sense, a man’s masculine identity is subject to changes when he exists in particular times and places (Connell, 1995), and may find different meanings of masculinity among different social groups (Hearn and Collinson, 1994b). To adopt what Connell has suggested, the meaning of masculinity is different between employed men and unemployed men; between middle-class men and working-class men;

between men holding a primary breadwinning role and men sharing the breadwinning role with their partners. Masculinity, as a gender identity, does not “have fixed features; it is fluid and can be reconstructed, deconstructed, or mediated between two or more social divisions under certain social circumstances” (Zuo, 1997: 801). It is in these senses that masculinity is not static, and may constitute different meanings in different cultures and at different times.

Structures, in Connell’s explanation, are the “patterns in social relations”. Such relations constitute a social practice and are organized in “personal life, interpersonal interaction, or on the larger scale” (Connell, 2000: 24) and as gender is also seen as a “way in which social practice is ordered” (Connell, 1995: 71), gender can be described as a structure (Connell, 2000).

In describing the structures of gender relations in modern society, Connell (1987) has suggested a three-fold structural model of gender relations: power relations, production relations, and emotional relations. Power relations can be highlighted as the dominance of men and the subordination of women. Production relations can be understood as the sexual division of labour, and such division is not limited to households but workplaces. Emotional relations emphasize emotional and sexual attachments. Connell (2002a) later added the dimension of symbolic relations to make her original model a four-fold structural model. Connell emphasizes that the meanings and interpretations of gender relations should be put in a cultural context.

As Connell (2000) has pointed out, adult masculinities are configured through a process of growth and development involving negotiation in

multiple social relationships. Masculinities, in this sense, are dynamic. According to Connell, every man, in his growth and development, will inevitably have relations with other social structures. The development of one's masculine identity depends on his social interaction with other social structures. Thus far, the discussions reveal that masculine identities are socially and culturally constructed. In other words, different patterns of masculinity will emerge when persons are situated in different places and positions. In this sense, unlike what the essentialists have suggested, there is not a universal masculinity that is solely based on biological determination; but rather that masculinity as a concept should be regarded as pluralistic. This can reflect the various facets of masculinities.

## **2.2 Masculinity or Masculinities**

As illustrated in the previous section, the plurality of masculinities has been stressed, and this has moved away from a fixed model of a singular masculinity (Collier, 2000). Yet, the usage of masculinity and masculinities is still sometimes interchangeable. In describing the traditional assumption of masculinity, Beynon (2002) states that if "masculinity is a standardized container, fixed by biology, into which all 'normal' men are placed, something 'natural' that can be measured in terms of psychological traits and physical attributes" (Beynon, 2002: 2), there should only be a single pattern of masculinity in this assumption. In fact, Beynon (2002) argues that when we link masculinity to culture, it becomes varied, fragmented, and should not appear in only one form.

Clatterbaugh (1998) points out that men of certain groups may share similar masculine characteristics, as they may uphold a similar culture,

have similar economic class, and other similar aspects. Clatterbaugh's view recognizes the differences of masculine characteristics among different groups of men, and hence, identifies diversity among men. In stating the importance of conducting studies on masculinities, Clatterbaugh suggests that these studies have strength in that, by "understanding what creates and maintains a masculinity, new and healthier ways to be masculine can be found" (Clatterbaugh, 1998: 25).

In addition to the argument that there should be more than one form of masculinity, masculinity is also formed in relation to one's background and network. Behnke and Meuser (2001), for example, argue that the developments of images of masculinity depend on one's "social affiliations". If a man is to have affiliation or joint activities with a group of men, he may share similar cultural and social backgrounds as others have, and he will acquire the similar masculinity that men surrounding him have. Therefore, men's masculine identities vary according to their social background, class, race, culture and other factors (Behnke and Meuser, 2001).

Connell (1987, 1995) emphasizes the multi-pattern of masculinity. She states that what we used to call "the male role" is understood as hegemonic masculinity, and this hegemonic masculinity is characterized by the dominance a man has. This form of hegemonic masculinity is considered as the dominant form of masculinity, and its existence is in relation to other patterns of masculinity. Because of the suggested dominance it has, other relatively 'weaker' patterns of masculinities co-exist. These include subordinated masculinities, marginalized masculinities, and complicit masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2000). Disregarding the debate of whether hegemonic masculinity is really the



dominant form of masculinity or whether it really exists, it is clear that multiple masculinities exist.

Pease (2000) also suggests that there exists a range of masculinities in society to reflect “the differences amongst men fluctuating over time and space and expressing men’s ways of living and acting differently” (p. 8). Pease’s idea has emphasized that the diversity of masculinities is caused by men’s difference in lifestyle and that this range of masculinities is not static. It can be assumed therefore, that the masculinity of a middle-class man and a working-class man is different if they do not share a similar lifestyle. Working-class men whose lifestyles are not the same may display different masculinities.

These perspectives show that when linked to social and cultural transformations, masculinities change accordingly. However, social and cultural aspects are not the only two factors affecting a man’s masculine identity. Social status, economic class, sexual orientation, and race are all factors affecting how a man exhibits his masculine identity. Apart from hegemonic masculinity, there are also black masculinity, white masculinity, working-class masculinity, gay masculinity, and other patterns of masculinity. The presence of these alternate masculinities demonstrates that multiple-patterns of masculinity can co-exist in our society.

Using masculinities has also avoided the stereotypes of masculinity and the drawback of essentialism (Clatterbaugh, 1998). As discussed in previous paragraphs, there are differences in masculine identities among different groups of men. To further this point, it is important to restate that individual men may interpret their own masculine identities subjectively. Clatterbaugh (1998) describes such subjective perception as an

“undeniable truth” for every individual man.

So far, I have demonstrated that the use of the plurality of masculinities in defining masculine identities is becoming prevalent in academic studies, and I have argued that there should be diversified masculinities with respect to the arguments of various scholars (Beynon, 2002; Clatterbaugh, 1998; Behnke and Meuser, 2001; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2000; Pease, 2000). The words of Collier (2002) can be used to summarize the discussion in this section. According to Collier (2002), the diversity in masculinities has driven us “towards an understanding of the complexity, fragmentation and differentiation which exists between the diverse lives of men” (Collier, 2002: 738). Hence, we may observe that there are hegemonic masculinity, subordinated masculinity, marginalized masculinity, gay masculinity, working-class masculinity, black masculinity, and so on. But, among the various types of masculinities, hegemonic masculinity is still considered the dominant type. In the following section, the discussions of why hegemonic masculinity is the dominant type will be examined.

### **2.3 Hegemonic Masculinity and Power**

Prior to the introduction of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, sex role theory was the main theory to account for the differences between the two sexes. Sex role theory has emphasized the expected behaviours of both male and female, but because of the fixed roles suggested in the theory, it has been criticized for being reliant on biological determinism (Demetriou, 2001) and has difficulties in grasping power (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Because of its deterministic position, sex role

theory has been criticized for lacking the capacity to accept the plurality of masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1987) argues that sex role theory has collapsed into an abstract account of sex differences.

The concept of power is important in understanding masculinity, and it is a significant aspect of men's social relations (Hearn, 2004). Hearn states that men's power and dominance can be "structural and interpersonal, public and/or private, accepted and taken-for-granted and/or recognized and resisted, obvious and subtle" (Hearn, 2004: 51). Men's power also includes "violations and violences of all the various kind" (Hearn, 2004: 51). Regarding the different aspects of power and the relations with men, it is important to include power in understanding masculinities.

Connell introduced the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the early 1980s when the concept was proposed in the debate over the role of men in Australian labour politics (Connell, 1982), and in discussion of the making of masculinities (Connell, 1983). Hegemonic masculinity is understood as the pattern of practice that "allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). This notion however, is only one-sided. Hegemonic masculinity also legitimizes the dominance of one group of men over other groups of men. As Connell (2005) has suggested, hegemonic masculinity is not a "fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable" (Connell, 2005: 76). Just like the general concept of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is also not a static form.

In fact, hegemonic masculinity cannot exist alone and its existence is in relation to the existence of other forms of masculinities, such as subordinated and marginalized masculinity. Such a relation is understood as the dominance of the hegemonic group of men over other groups of men. A homosexual man is an example of subordinated masculinity. Homosexual men are oppressed in many aspects of social relations, for instance, they are teased for their effeminate traits, and are subsequently not considered real men. This oppression can be considered as a result of homophobia, but this may not be related to the structures of class and race. Connell (2005) stresses that the interplay of gender with other structures will create further relationships between masculinities. If class is put into this interplay, middle-class and working-class masculinity will be formulated. Working-class masculinity is a form of marginalized masculinity. Working-class men are marginalized because of the limited chances in employment under the restructure of the economy. Marginalization of working-class men has indeed highlighted the authority and the privilege middle-class men have, this also marks the difference among men.

Messner (1997) holds a similar perspective in that there are differences and inequalities among men. Messner (1997) argues that not all men share equally the “fruit of patriarchy”. Men other than those who are holding a higher socio-economic status are less likely to enjoy such ‘fruit’. Messner (1997) also considers that hegemonic masculinity is constructed only in relation to femininities and other forms of masculinities. In fact, Messner (1997) argues that some groups of men who are enjoying privileges at the expense of other men. To Messner, the concept of

hegemonic masculinity should be a concept to understand the power relations between and within the genders.

Other scholars have also described hegemonic masculinity as related to power and domination. Kimmel (1994) describes hegemonic masculinity as having the quality of “being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control. That is the hegemonic of manhood is “a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power” (Kimmel, 1994: 125). Craig (1992) suggests that hegemonic masculinity consists of the traditional characteristics of masculinity in which men find that domination is a natural demand (Craig, 1992: 3). When we consider however, that hegemonic masculinity should be in certain forms of expected characteristics, we are prone to argue that hegemonic masculinity is deterministic.

It is considered that the introduction of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is an attempt to grasp the power relations between and within genders (Demetriou, 2001). Such an attempt highlights Connell’s critique to the inadequacy of the sex role theory in grasping power and change (Demetriou, 2001; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). To further the discussion in what way a man holding hegemonic masculinity can maneuver the power on women and other groups of men, Demetriou (2001) has attempted to theorize these two aspects. Demetriou (2001) names the dominance over women as “external hegemony” and the dominance over other groups of men as “internal hegemony”.

External hegemony, in Demetriou’s definition, can be related to Connell’s structural model of gender relations, particularly in the dimensions of power relations, production relations and emotional relations (Connell, 1987, 1995). Regarding production relations,

Demetriou (2001) argues that men take the advantages from patriarchal society, such as earning higher income or easier access to education. These examples reflect men's advantaged positions in the labour market. Regarding power relations, men are in control of institutionalized power, such as the state or political power. In relation to emotional relations, Demetriou (2001) argues that men have superiority and may use violence inside families. The institutions identified in these structures of gender relations are labour market, the state, and the family. Demetriou's external hegemony can be used to understand gender relations between men and women. Because of this external hegemony, men are likely to expect themselves to be in a position that they can claim power in the family.

Internal hegemony is referred to "the hegemony over other masculinities", and is a "social ascendancy of one group of men over others" (Demetriou, 2001: 341). To Connell, such ascendancy is best exemplified by the hegemony of heterosexual men over gay men. Gay men are subordinated to heterosexual men in terms of social status and prestige, and they suffer political, cultural, economic, and legal discrimination (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 1985). Apart from gay men, working-class men, black men, and other marginalized men are all subordinated to the hegemonic type. The concept of internal hegemony has indeed emphasized the domination of one group of men over the others. The concept of internal hegemony can help to further the argument that not all men are enjoying the same privileges as most other men have and that some men do enjoy this privilege at the expense of other men.

Though emphasizing hegemonic masculinity as the dominant type, Connell does not suggest that the majority of men are enacting hegemonic

masculinity, but rather, that is only a minority who do (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). What Connell suggests is that the concept hegemonic masculinity is a “cultural ideal” (Connell, 1995). Such an ideal is constructed through the production of exemplary masculinities such as movie stars and sports professionals. As an ideal way of being a man however, men as “an interest group are inclined to support hegemonic masculinity as a means to defend patriarchy and their dominant position over women” (Coles, 2007: 2). This explains why even though only a small group of men are enacting hegemonic masculinity, the hegemonic type is still dominating forms of masculinities. Thus, men who do not enact the hegemonic practice are still in relation with it or at least want to be in relation with it. Connell calls the type of men who are receiving benefits of patriarchy but not enacting masculine dominance as showing a complicit masculinity (Connell, 1995). It is noted that although not all men are in a dominant position, some groups of men still prefer to be affiliated to this dominant position.

## **2.4 Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity**

Even though the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been widely used in the studies ranging from the areas of sexuality, gay studies, criminology as well as prison sociology (Demetriou, 2001), it has also aroused a wide scope of debates (Lusher and Robins, 2007). One of the critiques of the concept of hegemonic masculinity is related to its strengths and weaknesses. As Coles (2007) has indicated, the strength of hegemonic masculinity is “its ability to describe the layers of multiple masculinities at the structural level” (Coles, 2007: 3). However, as Coles

(2007) argues, while the use of hegemonic masculinity is to describe men's power at a structural level; the concept does not provide a real understanding of how a man organizes and resists power at an individual level. Whitehead (2002b) also argues that hegemonic masculinity fails to incorporate agency. Thus, Coles (2007) and Whitehead (2002b) suggest that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is insufficient to understand how men negotiate their masculinity (Lusher and Robins, 2007). Although some men are prone to support men's hegemonic power, it is unclear why they choose to support this even if they do not enjoy the privilege and resources other men have.

Apart from the above critiques, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have summarized five principal critiques of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. The first criticism is related to the underlying concept of masculinity. Collinson and Hearn (1994b) criticize the concept of multiple masculinities as having the tendency to produce a static typology. Whitehead (2002a) criticizes the concept for dichotomizing the conception of gender and ignores differences within the genders.

The second criticism is related to the ambiguity of the concept. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is criticized for leading to inconsistent applications. Martin (1998) argues that the concept sometimes refers to a particular type of masculinity such as white men holding higher institutional positions in Western societies, but sometimes refers to other types at a particular time and place. In Martin's view, hegemonic masculinity should mean a specific form of masculinity. Yet, as Connell (2005) has argued, the meaning of hegemonic masculinity is not static, as masculinity as a gender is a configuration of social practice. Hegemonic masculinity is



relational to other forms of masculinity and is open to challenges. In other words, new forms of hegemonic masculinity will be constructed if the old one is challenged, and new meaning is given to it. The nature of hegemonic masculinity however, will not change, thus, dominance and power are still emphasized even if a new hegemonic masculinity is constructed.

The third criticism comes from Collier (1998) who criticizes the concept for its association with violence, crime, and negative characteristics. He argues that these negative aspects depict men as unemotional, non-nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate.

Hegemonic masculinity is also criticized for only emphasizing structures, and that the individual subject is missed. As discussed in previous paragraphs, Coles (2007) and Whitehead (2002b) hold similar arguments. Men's agency in adhering to hegemonic masculinity is overlooked.

Another critique of the concept comes from Demetriou (2001), who argues that hegemonic masculinity should not be simply a white or heterosexual configuration of practice but a "hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy" (Demetriou, 2001: 337). In other words, Demetriou (2001) suggests that hegemonic masculinity should interact with other forms of masculinity rather than the sole dominant type.

The debates in the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity have inspired the discussion in the reformulation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose that hegemonic masculinity should be reformulated in four areas:

(i) a more complex model of gender hierarchy; (ii) a recognition of the geography of masculinities at local, regional and global levels; (iii) an emphasis of social embodiment; and (iv) an emphasis of the dynamics of masculinities and the possibility of democratizing gender relations.

It is also important to note that the concept of hegemonic masculinity should be used to bring out its relationship with other forms of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hirose and Pih, 2009). Though, as Connell (1995) has argued, while not all men possess the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, men generally support hegemonic masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is important in understanding masculine identities as the concept itself cannot stand alone. The existence of hegemonic masculinity is in relation to other forms of masculinities and femininities. One of the arguments is the dimension of power in gender relations, and such power relations do not only exist among the genders but can also be observed within the same gender (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Discussions so far have examined why hegemonic masculinity is treated as the dominant type of masculinity and its relations with other forms of masculinities. Nonetheless, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is formulated in Western context, and whether or not this concept is applicable in a Chinese context needs to be addressed.

In the previous section, I have discussed the origin of Connell's theory of masculinity as in relation to the Australian labour politics and masculinities, it is wondered whether or not her theory is applicable to understand masculinities in the Oriental society, such as Hong Kong. Connell (2008) argues that Australian sociologists are dependent on metropolitan concepts and methods, and this has resulted in a lack of

distinctive cultural formation in Australian sociological publications.

Connell's words remind us that depending on metropolitan concepts and methods may limit the development of a local perspective. In discussing whether or not Connell's theory is applicable to the Chinese context, it is through the social practices of the working-class male informants, we can see how her theory can be applied in this study. Besides, Connell's theory does not only emphasize on hegemonic masculinity. Her theory also stresses on multiple masculinities, and marginalized masculinity is one of these forms of masculinity. Having said this, we also need an additional framework that can help us understand Chinese masculinity.

## **2.5 Chinese Masculinity**

The model of Chinese masculinity is developed from its distinctive cultural background in which men's characteristics in mental and physical strengths are emphasized. The *wen-wu* model has been considered as one of the paradigms that can reflect Chinese masculinity in the modern society (Louie, 2000). *Wen-wu* can be understood as the attributes that a man possesses, and it is an ideal if Chinese masculinity comprises both *wen* and *wu* (Louie, 2000). In general, *wen* is considered having the ability to use one's brain and literacy, while *wu* is related to the use of martial arts and brawn (Louie, 2000; Hirose and Pih, 2009). Though *wen* and *wu* are said to be comprised of different attributes, the phrase itself denotes that *wen* is preceding *wu*. As Louie (2000) has quoted, "those who work with their brains rule, those who work with their brawn are ruled" (Louie, 2000: 1066). This expression indicates that *wen* is preceding *wu*, and is associated with the ruling classes (Louie, 2000). From this notion, a man

having the *wen* masculinity is obviously enjoying a higher social status than someone who is having the *wu* masculinity. In a modern Chinese society like Hong Kong, men demonstrating the *wen* masculinity are mainly those who are holding higher institutional positions, attaining higher education, and those with knowledge and skills in management and advanced technology. While the working-class men who are mainly those who are working as manual-skill labourers, hold lower institutional positions, and have to rely on their physical labour to make a living.

It is note-worthy that what the Chinese masculinity emphasizes may not be the same as what has been emphasized in the Western style of masculinity. It seems that the Chinese masculinity is different from the Western masculinity as both literacy and physical strength are emphasized in the Western model, but literacy is emphasized more in the Chinese model. According to Louie (2002), “*wu* was then related more to the non-elite men who had less social power while *wen* is more clearly the masculinity of the elite” (Louie, 2002: 18). The differences between the Chinese and Western types of masculinity reflect cultural differences. Hence, it is appropriate to understand the cultural foundations when theorizing Chinese masculinity. Louie considers that the Western type of masculinity is inappropriate to the Chinese context because “their application would only prove that Chinese men are ‘not quite real men’ because they fail the (Western) test of masculinity” (Louie, 2002: 8-9).

Louie’s words remain relevant in that while the meaning and emphasis of masculinity will be different when the concept is placed in locations with different cultures, we should not over-emphasize such difference. In the Western model, hegemonic masculinity does not only

emphasize physical power, dominance and authority, but knowledge and specific skills are also emphasized.

Therefore, when looking into the dominant types of the Western and Chinese masculinity, it can be seen that the two have commonalities. The dominant Chinese type of masculinity is a combination of both the attributes of *wen* and *wu*. In the Western world, hegemonic masculinity as the dominant type are not actually possessed by many men, and this type may only be an exemplar (Connell, 1995; 2005). In addition to the physical power, hegemonic masculinity also emphasizes managerial ability, knowledge, and power (Cheng, 1999). According to Cheng (1999), there is the managerial form of hegemonic masculinity that highlights the power of domination without stressing physical strengths. There is also the technical/ professional form of hegemonic masculinity which emphasizes technical or professional knowledge that ensures a person maintain power over others. Both forms enable a person to have power over others through knowledge other than physical strengths. Considering this, Louie's *wen-wu* model has commonalities with the Western hegemonic masculinity. Although this ideal type stresses obtaining both literacy and martial abilities, the attributes of *wen* are still the emphasis.

Some argue that the *wen-wu* model would result in a return to the essential approach (Hirose and Pih, 2009). Hirose and Pih (2009) assert that the *wen-wu* model "tends to show signs of being a 'trait' approach that treats one form of masculinity as a collection of fixed character types" (Hirose and Pih, 2009: 7). Though emphasizing the trait, Louie does not attempt to develop the model in an essentialist sense. Louie asserts that the *wen-wu* model "can and does change with social transformation"

(Louie, 2002: 13). Louie (2002) also suggests that with the effect of globalization, in which Chinese men can interact with the outside world more frequently and closely, *wen-wu* will inevitably change.

Following the discussions in previous sections, as masculinities are socially constructed, Chinese masculinity should not be confined to the fixed traits as stipulated in the *wen-wu* model. Nonetheless, Louie's *wen-wu* model performs a foundation in understanding Chinese masculinity in the modern society. It is obvious that no matter in the Western model of masculinity or in the Chinese model, a man's power and the social class are affecting the type of masculinity he possesses. A point should be made here; Louie developed the *wen-wu* model by deducing the attributes of the male characters in Chinese literature. His work was not directly related to social sciences researches; yet, Louie's model is maybe the only model that can help us understand Chinese masculinity.

## **2.6 Men and Class**

In the previous section, I have discussed how hegemonic masculinity dominates other types of masculinities to illustrate the inequalities among men. In this section, it is demonstrated that contradiction and difference among men should be noted, and that not all men share the same privileges and power that men should have in social relations (Connell, 1987; Messner, 1997; Pease, 2000). Connell (1987) explains this difference by distinguishing hegemonic masculinity with other forms of masculinities including subordinated and marginalized masculinities. Messner (1997) states that men share unequally in the fruits of patriarchy, and men obtain privileges at the expense of other men. Although using

different perspectives, it is noted that there are differences and inequalities among men, and such differences and inequalities are based on men's social class, and the form of masculinity they are possessing.

To illustrate the relevance of class as a determinant in having power, Pease (2003) argues that the marginalized, such as the working-class men, are experiencing a threat to masculinity. Except from using the body and energy as a means to manifest masculine identity (Connell, 1987), many aspects of working-class men's work are wearing away their sense of masculinity (Pease, 2003). Working-class men do not enjoy the authority their superiors have, and with the diminishing demand of manual skilled labours, the physical power they have been using is no longer a necessity in the modern labour market. In order to compensate for their lacking of social power and being oppressed in the workplace, working-class men are more likely to treat women as underlings (Pease, 2003). To exercise their power, women become working-class men's objects. To theorize such domination, Pease (2003) states that "[w]orking-class masculinity becomes strung between the contradictory poles of the powerlessness of men's wage labour and the power and privilege they have over women of the same class" (Pease, 2003: 132).

Since working-class men do not share the patriarchal power of middle-class men, they are placed in a contradictory location in the structure of power relations (Connell, 1987, 2002a). Asserting power over women is a way to perform working-class men's masculinity. Pease's arguments have furthered the point that power is inevitably an important element in gender relations.

In relation to power, Kaufman (1999) considers that exercising power

is a learnt behavior. He asserts that:

This is a discourse about social power, but the collective power of men rests not simply on transgenerational and abstract institutions and structures of power but on the ways we internalize, individualize, and come to embody and reproduce these institutions, structures, and conceptualizations of men's power. (Kaufman, 1999: 63)

What Kaufman argues is that as an individual man experiences the privileges that power has given to men, men have indeed internalized what they have enjoyed. Kaufman (1999) argues that power stands for one's capacity to exercise control. This can explain why working-class men want to uphold the social power or the symbolic power, as they can exercise control in the same way they have been controlled by other classes of men. In this sense, men's power and the social class they are affiliated with are closely related. Whichever social class men are situated in, they will still exercise power.

The discussion above has illustrated the contradiction among men as a group. As Whitehead (2002a) has argued, the use of hegemonic masculinity tends to describe male power at a structural level but has no real understanding of how power is organized at an individual level. As masculinity does not mean the same identity to all men, what a man chooses to do should also be based on his individual choice and not just on following the structural order. To overcome this, a theory is needed that can account for an individual's choice to support one's position in this society. This is what I will discuss.



### **3. Men, Habitus and Capital**

#### **3.1 Men and Habitus**

As discussed, not all men enjoy the same patriarchal privileges as other men. It is worth to understand why some of the men who are not sharing the same privileges still uphold hegemonic masculinity. It is also worth to understand if men's choice is an individual choice or if this is a structural arrangement. In this part, I will discuss men's choices of life with the use of Bourdieu's theory of habitus, fields, and capital. Bourdieu's theory is seen as having the strength in the "ability to cross the structure/agency divide by theoretically integrating both subjective experience and objective structures" (Coles, 2007: 5). Habitus, in Bourdieu's words, is:

...the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations.....a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moments as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitively diversified tasks. (Bourdieu, 1977: 72)

In addition to a system of transposable dispositions, habitus is also the "result of an organizing action, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a way of being, a habitual state.....and, in particular, a disposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination" (Bourdieu, 1977: 214).

Wacquant (1992) reasserts that an individual adopts a particular habitus as a result of "the internalization of external structures" (Wacquant, 1992: 18), and has gone through an individuated process of "individual collectivized by socialization" (Wacquant, 1992: 18). In brief, habitus is a

“socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126).

Giddens (1984) states that people do not acquire gender appropriate habitus by intention but through socialization. Giddens highlights that gender habitus is acquired structurally. In stating that one does not acquire a habitus by intention however, Giddens does not agree that an individual’s behavior in acquiring habitus is based on one’s strategy. To understand whether an individual will also acquire a habitus intentionally, the relations between habitus and fields are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Habitus does not operate alone, and it operates in relation to fields (Sweetman, 2003; Cole, 2007). Sweetman (2003) points out that “each field is representing a relatively distinct social space -- occupational, institutional, cultural – in which more or less specific norms, values, rules, and interests apply” (Sweetman, 2003: 533). In describing the relation between habitus and fields, Coles (2007) states that “[f]ields shape the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates and include social institutions such as law and education” (Coles, 2007: 6). Sweetman (2003) argues that individuals have different values and different interests when placed in fields. Therefore, individuals may behave differently in different fields, and even when individuals are placed in the same field but in different positions, they will behave differently (Sweetman, 2003).

The arguments of the relations between habitus and fields may be one way to tackle the structure/ agency problems. Regarding an individual’s agency, Behnke and Meuser (2001) suggest that if an individual finds that male habitus is able to provide fundamental security, he will choose to live in it. Connell’s concepts of hegemonic masculinity

and subordinated masculinities are able to analyze domination within and between the genders. These concepts are however, unable to analyze why subordinated men are willing to support hegemonic masculinity as the dominant type. Bourdieu's habitus can be used to explain this. Although situated in a subordinated position within the field of masculinity, subordinated men have internalized the external structures such as gender power relations and patriarchal structure, and they see that they still enjoy symbolic privilege in the gender relations. In fact, how men oppose one another affects the way they oppose women (Risseuw, 1991). Furthermore, the methods men use to oppose women "reflect and (re)construct particular forms of masculinities" (Pyke, 1996: 532). Having such symbolic privilege and the opportunity to (re)construct masculine identities, subordinated men still have the propensity to support hegemonic masculinity.

To simplify the concept of habitus, Maton (2008) suggests that the choices we make depend on the history that we bring into our present circumstances, and the options available and visible at that moment of life.

Maton says that:

Habitus links the social and the individual because the experiences on one's life course may be unique in their particular contents, but are shared in terms of their structure with others of the same social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, occupation, nationality, region, and so forth. (Maton, 2008: 53)

Therefore, we may say that middle-class men do share different experiences in terms of content with working-class men as they are not of the same social class. Yet, to understand the concept in a broader sense, working-class men and middle-class men may share similar experience in

terms of structure because they are of the same gender. However, simply realizing the sharing of similar experience in terms of structure is insufficient to understand why men choose to support the hegemonic masculinity they do not have. It can also be understood that men have internalized an external objective structure. As mentioned, the concept of habitus cannot stand alone, and has to be linked up with Bourdieu's concept of field.

Field is in Bourdieu's words a social space where a set of specific norms are constructed and an individual has to follow the set of norms when they are placed in such a social field (Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu suggest that people can occupy more than one social field at one time (Thomson, 2008). In the example of a working-class man, he is involved in the field of men, the field of masculinity, the field of hegemonic masculinity, the field of alternate masculinity, and so on. Therefore, when looking into the lived experiences of a working-class man, it is impossible to just simply understand his life from only one social field he is in as the life of a working-class man is constructed in relation to other social fields.

### **3.2 Men and Capital**

Capital is another important concept in Bourdieu's theory. Coles (2007) states that "the accumulation and value of capital has the potential to influence the position of individual within any given field" (Coles, 2007: 7). In Bourdieu's own words, capital is "accumulated labour" (Bourdieu, 1986: 46), and through which a social agent can have access to appropriate "social energy" (Bourdieu, 1986: 46). Thus, the accumulation of capital enables either an individual or a social group to reproduce profits.

Bourdieu (1986) has observed several fundamental forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Basically, the various forms of capital can be converted from economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital, as the term has already suggested, is related to monetary resource and property right. Cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1986) has suggested, is convertible to economic capital, and is related to one's educational qualifications, whereas, social capital is the resource one has to develop a durable network. Considering the definition of capital, capital can be expanded to other forms. For instance, working-class men have to make use of their bodily strength in their paid work; physical capital is unique to working-class men.

Bourdieu's concepts of capital indicate an individual's lifestyle and capital are linked with social class. Apart from monetary resources, the amount of time devoted to acquiring these forms of capital is also significant in deciding the strength of the capital. Working-class men who have to work long hours a day and can earn only a barely sufficient income are at a less advantaged position to accumulate materialistic forms of capital. Nonetheless, it is inappropriate to exclude working-class men from possessing other forms of capital.

Symbolic capital, as a non-material type of capital, differs from economic capital, and is what the working-class men may possess. Bourdieu (1986) considers that all forms of capital can be derived from economic capital, and this will end up in producing the power that will be suitable in a particular field. Symbolic capital is "...a credit, it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition..." (Bourdieu, 1990: 138).

If a social agent or an individual is to possess symbolic capital, the individual is said to have gained the recognition of others in one's particular position. Thus, a father, a mother, a husband, or a wife are possessing symbolic capital, as they should have the sufficient knowledge to be in that status and they have the power since they are in that position. The same logic can also be applied to a breadwinner. In this sense, symbolic capital can be considered as a social status and a respect to a particular individual who is in a certain social position. Like other forms of capital, symbolic capital of any individual "is not only open to transformation, but is continuously fluctuating in response to changing field position and changing field structures" (Hardy, 2008: 132). Hardy's words remind us that when understanding the concept of capital, we have to place it in the context of a social field.

The concept of symbolic capital has been used by other scholars in the study of the male breadwinning role and unemployment. In studying long term unemployed men's unwillingness to relinquish their breadwinning role, Willott and Griffin (2004) adopted Bourdieu's concept of capital for analysis. As discussed previously, Willot and Griffin (2004) argue that one of the reasons for working-class men's unwillingness to relinquish their breadwinner role is because of the symbolic capital; the social status they can accumulate. Willot and Griffin (2004) highlight that symbolic capital is the only capital working-class men have.

Willot and Griffin define social capital as a "social status and is often conferred simply by belonging to a particular sex, race or age" (Willot and Griffin, 2004: 55). They further suggest that different groups of men will have greater or less access to different capital resources. Unlike

middle-class men who have access to various forms of capital, and can accumulate the values of capital, working-class men only have access to symbolic capital and limited social capital. In acquiring symbolic capital, men can at the same time claim their symbolic power, and without such symbolic capital, they are unable to claim other forms of power. Different from what they are lacking in the workplace, symbolic power gives working-class men the power in the household, where they can exercise their dominance. In relation to social capital, as it is considered that working-class men may only have a horizontal network, their ability to expand their scope of available resources may be limited.

Bourdieu's theory has the strength in accounting for why men will support and resist different forms of masculinities. In applying Bourdieu's theory of capital, we may understand why working-class men are unwilling to abandon their breadwinner role. Relinquishing the breadwinner role requires also giving up their symbolic social status. Pease (2010) comments that Bourdieu's theory of capital is also useful in analyzing class, as the accrual of the various forms of capital, such as the attainment in educational qualification in cultural capital and group membership and connections in social capital. The accumulation of these forms of capital leads one to have access to legitimized power. This also highlights the argument that if working-class men give up their symbolic capital, they will as well give up their symbolic power.

Their unwillingness to abandon the breadwinning role also reflects the importance of paid work in a man's life. In the following section, I will discuss the relations between men and work.

## **4. Reconceptualizing Work**

### **4.1 Concepts of Breadwinning Role**

In the first chapter, the pattern of changing labour force participation and the influence on men's employment were discussed. It is worth noting that with the changing structure in the economy, working-class men are more vulnerable to unemployment. Men have been associated with paid work, and in paid work, men can demonstrate their breadwinner status in the family. Warren (2007) argues that there are several ways to understand breadwinning. One is simply the literal interpretation of breadwinning, and that is who wins the bread for the family. Another draws on the financial contribution, which means who is the main financial provider for the family as well as the main labour market participant. Therefore, as Lewis (2001) has argued, the debate of breadwinning has traditionally been linked to the consideration of a family wage. The breadwinner should be paid enough by one's employer to support one's family.

With respect to men's masculine identities, Warren (2007) suggests that the male breadwinning role offers a source of identity for many men. It is arguable that the word breadwinning is never gender neutral; it upholds patriarchy. This traditional male breadwinner model has the policy implication for taking men as an individual but women as part of the family and is dependent on men's wages (Lewis, 2001). Crompton (1999) argued that men were assumed to be the major breadwinners, and women's responsibilities rested with the domestic duties. Crompton's view highlights that the traditional male breadwinner model was not gender neutral as it rested upon a particular division of labour between men and



women.

## **4.2 Men and Work**

In relation to the traditional discourse of men's breadwinning responsibility, work has become the core part in men's life. Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) suggest that work and men have become synonymous as a result from the "reordering of gender landscape of work" since the eighteenth century, and this led to the "breadwinner/ homemaker dichotomy" (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 21). Such re-ordering of work has also led to the implementation of family wage, under which the employment of women was seen supplementary to men's wage. Acker (1992) suggests that although the presentation of work is gender neutral, the concept is gendered. Acker (1992) argues that the concept has the assumptions that the public and private spheres are separated.

On one hand, the re-ordering of work has made men's breadwinning role more explicit. On the other hand, men have been closely identified and invested in being a worker (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003). Alverson and Billing (1997) argue that work does not only have explicit meanings, but also implicit meanings and unconscious fantasies. These unconscious fantasies can be considered as related to men's symbolic power.

Considering the historical changes in the relationship between men and work, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill (2003) argue that the relations between men and work should not be understood as static or fixed. With the changes in the sex-based constitution of the labour force in the twentieth century, this has blurred the gendered domination of public and

private spheres. Breugal (2000) articulates that women have participated in the public spheres of health and education, while men have dominated the private spheres of manufacturing, construction, electricity, water, gas, and communication. In using the term feminization, Breugal (2000) tries to illustrate the changes in certain labour markets, and he suggests that not all men participate in manly work. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) suggest that feminization of work can be described as a result of employers' increasing tendency in employing women. Feminization of work is, as suggested by Breugal (2000), a shift from industrial (masculine) work to service (feminine) work. Thus, when men work in the service sectors like banking, catering, and hotels, they are exhibiting attributes in emotional labour which is associated with femininity but not "dominant occupational masculinities" (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003: 27). Nixon (2009) argues that even if men are to work in service industries, men choose the kind of occupations that are related to their masculinity, for instance, truck driving, logistics, and security. By engaging in these occupations, men are reinforcing their masculinity. On the other hand, if men are to work in the occupations that are largely occupied by women, they can make them a man's job. This however, happens mainly in cases when men are holding senior positions in offices, where their managerial skills and professional knowledge help them transform the job into a man's occupation. Nonetheless, this is not the case for working-class men. If work brings men social status and power, with the increase in women's labour force participation and men's decrease in labour force participation, and the change in the nature and contents of work, it is likely that men's position in society would also change (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003).

In an attempt to expand the meaning of work, Collinson and Hearn (2005) have stated that work is a “socially contextualized phenomenon” (Collinson and Hearn, 2005: 290), and work should not be confined to the meaning of paid and employed work in the public sphere. Feminists have argued that domestic labour is also work, and they show that the division of labour in housework varies. Men tend to concentrate in less time-consuming tasks, such as putting children to bed, playing with children and household repair (Choi and Lee, 1997). Women have to do other time-consuming tasks such as cleaning, shopping, washing, ironing, cooking, and routine caring work (Oakley, 1985). In this sense, women work longer hours than men do, assuming that women have both the paid work in the public sphere and nonpaid work in the private sphere. Work should therefore include the meaning of domestic, nonpaid, and non-employed labour in the private sphere (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). Holter (2005) shares a similar view, and points out the traditional wage-work-only definitions of work cannot reflect the reality in time-use and the quality of work. Such critique of the wage-work-only definitions of work is mainly observed in gender equality theories (Holter, 2005).

For many men, work provides economic resources and symbolic benefits that reinforce their position of power, authority, and discretion both at work and at home (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). But, not all men share the same economic resources. Working-class men such as manual skilled workers, whose job statuses are considered insecure, are the group of men who do not share economic resources. Even though male manual workers do not share the same economic resources, they still enjoy the symbolic benefits from work, especially at the expense of women. This

can be observed from the inequalities in salaries, job segregation, and sex discrimination (Collinson and Hearn, 2005). Collinson and Hearn (2005) suggest that male manual workers have constructed working-class masculinity as a counter-culture to the negation of management officers and women.

Not all men; however, share the same economic resources and symbolic benefits. Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) have used the concept “multiple masculinities” to analyze men at work. It can be deduced from this concept that various forms of masculinity “may be constructed and persist in relation both to femininity and other forms of masculinity” (Collinson and Hearn, 2005: 294). There are observed differences between hegemonic masculinity and other forms of masculinities (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity, which represents the management and administration, dominates the subordinated masculinity—the manual workers. It is quite clear therefore, that the status of work will determine a man’s masculinity.

So far, the discussions in this section have echoed the theories developed by Connell (1995) and Messner (1997). Messner’s themes in “men’s institutionalized privileges, the costs of masculinity, and differences and inequalities among men” (Messner, 1997: 3) can be used to understand gender relations as well as the inequalities among men. Messner’s first theme is generated from the social construction of gender power relations. Messner’s second theme can be understood as resulting from men’s individual commitment to the traditional definition to masculinity. His third theme is a synthesis of his first two themes. Messner does not rest on the point that all men enjoy the same institutionalized

privileges. According to Messner (1997), inequalities are not only observed between the two genders, but also exist among men. Not all men share the same privileges from the patriarchal regime in our society. Masculinity, such as working-class masculinity, is encountering marginalization.

The above discussions have also echoed the suggestion of Tolson (1977). He connects masculine identity with the types of work that men do. He expresses the view that men will develop different male gender identities when working in different occupations, and that work sustains certain masculine beliefs and values. Tolson (1977) however, sees that men's work is the operation of fundamental contradictions. This is especially obvious among working-class men. One such contradiction is alienation and dependence. He states that working-class men show alienation to capitalism as expanded capitalist society takes away their psychological unity of home and work. Working-class men have to depend on wages from their work. Tolson considers the wage as compensation to working-class men's alienating experiences. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) consider that the wage acts as a buffer to disrupt masculine identities. In this sense, as Willis (1979) has argued, the wage becomes a prize to masculinity, such that if a man has a higher wage, he will have a stronger sense of masculinity. Considering the types of work that working-class men do, it is possible to argue that working-class men's masculinities are produced through work and by their own body. The words of Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) would be a suitable phrase to reflect on the work of working-class men and the above discussion: "[h]arsh work becomes the symbol of masculinity" (Haywood and Mac an

Ghail, 2003: 30).

In this section, I have discussed the relationship between men and work, and have argued that working-class men's masculinities are affected by the type of work they do, by the use of their physical ability, and by the amount of wages they earn. With the emergence of the post work society however, the nature of work is changing, the hours of work are changing, and the amount of wages is also changing. Whether or not the male breadwinning role can withstand these changes is debatable. In the following part, I will move to the discussion of post-work society and discuss the ways it affects the lives of working-class men.

#### **4.3 Men and Post-work Society**

As mentioned earlier, men's masculinity is largely related to one's work, and it is through engaging in work, that men can provide for the family and can exercise power in the family. It is therefore important for men to earn a sufficient income so as to maintain one's position in the family and in society. In this sense, a man has to keep working to fulfill this family responsibility and to meet the social expectations. However, in his book *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-based Society*, Gorz (1999) argues that "[t]he imperative need for a regular income is used to persuade people of their 'imperative need to work'" (Gorz, 1999: 72). In this statement, Gorz criticizes capitalism for persuading a person to strive to work in order to get paid, and this makes a person sacrifice one's time and concentrate on work.

Nonetheless, not everyone is able to find a stable job in the post-work society. Bowring (1999) has suggested several features in the post-work

society. One of which is jobless growth. According to Bowring (1999), due to office automation and advancement of technology, productivity gains are higher than in previous time when labour was the major source of production. Bowring (1999) argues, such technological advancement has resulted in “labour-saving effects” (Bowring, 1999: 70). The labour-saving effects are mainly observed in the labour-intensive service sectors, such as banking, retailing and customer services. It should be noted that the expansion of these sectors is considered as compensation for the job losses in manufacturing and industrial sectors. In the post-work society however, these service sectors also experience labour-saving. Considering that most working-class men are manual skilled labours and have to use their bodies (physical capital) in their work, job losses are related to the technological advancement in the sectors they had previously worked. A continuous technological advancement means that their skills would be further belittled.

Apart from jobless growth, the rapid growth of part-time work is another feature in the post-work society (Bowring, 1999). The growth of part-time work results in diminishing working hours as well as wages. As discussed in the previous section, women’s paid work is considered to be supplementary to family income. In this sense, women would be more adaptive to participate in part-time work. For men however, bearing the breadwinner role makes part-time work their final choice. In Hong Kong, part-time employment is also increasing, and as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, women are the majority of part-time employees, with men constituting a minority. Ngo (2002) also argues that there is a pattern of occupational sex segregation of the part-time workers, with women mainly

occupying the service sector and elementary occupations, and men occupying the blue-collar jobs. However, the expansion of the service economy is most obvious in elementary or low-skilled service jobs. These jobs are most likely occupied by women (Chiu and Lui, 2004; Lee et al., 2007). If men have embodied a particular type of working-class masculinity in their previous work, it is unsurprising that men do not find service work as compatible with the expression of their masculine identities. This may be a factor contributing to their unemployment.

Another feature in the post-work society is the expansion of unproductive labour (Bowring, 1999). Unproductive labour is mainly confined to the service sector, and the sector is mainly dominated by workers, both male and female, who are able to present feminine attributes. Working-class men, who are displaying some traditional masculine identities and who are considered less likely to perform good communication with customers, have fewer opportunities to enter the service sector. It is also not their preference to enter the service sector (Nixon, 2004, 2009). Ngo (2002) has also discussed the increase in employees in the service sector in Hong Kong, and in his analysis, men are less likely to enter the service sector than women are.

By adapting Bowring's (1999) position on post-work society, I argue that the features of post-work society, such as technological advancement, jobless growth, rapid growth of part-time work, and the expansion of unproductive labour in service economy have made working-class men unable to adapt to such transformation. Because of the habitus they are maintaining an attachment to, working-class men are more likely to look for jobs that can display their masculinities. Nonetheless, in post-work



society, there are not enough manly jobs for working-class men. As a result, if they persist with the traditional male breadwinning discourse, they will find it difficult to live up to the societal expectations of masculinity.

#### **4.4 Impact of Unemployment**

The negative impact of unemployment on individuals has been widely discussed in a number of studies. The feelings of shame, humiliation, and degradation are experiences that an unemployed individual encounters every day (Borrero, 1980). Studies also reveal that suicide is strongly associated with unemployment (Lewis & Sloggett, 1998). These impacts are closely related to the cultural expectations that surround men (Willot and Griffin, 1997).

In addition, unemployment is affecting the relationship between the unemployed individual and other social structures. Gheradi (1995) argues that if employment is the basis of masculinity, unemployment is threatening men's identity. Willot and Griffin (1997) hold similar perspectives, and claim that unemployment will cause an upheaval of the hegemonic ideal and the associated discourses of public and domestic provisions. Russell (1999) found that unemployed men are less likely to replicate their existing social network. Russell's study shows that men's social networks are usually related to leisure, and are not home-bounded. According to Willot and Griffin (1996), a man's ability to control his activities in the public sphere is associated with employment. If a man is unemployed, he will lose the autonomy to take control over his activities. When a man has no money, he cannot go out. For men therefore, unemployment may become a hindrance to maintain contact with their

social network.

Unemployment has become a growing feature in male labour force participation, and there is an increasing trend in studies relating to men and unemployment (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Willot and Griffin, 1996, 2004; and Nixon, 2006, 2009). Yet, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, local studies on how work and unemployment have influenced men's masculinities are limited. In suggesting a way to understand the issue, Morgan (1992: 99) states that "one strategy of studying men and masculinities would be to study those situations where masculinity is, as it were, on the line". What Morgan (1992) suggests is that a strategy for understanding masculinity is to study men whose identities are at risk. Working-class men represent this group. As paid employment has a close association with men's constructed masculine identities, it is important to understand the ways in which employment affects the masculine identities of men in Hong Kong, and in what position working-class men place themselves in relation to masculinities and work.

## **5. Framework of Analysis**

Issues such as men's work, men's family, men's social life and other concepts linked with masculinities have been addressed in this chapter. I have used various theories and concepts to illustrate what masculinity should be referred to, especially in the aspects of whether masculinities are socially constructed or naturally acquired, and whether working-class men possess the same kind of masculinity as middle-class men.

As this research has been focusing on the issue of gender and more specifically, the way working-class men construct their masculinities

in relation to work, several concepts have been taken into account. These are masculinity, work, social class, family, and social life. These concepts are important aspects that I have included in my research when doing the analysis. In doing so, I have adopted a framework that is not solely adhering to a single theory.

Based on the research literature and the various theories and concepts described earlier, I have adopted a conceptual framework to include Connell's theory of masculinity and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital. As described previously, the strength of Connell's theory is its ability to contextualize gender relations with other structures, and the relationships between various forms of masculinity. The strength of Bourdieu's concepts is its understanding individual agency in making a choice, which helps to explain why marginalized men such as the working-class men support the kind of traditional masculinity even though they have difficulties in fulfilling the social expectation. This framework also highlights the relations between men and the specific aspects of work, family and social relations, of which working-class men interact with in daily life. Thus, these aspects interact with other aspects such as class, life style, Chinese culture, and personal history, and these contribute to the way a working-class man formulates his masculine identity. Although men as a group will adhere to certain aspects of masculine identities, working-class men in particular have certain lived experience that not all men have experienced. The masculine identities working-class men display can be considered a specific form of masculinity. This is the key aim of this study.

In addition to the theories of Connell and Bourdieu, employing a social

constructionist perspective is also important in understanding the way a working-class man constructs and gives meaning to his masculinity when he interacts with the various social structures in everyday lived experience.

## **Chapter Three**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **1. Introduction**

The preceding chapters have argued that not all men share the same privileges that men as a social group have. Even though some men are subordinated by other men, they are still eager to uphold the traditional privileges of men. If work is one way to manifest a man's masculine identity, unemployment is a distinct challenge to a man's masculine identity. This then begs the question of why unemployed men still willing to support the patriarchal privileges that men enjoy. To solve this agency structure problem, I have tried to demonstrate that Bourdieu's theories of habitus and fields can help to understand this. In reference to the issue of structure, I argue that unemployed men are in a social space that makes them adopt the socially constructed masculine identities. In these spaces, they enjoy symbolic privilege just by being a man. They have also adopted a strategy that allows them to get the benefits from patriarchal social relations. Men are conscious of enjoying the privileges given to them. If the breadwinner role is a kind of privilege, then maintaining the breadwinner role means that unemployed men still possess such status albeit in symbolic form, and thus can enjoy the symbolic power and privilege from it.

So far, I have discussed why working-class men are unwilling to give up their breadwinning role or the kind of symbolic capital, despite being marginalized in society and subordinated to hegemonic masculinity. To

obtain a possible interpretation of this, I have adopted the constructivist approach as my research paradigm. This chapter begins with a discussion on the rationale of adopting the constructivist approach as the research paradigm. Following this is a description on the selection of informants and the discussion of issues that arose from the adoption of selecting the informants. This chapter will conclude with a description of the method of data collection and data analysis.

## **2. Rationale for Using Constructivist Paradigm**

The rationale for using the constructivist stance as the research paradigm will be discussed here. The constructivist paradigm was formerly known as the naturalist paradigm developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their book *Naturalistic Inquiry*. They use the language of constructivist paradigm in later works (see Guba and Lincoln 1994, 2000, and 2005). Before going into the discussion of the use of the constructivist paradigm, I would like to state that the phrases *interpretive constructionist* and *constructivist* are used interchangeably in this thesis. Though scholars (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 2005) have used different terms to represent their stance, the three carry the same meaning in the ways the researchers use in studying and understanding human experiences and construction of knowledge.

The aim of inquiry in the constructivist paradigm focuses on “understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold”, and this leads to “new interpretation as information and sophistication improve” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 113). In this sense, apart from the inquiry aim, the use of reduction or

reconstruction denotes how the researchers treat the data in a different manner. The focus of this study is to understand the life experience of working-class men and this requires informants to share with me, as the researcher, the detailed account of their experience in various aspects of life.

Unlike positivists who believe that knowledge is conducted in a value free and objective manner (Flick, 2009), interpretive constructionists consider how people view an event and people's experience in that event as well as the meaning they ascribe to it as more important than in establishing a simple objective 'truth'. Constructionists assume that there are multiple realities (Flick, 2009; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that what interpretive constructionist researchers do is try to "elicit the informant's views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 28), and that they are looking for "the specific and detailed and try to build an understanding based on those specifics" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 28). To elaborate, I shall use the experience in researching working-class men in this study as an example. As a researcher, I have not simply assumed working-class men as someone I expect them to be, but have also considered the meanings that working-class men have created to their life experience. Through learning their stories and understanding their life experience, knowledge of working-class men's masculinity is constructed.

Thus, constructionists assume that people who work, play, or interact in the same group may hold shared meanings to certain things. Therefore, in the research process, in addition to understanding the distinct manner

of informants in encountering certain experiences, constructionist researchers are, at the same time, exploring the shared meanings that informants hold, and the shared meanings negotiated with others around them (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In this sense, constructionists also pay attention to the “multiple knowledges” that are related to the social, cultural, political, economic, ethnic, and gender factors (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 113). In other words, when understanding an individual’s life experience, constructivists will take into consideration the individual’s interaction with the surrounding structures, and see how this will have influenced one’s life experience. This matches with the theories of masculinity developed by various scholars (Connell, 1995, 2005; West and Zimmerman, 1987) in that the forms of masculinities are constructed in social relations. This also matches with Bourdieu’s field theory when considering that although working-class men are from the same social class and may share similar life experiences, when they are in different social spaces, they may demonstrate distinct dispositions.

The epistemological issues that arise from the constructivist paradigm provide other forms of support for using this as the research paradigm. As the researcher, I have adopted a “transactional and subjectivist” position (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 111). This means the researcher and the informants are interactively linked. Being influenced by this interactive relationship, knowledge is constructed as the research proceeds.

In adopting the constructivist stance as the paradigm in this present research, I have stressed the importance of interacting with the informants; co-constructing the meanings to the experiences that the informants shared in the process. And, it is noticed that values of those involved, the



researcher and the informants, have influenced the process of research. Nevertheless, this influence is seen as inevitable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the inquiry process is influenced and bound by values in several ways. These include the choice of the problem, the choice of the paradigm, the choice of the theory in guiding the data-gathering and data-analyzing process, the choice of context, and the choice of format for presenting the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 38). This stance departs from the positivists' emphasis on value-free and objective methodology. Thus, it is inevitable to include values in understanding the subjective life experience of the informants.

Apart from emphasizing the role of values, interaction is another important element in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed why interactions should be included in the inquiry process. Interaction is important in finding the cases that fit the inquiry purpose, to foster full understanding and cooperation with the informants, to make use of the "dialectical-dialogical" nature of human research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 108). Interaction is also essential as it allows the use of the "human instrument" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 39) in the process of gathering data. The human instrument includes the inquirer or the researcher, the informants and others. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the human instrument is the only data-gathering tool that is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of differential interaction. Thus, using the constructivist paradigm, as what Diversi (2007) has suggested, represents "alternative ways of doing social science that accounted for subjectivity of experience, interpretation, and representation" (Diversi, 2007: 1178).

The statement of Gubrium and Holstein (2003) summarizes why I

have used the constructionist paradigm. I am primarily concerned with how “the social construction process is shaped across various domains of everyday life, not with how separate theories of macro and micro domains can be linked together for a fuller account of social organization” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 228). This matches with my objectives in this research of understanding the meanings of employment and unemployment that have been given by working-class men, and how working-class men construct their masculinities in relation to their life experience.

### **3. Use of Qualitative Research Methods**

The choice of research paradigm has influenced the usage of qualitative research methods. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, one of the characteristics of the naturalist or constructivist paradigm is the selection of qualitative methods over quantitative methods. Although qualitative methods are not the only option for constructivist researchers, qualitative methods are compatible with the assumptions of constructivists. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative research methods are able to deal with multiple realities, and are “more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 40).

The definition of qualitative research may vary in different moments, and it is difficult to give a specific definition to qualitative research. In light of this, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) have given a generic definition to qualitative research. They define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:

4). Regarding the role of the researcher, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that qualitative researchers are “attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 5). Given that the life experience of every individual is unique and each individual may have varied subjective perspectives towards different aspects in life, specific meanings can be made from the interface between the various aspects in a man’s life. In interpreting the meanings given by the informants, qualitative research enables the researcher to see the men’s world from their perspectives.

In this study, my main research questions explore the ways in which unemployment is affecting men’s masculine identities and the ways men construct their masculinities in relation to work. In answering these two major topic areas, I have explored the ways men live under unemployment, the meaning of employment and unemployment to them, and in what way working-class men locate themselves in relation to the discourse of masculinities. By answering these questions, some insights have been elicited to deconstruct the existing prevailing models on masculinities.

Flick (2009) suggests that the consideration to use quantitative or qualitative research methods may depend on the type of research question. Flick (2009) used chronic mental illness as an example to illustrate his argument. If the researcher wants examine the subjective experience of the patients, the researcher should conduct “biographic interviews” (Flick, 2009: 24) with the patients. However, if the focus of the researcher is on finding out the frequency and distribution of such diseases in the population, the researcher should run an “epidemiological study” (Flick, 2009: 24). In responding to the first question, qualitative

research methods are appropriate, and in the second question, quantitative research methods are more appropriate. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) hold similar view and state that qualitative studies seek answers to questions that emphasize how social experience is created and given meaning. This study aims to better understand the masculine identities the working-class men are holding, and how such masculine identities are influencing them. Therefore, learning from their point of view will be the appropriate method. In addition, considering the focus of the study is an interpretation of the life experiences of men, I have employed qualitative research methods in this study.

Another consideration in adopting qualitative research method is that little is known about how employment and unemployment affect a Chinese man's masculine identity. Glaser (1992) suggests that "qualitative methods can be used to uncover the nature of people's actions and experiences and perspectives which are yet little known in the world of research products" (Glaser, 1992: 12). In addition, qualitative research design is considered ideal for generating thorough and holistic descriptions of complex processes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As shown in the preceding chapter, little is known about the life experience of working-class men, and as life experience involves a fuller understanding to the various aspects in a man's life, qualitative research has helped generate a holistic description of a man's life.

Although quantitative and qualitative researchers are both concerned with the individual's point of view, qualitative researchers try to get closer to the individual's perspective through detailed interviewing and observing (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 16). The ability or the intention to capture the

subjective perspective of the individual is considered a distinct feature in qualitative research which, as Denzin and Lincoln (2003) have argued, is seldom touched by quantitative researchers. This ability to capture the informant's subjective perspective is another reason why I consider a qualitative research method in this study as being more appropriate.

#### **4. The Informants**

##### **4.1 Overview of the Informants**

Instead of using random sampling, I chose to purposively select the informants in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that this kind of sampling increases the likelihood that “the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 40). Since this research focuses on the life experience of working-class men, it is appropriate to select the informants with a specific work history and background.

A brief description of the informants can be found in Appendix Two. The informants consisted of nine working-class men aged 43 to 64, most of them were living in rental units, and only two were born in Hong Kong. All of these men had little education with only one having completed secondary education. Four of the men were engaged in paid-job at the time of the study, and the rest were welfare recipients. The jobs in which they had been engaged were mainly low-skills manual labour; some managed to work as *sam-hong* worker, truck driver, delivery worker and one owned a fruit stall. *Sam-hong* is an indigenous term in Hong Kong, which refers to interior decoration; mainly involving plaster work, wood work, and paint work. Although some of the informants were welfare recipients, some actually had a low-wage job. This was because the wage

was not sufficient to maintain the living of the family, and so they need to apply for welfare benefits as a supplement to their low wage. Most informants were living with family members, and in some cases, views of family members were also gathered. This allowed me the opportunity to hear from them about how they thought a man should perform. One informant was divorced and was living alone, although he reported to have contacts with his ex-family members.

Not all informants were in a healthy condition, and some reported deteriorating health. Their deteriorating health conditions were sometimes the results of industrial accidents, while some reported to have hereditary eye disease. In all cases, these health conditions resulted in them losing the ability to continue their previous work. It is also relevant to understand these men whose health conditions might make them unable to continue their work and make their living.

A specific characteristic of the informants was that all of them had connections with social service organizations or labour unions. They were either service recipients or volunteers in these organizations. Although only nine informants were interviewed in this research, the stories they told demonstrated that they had different life experiences, and that they had specific views on various aspects of life. The rich data they provided enabled me to complete this thesis.

The decision to recruit these informants who were middle-age and upper middle-age, with low education attainment was partly informed by the process of reviewing the literature. These men could only work in low-wage manual labour jobs, and they were more vulnerable to the changing economic structure; especially in this knowledge-led economy.

The work history of these men showed that they were first to get laid-off, or that they could only struggle in low-paid jobs with rare job welfare. These working-class men represented men who were vulnerable to changes, who claimed the breadwinning responsibility, and who were also vulnerable to the crisis of masculinity.

#### **4.2 Recruiting the Informants**

In selecting the field and recruiting the informants, it is important to consider the manageability of the process of data collection and the accessibility of the field. Have (2004) has indicated the importance of maintaining access to the research settings, and stated that “maintaining ‘access’, not only physically but also ‘socially’, requires constant relational management, and the gathering and recording of ‘data’ anticipates the report that is to be written” (Have, 2004: 110). As choosing the research settings would have affected the process of data gathering and analysis, I decided to identify the settings that I could gain access and would ensure that I could have contact with the potential informants.

I made use of my personal network to approach the social workers and the labour union organizers who had contacts with working-class men. Before starting the interviews, I had participated in some men’s group sessions which were organized by a welfare service organization. Two group members turned out to be the informants in this study and the rest of the informants were either referred by social workers or labour union organizers. While participating in these group sessions, I tried observed the topics that group members had interest in, and the way they communicated with one another. This was an important part in my field

work. Even though I had been working as a social worker for several years, and I had delivered some groups for men, I had to keep in touch with them to fully comprehend the concerns of working-class men as a group. This experience also gave me some ideas on developing the interview guidelines in the later stages.

After joining some sessions, I decided to invite some group members to be informants. Before making contact, I requested the organization staff to ask the potential informants if they would like to take part in the study. Such experience was positive, and this source secured me with some eligible informants. In expanding the varieties of informants, I requested a social worker of another organization and a labour union organizer to refer some suitable informants to me. There were three unsuccessful cases. Their reasons for rejecting the interviews were largely related to their limitation of time and they were not ready to disclose their personal stories to a stranger. In this research, I was the stranger. I consider that their refusal did not only highlight their reluctance to disclose their personal stories, this also highlighted their sense of powerlessness. Although the experience was not negative, this somehow reflected that negotiations with gatekeepers were crucial in whether or not we could gain access to these informants.

Recruitment of these nine working-class male informants depended on the cooperation of the gatekeepers. Including the unsuccessful cases, I had approached twelve working-class men who were experiencing unemployment or had experienced unemployment. As this research is about the life experience of employment and unemployment among working-class men, this has limited the sample. Firstly, informants' were



working-class men. Secondly, informants had experienced unemployment. The twelve men I had approached all met these two conditions. Although I could only interview nine informants, I interviewed each of the informants twice. In addition to these interviews, I also did various forms of fieldwork that could help me uncover their life stories.

## **5. Logistics of the Interviews**

The in-depth Interview with an interview guide was a major tool in collecting data in this research. Marshall and Rossman (1989) point out that the interview is a useful way to gather a large amount of data quickly, and allows for immediate follow-up questions and clarification. McCracken (1990) states that interviews enable the researcher to step into the mind and to experience the world of others. In this research, the prime aim is to understand in what way masculine identities are affecting unemployed men's lives; direct contacts allowed me to learn more about the informants' views on various aspects of life.

It is worth noticing that although I had only interviewed nine informants in this research, the issue of multiple viewpoints had still arisen. This had resulted in the construction of multiple realities. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stressed, this kind of multiple realities will be uncovered in the interactions among the inquirer, the informants and others, and that this process of construction of multiple realities is the constructionists' belief in the nature of reality in constructionist paradigm. In this sense, the construction of multiple realities is unavoidable in the process of understanding the subjectivities of the informants.

After each informant agreed to participate in the interview, I either met

them in the social service centre, in their home, on the university campus or in some public spaces. In two interviews, I had to meet the informants in a public space near their home, and the interviews were conducted after their work which was around 10 p.m. Before asking the informants to sign the informed consent form (Appendix Three), I provided them with the details of the study and informed them of their right to choose to quit the interview at any time should they feel too uncomfortable to continue. I also obtained their consent to have the interviews audio taped, and I explained to them that the interviews would only be used for research purpose.

I interviewed each informant twice, and each interview lasted one to three hours. One to two weeks were allowed between the first and the second interview. In a few cases, I allowed a month between the first and the second interview. The reason for this was mainly related to the time clash with informants and my own schedule. I listened to the audio files after the first interview, and noted areas that could be clarified in the second interview. By doing this, I could check whether the informants had given consistent views. In the second interview, I would review what we had talked about in the first interview as warm-up conversation.

As mentioned in the preceding section, I had participated in a men's group. In addition to this, I also escorted an informant to the hospital, and helped an informant to pack the remaining fruit after a day's work. These experiences were ways to develop a trustful relationship between the researcher and the informant. These forms of informal conversation were also used in data analysis.

## **6. Content of the interview**

To make the interviews look more like a natural conversation, although I had prepared an interview guide (Appendix One), it was hard to follow the sequence of the guidelines, and I had given up sticking to it after the first interview. The reason was that following the guidelines had made it difficult to have a smooth conversation with the informants, while prompting them to respond to the pre-designed questions also raised the issue of unequal power relationship between researcher and participant.

Having said that, I still referred to the topics I had laid down in the interview guidelines when I was conducting the interviews. The major areas I covered in the interviews were basic demographic data, education, employment history / work experience, changes in employment status, fathering and family relationship, views on domestic duties and household participation, friendship and other forms of social life/ social experience, views on breadwinning, views on gender roles and their views on what a man should be like.

In some cases where informants were unemployed, topics such as the views on unemployment and living on social welfare were also covered. Three informants were unemployed because of relative degrees of disability. In those interviews, I also covered the topics on their views relating to disability. Although not all informants were asked the same set of standard questions, the variation in the usage of interview questions reflected that the individual life experiences of participants were not all alike, even if they were all working-class men. This again justified the reason to adopt the qualitative research method in this research.

Apart from the aspects mentioned in the preceding paragraph, I drew

reference from the practice of Handel (1994) to start the conversation with men. The statement was presented as “I’d like you to tell me the story of your life. Begin at the beginning. Tell me as much as you remember. Then I’ll ask you some questions” (Handel, 1994: 297). Handel (1994) used this statement as an invitation to the informant to say something to represent their experiences. In doing this, I had given the informants a free hand to tell me whatever they wanted. Some informants were eager to tell me their life story, but some could just tell a brief history. For those who were eager to tell me more however, their stories did help me to understand their history and the way they developed their perceptions on certain issues.

## **7. Issues Arising from Interviewing Men**

### **7.1 Considerations on the Masculine Self**

While everyone holds an identity of self, men also acquire a masculine self (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, 2003). Though it is argued that the masculine self is varied by age, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, culture and other factors, there are commonalities in the notions of qualities and capacities that men have to possess to be fully creditable as men. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003) suggest that men create their masculine self strategically or by unconscious habit. They also suggest that men tend to differentiate themselves from women by “signifying greater desires and capacities for control of people and the world” (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001: 90). Although Schwalbe and Wolkomir emphasize that this capacity is important among men in Western culture, the ability to control people and things around him is perceived as important among men in other cultures. Thus, the incapability to do this

would be a threat to a man's masculinity.

The process of doing an interview with men is recognized to cause masculine threat (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001: 93) that will induce defensiveness. One of my unsuccessful experiences in recruiting informants related to his feeling of losing control. In a telephone conversation with a potential informant, I tried to describe what I intended to do, and how he could help me. After knowing that what he had to do was to tell his story to a stranger, he finally rejected my invitation and stated that he was not used to telling his own story to others. This, as Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) have suggested, is a masculine threat. If a man agrees to participate in an interview, he will "give up some control and to risk having one's public persona stripped away" (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001: 91). As a researcher and a stranger had the power to set the agenda, it was possible that the request to interview an informant could be seen as a threat to men and their sense of masculinity; possibly inducing them to act in a defensive way.

Not all of the experiences were unsuccessful however, as there were two informants whom I knew when I was working as a frontline social worker, I was able to contact these men again with the assistance of the social worker of the organization. Although I knew them when I was working as a social worker, they were not my clients. That was why I had to seek the assistance from the social worker. The two informants gave me a positive response by approving to do the interviews. The positive experience in these two informants demonstrated that while the threat to the informants' masculinity was an obstacle in interviewing, there were ways to overcome this. The first was to engage with the potential

informants in occasions other than the research setting. In doing this, I had visited the informants' homes, stayed with one informant in his fruit stall at the close of business and helped him pack up the fruit, and even escorted an informant to a medical consultation. These experiences enabled the informants to understand my purpose more before the interviews, and this not only paved the way for their willingness to participate in this research, but also encouraged informants in the knowledge that they would not lose control. The second was to cooperate with the gatekeepers who have access to the potential informants. Without the assistance of the gatekeepers, it was difficult to locate these men, and although they were service users and volunteers, they did not go to the organizations often. As such, I had to rely on the gatekeepers to help me contact the informants. It was also noticed that informants showed that they were willing to speak with me in interviews not only because I am a man, but also as an ex-social worker, an educated man, someone who is working in a university, and someone who asked for their assistance.

## **7.2 The Power of Interviewer and the Informants**

As noted in previous paragraphs, relinquishing control in an interview may mean losing power. To exercise control is a way to signify the masculine self (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001). As a researcher, I had the power to set the agenda and to decide the questions to be asked. Having this power, the informants had to respond to my questions either in detail or in a brief manner. For their part however, informants did have the power to control the content they would discuss, especially in the areas I did not know but was interested to explore. When responding to my questions or

in telling their stories, informants were actually exercising this power. As power throughout the interview process may shift from the researcher to the informants, I had tried to keep myself conscious to this interview power dynamics (Hoffmann, 2007).

A measure I adopted to minimize the threat of taking control was to invite the informant to ask a question with this sentence at the beginning of the each first interview, "Thanks for your willingness to help me in this research. Before I ask any questions, I wonder if you'd like to know more about what I'm interested in". Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003) suggest that this allows informants to feel less like they are losing control to a stranger with an unknown agenda. At the end of each interview, I asked the informants if they had any supplementary information they wanted to provide. This allowed informants to finish what they had not completed. At the same time, the informants could raise questions they wanted to ask. Although this may not carry actual meaning, symbolically, this was a gesture to invite them to play a more active role in this research.

Although there were power issues in interviews, it did not mean that the interviews were conducted with problems. Rather, the interviews were conducted smoothly, and the duration of the interviews showed that male informants were not as silent as previously assumed. There were however, frequent occasions that informants did give only very brief responses, and this required me to use more questions to make them elaborate their meanings.

Another episode is relevant to be noted here. As I have mentioned, I escorted an informant to the hospital for medical checkup. The informant asked me to negotiate with the doctor on the time he could receive the

medical operation. His reason of asking me to speak on behalf of him was that he considered that as someone educated, the doctor would be more willing to talk to me. The informant's intention reflected that he did not perceive himself in a position to negotiate with someone whom he considered was in power. By making the request, the informant also demonstrated that he admitted a sense of powerlessness in that situation.

## **8. Analysis of Data**

Data analysis in qualitative research should be viewed as the process of making meaning from the data collected. In this study, data analysis was conducted alongside with data collection. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define this as the process of "bringing order, structure, and the meaning to the mass of collected data" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989: 112).

### **8.1 Organization of Data**

In this study, interviews with the working-class men were the major source of data to be analyzed and these interviews were the tool to create meanings to understand men's lived experiences. To organize the data in a meaningful and manageable way, these interviews were transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

One of the reasons for turning the interview data into transcripts is in line with Silverman's (2000) suggestion, the transcripts can help the researcher focus on "the 'actual details' of one aspect of social life" (Silverman, 2000: 829). In this way, it is possible to "inspect sequences of utterances", so that the researcher "make sense of conversation"



(Silverman, 2000: 830). An objective in this research was to understand the meaning of masculinity for these working-class men; the transcripts were an instrument to help me achieve this. Keeping the sequences of the conversation was also important in knowing the context of what the informants had told.

As the transcriptions were in the form of “natural discourse or speech”, these transcriptions were treated as the “original interview data” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 6). As the interview data consists of informants’ distinctive stories, I treated these transcriptions as a separate narrative. Polkinghorne (1995) also suggests that a narrative can also be referred to the interview data that is collected in qualitative inquiries that are related to “everyday or natural linguistic expressions” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 6).

## **8.2 Analysis of Narratives**

The approach of narrative analysis was used for analyzing the data. Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that narrative analysis is “studies whose data consists of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 5). In this study, the data I had collected were in the form of “storied narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 12), and these were suitable to be analyzed with the approach of narrative analysis.

As a paradigmatic type of analysis, analysis of narratives examines the data to identify particulars as “instances of general notions or concepts” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 13). As this kind of analysis seeks to locate common themes among the stories, the procedures of coding and categorizing are needed to generate common themes or conceptual

interpretations. In doing narrative analysis, there are two types of paradigmatic analysis. As indicated by Polkinghorne (1995), the first type is in developing concepts which are derived from previous theories, while the second type is that the concepts are inductively derived from the data. Regarding this study, both types of paradigmatic analysis were applied.

In the preceding chapter, I have discussed that I used both Connell's theories of masculinity and Bourdieu's habitus and capital as my framework. Thus, using coding and categorizing, I checked which part of the storied narratives could be interpreted by theoretical concepts. Nonetheless, there were storied narratives that could not be interpreted by previous theories, and so by using inductive analysis, I worked to develop emerging themes from the narratives. As noted by Polkinghorne (1995), this kind of inductive analysis "includes the recursive movement from noted similar instances in the data to researcher-proposed categorized and conceptual definitions" (Polkinghorne, 1995: 13). Through these recursions, the definitions of the concept will be altered until the concepts come to a definition that best fit the ordering of the derived categories (Polkinghorne, 1995). To ensure this, I read and re-read the narratives a number of times to ensure that the emerging themes could best represent the meanings of the informants. Overall therefore, this research aims to "simultaneously study what people say or do and how they make it meaningful" (Marvasti, 2004: 97).

As will be seen in the coming chapters, with the collaboration of the informants, I have worked to depict an alternative meaning to masculinities that is beyond our understanding of the traditional working-class masculinity. Some of the concepts were derived from the gathered data

rather than by imposing existing theoretical concepts. Polkinghorne (1995) also argues that paradigmatic analysis “provides a method to uncover the commonalities that exist across the stories that make up a study’s database” (Polkinghorne, 1995: 14). In other words, it is able to generate knowledge from the storied narratives told by the informants. With the discussion of data gathering and analysis complete, I will now begin the discussion of the first analytical chapter on men and work.

## Chapter Four

### MEN AND WORK

#### 1. Introduction

In previous chapters, I discussed the importance of engaging in paid employment in maintaining one's masculine identity. This theme has been widely discussed in other studies (Chant 2001; Fuller 2001; Jackson 2001; Murphy 2003; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2003; Edwards 2006; Fletcher 2010). These studies address the importance of work in maintaining a man's breadwinner status, the societal and household benefits men enjoy, work as a fundamental element in forming a successful masculine identity, and why men are prone to maintain the status of employment. As figures show however, more men are encountering underemployment or even unemployment. To the working-class men, the meaning of work is sometimes symbolic rather than having actual benefits. Yet, as Murphy (2003) states, "work is an essential element of an individual man's identity", and "the income and status derived from work largely define a man's place in the world" (Murphy, 2003: 19). However, low pay, difficult working conditions or detachment from work might threaten the prestige that work has brought to men. Murphy's arguments have highlighted the importance of work. The views of Edwards (2006) can further emphasize the relationship between men and work. According to Edwards (2006) work is an integral part of men, and states that "work not only matters *to* men, but is also part *of* them as a key dimension of their identity and masculinity" (*emphasis in the original text*) (Edwards, 2006: 7). Given the importance of

work to men, this chapter begins with descriptions of informants' work histories, and will then focus on their perspectives on the issues related to work.

This thesis explains the ways unemployment is affecting the masculine identities of men and men's strategies to construct their masculine identities in relation to work. In exploring these two themes, this chapter will focus on the discussion of the related issues in work and masculine identities. To emphasize the importance of work, some may consider that work is an integral part of a man's life. However, with the change in economic structure and the decline of industries which require intensive manual-skilled labours, working-class men are more likely to find themselves detached from the labour market. This was true for the informants in this study, as almost all of them had experienced unemployment.

## **2. Informants and their Work**

### **2.1 Work History of the Informants**

Informants in this study had been engaged in certain occupations, and all of them had worked in a number of sectors. Some of them even had worked in more than five industries. Given that they had engaged in various occupations, informants' working experiences varied significantly; which in turn, affected the ways in which they developed their sense of masculinity.

Tsui was amongst the informants who had entered the labour market at the earliest age. He was at 13 when he became employed. He came to Hong Kong from the Mainland on his own to join his family at the age of 13.

His first job was in a silk factory. After working in the factory for 6 to 7 years, he was laid-off. He recalled that at that time the silk industry competed with that in the Mainland, but that he was laid-off because of poor business. After that, he worked for the Kowloon Motor Bus Corporation as a ticket-selling worker. After a few years of working in the bus company, he encountered the challenge of the city-wide riot in 1967. He joined the left-wing union at that time, and he participated in a strike. He recalled that as he was unable to maintain continuous employment in the bus company after the strike, and so the labour union helped him obtain work in a department store which had an affiliation with the Mainland government at that time. He was then involved in another strike, and again lost his job as a result. He was able to find another job in a factory producing thread, and subsequently managed to work there for nearly 20 years. However, when the factory moved to the Mainland, he was laid-off again. At the same time, he was diagnosed of suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa, and gradually lost his eyesight. From then on, he became unemployed.

Fun also entered the labour market at an early age, and had worked in quite a number of fields. He left school before completing junior secondary school, and started to work when he was around 15 years old. His first job was working as an apprentice in a shop repairing electrical appliances. This was a place where he gained knowledge in electronics. Unfortunately, he was fired after working for a couple of months, whereupon his mother then asked a relative to introduce him to work as an apprentice in a factory producing lens for spectacles. There, he met his first wife. After two years of apprenticeship, he found another job in a factory producing lens, during which time he got married. After having his

second child, he started to work as a night-shift taxi-driver. He recalled that the wages he earned in the factory were all given to the family. After having his third child, he became fully committed to working as a taxi-driver; investing in his own taxi and hence becoming self-employed. After another two years, Fun sold his taxi and invested in a restaurant. Running a restaurant was an unsuccessful experience for him. In addition to losing the restaurant, Fun's family relationship also broke down. It was at that time he separated with his first wife. Although encountering such difficult experiences, Fun did not consider that he had done anything wrong in running a business. He emphasized that he wanted to do something good for his family. Fun then worked as a lorry driver, and later worked in a bus company. After several years, he joined the voluntary resignation scheme offered by the bus company, and worked as a '*sam hong*' (*sān hang*) worker before he became unemployed. At the time of the interviews, he was studying a course offered by the Vocational Training Council.

Tin, a father of two children, started to work in container terminals after he graduated from secondary school. At the later stage of working in container terminals, he had the chance to supervise some juniors. He also took pride of the capability to communicate with some foreigners. He remained working in this field for more than 30 years until he was laid-off. He called that a "sunset industry" as the Mainland had developed its own container terminals, and did not need to rely on Hong Kong as an entrepot. After that, he worked as a taxi driver, but owing to an accident that resulted in the loss of his eyesight, and having been diagnosed with heart disease, he was no longer able to continue working as a taxi driver. While still

working, he applied for welfare benefit, as the wages on the driving job were insufficient to maintain a living. He had tried to apply for other jobs but was unable to get stable employment. He had worked as a cleaner in a shopping mall, but again had to quit the job because of deteriorating health. He recalled that the cleaner job required him to work 12 hours a day, and the duties included cleaning of washrooms, shop floors, and even handling food wastes. Most of what he had done in that period were service jobs, which Tin considered to be more appropriate for women than men. He demonstrated a relatively open attitude towards women's participation in the labour market. His wife was working as a part-time sales assistant, and the salary was sufficient for her own living. Tin considered that this would help relieve the tight financial burden of the family. Though the family was living on welfare benefits, because of the status as a new arrival from Mainland China, his wife was not included in the welfare account.

Tsang, a father of two children with the daughter studying in secondary school, started to work when he was around 16 years of age. He started his first job in the Mainland, and had been engaged in some illegal work as a youngster. He was studying in higher secondary school when he started to have association with some gangsters. The turning point was when he sustained a serious head injury at the hands of other gang members that nearly ended his life.. After that, he found a job in an ironware factory before he migrated to Hong Kong. In his first days in Hong Kong, he was able to find a job as a welder. The job was similar to the one he had been doing when he was living in the Mainland; however as the operation of the industry was different from that in the Mainland, he



was fired after having worked for only a week. He faced the same problem in his second job. He managed to work longer in his third job, in which he worked as an outdoor welding worker. Since the job was on a basis of day labour, he had to find other jobs on Sundays, as so to have sufficient wages to support the living of his family in the Mainland. He worked as a worker distributing newspapers, repairing roads and disposing of domestic waste. After an accident, he decided not to work as an outdoor welder. He recalled that the accident occurred when he was welding the walls outside a building and fell from the twenty-third to the twenty-first floor. After this, he shifted to working indoors. As a result of having to adapt to a new working environment, he had to start working in the lowest post. After working as a '*sam hong*' worker for more than ten years, Tsang called himself a master (*shī fu*), but the wage was still on a daily basis. He reported that because he could only read a few traditional Chinese characters and was unable to write any traditional Chinese characters, he did not have the courage to take up any business as he did not have the confidence to sign a contract.

Ng, a father of three children, owned a fruit stall in a market. His eldest daughter was working in a fast food chain store. In Ng's view, his daughter's occupation did not have any prospects. There was a chance for his daughter to work as a sales assistant in a watch company, and he thought occupation of this sort had more prospects. Ng had been running the fruit stall with his wife for more than ten years. Before that, Ng had worked as a worker in a garment factory for a number of years. After that, he worked as truck driver, and it was in that capacity he met his wife. At that time his wife was selling fruit in the market where he used to deliver

fruit. After their marriage, they owned a larger fruit stall, and he was still working as a truck driver at the beginning. After the birth of the first child, his wife had to spend more time at home, and he, therefore, quit his job as a truck driver and spent more time in the fruit stall. Because of the nature of his work, he went to the fruit market before dawn, and would work till late evening every day. Though he was running his own fruit stall, the income was not sufficient to sustain the living of the family. The family was living on the supplement of the social security to make ends meet.

Liu, a truck driver, was living with his wife. They had no children. Though they had thought of adopting one, they did not do so. Before working as a truck driver, he had worked in a zip factory for a number of years. As the factory had moved to the Mainland, he worked in the Mainland for a period of time. He was however, later laid-off, and so came back Hong Kong, and had worked as a worker repairing electrical appliances. After that, he worked in a kitchen utensil factory. With the moving of the factory to Thailand, he was laid-off again. He was unemployed for almost a year. Liu emphasized that though he was unemployed at that time, he did not allow himself to rest for a couple of days. He did try to get something to do, no matter what the nature of job was. He had been working as a self-employed truck driver for almost ten years. As the truck was provided by the company, he did not have any employment contract with the company and so was not entitled to have any employee benefit.

Cheung, who had been unemployed for two years, was living with his wife and his daughter. At the age of 60, Cheung still hoped that he would find another job. He had worked as an apprentice in a furniture making

factory, a sailor, and a *sam hong* worker. It was the job as a *sam hong* worker that had dominated most of his working experience. He started to work at the age of 15, and he was an apprentice at that time. He then worked as a *sam hong* worker, and after several years, being introduced by his friend, he changed his job and worked as a sailor. After staying in that industry for 6 years, he came back Hong Kong and worked as a *sam hong* worker till he was unemployed. Cheung's unemployment was not because he was unable to find a job but because of health related issues. He was unable to kneel down, and had problems in his respiratory organs. Working as a *sam hong* worker required him to use physical strength and thus his knee problem had reduced his ability to work. After he was unemployed, he took up the caring role for the family, and was responsible for taking care of his daughter's daily living. His daughter was at age five, and enrolled in kindergarten. To maintain the living of the family, his wife was working as a senior staff member in a Chinese restaurant, and so it was she who was the financial provider for the family. Cheung received several thousand dollars from his wife as monthly expenses for the family. There was a swap of roles in his family, with his wife taking up the providing role and Cheung taking up the caring role, with Cheung being considered as a fulltime homemaker.

Lee, at the age of early 50s, was working as a goods-delivery worker in a grocery store. His daily work was to pack things on a bicycle and to deliver the goods to the customers. He arrived in Hong Kong in his early 20s, and he entered the city illegally. He recalled that he entered Hong Kong before the Government announced the Touch Base Policy. He managed to enter the urban area before November 1974 and obtained an

identity card. He worked as factory worker, a mobile hawker selling cooked food, a food-delivery worker, and in his present capacity as a goods-delivery worker. He was living with his wife and the four children. The youngest daughter was aged 14 and the eldest one was aged 20, and all of his children were studying in secondary school. He was the only one having a paid job in the family, but as he only received roughly 7,500 dollars as monthly wage, the amount was not enough to maintain the living of the family with five members. As a low-income family, they were entitled to apply for the social security, and Lee's family was receiving social security as a supplement.

Wah, in his early 50s, had been unemployed for some years after he had suffered from an industrial accident when he was working as a construction worker. In this accident, he fell to the ground from a work platform. He said that he had hurt his hips and could no longer hold heavy things. He was living with his wife and his son in a rented unit. Just like Tin and Tsui, because of health problems, he was forced into unemployment. Although the family was living on welfare benefits, Wah's wife had a part-time job. Wah had tried to work as a security guard but because he could not manage to walk down the staircases from the upper floors to the ground floor, he quit the job. Wah also reported that his supervisor expressed harsh words to him and blamed him for his laziness, but it was actually because of his health problem that he could not walk that often. Before working as a construction site worker, he had worked as a hawker selling dolls, a worker delivering goods, and a cleaner in a bus company. He emphasized that although before the accident he had been physically fit and strong, after the accident he could no longer display his physical

power.

The informants' education achievements varied, only two had finished secondary school education, with one having received his education in Mainland China. The rest were not well educated, and some did not even have any formal schooling. This limited education background would have hindered their opportunities in looking for jobs (Murphy, 2003). Informants' work histories of low-wage work, unstable income, underemployment and unemployment made them consider working in a stable environment and earning a sufficient income a blessing. Informants had worked at a variety of jobs such as factory worker, terminal worker, shopping mall cleaner, construction site worker, *sam hong* worker, taxi driver, truck driver, bus-ticket seller, goods-delivery workers, hawker and owning of small fruit stall. Most of these jobs were considered as manual-skilled jobs and did not provide enough employee welfare and protections to the informants. In many cases, men in this study did not enjoy any employee welfare because they were in a self-employed status. Despite the unfavorable conditions they were encountering, informants in this study showed their eagerness to work.

## **2.2 Mid Age and Poor Health as Hindrance to Look for New Jobs**

Hong Kong has been undergoing constant economic restructuring constantly, which has resulted in the decline of some industries, and this was seen in the industries that the informants had engaged in when they were still young. Having been engaged in these industries for a long period, when these industries were forced to decline, men reported difficulty in finding another job. In addition, the experience and the

networks they had accumulated would not necessarily contribute to them finding new work. Tsui, for example, worked as a factory worker in his middle-age, but with the decline of the industry and the removal of the industry to the Mainland, Tsui was laid-off. At the same time, he was suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa, he had to give up working.

*“It was around 1994.....the factories moved to the Mainland, my eye-sight was deteriorating at that time. I could not go to the Mainland to continue my work. And, I accepted the early retirement offer, from then on, I had no employment.” (Tsui)*

Tin, another informant, had been engaged in the shipment industry for more than twenty years. Yet, with the decline of the industry, he was also laid-off. He described the shipment industry after the early 1990s a sunset industry,

*“When I was 48, because....the environment of shipment industry was not good, we called this a sunset industry, and there were quite a lot of industrial accidents while working on the sea, and maybe the Marine Department wanted the industry to move back to the harbours. There was no room for the development of the container sector, and as the industry started to collapse, I was unlucky and was laid-off. I was 48 at that time, approaching 50..... ” (Tin)*

Change in the overall economic environment and the decline of shipment industry in Hong Kong at that time was a factor that forced Tin to leave the industry that he had developed his skills and where his working experience had accumulated. From what Tin had said, age was another factor leading to the difficulty to find a new job. To enter another industry required other skills and knowledge that Tin was not familiar with. Tin remembered that he had several job interviews after then,

*“I had looked for many jobs, but, firstly, when they (the employers) noticed my age, secondly, if you’re only a novice, they would have second thoughts, and they would either lower the wage level or to extend your working hours. I had also worked as a sanitary worker in a mall, it was better than having nothing to do. I had to work overnight, and their demand was so high, not only that the wage was low, I had to work for long hours. The official working hours were 10 hours, but I had to report duty earlier, and had to leave later, and I actually had to work for 12 hours. But, I could only earn 5 to 6 thousand.” (Tin)*

His words illustrated the job changing experience that a middle-aged man had encountered. At his age, Tin would expect to have a job with a wage that could support the living of the family, but as others treated him as a novice, he was only given a mean wage. Though he had tried to find other jobs to make a living after being laid-off, due to his deteriorating health condition, he was unable to find a job that he could consistently maintain.

Tin raised another argument in that employers prefer younger workers. Working-class men such as the informants in this study were in their middle-age, and therefore had to face not only the challenge of their adaptability to a new working environment, but also the challenge of the younger counterparts who possess better physical strength, a crucial element in manual-skilled labour.

### **2.3 Restricting Job Opportunities Due to Limited Education**

Education may not necessarily be the sole factor affecting the kind of jobs one is able to engage in, but it is always a critical factor affecting one’s job opportunity and bargaining power (Murphy, 2003). As mentioned, most of the informants have only limited education attainment.

Looking at the types of jobs the informants had been doing, many of the jobs were manual-skilled jobs, and that the jobs were often considered as elementary jobs. In recalling the jobs he had done, Ng said that:

*I'm illiterate, and I have only worked in a few sectors, like ironing clothes in a factory, truck driver, and selling fruit. I have been driving a truck delivering fruit for 20 years.....You can do nothing else if you're illiterate, you can do nothing else.*

Many of the informants in this study shared similar working experiences as Ng had. The jobs they had worked were often manual-skilled and low-waged.

Tsang explained that his limited education had hindered him from taking up the role as a contractor, and he could only work under others. He explained that:

*If you didn't do the job, you would have no other job opportunity. We could not sign any contract, if you signed one, it looked as if you would become a slave to it, I did not want to take the risk.*

The major concern was that he did not know any traditional Chinese characters or English. He thought that if he did not know the meaning of the contract, and if he had signed a contract, it would be risky. Limited education had deterred Tsang from starting his own business. And, this was what he did not want his children to succeed from him.

Their limited education attainment and limited job opportunities had also been a driving force for them to give the best to their children. They did not want their children to walk the same path as they did. Yeandle (2003) discussed that men in her study have the tendency to give the best



to their children, so as to let their children have the similar opportunity as others have. In doing so, men would limit their daily expenditure. Men in this study also showed this tendency. They kept using less money and would save the wages for the family. The detailed discussion in this area will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Apart from limited suitable jobs, in most of the situations, informants did not have the bargaining power to ask for better remuneration. Indeed, the kinds of jobs they had occupied were mainly manual skill jobs and did not require higher level of education attainment or advanced knowledge and skills. These jobs also did not entitle workers to better fringe benefits. As such, when these men requested better employment terms, they were less likely to be successful. The worst thing was, as Murphy (2003) had pointed out, in order to struggle for an employment, men of this kind had to face competition in a far lower wage environment. They might have to compete with women, young people and other middle-aged men who, without other choice, had to accept the lower wage. Lower wages among junior level workers is a serious social concern. Although Hong Kong has enacted minimum wage legislation, there are still different views on whether the minimum wage can help the elementary level workers.

In relating one's bargaining power with the implementation of minimum wage, Tin considered that the minimum wage might not be something good to the elementary level workers. He held that for the labourers who were not young and did not have higher level of education attainment, they might suffer from the enactment of minimum wage as employers had other choices if they had to pay the minimum wage. He said,

*Employers in Hong Kong have changed a lot, they tend to lower the wage level, and they want to have younger employees. The recent legislation of the minimum wage is on the surface protecting the low-waged labours, but is this the case? This is not the case. Many of those who are either of age issue or lacking of education qualification can strive to have a job because of the fact that their wages are low. Because of this, employers might think that this is a win-win situation, and the low-waged workers can still maintain a living. If the minimum wage is implemented, this group of low-waged worker will disappear [in this labour market]. Employers will consider that as they have to pay for more for the wage, they prefer to hire someone younger. By then, this will create another social burden. If a person can't maintain a living, he'll look for the assistance from the government. I didn't think about these before, but as I have experienced this myself, I notice that it is really hard to find a job now. (Tin)*

What Tin worried about was the dwindling opportunity for the middle-aged men to compete with younger people in the labour market. The problems of the middle-aged men in looking for jobs are not anything new in Hong Kong. As in this study, the informants did not have a higher educational qualification, and were always placed in a less advantageous position due to their limited educational attainment. It is possible that Tin's belief was affected by his experience of failure in seeking for a suitable job after his was laid off. Although Tin had tried a number of methods to look for a job, his impression was that he was rarely given a chance because of his age and because he was a novice in the fields of jobs other than the shipment industry.

Tin's experience in working as a cleaning workman in a shopping mall echoed Murphy's (2003) arguments in the way that men of inadequate education attainment have to compete in a far low-wage working

environment. As Tin had mentioned however, educational attainment was only a factor; age and inexperience in the field were other factors an employer might consider employing him or not. It should be further pointed out that lack of job opportunities had indeed affected a man's family responsibilities as well as making a change in the division of labour in a household (Yeandle, 2003). As demonstrated in Tin's case, with his unemployment, he could no longer bear the breadwinning responsibility. This had affected the couple's roles in the family, with Tin spending more time with the children and his wife engaging in a paid job outside home. Given that the dominant discourse on men's gender identity is that men should work and be responsible for the lives of their family members, a man's inability to fulfill this demand would have threatened his masculine identity. Although Tin's health condition and eye-sight were poor, he said that he was eager to look for a job, and that was why he did not mind working in whatever setting. He believed that it was inappropriate for a man to rely on welfare benefits and to take care of the children at home.

Another characteristic in the working experiences among the informants was that they all entered the labour market at an early age. Some had to share family responsibilities, and some had formed their own families and were responsible for the role of provider. Apart from the lack of opportunity to continue their education, the need to contribute to the living of the family was another factor leading them to enter the labour market at an early age. As Murphy (2003) believes, the shortening youth stage has affected their chances of getting better vocational skills that they need to find better paid jobs. Fun, Tin and Wah were among the informants who had taken actions to enhance their vocational skills that

might help increase their chance to look for a better paid job. They had participated in certain vocational skills training courses. Another question was whether or not training courses were effective in facilitating the trainees to get employment.

Decline in industries that men had previously engaged, the middle age issue, increasing challenges, and working-class men's limited educational attainment were some of the factors contributing to their difficulty to look for a job replacement. In the coming section, how these working-class men created a meaning to work will be discussed.

### **3. Creating a Meaning to Work**

Work has always been a core element in a man's life. The qualitative data in this study demonstrated that dignity, capability, responsibility, achievement, and making a living were meanings that work had given to the informants. The meaning of dignity, capability and responsibility were in line with Fuller's (2001) arguments in another study with Peruvian men. These three aspects were what work had given to his informants who were living in urban Peru. Fuller (2001) argues that it is responsibility to family that gives men "the ultimate justification of work", and it is through work that provides the "foundation of masculine predominance over women and children" (Fuller, 2001: 98). To the informants in Fuller's research, work was the main foundation of their masculine identity, as work transforms them into men, guarantees them a place in masculine space as well as allowing them to become a responsible person and the head of the family (Fuller, 2001). By discussing this, Fuller (2001) pinpointed the importance of the legitimacy of masculine predominance in the public sphere. Fuller

(2001) also suggests that those who are unable to secure employment are becoming marginalized and dwelling an alternative form of masculinity.

### 3.1 Dignity

Informants in this study said that work carried a meaning of dignity. Tsui, for example, emphasized the dignity which employment had brought him,

*“If you have work, you’ll have something to commit to, and will have a contribution to the society. You’ll be dispirited if you don’t have any work, so work affects one’s outlook. If you don’t have any work, you won’t have any spiritual outlook. If you have to hurry to work, you’ll walk faster. But, if you don’t have (any work), you’ll be like a wandering soul. If you like gambling, you’ll read the material on horse racing, otherwise, you’ll read several copies of newspaper. Life will be boring if you have nothing to do.” (Tsui)*

Tsui mentioned that in the first few days of his unemployment, he was rather relaxed, but after eight to ten days, started to feel bored, and because others had to work he found himself alone, bored and without regular contact with friends. Apart from his family members (wife and daughter), there was no one else to be with him. Tsui’s situation highlighted that he had relied on the relationships built in the workplace. Work was to him a contribution to society, but without work, had become dispirited. In differentiating the difference between being employed and unemployed, he had used words like “*contribution*” and “*dispirited*”, “*walking in a faster pace*” and “*wandering like a soul*”. The differentiation showed that Tsui was eager to have paid work as work would bring him energy and a feeling of self-worthiness. When recalling his feeling towards

unemployment, he had the following words,

*"I felt sadder and sadder, I needed other's material assistance, and I felt myself useless, and I could not earn a living. Even if living on CSSA is a choice, one can only have a thousand or more for monthly expenses, this kind of living is intolerable. I have some friends who are also with sight problem, they end up committing suicide. I went to a gathering yesterday, and I heard that someone died and some jumped down from a building. I felt so sad, those are whom I know....." (Tsui)*

The inability to work was endangering Tsui's dignity. The inability to provide for himself and the family was in contrast to his belief in the importance of work. Unemployment had deprived him of the ability to provide for the family; forcing him to rely on others' assistance. Living on welfare has been considered as deficiency by the informants.

Unemployment was emasculating Tsui's masculine identity as he could not provide for the family. Tsui's experience of unemployment was not solely related to his failure to find a job. He was also suffering from Retinitis Pigmentosa which caused him to lose his eye sight after his 40s. He became unemployed when he had lost his eye sight completely.

Disability is another aspect that has influenced how one perceives his male identity (Gerschick and Miller 1995; Shakespeare 1999a; Sparkes and Smith 2002). Gerschick and Miller (1995) described three strategies in which disabled men employ in responding to the clashes between hegemonic masculinity and the general perceptions of disability as weakness. These strategies are: reformulation, reliance and rejection. Reformulation is how a man redefines his masculinity according to his own terms; reliance is how a man internalizes traditional meanings of masculinity and to meet these expectations; and rejection is how a man

creates alternative masculine identities and subcultures (Shakespeare, 1999a). Adoption of these strategies reflected if a man has adapted to disability. In Tsui's case, though he disclosed a feeling of misfortune, he was adopting a reformulation strategy in responding to his disability and the way he was emasculated from work. He did participate in some sessions sharing with others the ways to tackle the loss of eyesight. He did learn to cook and he was proud that he was able to cook some food better than his wife. He learnt how to walk by himself without the help of his wife and thus, aimed at retaining his autonomy.

### **3.2 Capability**

Capability was another aspect that the informants in this study raised. Apart from the capability to work in the public sphere, capability carried another meaning. This meaning was reflected from Tin's working experience. In summarizing his former employment in a container shipment company, Tin disclosed that in the later stage of his employment, he had the opportunity to coach other juniors; using the following words to summarize this experience:

*Actually.....work.....is a pattern for us to maintain a living, I work to earn a wage, and I get much experience in work. This is very important, such as the manner to deal with people, and it is important that you have the ability to teach others, I have taught many juniors. We have to follow a junior's work for a month in the industry. We have to learn how to draw a graph and to do some calculations, the most important of all is the structure of a ship, the procedures in getting the containers onto the ship, we have to teach them all these. There are many things which you don't know, which you acquire the knowledge, which you later teach others. These are what we*

*can get from work. Apart from an income, how to deal with others, how to solve a problem.....in short, apart from income, one can gain some experience in life and the way to deal with others in work. Because one must work, from the day you entered the labour force to getting married and having one's own kids, work is a necessary condition for meet these. If you don't have a work, you won't have these. (Tin)*

In recalling this experience, Tin demonstrated his capability of not only in having employment, but the competence in coaching others. The capability to engage in work had given Tin a sense of pride. In coaching others, he was able to transfer his knowledge to others. Although this was not necessarily a behaviour of predominance over others, in conveying this capability, Tin was asserting his power over the subordinates. In this way, power could be seen important in maintaining a man's identity, and it was through work that power was reproduced.

It is unquestionable that this sense of competence or capability is not only important in a man's work but in the way one treats others. Just as Tin had stated, it was through employment that one had learned how to treat others in a proper manner. In addition, this capability was related to one's direction in life. Again, this direction in life was reproduced from work. Tin had the following words when talking about this issue:

*.....With regard to work.....to a person, disregarding health condition, I think it is necessary for a person to work, no matter if the family needs you to work or not, I think everyone should work. Work is a pattern for one to live, and you can't open your eyes in the morning and just wait there till going to sleep at night. That's not the attitude, one must have an objective in life, and work is one of the objectives. Some will say that to work hard.....work is a kind of .....if you have eagerness to advance..... and after I have learnt the*



*knowledge, I'll be the head later or you'll have your own shop.....This is what you have to struggle for. With this, you'll have a direction, and you won't end up without any direction nor doing nothing all day. You have a work, you'll have an objective in life, so work is important to a person. (Tin)*

Words like to “be the head of a team” or “to have one’s own shop” not only reflected Tin’s aspiration to work, but his ambition and the drive for upward mobility. His words also revealed that it was through work that he could do something with an achievable aim, and not just to hang around and do nothing. In other words, in Tin’s view, work kept him moving forward.

As with Tsui’s experience, Tin’s unemployment was also related to his health condition. It was observed that he was still occupied by a feeling of nostalgia to the days when he was employed. Employment was important to Tin as he could earn a living, and could accumulate his experience in life. Employment also provided him with a direction in life, and enabled him to gain power, this could be seen from his position of supervising some juniors. His unemployment was seen as a threat to his manliness. It is no wonder that, to a working-class man like Tin, work was important in sustaining one’s male identity.

Unlike Tsui, Tin had not adapted to his disability. He was still preoccupied with traditional expectations of how a man should perform. Since he believed that a man must work, his inability to work had violated his personal belief. Using Gerschick and Miller’s (1995) strategies, Tin was employing a reliance strategy, in which he was still clinging to the traditional meanings of masculinity such as acting as a provider of a family, having a higher social status, with physical strength, and being

independent. Apart from the inability to secure employment, he had to rely on his wife to take him out at night. Such misfortune was demonstrated when I accompanied him for a medical consultation. He asked me to speak on behalf of him to request the medical practitioner to do surgery to improve his condition. The reason behind his request was that he thought he was in an inferior social position, and that the medical practitioner would not listen to him. In supplementing the reason for requesting surgery, he added that as a man, he wanted to have a job. Tin's words showed that he could not tolerate himself as an unemployed man and that employment was what he considered gave him the capacity he desired.

Tin and Tsui were both disabled, and were both experiencing the loss of their eye-sight. They did however, employ different strategies in responding to disability and their inability to meet the expectations of traditional masculine identities. Tsui was more likely to adapt a reformulation strategy and was redefine an alternative masculine identity in his own terms. He was adapting to his disability and was doing something else that would exhibit his strength. Tin, on the other hand, was employing a reliance strategy, and was still captured in his interpretation of traditional masculine identities. His present state was in contrast to his past experience in supervising some juniors in a crew. His situation was similar to what Shakespeare (1999a) has suggested, in that he did not automatically enjoy the power and privileges of non-disabled men. The different strategies Tin and Tsui employed demonstrated that individual disabled man differed from one another.

Another informant Cheung also talked about how he had used his time when he had a paid work. He said:

*If you have a job, you'll find it easy to spend a day, and you'll feel happier. Although it is exhausting in working, you'll feel happy when you can make money, and you'll find the time passes fast. If you work from 9 am to 6 pm, you'll start working in a quarter past nine, have lunch at twelve, and have tea at three- thirty, and then you only have to work two more hours, and leave the workplace at five or six. You'll find the time passes fast if you have a job. If you don't have a job, you'll find.....it hard to spend a day. You have to go to the market, then you'll be staying at home, and reading newspaper.*  
(Cheung)

In addition to the direction that Tin had mentioned, Cheung had differentiated the pattern in use of time before and after unemployment. Taking control of the time spent when he had paid work was to him a better experience, and he found it easier to spend a day when he had paid work. Thus, the drive to have autonomy to use the time outside of home rather than being confined indoors was obvious in differentiating why Cheung preferred to have paid work.

### **3.3 Responsibility**

Responsibility was another meaning carried in work. Tsang, for example, stated that he worked for his children and the family, and in this, was emphasizing a provider role in the family. Growing up in a traditional Chinese family, Tsang demonstrated that he had learned from his family members, and such responsibility was reproduced from socialization. Tsang stated that,

*It is all for the next generation, what is done is for the next generation. My father brought me up, and I hope that I can bring them up. I also hope that my children will do better than I do. My parents also taught me this way. They thought that they*

*were not educated, my mother was illiterate, my father had only been educated for a few months, and what he did was to earn money for the family. He left nothing for himself, but he left everything for us. I'm doing the same thing as what he did to us. I'm teaching my children to cherish each other as in the way my siblings taught me. So, what I'm doing is for the children, I don't think I have any achievement, to be able to provide for the family is a kind of achievement in this society. To provide for the family, it is important that one should be industrious and frugal.....my purpose is to manage the basic household expenses. It is fine to just meet the basic living, the children won't be lacking of money in study, though they don't have much pocket money, they won't be lacking of it. (Tsang)*

Tsang emphasized responsibility to the family, and at the same time, his provider role. Responsibility has been mentioned in other studies as to be one of the key aspects in a man's work (Willot and Griffin 1996; Fuller 2001). Responsibility is related to the traditional masculine identity of breadwinning and of being a provider. In taking on this role, Tsang emphasized the importance of earning a sufficient wage for the daily expenses of the family. This responsibility was more than providing a sufficient living for the family. Tsang was expecting that by providing for the children, they would live a better life. Such expectations towards the children are also observed in other informants. Ng, for example, when talking about his daughter's work in a fast food restaurant, stated that there were no prospects in working in the fast food restaurant. He wanted his daughter to follow the path of his niece who was working in a watch company. He stated his expectations:

*Expectation.....it's fine if they know a specific skill, to learn more things and will have some more chances.....unlike me, I'm illiterate, I had worked as a factory iron worker, a truck*

*driver, and I had been a truck driver delivering fruit for twenty years.....you could do nothing if you're illiterate, could do nothing..... (Ng)*

Both Tsang and Ng did admit that they did not have the literacy to allow them to work in fields other than those required only manual skills. Providing for the family as a responsibility was to let the family members, especially the children, pursue something that they themselves could not achieve. They were, on one hand imposing an expectation on their children; while on the other hand, wanted their children to live a better life. In this way, informants did not only treat responsibility as a matter related to providing for the family, they also considered that they were responsible to help their children have a better future.

### **3.4 Sense of Achievement**

Tsang stressed that he had no achievement but the capability to provide for a family. He said that, *"I don't think I have any achievement. To be able to provide for the family is a kind of achievement in this society"*. Such achievement could as well be considered as his capital. In a study, Willot and Griffin (2004) suggest that symbolic capital is important in maintaining a man's masculine identity. They comment that working-class men do "have a greater investment in the breadwinner position than men from more socially privileged backgrounds" (Willot and Griffin, 2004: 64). Working-class men do not have the equivalent access to other forms of capital as middle class men have. In another study, Fuller (2001) also suggested that middle class men are less worried about their role as a provider, compared with working class men. His interpretation is similar to

that of Willot and Griffin (2004) in the way that working-class men do have less access to other forms of capital.

With reference to their points of view, and as I have stated in previous chapters, working-class men do not have equal access to other forms of capital as other men do. The wage they earned could barely maintain the living of the family, and in general, working-class men do not possess higher education qualifications and little to no cultural inheritance from their predecessors, and therefore, did not have the same level of cultural capital as middle-class men. The social capital they could access was also limited due to their minimal accessibility to resources and people. As such, working-class men like Tsang had little access to other forms of capital, but their perceived achievement and the authority were derived from the ability to provide for their respective families. It was this authority together with the status as the provider or breadwinner that gave men the symbolic power in the family.

Bourdieu (1990) asserts that “symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1990: 138). In order to have this symbolic power, men need to possess the symbolic capital. In explaining what symbolic power is, Bourdieu states, “symbolic power is a power of consecration or revelation, a power to conceal or to reveal things which are already there” (Bourdieu, 1990:138). Regarding the social relationship, traditional gender relations and gender order are considered a kind of existing relationship, and it is through daily interaction that men are able to display this symbolic power onto women and to other family members. Although the data provided by Tsang did not show that he was displaying this power onto his family, when informants considered that

they were the household head and they were in the position to make a decision or to reject others' view, they were asserting symbolic power.

Lee, for example, said that he was not in the habit of cleaning up his home, and would wear the same pair of slippers whenever he was going to work or staying at home. He, therefore, would reject his children's view on changing his slippers at home. He said that, "*They don't dare to give me words, I have been living this way for many years. They don't dare to give me words*". With this short phrase, it is reflected that he held the status as a father, and he could display to his family members that they were not in a position to confront him.

### **3.5 "To have work is to make a living"**

Apart from dignity, capability and responsibility, to make a living was another meaning that work had given to the informants. To Fun, work was to enable one to make a living, and he considered that if someone wanted to continue to work, one had to upgrade oneself. In this sense, he considered work was a means to make ends meet. Like other informants, jobs that Fun had been engaged in during his middle-age were mainly manual skilled labour, and these jobs were unable to give him a chance to earn much money. As such, work was to him a way to make a living. In the following conversation extract, Fun expressed his views on work,

*Interviewer: I still have a few questions, you have worked for more than 30 years.....*

*Fun: Yes, I have. I have just realized that I have wasted many years, I have nothing.*

*Interviewer: experience.....what do you think you have got from work?*

*Fun: Work.....*

*Interviewer: what do you think you have got from work?*

*Fun: Work.....can make a living, I find this question very interesting, Work has enabled me to live a life, it is only through work, one can live a life. The other thing is, because we have to live, we need to work, and we have to upgrade ourselves, the relationship is very interesting. To meet the demand of the society, the society was previously dominated by factories, but it is no longer the situation, service industry is now the focus. It is interesting, because I have to live so I have to work, and if I want to work, I have to upgrade myself, and I have to upgrade myself so as to make myself able to live a life.....*

The last few lines of the above quote reflect the view of Gorz (1999),

*The imperative need for a regular income is used to persuade people of their 'imperative need to work'. The need to act, to strive, to be appreciated is used to persuade people that they need to be paid for whatever they do. (Gorz, 1999: 72)*

If one wants an income, one has to work, and if one wants to maintain a living in this society, one has to work to get the income. In Fun's words, having paid work was to make a living. To be appreciated by others was a motive for one to learn and to work, Fun had mentioned "*I want to be appreciated by others*" and "*I felt rather happy as I was able to be promoted from the supervisor of a line to the head of a section. When someone appreciated what you had done, it wouldn't be a waste of the efforts you had committed*". Fun was eager to learn and to perform himself as a competent staff. Appreciation as a non-materialistic driving force was crucial to make him work hard.

In the interviews, Fun revealed his ambition to make a large amount



of money in his earlier stage of life. Fun had owned his businesses, for example: running a taxi, a restaurant and a van. Although all of these ended in failure, he disclosed that what he did was for the sake of the family. He stated that the reason for running a restaurant was to improve the living conditions of his family and his parents. Fun stressed that his ex-wife did not agree with his plan to operate a restaurant. He however, had his own motivations. He explained:

*In fact, my intention to run a restaurant was for my parents because they were old, and if the restaurant had good business, the whole family would have work, don't you think so? I own nothing. The taxi and the public housing unit were for my wife, and I did not have any share. She was named the household head of the public housing unit.....In fact, my purpose for running the restaurant was to let all family members have work. Don't you think so? I told her that it was good for her to become a boss. (Fun)*

What Fun had emphasized was his responsibility to family. If a breadwinner role was also a role to financially support the family, Fun was taking up the financial provider role at that time. It has been suggested in other studies that this financial provider role offers a source of identity to many men (Chant, 2001; Jackson, 2001; Warren, 2007). This matched Fun's intention, since as a man, it was his responsibility to financially provide for the family.

In addition to this responsibility, Fun's account reflected that he wanted to invest in small businesses to allow his family live a better life. His efforts however, ended in failure. Fun's intention to work as a mobile hawker, to run a taxi, and to set up a restaurant was to invest what he had to make a living that he had thought would give a more stable and secure

life for his family. Though Fun had not used the term entrepreneurship, he said *“don’t know why, I liked to do business”*, and the history in running various small businesses displayed his entrepreneurial intentions. Harrell (1985) suggests that one of the characteristics in Chinese culture that makes Chinese people work hard is that they are driven by the ethic of entrepreneurship. The meaning of entrepreneurship is to Harrell, “the investment of one's resources (land, labor, and/or capital) in a long-term quest to improve the material well-being and security of some group to which one belongs and with which one identifies” (Harrell, 1985: 216). By defining this, Harrell (1985) has specified some crucial factors in this kind of entrepreneurship. These are long term efforts, security, and the collectivity as a family.

In setting up a restaurant, Fun's stated intention was to allow all of the family members a chance to work, that his parents would go to the restaurant when they did not have a place to socialize, and his wife would also be addressed as an owner. He was imagining a long term vision, and he was trying to do something to engage his family in that investment. Fun was rationalizing what he was doing at that time. Though he was trying to provide a secure life for his family, the eventual losses made the business no longer viable. In addition to gaining profits, Harrell stated that security is also “to establish hedges and defenses against loss” (Harrell, 1985: 216). And, in Fun’s case, the loss was enormous, he reported that, *“doing businesses made me lose everything, and worsened my family relationship”*. He regretted that he was unable to provide a sense of security to his family at that time. Although Fun’s case was not a typical case, entrepreneurship as Harrell (1985) has suggested was a value that

a man would uphold in order to enable his family to lead a better life. The ability to provide for the family was a sense of pride. This pride was highly related to Fun's masculinity in that he had a family to provide for; a task which he had succeeded at until being forced to close down the business. In the interview, Fun was proud to tell me that he once had a privileged bank account before having to declare bankruptcy. His words and attitude reflected that he placed financial success on a high order in life, and this financial success was important to his masculinity as this was equivalent to the ability to provide for the family.

To summarize the discussions in this section, work had given men in this study the meanings of dignity, responsibility, capability, achievement, and to make a living. Informants who were unable to work because of disability, frequently experienced a loss of dignity, but this loss also depended on the strategy a man employed to cope with his disability. As discussed in other studies, work had also given men a kind of symbolic capital. This capital was related with men's achievement in their work and though this capital was symbolic, it gave men the authority and status to access certain benefits that work had brought them. For instance, when negotiating the kind of household duties they had to undertake, their status in employment would free them from doing certain tasks or allow men to concentrate doing the tasks they wanted. This symbolic capital had allowed men to gain symbolic power, and this enabled men to display their authority at home. It was also a sense of pride to have a family to provide for, but their misfortune made it impossible for some informants to provide for their family; an experience that was beyond their control, and which was damaging to their pride. When they were healthy, the men could work

and earn a living for the family. Their disability was a sharp contrast to their previous health condition, and though they were still working-class men when they were disabled from work, they still displayed their priority of valuing the ability to make a living. After the deterioration of their health and disconnection from work, they were further pushed into a marginalized position. In addition to lacking social privilege that other men had, the inability to work was challenged their experience of masculinity.

#### **4. Differentiating Paid Work from Volunteer Work**

Some of the informants in this study had experience doing volunteer work. The data in this study shows that informants carried different views when doing voluntary work. Freeman (1997) and Taniguchi (2006) found that men's volunteer work experience was sometimes discouraged by their status of unemployment. In their studies, men who were unemployed did not spend as much time in volunteering as men who were employed. It is perhaps reasonable to assume that if men were unemployed, they should have more time committing in non-economic activities. In fact, this may not be the case as reflected from the studies of Freeman (1997) and Taniguchi (2006). Given the social norm that men are expected to engage in economic activity outside home, unemployed men may spend more time in looking for chances to participate in some economic activities that will secure the living of their own as well as the family's. This accounts for one of the reasons why unemployed men are less devoted to volunteering. Taniguchi (2006) suggests that what differentiates volunteer work and paid work or family work is voluntarism. Voluntarism embraces the meaning of altruism and in doing volunteer work, one is able to benefit

others. As this is a reciprocal relationship, the volunteer will then be respected and recognized by others. In doing volunteer work, working-class men would get what they did not have in paid work.

Although not completely different from the studies of Freeman (1997) and Taniguchi (2006), informants in this study did have experience in doing volunteer work. Some of them worked as volunteers in the social service units where they sought help, and some worked as volunteers in labour unions. Except for a few, the majority of them were engaged in volunteer work and these enabled them to use their previous working experience and the physical capital that they had, thus, to display their masculine identities.

Tin, for example, had sought help from a social service organization, and in the process of receiving help, had participated in a men's social group as well as participating in volunteer work with other male group members. The duties he was involved in were mainly tasks that required bodily strength such as helping the elderly move into new accommodation. In doing so, he was appreciated by the elderly people. In re-telling his experience in doing volunteer work, Tin stated that:

*I will do some volunteer work when I'm in better health condition, I learn this in these few years. When I'm able to help others, to help the elders for removal, and see that others are happy, I'll feel good. This is different from other forms of happiness, and is unlike making money. You might be less committed in making money, but after you have done some volunteer work, you'll feel great. I totally support others to do some volunteer work, you'll find this a way to release your pressure. I have done volunteer work for many times, and I'm happy about that. I see that I have the ability to help others for removal and can assist the service centre, the feeling is great.*

*Firstly, this can help oneself release pressure. Secondly, it is good to help others. I had not thought about this before, and I thought if I had time, I'd rather take a nap. But, after I have suffered from these, I noticed that others helped me for no reward, and at first I thought that if others had helped me, I could just help others once so as to repay for their assistance. I treated volunteer work with this attitude before. After you have done volunteer work, you'll notice that when you sense the happiness of those elders you have helped, the feeling from it is somewhat different. Even if I have sweated a lot, I still find that doing volunteer work is great. (Tin)*

While emphasizing the benefits in doing volunteer work, Tin saw the difference between paid work and volunteer work. Volunteer work, as Taniguchi (2006) argues, is not something taken for granted. As men are expected to engage in economic activity outside home, spending time in volunteer work is considered as another non-economic activity which is not preferred by men. In Tin's case, he did not prefer engaging in volunteer work before he sought help from a social service centre. Instead, he preferred to rest; considering volunteering work as a time-wasting activity. His attitude towards volunteer work changed significantly after he had become service recipient. The appreciation and recognition he received from the elderly people whom he had helped made him value the experience of volunteering. In his words, it was seen that he treasured the moments in helping others, and this reflected his sense of altruism. To him, doing volunteer work was something that could benefit not only himself but others as well.

Informants stated that the reward for doing volunteer work was different from engaging in paid work as the nature of the reward was non-materialistic. The recognition and appreciation men received provided

incentives for their future commitment in volunteering. In differentiating volunteer work and paid work, Tin said,

*I have tried to do volunteer work and I do feel great, such kind of happiness is a reward, and is better than giving you ten dollars or even some hundred dollars. Those forms are materialistic, maybe those money will allow you to buy things, and the money is what I have earned from a work. You'll feel indifferent to this money. But, when you realize that you feel happy and others feel happy, that is already a good reward. If you can think about this, you won't feel that you have lost to someone.....these are the appreciation from what I have seen what others and I have done. I feel happy when the elders I have helped are happy. To help them move to a new accommodation, and they get what they want. They can live a better life, and they can move from a very restricted place to having a new home, and if you help them to tidy up the place, they do feel happy. (Tin)*

The words of Tin reflected the differences between paid work and volunteer work. As Taniguchi (2006) argues, volunteering benefits one in life enrichment, and this feeling is beyond the experience gained in paid work. Tin's testimony echoes Taniguchi's views. According to him, one could get a higher sense of achievement from voluntary work than in paid work.

It was noticed that informants in the current study tended to commit in the types of volunteer work that can display their bodily strength or in areas that their capital would be treasured. Wood work, minor indoor decoration, installing electrical appliances, painting, helping others to move to new accommodation were the types of volunteer work informants had been engaged in. This reflected that even if informants were not engaged in economic activity, they still preferred to engage in the type of

work where they could use their skills. In responding to my question of what he would do if he could not find a job in the coming days, Fun had the following response:

*"I have planned that even if I'm unable to find a job, I won't waste what I have learnt. I can go to a temple to do some volunteer work like maintenance and repair. When I'm doing the construction work, I can learn something more professional. If I have a work, I can do better, if no one employs me, I can take up some jobs myself. If not, when I get older, I can help in a temple, in the service centre, and to help in the church, but you have to help others first. If you have sufficient skills, you should be able to help others, and you won't feel lonely because you can help others. That's what I have in mind, I can work or to contribute to the society." (Fun)*

What Fun said might reflect what others had in mind -- to make use of one's obtained-skills in volunteer work. As previously discussed, working-class men did want to use the kind of capital they treasured or they were good at in volunteer work. This capital was also related to the skills they had to make use of in engaging a paid work. It was no wonder that when informants recalled their experience in volunteer work, the majority of them shared that what they had done was largely related to their work experience or the manual skills they had. It was rare to hear men's volunteering experience in supporting others emotionally or in child caring. As these kinds of support are frequently considered feminine, a man's masculinity would be undermined by undertaking such tasks; and therefore, men are less likely to involve themselves in these volunteering activities.

Men did not consider replacing paid work with voluntary work. When I asked Fun what he would do if he was unable to find a job after he had



completed the retraining courses, his response showed that he had not thought of replacing paid work with voluntary work. He stated: *"If you can't make a living, you'll express your sorrow even when doing volunteer work. It's hard to imagine if one can do the volunteer work if one feels sorrowful"*. To look for a paid job was obviously some informants' first priority.

## **5. Adopting a Work First Principle**

As illustrated, some of the informants in this study were unemployed at the time of being interviewed. Although the duration of unemployment varied, informants did show a strong view of adopting a work first attitude. This attitude could be reflected from the efforts they had invested in looking for job opportunities, and the reasons behind their eagerness to look for a job.

Tin, for example, was laid-off from the shipping industry, which he had worked in for more than twenty years. He found a job working as a taxi driver two months after being laid-off. Though he could not work in this field for long because of his health problem, he still tried to look for other job opportunities by other means. Tin stated:

*I have tried many ways to look for a job, I have gone to the Labour Department, through newspaper, to join the recruitment exercises organized by some service centres, and have used my personal network. Besides, I have completed two courses in building security and computer, I wish to upgrade myself and to have a better chance to find a job. But, it is different from what you have expected.....men nowadays.....especially men at their middle age are difficult to find a job. (Tin)*

Similarly to others, Tin had used various means to search for jobs.

Apart from using services provided by the Labour Department, he had upskilled himself by enrolling in several courses that would benefit him in job searching. He considered however, that middle-aged men under this economic structure were less advantaged in finding a job. Wah shared a similar experience, and reported that when he first came to Hong Kong, it was easier for him to find a job even he had only received few years of education in the Mainland. He could then rely on his physical strength to maintain employment. Now however, he was unable to find work even after completing a job retraining course.

What Tin and Wah discussed reflected the views of the middle-aged men who found it difficult to look for a job. Fun was another informant who had tried to upskill himself by taking several job skills training courses with the intention of not just facing his current difficulties but also planning for the future. The two excerpts below express Fun's views on his eagerness to work, as well as the plan he had in mind in order to achieve what he was striving for.

*"I'm now approaching 50, I have to plan for myself, and have to enhance my skills, even if I will work as a security guard, acquiring more skills is an advantage. I didn't have a license to work as an electricity worker, and I get that recently, I have some preparations. I had worked for the one who had hired my van for a period, and his mentor was his partner. I had taken a course in bricklaying and plastering, and he had given me a chance to work for him, but mainly focused on minor stuff, the major part was handled by the mentor. I could do the painting, but not the bricklaying and plastering. He only allowed me to do the minor part. If he had jobs, I had jobs too. But, if he did not have any job, neither did I. I could not continue that way, and as I noticed some retraining courses at that time, and I*

*therefore took the course in bricklaying and plastering, but I could not get the license. You need a long plan for the future, and I took another bricklaying course on that same day. I have been studying in this course for 6 months, and I started to get CSSA in June. As I couldn't make ends meet with the limited subsidy from the course, I only had 90 dollars for daily use, I couldn't make it, and I started to live on CSSA. ” (Fun)*

*“At that time, I had conflicts with my ex-wife and I ran away from home, and stayed in a charity organization for more than 10 days, and I applied for the CSSA. Later, a boss asked me to help him, and I went to work for him. I thought it would benefit me as I need 5 years of working experience before getting the license to work as an electric worker. I hope that he will issue me a letter to allow me to get the license. I think in the long run, I will be a property security guard. I won't be able to take hold of heavy machine all day. If I'm unable to do that, no one will hire me. Besides, the nature of such job has no protection, apart from injuries, constant work is not guaranteed. Maybe you can only work one day but have to wait at home for another two days. I prefer to work in this field and to accumulate the experience to get a license at the same time. In the long run, I want to find a job that doesn't require that much physical strength. I'm no longer young, even if I get a license in bricklaying, I won't be able to do that.....I have to accumulate experience and to learn new things at the same time.” (Fun)*

Sharing the same views as Tin and Wah, what Fun did was to accumulate his own capital in the way that he thought would benefit him in looking for jobs. He also sensed the dilemma as others had mentioned about the difficulty for middle-aged men to look for a job. Thus, he chose not to compete with the younger generation in the jobs that required physical strength. As such, the job skills training courses he could choose were limited.

Although working-class men like Tin, Wah and Fun had tried hard to upskill themselves, the courses they had attended were limited to the manual skills enhancement, such as electricity work, water work, painting, indoor maintenance, bricklaying or security guard training. All of these courses were largely dominated by men and were considered less feminine. Although informants would consider jobs in service work, they would limit themselves to the jobs that were mainly occupied by men, such as driving and security work which required some skills they had previously adopted, and not only service provision. Tin found a job as a taxi driver after he was laid off from his long-term employment, Wah tried to work as a security guard, and Fun reported that if he could not find another job with what he had learnt in the retraining course, he still had a driving license, and could work as a driver again.

Service jobs other than those being occupied by men were not preferred by these men. Nixon (2009) argues that service work that may be suitable for working-class men with limited education qualification is mainly occupied by women. Women are considered as having the attributes in deference and docility that enable them to have better emotional control when handling a customer. The importance in management of feelings when interacting with customers has been considered essential in low-skilled service jobs. Nixon also suggests that “women’s supposed gender-specific skills and attributes are often central to the service being provided in the low-level servicing jobs that they dominate” (Nixon, 2009: 306). Thus, employers may consider that women inherently possess such natural attributes, and therefore have more advantages in seeking a low-skill service job. Men however, especially

working-class men, are believed to lack such attributes. Tin, for example, related how he thought women had a better chance of finding employment.

He stated:

*They (women) also need to find a job to make a living. Many of them have got used to working here, and they have worked in many of the jobs they did not do in previous days such as security guard, drivers, and restaurant waitress. This leads to decreasing chances for men to find a job. Employers tend to hire women because they have better manner in dealing with people, their wage is lower, and they are younger. Others may have the feeling that hiring a woman is better than hiring a man. All in all, women have better acceptance to work in service industry, in this way, men do have fewer chances to find a job. (Tin)*

Tin admitted that women were better in interacting with others, and he thought women were more acceptable for service jobs. Although Tin did not further explain why women were more acceptable for service jobs, his view was related to his own experience when he was a taxi driver. He recalled that he had been treated rudely by some customers who thought he did not know the route to the destination. He said that customers were sometimes “*very mean in what they said*”, and he thought that “*taxi drivers always suffer from mean words and rude attitude*” of these customers. For him, it was normal to have interactions with customers when providing service, and one might encounter situations that would cause him to “*suffer from mean words and rude attitude*”. Tin’s words showed how a man who was working in the service industry was less tolerant of these words and more likely to express one’s negative emotion.

Working-class men are not completely resistant to the idea of getting into service jobs, but prefer to choose the job that is dominated by men

and less feminine (Nixon 2006, 2009). Nixon (2009) explains that service jobs are challenging working-class men's masculinity, as the low-skill interactive service jobs are endangering the specific masculine form of labour. According to Nixon (2009), working-class men are less able to get promoted to higher ranks in service jobs which require higher education qualifications. They have; therefore, fewer chances as their middle-class counterparts who have more chances to enter higher ranks or even managerial positions. Working-class men are also less adaptable than their female counterparts in adjusting to certain low-skilled service jobs that require more communication skills. In this way, in order to maintain their masculine identity in service work, what working-class men can do is to look for jobs that are mainly occupied by men and in which they can display the strength they treasure.

Working-class men's limitation in the choices of service jobs can also be understood as their strong identification with manual labour jobs. Manual labour has the specific importance in the construction of masculinity. Working-class men are unlikely to seek to enter interactive service jobs that are not dominated by men as these service jobs do not offer any masculine compensations provided by manual labour (Nixon, 2009). Thus, manual labour is seen as a source of identity, pride and power for working-class men (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000). In fact, men in this study showed that they had adopted various means to try to tackle the difficulties of looking for work; showing that they were flexible in the sense that they did not stick to the industry they had previously engaged.

Enrolling in retraining courses was one of the strategies informants had adopted to enhance employability. Some would commit themselves in

casual labour as another strategy tackling the pressure unemployment had incurred. Liu was an informant who had experienced unemployment for a year, but instead of enrolling in the retraining courses, he frequently worked as a casual labourer during that time. He revealed that he was feeling bad in that year of unemployment, for he had a mortgaged flat, and he had to earn sufficient income to make his monthly repayments. He thought selling the flat was not a good idea, as this would cause him to lose what he had already invested. He was willing to work in any setting, provided that he felt competent in fulfilling the expectations of the job at hand. When I asked him what the feeling was like in those days when he was unemployed, he provided the following response,

*Liu: The feeling.....of course it was bad and I felt anxious, the compensation I got from lay-off was.....I needed to pay ten thousand a month for the mortgage, the money was used up rather fast, and I had to spend 8 to 9 thousand dollars a month, the money couldn't even be used for a year. What could I do if I couldn't find another job? I had paid four hundred thousand on the flat, if I was unable to pay the mortgage, I had nothing. Don't you agree with me? So, I kept on forcing myself to find a job, no matter what kind of job, I had to work. Don't you think so?*

*Interviewer: In that year, all of the jobs you had done were day labours?*

*Liu: Yes, those were day labours, actually, I did any job that I could find, and I did any job that suited me. Don't you think so? I'm not those who don't have the ability to work. It is another issue if no one employs you.*

The testimonies of Tin, Wah, Fun and Liu illustrated other informants' attitude to paid work. Their words demonstrated their eagerness to work, and willingness to engage in areas that they thought would enable them to

look for jobs. Though not mentioned in an explicit way, this work-first attitude was closely related to their manliness. Working-class men in this study did expect that they should be engaged in paid employment in the public sphere; and it seemed obvious to them that earning wages with their own hands was the most appropriate way to make a living. They had not only internalized this belief, but had also put this into their social practice. In addition to enrolling in retraining courses to enhance their employability, some had also worked as day labourers in times of unemployment. Though some of the informants were living on welfare, they considered this as a temporary solution to make ends meet, and that this reliance should only be a transitional period before they would secure themselves and their family with a paid job.

## **6. Views on Women's Work**

One of the arguments in this chapter is that working-class men consider themselves to be the financial provider for the family. In taking up this role, men are getting the benefits that have been given them as they have to work in the public sphere, and can spend less time at home doing household chores (Pyke, 1996; Warren, 2007). As Pyke (1996) has argued however, men's advantages in using less time doing housework is not only because of their gender but the provider role men have occupied. This also matches with what others have suggested in the way that men do not want to give up their role as financial provider (Fuller, 2001; Willot and Griffin, 2004). Though the male provider role as suggested by Crompton (1999) and Lewis (2001) may be in a state of decline, men do not want to relinquish such a role because of the structural advantages



that it has brought to them. In the case of household chores, men have thought that they are entitled to do less, since they have already committed their time in paid employment and are the main provider in the family.

However, working-class men would enjoy fewer advantages if their provider role is supplemented by their wife's income. In this way, working-class men may have to spend more time in housework or other caring duties (Pyke, 1996). Although their actual financial contribution in family is less likely to grant them the provider status that other middle-class men have, working-class men are less likely to give up this provider role as this role itself provides the symbolic capital that brought them these advantages (Willot and Griffin, 2004). This sort of symbolic capital, as mentioned earlier, is the symbolic privilege that the provider role has given to men. Nonetheless, this symbolic capital may also bring men some actual advantages, such as committing less time to household duties. If women's labour force participation would mean a threat to men's symbolic privilege, it is interesting to understand a working-class man's views on woman's labour force participation, especially in cases where a man's providing role is shared by his wife. In these cases, men are no longer the sole provider for the family, and as seen from the qualitative data in this study, informants' views on their wife's labour force participation were different, and such difference was partly due to the financial position men held in the family.

When I asked Tin his views on whether or not it was still valid to state that men should be responsible for making money to ensure the living of the family, and that women should stay at home taking care of the family,

Tin's response was that he was not bothered by his wife's going out to work as the welfare payments the family obtained did not include his wife's share. This was due to his wife's status as a new immigrant from Mainland China, and the Government's policy on restricting them from getting welfare benefits. He stated that it was fine for his wife to work part time, as she could secure herself with a wage that would support her own living. Tin still considered however, that it was important for a man to have a job, as the wage would sustain the living of the family, and that men were still considered as the main provider in the family. Tin stated:

*The way you say so.....I can't say whether it is right or not, but, the society is different, what you have said was referring to the previous days. Yes, a man must have work because the breadwinner in the family is the man, and he leaves home for work .....we say that the public man, the private women, there must be a man and a woman in a family. Men's paid work is to maintain the daily expense, (to meet) the basic needs, you must have this paid work. Without this, unless you're very rich, but not everyone is rich, those who are born with a golden spoon are exceptions. If you want to maintain the living of the family, you have to work. Work is a basic to meet those needs, don't you think so? (Tin)*

Although Tin still clung to the view that men should be the provider of the family, he did not think this remained a prevalent model in Hong Kong. With the decrease in the number of manual-skilled labours, and the increase of women's labour force participation, working-class men experience increasing difficulty in securing a job. Tin considered that men could no longer be the sole provider in the family. He added:,

*To say that a man has to work, this was an old saying in previous days. For the breadwinner in the family, a man must*

*take on this role, but the society has changed. Nowadays, women can also be the breadwinner, maybe they are the one to earn a living. A man may stay at home, but a woman may find more money than a man does. Man's earnings may become a supplementary income of the family, and men don't dare to say that they are the breadwinner, am I right? What you have said was true in previous days, men must have work, but nowadays, it is not the case that you'll have a paid work if you want to. The trend in Hong Kong is not the case that if you want to have a job, you'll have a job. We can't think in this way anymore. Even if the young people want to find a job, many of them can only find a job in fast food shops. No one dare to work in this setting in previous days, but why do many choose to work there? Because they can't find any job, they have no choice and they have to work there, that's it. (Tin)*

Tin's words reflected his view on men's difficulty in looking for a job with a good wage. His words also reflected that he was still clinging to the nostalgic feeling that the days as a provider in the family was still his preference. However, societal changes as well as the change in labour market and increase in women's labour force participation made him realize that change in gender roles was inevitable.

Tin furthered his points by suggesting that employers nowadays preferred to hire women, as women were better in communicating with others and because they could be paid lower wages. He said,

*Besides, I consider the employers in Hong Kong are.....there are more new arrivals from the Mainland, and there are more women, they also need to find a job to make a living, Many of them have got used to working here, and they have worked in many of the jobs they did not do before such as security guard, drivers, and restaurant waitress. This leads to decreasing chances for men to find a job. Employers tend to hire them because they have better manner in dealing with people, their wage is lower, they are younger. Others may have the feeling*

*that hiring a woman is better than hiring a man. All in all, women have better acceptance to work in service industry, in this way, men do have fewer chances to find a job. (Tin)*

Tin's words corresponded with what Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003) have suggested in the emergence of 'feminization of work'. With the increase in the service economy, women are more likely to be employed because the wages spent on employing them are often lower, while their communication skills are better than many men. Chiu, So and Tam (2008) found that the flexible employment pattern is becoming more prevalent in Hong Kong, and that this arrangement is more acceptable among women than among men, as the working hours are often shorter, allowing women employees to still devote their time in family. This can also explain why women are more likely to be engaged in nowadays economy. Men such as Tin, who was holding the provider role, preferred to work longer hours to earn a wage that would be sufficient for the living of the family. Given that most of the jobs working-class men engage are remunerated on an hourly basis, working fewer hours mean that they are unable to predict if they have sufficient income to maintain the family. Even though Tin held a relatively open attitude to women's work, he still considered that men should work.

Tin's words also demonstrated his feeling that women were more suitable to work in the service industry, but men were not. According to Bishop, Cassell and Hoel (2009), it is often argued that occupations offered in service industry such as the personal and caring services are more suitable for women because of the requirements underpinning in the service jobs are associated with servility and docility. Instead of displaying

this emotional labour, working-class men are more eager to display their manual labour.

Tsang, whose wife was working as a part-time domestic helper, also considered that his wife's work was supplementing his contribution to the family. He stated,

*It is very good for a sam-hong worker if he can work 20 days a month, one may earn eleven to twelve thousand, if the wife has the supplementary income, the family can function normally. (Tsang)*

Tsang's words reflected that he was supporting the traditional male provider model as his wife's wage was supplementing his wage. He further commented that when his wife had just completed the training course, she could only manage to earn three to four thousand a month even if she worked full-time. She could potentially earn more when she obtained more experience and if she was willing to stay in the employer's household overnight. The family however, did not allow her to do so. He said,

*Some women centres charge a few ten dollars an hour, my wife could only earn similar amount, but it is better now. She could only earn three to four thousand a month when she still needed to be guided by the seniors. Three to four thousand dollars were only sufficient to pay for the charges of the women centre. We have sometimes asked the daughter to look after the younger brother, and I will come home earlier. I will come back immediately after work, during this period, (the children) won't get along with the gangs, and when she's able to work for 8 hours, she can earn 8 to 9 thousand dollars a month, and this is already good. She can't work 24 hours a day, the daughter is still young, and when she gets older, she prefers to work 24 hours a day, but the family doesn't allow her to do that, working 24 hours can earn more than ten thousand dollars. (Tsang)*

If his wife worked longer hours, the wage would be much higher. Tsang however, did not think that such long working hours would be an advantage to the family. He implied that his wife needed to take care of the family. His words also implied his belief in the division of household labour. Tsang was open to his wife's employment as a domestic helper; however, at the same time, he held the belief that his wife was to take care of the family. Tsang's words also reflected that he was adhering to the traditional division of household labour, considered that his wife's financial contribution was a supplement to his income, and that his wife could not work for longer hours at that moment because she needed to take care of the family. Such a belief also reflected the way his parents had influenced him. He had mentioned in the interview that his father had come to Hong Kong when they were still very young, and that his mother was in Mainland to take care of the siblings. Tsang himself, followed his father's style in providing for the family.

Many of the informants in this study held a belief that a man should take on the major providing duty and that the woman's employment was considered a supplement to the family income. Cheung; however was a stay-at-home man whose wife occupied the role as the major financial provider. In relating his experience and his views on his wife's work, Cheung held an attitude that his wife should go out to work. He said "*my wife is still young, she needs to find a job*". His wife was in her early thirties, and had worked in a Chinese restaurant before she migrated to Hong Kong. Her previous working experience in the catering industry in the Mainland had enabled her to find a similar job in the city. Cheung added that it was not difficult for his wife to find a job, stating that:

*It's not difficult for her to find a job if she works in catering service. She's tall and she has the style, so she has no difficulty to find a job. Besides, she had worked in the catering for many years, she has the experience. (Cheung)*

It was always considered that women are at a better position to be employed in interactive service jobs because of their perceived natural attributes in communicating with others. The experience of Cheung's wife was an example of how a woman was in an advantaged position to be engaged in certain service jobs. And, as Tin had illustrated, women might become the provider in the family.

It is interesting to see whether or not men would move away from traditional masculine identity if their female partners were engaging in paid employment. In Cheung's case, although his wife had taken up the provider role, he showed that he had not given up his connection to work. Cheung disclosed that the amount of money his wife had given him was insufficient for their daily living. He still considered having a paid job as a measure to improve their living. He stated that *"It is preferable for a man to earn a living for a woman, and not so good to have a woman earn a living for a man"*. The identity as a financial provider was still at the core of his masculinity. Thus, his masculine identity was mainly developed from his financial condition. When I asked Cheung whether or not it would be acceptable to remain as a stay-at-home man if his wife would give him more money for the household expense so that he could continue the caring responsibility, he responded:

*It's not the same if I have sufficient money for household expenses, I'll be happier. But, it's insufficient to have only 5,000 dollars a month. It is barely sufficient for one person to*

*use, but the daughter is studying, after all, it's a matter of money. If I have a sum of money after retirement, it's different. If I was a civil servant or if I worked in an enterprise, I might have a pension, and I'll be happier. But, I don't have. Worked as a day labourer, I don't even have provident fund, it's your ability if you can save money, and you can use it for a longer term. (Cheung)*

Although Cheung did not think that it was appropriate for a woman to earn a living for a man, because he had to take care of his young daughter, he would accept the change in the traditional masculine role. The existing status as a stay-at-home man however, was not preferred, as Cheung did not have the financial independence that he enjoyed when he was employed.

The ability of the informants' wives to find a job, had thus demonstrated that there was an upward trend in women's labour force participation in certain service jobs (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 2003). Haywood and Mac an Ghail's position (2003) is compatible with Nixon's (2009) argument that men are less likely to participate in service jobs, especially in low-skill interactive service jobs. Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2003: 26) suggest that this 'feminization of work' can be described as "resulting from employers increasingly targeting and employing women". Having discussed, the wages spent on women are often lower, and as they are more adjusting to the interactive service jobs, women with relevant experience are easier to get employed, as in the case of Cheung's wife. For men however, even if they are willing to work in service jobs, the salary they expect might become a hindrance for the chances to secure an employment.



## **7. Living on Welfare**

Having paid employment is closely related to a man's masculinity and their ability to secure the living of one's family. Having the ability to earn a wage from one's work is therefore, treasured by most men. As reflected from the data in this study however, men were sometimes reluctant and had to live on welfare benefits. The informants' testimony raised questions of whether or not living a life maintained by welfare benefits was anything preferred and if the informants considered that living on welfare benefit was a way to make ends meet. Informants had been asked their views on living on welfare, and various responses were given.

It is agreed that the social security provided by any government serves different purposes, Alcock (2003) summarizes:

...these include the relief or prevention of poverty, the maintenance of income in periods of labour market absence, life course investment to support retirement and the provision of extra resources to support child care or disability costs.

(Alcock, 2003: 56)

With the various purposes of social security, men also held different views on receiving welfare benefits. Some of the informants in this study were welfare recipients at the time of the interview and had received welfare assistance. The views on receiving welfare benefits varied, with some holding the view that welfare benefits helped them to make ends meet, while others believed that receiving welfare benefits was not acceptable.

Informants who held a relatively positive attitude to receiving welfare did so because it was based on their actual needs. Tsui, for example, in

recalling why he had to apply for the social security, said that he did not want to apply for social security, but that he needed the welfare payments to maintain the living of the family. He lost his eye-sight and was unable to work after his 40s. His wife worried about their living, especially since their daughter was still little at that time. He had no choice but to apply for the social security as a relief to the family's financial hardship. He stated:

*She (his wife) was very anxious, on the one hand, she had to look after the daughter, on the other, I did not want to live on CSSA.....Finally, I reluctantly applied for CSSA, and have been receiving it for more than 10 years. (Tsui)*

When his daughter graduated from university, the family changed to apply for low-income social security. Living on welfare affected Tsui's habits. He used to go to a Chinese restaurant when he was still working in the factory. He was frustrated that he could only buy some tea for himself, and that he could not go to a restaurant after he became unemployed. He stated that the money was just barely sufficient for the living of the family. Changing habits had not resulted from receiving the welfare payments, but his unemployment. Not only unemployment had taken away Tsui's autonomy in using money, it had also limited his independence. Nonetheless, in Tsui's case, it was seen that social security was an option to relieve the financial hardship caused by disability. Although having a feeling of reluctance, living on welfare was a measure that could help Tsui find relief from financial difficulty.

Although informants wanted to have a stable job, some of them considered that living on welfare was an acceptable transition before they were able to find a paid job. Fun, who had been receiving welfare benefits

for nearly a year, thought that social security helped him a lot. Fun stated:

*Anyway, I'm receiving CSSA, I can keep on studying in the training program. I had set last year as my year of study, I did keep on working and studying. Hong Kong is a good place, the government has helped me, otherwise, you won't have any chance to change yourself. (Fun)*

Fun considered receiving welfare benefits as a transition period in which he could upskill himself with the aim of finding a better job. He was attending skills enhancement courses and would look for a stable job upon the completion of the course. He further explained why he thought his status as a welfare recipient would help him improve his chances. He stated:

*Last year was set as the year of study, and I am receiving CSSA, I am also working in day labour jobs, and I will report to them (the social security office), and they will deduct the welfare payment. But, as they have the incentive and will not deduct all the welfare payment, this is good. If the boss has not yet settled the wage, I have to lend money from others, they will give you some hundred dollars.....I expect that I will be able to find a job after completing my course in the coming April, and I tend to find a long term employment. I'll be allocated a public housing unit in April, and I'll settle all things. Otherwise, it will be in trouble. (Fun)*

It seemed that Fun had a plan in his mind. Even though he was not sure whether this plan would come into being, he insisted that he would look for a stable job after he had completed the retraining course. Even if Fun did not hold a negative feeling to receiving welfare benefits, just like other informants, he was eager to look for a paid job. What he had emphasized was a plan that he could make use of in the year when he was receiving welfare payments, and he could upskill himself so as to

increase the chance to find preferred employment. In essence therefore, what Fun had in mind and what he had done were all related to looking for a chance to work.

Some informants of this study were not living on social security. Of these participants, many held a negative view about receiving welfare benefits. Tsang, for example, was not a welfare recipient. He asserted that no matter how difficult life was, he would not choose to live on social security. In explaining the reasons why he preferred not to apply for social security, he stated:

*Having the chance to be allocated this public housing unit is already good, for a poor family. The government has treated us well, and we don't have further expectation from the government. I'll keep working if I can, and I can't accept getting CSSA at this age, I really can't accept that. It is a matter of my character, I want to live on my own hands.*  
(Tsang)

Words like wanted to “*rely on one's own hands*”, and “*could not accept to become a welfare recipient at his age*” reflected Tsang's negative views of receiving welfare. His underlying reasons seemed to be simple. He thought the government was treating them well as they had been provided with a public housing unit. They still had the chance to work, and they could continue to work with their own hands. Yet, Tsang's statements showed that he had negative feelings toward a reliance on welfare benefits and that he preferred to earn a living with his own hands. Informants who were living on a variety of welfare benefits considered that earning a wage on their own would maintain their dignity. This belief was the reason why they were so eager to look for a stable job.

When comparing the attitudes of Fun to other informants, it was noted that Fun did not perceive social security negatively. This was not to say that Fun was feeling comfortable staying in the welfare system, but he also did not have the family responsibility that other informants had. The responsibility of a man to provide for the family was discussed in the interviews. Apart from emphasizing such responsibility, informants had the attitude that they should act as a role model for their siblings and for their children. Informants such as Tsang and Tsui had mentioned these feelings, as seen in the following statements:

*“If you can make a living for the family, it is an achievement.”  
(Tsang)*

*“After you have got married and have children, you have to pay more efforts in making money, and hope to make more money.” (Tsui)*

*“The question is you’re an elder brother, you have to set a model for other siblings, they would learn from me as the elder brother. If we’re dispirited, and did not care about anything, this might be a bad model.” (Tsui)*

Apart from illustrating the value the men placed on the position of being a role model, these statements also demonstrated how seriously they took their family responsibility. Fun, who had divorced and whose his children were grown-up, emphasized that he did not have to consider as much as others who had a family. Nonetheless, his plan was still focused on with finding a stable job.

The stories of these men show that even though they might hold different attitudes to claiming welfare benefits, living on welfare was not a preferred living strategy. Getting paid work that could display their

responsibility to the family was more desirable. Their attitudes on living on welfare echoed their work first principle. This also reflected that work was a core principle in their lives, and that this was essential in maintaining their masculine identities.

## **8. Discussion**

Economic restructuring has resulted in changes in the work patterns over the past decades. Both men and women have been inevitably affected by this change in the work pattern. Such change has also resulted in the decline of traditional manufacturing industries, of which low-skill working-class men were previously heavily engaged. In encountering the decline in traditional manual work, O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) suggest that "[w]ith the decline of manufacturing industries, and the relative rise in service industries and the media, men have had to make a radical readjustment in their jobs and careers, and indeed in their aspirations to regular employment" (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000: 126). Their statement emphasizes that if low-skill working-class men are to survive in the new economy, they have to adjust themselves by adopting new skills other than those they have previously acquired, to accept working in the service economy, and to adjust their expectations. Many of the low-skill jobs do not remain in manufacturing industries, but in service industries such as catering, cleaning, driving, retail and security work. These form the majority of jobs that low-skill working-class men can do. Yet, no matter the retraining courses they had taken or the jobs they had intended to work in, what working-class men in this study preferred to take were the jobs that would still display their traditional masculine identities.

There were certain service jobs that working-class men did not want to engage in. Some informants were laid off in their previous employment, and subsequently had their own strategies to cope with living. Apart from living on welfare benefits, some had engaged in casual labour for a year, and some changed their jobs to work as a driver. Some took the advantage of living on welfare and took the chance to upskill themselves. It was noted that even if they had the drive to enhance their employability by means of taking re-training courses or to obtain a license that would enable them to find a job, many of these jobs were related to what can be understood as traditional male occupations, such as driving and construction work. It seems that working-class men are reluctant to change their orientation to accept 'women's jobs', as these are not linked with their masculinity. Informants' choice of work also reflected that this was a class specific experience. Informants would choose to work in transportation and construction industries. Even after they had a chance to upskill themselves, they could only work as workers at elementary positions in the industries I have just mentioned. These working-class men knew what they could do. Therefore, when they looked for a new job, they would still choose to work in a setting that was similar to the previous one they were in.

Men in this study showed that they had constructed various meanings to work, such as dignity, capability, responsibility, achievement and to make a living. The first three aspects are similar to Fuller's (2001) discussion in his study with a group of men in Peru. Working-class men such as the informants in this study were affected by their limited education, and were therefore limited to the exposure of manual-skilled

work. Given that men in this study were in their middle-age and had only a limited education, it would be easy to assume that they must be unable to adapt to the changing economy. Yet, these men demonstrated that they had struggled to survive in the labour market, and had worked in various industries, such as traditional manufacturing industries, transportation, construction work, and retail. The jobs that the informants had engaged in were mainly occupations with unstable income and limited staff welfare. Nonetheless, what they did was evidence that they had tried hard to engage themselves in employment. Informants were however, placed in a difficult situation that the income they could earn was little, and as a result, had to accept whatever settings they could work in. They demonstrated that they were flexible to work in various industries, but it was the under-valuation of their work that made them become part of the 'cheap workforce' (Gorz, 1999: 81). Even though some of these men had engaged in voluntary work, they tended to differentiate voluntary work from paid work. Such differentiation reinforced the dominant definition as emphasizing productivity and the generation of economic capital. Other forms of activities that do not carry these were not considered as work.

Work is part of the class specific behaviours that can display working-class men's masculine identities, especially in a way that they can identify with their bodily strength. Work is considered a habit, if not a necessity among this group of working-class men. Unlike middle-class men who will also commit themselves in other forms of cultural activities, work has formed the core component in working-class men's lives. In the life of a Chinese man, work reflects one's values, and as Harrell (1985) has discussed, hardworking is considered a virtue among Chinese. As the



men in this study showed, they valued employment highly, and some said that as Chinese, they were more eager to earn a living with their own hands. These values explain why men in this study considered that living on welfare was not a solution to their difficult situation in the long run. In some cases, even though they were welfare recipients, the men still occupied a paid job, and the welfare payment was a supplement to their wage. The data in this study show that work is a crucial component in the construction of masculine identities by working-class men. Gorz (1999) argues that it is the imperative to earn a regular wage that forces one to have regular work, and that it was this imperative to have regular work that made working-class men commit to the process of looking for jobs. Gorz also argues that “[a]ll forms of workfare stigmatize the unemployed as incompetents and scroungers, whom society is entitled to force to work – for their own good” (Gorz, 1999:81). It was this stigmatization that made the informants believe that receiving welfare benefit was not a preferred option, and that the stigmatization of incompetence did not match with men’s perception of what they should be.

This chapter has discussed the issue of work and especially the subjective experience of men in relation to their working experiences. Not every man interviewed in this study was engaging in a paid employment at the time of interview. The qualitative data demonstrated that men’s views on work varied. Such variation reflected men’s variation on their skills, work experiences, and attitudes toward the jobs they had been occupied. As such, the stories of these men cannot represent all working-class men, but can present the situations encountered by a group of working-class men who are also characterized by poor educational attainment, manual

skills, and vulnerable to changes in the job market.

The qualitative data presented in this chapter showed that informants were still adhering to the breadwinner role. Men in this study did take the breadwinner role as a drive for them to work and to earn a living for the family. However, as informants in this study were working-class men and had only limited educational attainment, it was not easy for them to adjust to the rapid social change associated with the development of the knowledge economy. In this way, if working-class men maintained a strong belief in the traditional breadwinning role, the experience of unemployment and difficulty in finding work would compound their sense of hardship. Inability to provide for the family also means that men have to give up certain privileges that the breadwinner roles have given them, and this challenges their hegemonic social position. In addition to this breadwinner role, there are other roles the informants were performing. Men's perception on their roles in the family, and their daily family experiences are to be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **MEN AND FAMILY**

#### **1. Introduction**

The previous chapter has focused on the discussion of the meaning, importance and symbolic capital that work has given to men. In the wider context of this discussion, men's roles in family should not be overlooked. Men perform various roles in a family in addition to the role of husband. Men are fathers, siblings, and sons. In performing these various roles, men have to strike a balance between their work life and their family life. In this chapter, the interrelationship between men, family and work will be discussed with reference to the qualitative data that have been gathered from the interviews. As discussed in the previous chapter, working-class men placed significant importance on their work life, and directly associated their masculinity with work. Informants also emphasized the importance of the breadwinner status in maintaining their masculinity, and thus, a change in their breadwinner status would not only affect their own conception on their masculinity, but also the way they perceive their roles in family.

Men have the expectation to work full time and to provide lifelong financial support for their wives and their children (Yeandle, 2003). However, with the growing worldwide trend in men's unemployment and under-employment, the expectation on men's linkage with the provider role has become less prevalent. In addition to providing for the family, men are also expected to share some domestic duties. This does not mean

however, that men will necessarily spend more time in sharing household work and child care with their spouses. As suggested by Ranson (2001: 5), men may be less involved in household work and child care than what the 'new fathers' are expected to commit. Men do less at home, may not be considered to be as fulfilling their obligations (Doucet, 2004). This is consistent with the argument that men are now considered as 'new men' and there is a range of changes indicating a departure from the traditional breadwinner masculinity (Aarseth, 2009). Men have to fulfill more domestic roles and are expected to get more involved at home. Although the discussion on new men originated in Western society, it is also widely discussed in other parts of the world. In Hong Kong for example, the term 'new men' has been adopted in recent years, especially after the promotion by certain social services organizations. It has been suggested that the term 'new men' was introduced to re-assert men's involvement in household duties and child-caring duties.

Given that the discussion of men's changing roles in domestic sphere is widely adopted, many of the literatures have linked men's domestic roles with fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988; Doherty, Kouneski, and Erikson, 1998; Ranson, 2001; Yeandle, 2003; and Summers et al., 2006). Apart from suggesting frameworks in understanding the meaning of fatherhood from the perspectives of the informants, this literature suggests that the meaning of fatherhood will change over time, and is affected by social change. Thus, it can be argued that fatherhood is socially constructed. LaRossa (1988) suggested that the elements of fatherhood include the culture of fatherhood and the conduct of fatherhood. Culture of fatherhood refers to the shared norms, values, and beliefs that are surrounding men's

fathering; whereas, while conduct of fatherhood refers to what fathers do, and their parental behavior (LaRossa, 1988). These two elements do not occur simultaneously, with the culture of fatherhood transforming more rapidly than the conduct. Echoing LaRossa's view, Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson (1998) suggest that "[e]ach generation molds its cultural ideal of fathers according to its own time and condition" (Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1998: 278). In addition to time and culture, when understanding the meaning of fatherhood factors relating to class, occupation, age and race (Miller, 2011) must also be considered. In Western society, the term 'good fatherhood', predominantly refers to middle-class fathers (Miller, 2011), as they can afford to spend time with their children, and can plan activities for their children. However, the meaning of fatherhood in Asian societies, especially under the context of Chinese society, may be different from Western society. The qualitative data in this study provides a source to understand fatherhood, and how the term 'good fatherhood' is understood among a group of Chinese working-class men.

Although fathers' involvement in domestic duties including child care is emphasized, it is not certain that men will automatically increase domestic involvement. Even if men and women are to share providing financial responsibility, men may still devote less time in providing care to the family members. Such variance is partly contributed by the perceived difference in the natural attributes between men and women (Miller, 2011). Men perceive that they are lacking the natural caring attributes that women have and consider that care giving is more closely associated with femininity. The caring responsibility therefore, does not match with men's masculinity, and thus, such caring duties are not generally perceived as

part of their reasonable obligations. Such discourse explains why men are more comfortable when they are fulfilling the role as a provider, but feel uncomfortable in the role of caregiver.

This chapter will be divided into several themes, and each will be sub-categorized to facilitate a detailed discussion on the aspects of family and fatherhood from the informants' perspectives. These themes are responsibilities in fatherhood, constructing a division of labour in the family, and maintaining family bonding. In understanding the role of a man in the family, the provider role has always been an indicator to whether or not men consider themselves as a good father. The discussion now turns to an examination of this role with reference to the qualitative data obtained in this study.

## **2 Responsibilities in Fatherhood**

The word 'responsibility' carries the meaning that someone ought to do something. Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998: 278) argue that in understanding the meaning of responsibilities in fatherhood, 'responsibility' suggests "a set of desired norms for evaluating fathers' behavior". They comment that this understanding "conveys a moral meaning (right and wrong) because it suggests that some fathering could be judged 'irresponsible'" (Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson, 1998: 278). Thus, whether or not fathers are able to fulfill their responsibilities are affected by various factors and some of which are related to the wider structural context, flexibility of employment and level of income are some of these factors. Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998) suggest that emotional care, physical care, and financial support for the children are some of the

responsibilities fathers perceive they should exercise. Informants in this study also claimed that these were their responsibilities in fatherhood.

## **2.1 Supporting the Family Financially**

The ability to provide for the family is frequently considered the major contribution a man can bring to the family. Men in this study were mainly working-class men with barely sufficient income to provide for the family. Even though they could only earn a limited wage, these men were still less likely to give up their breadwinner role. To be a breadwinner carried several meanings: *“you have a responsibility to the family, no matter how bad the situation is, you still have to face it”, “a man is the breadwinner in the family”, “all money I have earned is for family use”, “my purpose is to maintain the household expenditure”*. These quotes reflected men’s views on their responsibility to provide for the family. For example, Tsui recalled that when he was employed, he gave almost all his wage to his wife. He was eager to earn more after he had his own family and especially when his daughter was born. Tsang also claimed that he would give almost his entire wage to the family, and he would keep a small portion for his own daily expenses. He stated:

*Basically, what I have earned is for family use, except for the essential expenses, such as transportation and the lunch outside, I’ll give the rest to the family. I don’t smoke, and I don’t drink. Sometimes, I’ll join some social activities, to have a chat with others, and to play mah-jong. These may require three to four hundred dollars expense. (Tsang)*

The essential expenses Tsang mentioned were all related to his work, including the expenses that he used for social activities, which were

predominantly involved in keeping a network to look for jobs. According to Tsang, the most important thing was to maintain the living of the family, and to allow the children to have enough pocket money.

Other men in this study shared how they made a living if the wage from their primary job was insufficient to provide financially for the family. In order to have sufficient money to provide for the family, Fun worked as a night-shift taxi driver and a factory worker at the same time after his sons were born. Fun explained,

*At that time, we had the first child, and was taken care of by my mother. When we had the second child, I gave all of the income to the family. I had a taxi license at that time, and I worked part-time. The income I earned from the part-time was for my own use. When we had the second child, I had already worked two nights. (Fun)*

Although working two jobs at the same time was sufficient for the living of the family before the birth of his third son Fun decided to work as a full time taxi driver, and so quit his job as a factory worker. He stated:

*The income was sufficient at that time, and we had the third child, after the third child was born.....I felt it was hard to maintain the living, and I had to work night shift every other day, and I thought it was not a way to maintain a living. I realized that I could maintain the living if I worked as a full-time taxi driver, and I decided to be a taxi-driver. (Fun)*

Fun's clear intention was to provide for the family. This motivation was a significant factor in the decision to quit his long-term job, and to invest in another business that he thought would safeguard the living of his family.

Men's financial responsibility to the family was not inherited naturally, but developed through interaction with family practice and Chinese culture.



Some men commented that they held such responsibility because of their Chinese cultural origins. Tin commented:

*“I think that as a Chinese man.....a man is the breadwinner and the household head, as I’m a Chinese man, I also hold this belief, if you don’t have a paid work, you’ll feel uncomfortable.” (Tin)*

He further commented that his wife’s ability to look for a job would provide benefits and financial stability to the family, Tin further hoped that he would re-enter the labour market when his health condition showed improvement. In Tin’s mind, as a Chinese man, it was not acceptable to live on without employment. For him, unemployment took away a man’s providing role in a family, and this increased his participation in caring duties including his son’s schooling. Tin’s words matched with the sentiment in the common expression ‘public man, private woman’. The persistence of this sentiment in Tin’s point of view meant that his changing roles as a result of unemployment made him increasingly uncomfortable.

Tin was not the only one to relate this providing role with Chinese culture. Tsui, for example, said that he did was learnt from his parents. He stated:

*As we are Chinese, the cultural tradition of Chinese, you can observe how your parents perform, and the relatives are all performing the same way, they always care about the family, and this responsibility is embedded in me. (Tsui)*

In saying this, Tsui was not specifically pointing out the providing role of a father, instead, he emphasized that he learnt this Chinese tradition from his parents and his senior relatives. His sense of financial responsibility to the family was further enhanced after marriage and the

birth of his daughter. He stated:

*When you have got married and have children, you have to put more efforts in money making, and you hope to make more money. When you had worked for many years, you noticed that you could not work anymore, the anxiety you had was unexpected and unbelievable. (Tsui)*

His words showed his hopelessness at his inability to provide for the family. From striving to earn more money for the family to losing such ability and the financial responsibility, Tsui described how agitated he was, and although he was only able to earn a barely sufficient income, he was proud with that as he was demonstrating to his siblings that he was working hard to make a living. This also echoed his belief in the reluctance to apply for the welfare benefit.

Tsang was another informant who had related men's familial financial responsibility to Chinese culture and the practice of his father. He stated:

*My father had only studied for a few months, and what he did was to give the children whatever he had earned, he left nothing for himself when he died, all the things were left to the children. I'm also doing this, just acted like him. (Tsang)*

He emphasized that he had learned from his father in leaving everything to his children. Though he considered that he was unable to give his family a 'well-off' living, he stated that

*My purpose is to maintain the household expenditure, to meet the basic needs, and will not be lack of money in studying. Although I won't give them much pocket money, but won't be lacking of it. (Tsang)*

Through this statement, Tsang further emphasized his financial responsibility to his family. As with other informants, Tsang's view on his

major role to the family was primarily linked to his providing responsibility. This provider role as suggested by the informants was related to the Chinese culture they were raised in. This does not mean that the conduct of fathering in a Chinese culture is different from that of the western culture. At least, as suggested by the informants, fathers considered that they were responsible for providing financially to the family, and this is the same as suggested in the western literature.

Men's provider role or breadwinner role in family has been widely discussed in studies on fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988; Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson, 1998; Summers et al., 2006). The importance of this role is to provide the family members with sufficient daily food, clothes, and accommodation.

Jarrett, Roy and Burton (2002) suggest that if men are unable to provide financial support to their children and female partners, they become less involved in family life. Some informants in this study showed that they became less involved in their paternal role when they were unable to provide financial support for the family. For example, Fun demonstrated that he was not involved in family life when he faced financial hardship. He told that after he had declared bankruptcy because of the huge deficit in his restaurant, he left his family and stayed elsewhere for several months. After this, he did not live with his ex-wife and the children. At that time, the oldest child was only a few years old. Fun's decision was partly because he was unable to provide financially for the family. This however, should not be exaggerated as the sole factor leading to his leaving. His action was also a consequence of his family members' refusal to lend him money. This refusal apparently led Fun to feel that his

position in the family had been challenged.

Fun's story reinforced the argument that informants' expected prime role in the family was the financial provider. If they were unable to achieve this, they may feel that they were unable to measure up to the standard and the expectation of what a man should do in the family. The inability to provide for the family therefore, had a direct relationship with their reduced family involvement. Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) state, "when men are unemployed or underemployed, they often find it difficult to feel good about themselves as fathers because the provider role continues to be an important features of hegemonic images of masculinity and men's fathering experience" (p. 260). Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) point out that having money is not only important to a man who is living with his family, but rather, a man's socioeconomic position is also important in the way he negotiates and manages his fathering experience. When men have adequate income, they are more likely to construct their paternal identities, to plan fathering activities and other family arrangements, through which, men can display their masculine identities. The arguments of Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) suggest that fathers of various socio-economic backgrounds have different fathering experience. Middle-class fathers have comparatively more resources than working-class fathers to arrange a variety of activities for their children. Working-class fathers may find it difficult to fulfill their provider role and the caring role at the same time, and may not have the resource to arrange different activities for their children. Having enough to financially support their families was to these fathers, considered a significant achievement. Tsang expressed himself thus: *"I don't think I have any achievement, to be able to provide the living for the*

*family is already a kind of achievement*". His words also summed up the expectation of the working-class men to the family and the reasons why they were reluctant to relinquish the breadwinner role.

## **2.2 Being There**

Being there as indicated in studies on fatherhood (Summers et. al 2006) suggest that fathers consider that to be with the children is a kind of protection and to support the children physically and emotionally. Others have used the terms accessibility, presence, and engagement (Lamb, 1987; Doherty, Kouneski, and Erickson 1998) to represent similar meaning. These studies demonstrated that simply 'being there' is considered an important conduct of a father. The importance is to let the children know that fathers are there when they need them.

Informants in this study did not specifically raise the importance of being there in interviews, but some shared about the experience of staying with their children. Informants in this study considered that being there was not necessarily presenting oneself in front of their children. Making use of mobile phone was also a means to ensure the children could find them when they were in need. Cheung shared his experience when his daughter contacted him via his mobile phone. He emphasized that the matters were always trivial, such as asking him to buy the kind of food she liked. Cheung stated, *"Sometimes when I go to the market, she will give me a call, and tell me she likes to eat broccoli, and I'll buy her broccoli"*. Although, as noted by Cheung, the matters were always trivial, this still showed that he was ready to be there for his daughter and to meet her needs.

Tsang also shared his experience of showing one's presence in ensuring the children did not get involved with some youth gangs. According to Tsang, he would return home immediately after work in order to prevent his children's contact with gang members. He stated: "...I will come home earlier. I will come back immediately after work, during this period, (the children) won't get along with the gangs". Thus, to Tsang, being there also carried a meaning of protecting the children from being influenced by youth gangs.

Being there however, was sometimes a hindrance to the informants' employment, and thus affecting their expected financial responsibility to the family. Although Cheung had emphasized that it would be better if he could be employed again, he considered that his daughter was little and he could not give up the caring duty. When he was asked if he would consider finding another job, he replied:

*The social worker asked me if I wanted to find a job, those jobs were.....on the one hand, I don't have time, on the other, I have to look after my daughter. I only have three hours free time, what I can do with three hours of time? I can't do anything, unless my daughter has entered primary school and attend a full-day school, I can think of finding a job. I will consider those jobs requiring me to work six hours, and those that are not that tough, I will consider those. Will see what I can do, but it is hard for me to work at this moment. (Cheung)*

Unlike others whose children were older, Cheung demonstrated that he was not willing to give up the caring role when his daughter was still at a young age. Considering that his wife currently had a stable job, he thought he ought to be the one to take care of the daughter. He also indicated that he had thought of finding a job as a security guard in old

buildings, since he could not speak English, his chances of getting a job would be hindered. This also implied that he was not optimistic to find another job.

Although being there is considered important to children's development, not all informants were capable of being there when the family members were in need. Failure in being there has been suggested to have negative influences on children, and men in this study reported this influence. Fun, for example, explained that after years of having been separated from his first wife and children, he had the chance to stay with them again. He realized however, that he did not have a parent-child relationship with his sons. Even after the teacher's complaints, he was not comfortable to talk to his son, for he worried that his son might answer him back. As he explained:

*To be frank, I want to blame him, but I haven't. I said to the teacher if my son said to me that "you haven't taken care of me for more than 10 years, why you care about me now", what can I say? (Fun)*

Though he had thought of talking to his son about the teacher's complaints, he did not. He considered that his leaving had negative influence on his relation with his son. Fun regretted what had influenced his son, and offered this remark:

*Actually, I do feel regret to the children, especially the youngest one. That makes him develop a detached character. (Fun)*

Fun did regret that it was now too late to show his concern to his sons, and he had these words,

*It may be useless to care for them, the route I have taken has already.....it is useless even if I want to care for them, I can't change anything. (Fun)*

Being there carries a meaning of care and concern, and in Fun's case, not being there not only demonstrated a lack of care and concern, but his absence had also limited the communication with his sons. As a non-residential father therefore, he was unable to develop a constructive relationship with his sons.

In this study, being there or presence of fathers in the family referred to care, concern, support and protection of the children. In demonstrating this aspect, informants were performing a kind of masculine identity that they thought was a father's obligation. Being there is a conduct, as it depicts acceptable fatherhood behaviour. It is also a culture (LaRossa 1988), as fathers can tell the importance of being there with the children. Being there; therefore, represents the fathers' values and their beliefs. Even in the case of Fun, he considered that he owed his children as he was not with them in their development, and he regretted for being too late to have influence on his sons or to change their behaviours. As suggested by the data, many fathers faced a dilemma over whether to prioritize either the caring role or the providing role.

### **2.3 Teaching and Shaping Values**

Teaching as a fathering activity indicates that it is an everyday activity in daily life experience, and teaching involves transmission of values and particular contents that fathers want their children to learn (Summers et. al, 2006). Informants in this study reported that they were teaching their



children some knowledge. Such knowledge was related to their expectation to the children and the values that they thought were good and useful when their children grew up. They wanted their children to be better educated and to do something other than what they were doing or had done. For example, when talking about the preferred job that his daughter ought to do, Ng expressed his feeling that he did not want his daughter to work in McDonalds, as he considered that the job had no prospects. Ng stated:

*At that time, I asked her not to work in McDonalds, the wage was not high, and the job didn't provide any opportunity. My sister's daughter is able to earn seventeen thousand a month.....she can make some decisions.....she says that as a novice in clock and watch industry, one can earn more than ten thousand a month, and can at least learn something new. Working in McDonald is useless, it seems that she can earn 30 dollars an hour, it is useless, and she can just earn this amount. (Ng)*

What he had told his daughter was more his expectation for her. In his mind, choosing a job with prospects was important. His expectation was also related to his own experience and his limited choice in employment. He had added the following comments after explaining why he wanted his daughter to work in a watch company.

*Expectation.....they acquire a professional skill, learn more things and will have more opportunities.....(un)like me, I'm illiterate and have worked several jobs, such as ironing clothes in factory, truck driver, selling fruit, and I had been a truck driver delivering fruits for twenty years.....if you're illiterate, you can't do anything, can't do anything. (Ng)*

It was common for the informants to expect their children to do

something that they could not do. It can also be argued that it is common for parents to expect their children to work in a preferred industry. In Ng's perspective, it was important to learn a specific skill, and though he had worked in various industries, because of illiteracy, he was unable to find a better job. He therefore expected his children to secure career prospects for themselves that he had been unable to achieve.

Apart from expectations, fathers in this study also conveyed to their children some social values that they thought were important and could help their children's development. Teaching the children social values may carry a broad meaning, and the values themselves vary from father to father. In a broad sense, teaching children social values can be referred to as "providing structure, authority, self-discipline, and a moral sense of how to act and treat others" (Summers et. al, 2006: 154). Cheung, for example, shared what he had taught his daughter. He mentioned that he would tell his daughter what she should do and should not do. In doing this, he was actually transmitting to his daughter the social values. Cheung stated:

*Much of her knowledge is taught by me, I'll teach her if I have that knowledge.....expectation.....I'm not sure if I can see that, I'll be over 70 when she is 17 to 18 and begins to earn an income, and I'm not sure if I have that life expectancy to see that. What I can do is to teach her what I know, what should be done and what should not be done, and explain these to her..... (Cheung)*

Teaching his daughter social values was considered a way to facilitate her to face the ups and downs in future life. Another informant, Lee, shared a similar experience, and related that he would tell his children what should be done first and what should be done later. He emphasized

that he considered someone who can “keep one’s words” and “keep one’s promise” as fundamentally important. In describing what he would teach his children, Lee offered the following comments:

*The education in my family was that you’re responsible for your own work, and you had to complete that on your own.....we had many house chores in village, and it was good to let you go to school, we had to study and at the same time to plough a field.....so many tasks.....the four seasons in year, in spring, we had to cultivate the fields and to sow the seeds, autumn was the time for harvest, and had to sow the seeds again.....doesn’t like Hong Kong, we only have to remind our children to study hard.....his own stuff, the tasks in schools, the home assignments, you say what you say, but they won’t listen to you. If tomorrow will be Monday, they will do the assignments tonight and to work till late midnight, [sigh!] We were not like them, if we had to finish the work, we would finish it first before going to play. My father taught me in the way that we had to complete the work first that was the most important, after then we could play. The children won’t listen to us, sigh! (Lee)*

*I told them that they had to keep a healthy body, and not to have crooked ideas.....need to have rich knowledge, they will benefit from these lifelong if they can do all these. If I have a healthy body, no matter how knowledgeable a doctor is, I won’t go and find him. I don’t have any sickness. If you don’t have any crooked idea, you will walk a right track of life, and you won’t get disjointed from the society. You have the knowledge.....can make some money, you won’t be cheated by others, and you won’t suffer losses. I want them to live a better life, but whether they will listen and act as the way I teach them, I can’t control that. (Lee)*

The two excerpts above illustrated Lee’s way of shaping his children’s values. Lee held an explicit attitude that he wanted to let his children distinguish right from wrong. He added however, that he could not control

whether his children would listen to him or not. He was also frustrated by the way the children responded to his words. Lee considered that as a father, the children should listen to his words, and that was exactly what he did when he was a child. He would listen to his father's words, and if he did not do so, his father would punish him. It seemed that he did not possess the absolute power as his father had.

Informants also commented on the teaching methods they had used. Methods such as "talk to them" and "explain the reason" were mentioned frequently. Some would use mild physical punishment to supplement talking to the children. Cheung, for example, would use a combination of methods to make his daughter understand the reasons behind his actions. He stated:

*If she didn't listen to me, I would scold her and beat her, but would comfort her after that. I would explain to her because she didn't listen to me and I didn't want to scold her. She would cry, and if she cried, I would comfort her, and she would feel better. If I scold her for the thing that I'd told her not to do, she would cry, but she would calm down if I comforted her.....I would explain to her that I did not want to scold her but she did not listen to me. If I could comfort her, I would feel happy. It's a matter of money, what I mean is if I have a job and can earn a wage, I feel happy. But now, I don't have a job, I don't have an income, I do not feel happy... (Cheung)*

Cheung disclosed that he would use physical punishment, but he would comfort his daughter and explain to her the reasons. From this quote, it was noticed that what made Cheung lose his temper was not only the conduct of his daughter, but his status of unemployment. Thus, the inability to secure the provider role frustrated him a lot.

In commenting why explaining rather than scolding was a preferred

way to communicate with children, Ng explained that the children would not listen to him if they were scolded. In recalling an experience when his son was apprehended for engaging in a fight with other students, he explained that he had not scolded his son since it would have been counterproductive. He stated:

*Have to teach him, it's useless to blame him. He was very young at that time.....to blame him was useless, you had to teach him, you had to tell him the reasons. (Ng)*

In Ng's mind, communicating reason to his children was a preferred way to teach them rather than to simply force them to follow one's way. He considered that the most important thing was to make the children talk to him. According to Ng, *"It's useless if you're fearful, if you're so, they will be afraid of you, and they dare not chat with you"*.

Explaining reasons may be a behavior involving indoctrination of a moral principle. Lee for example, would explain his reasoning to his children by sharing with them the moral principles described in the *Book of Laotse (Dao De Jing)*. He expected his children to learn to be people with high moral standards.

The variety of ways in handling children's conduct highlighted the uniqueness of the fathers in this study. It reinforced the possibility that every father had his own way to communicate with children. Although the fathers in this study were working-class men, and were not well-educated, this did not mean that they must use a strict and disciplinary way to make their children understand their reasons. Though some would use mild physical punishment as a way to stop the children's misconduct, explaining the reasons or moral principles was to some informants a

preferred way to teach their children. As mentioned, when teaching their children, fathers in this study were actually conveying their expectation to the children, and as some considered that they had their own limitations, what was in their mind was *“I wish my children to have better achievements than I have”*. This demonstrated that fathers were not satisfied with their existing status, be it socially or financially, and they did not want their children to follow suit.

## **2.4 Care Giving and Physical Interaction**

Care giving and physical interaction as commented by the fathers in this study referred to as playing, preparing for meal, arranging for school, and spending time with them. Hanlon (2012: 43) suggests that there are several factors that are related to men’s involvement in their children’s lives, including men’s beliefs in gender equality, the flexibility of paid work, education, income, other class-based resources, and negotiations of power with their wives. These were also the factors affecting the informants’ involvement in their children’s lives.

When fathers in this study were asked what they would do when they were with the children, their responses were *“If I have time, [I] will play with the children”*. The availability of time was crucial if men wanted to take care of their children, and playing with the children denoted a traditional paternal involvement. Yet, when responding to the playing activities with the children, men in this study frequently stated that they had little time to play with the children, as they had to work very long hours. Fun, for example, stated that he had played with the children when he was still maintaining the marriage relationship with his former wife, but that as most

of his time was occupied by his paid employment, he did not spend much time playing with his children at that time. According to Fun: *"I could only play with them at home, occasionally.....you can imagine, I worked in a factory and I had to work overtime till late night, I even had to work on Sundays"*. In Fun's description, paid employment had occupied much of his time, and he used to work very late; even on Sundays. The nature of the jobs informants were engaged in as mentioned in the previous chapter was mainly manual-skilled work. Some only managed to work as day labourers, and as a result, could not generate income if they took time off work. As they wanted to earn a sufficient living for the family, they had to work longer hours and more days. As paid employment occupied the majority of their time, many men in this study felt bound to the traditional male provider role because of the expectation to earn a stable living for their respective families. This also reflected that their work was not flexible enough to allow them to wholeheartedly involve in their children's lives.

Arranging for school was another frequent activity men in this study would do with their children. This activity was especially obvious when the informants did not have any paid employment. For instance, Cheung shared that he was responsible for taking care of his daughter after he was unemployed, and arranging for school was what he had to do daily.

Cheung stated:

*I'll take the daughter to school, read the news, prepare for the food, pick up the daughter after school, she does the homework, stay in the garden nearby for a few hours, and then go home to prepare for the dinner. (Cheung)*

This reflected a caring father's daily life, but in Cheung's view, this was not

a preferred life. In his mind, it was better to have employment and to bring money back to the family. He offered these words, *“just like the current situation, I can’t make any money, having the daughter is a burden, the worst is, I don’t have any income, but have to support her daily life and schooling”*. Taking up the full care giving responsibility was not a comfortable experience for Cheung. What was in his mind was to find a paid employment, and to reclaim the provider role in the family. Though he was concerned about the development of his daughter, when it came to conflict with his breadwinning role, he would still consider that taking care of his daughter was to him a burden.

Hanlon (2012: 48) argues that men will “undertake caring when there are no women available to it for them”. This represented Cheung’s experience. His wife took on the responsibility as the breadwinner in the family, and he had taken the carer role. As reflected from his words, there was tension between his expected role as a breadwinner and what he could actually do.

Although preparing for meals was not a direct form of interaction with the children, it represented however, another way to involve themselves in family. It was interesting that some fathers in this study would spend time in the kitchen to prepare a meal for the family, and some commented that their children preferred the way they prepared the food over that of their mothers. When men were asked how they could cook the food better than their wives did, they would give a reply with a rationale behind. Ng was one of the fathers who reported that the children liked his cooking more. We had the following conversation on this topic:



*Interviewer: You will still cook with your wife after a day's work, this is not common, and normally only one will be responsible for this.*

*Ng: She does the washing and preparing for the material, I do the cooking.*

*Interviewer: Because you think that you can cook tasty food?*

*Ng: The children say so, and my wife will just make the food done. I'm somewhat different, I have to make the food tasty, just like cooking the vegetable, I don't add oil and don't cover the wok. She's not the same, and will add oil and cover the wok, that's for sure different.*

Lee was another one to have said that his children liked him to prepare the food, even if he only had time to cook on Sundays. Lee speculated why he thought he could cook the same material with better taste, and he shared his perspectives in preparing food for his children.

*Lee: When I have time, I'll do the cooking for the children. My elder daughter likes what I'll cook for them. They think I cook tasty food so they like me to do the cooking.*

*Interviewer: Why? Is it that their mother can't cook tasty food?*

*Lee: Cooking requires a lot of knowledge, for instance, if one is a good chef, no matter what sort of material you have, he's able to cook tasty food. If someone who have knowledge in cooking, he can make use of whatever material. My family has the knowledge in cooking, my father makes tasty food, my uncle makes tasty food. When I was studying, the cook in the school was a friend of mine, so my skill in cooking is not bad. My elder daughter likes my cooking the most, she will eat up what I have cooked.....the way in her mother's cooking is different from me. If the children like some food, she will cook more the next day. Unlike her, if the children like certain food, I won't cook that for two days.....she will cook more on the next day, and the children won't finish all the food. I'm different, if they like to eat, I'll cook that a few days later.*

The informants were using some reasons to account for such

difference. Cooking for the family, like other domestic duties, is an activity in the private sphere. It is also linked with caring duties, and is therefore related to femininity. In differentiating themselves with women, men were constructing a different perspective in doing the cooking tasks.

Simply spending time with no specific objective and activity may also be regarded as an interaction with the children. Some fathers talked about 'hanging around' with their children. Some informants reported that they would take the children to the park near to their residence, and to take them for a walk in a shopping mall. These fathers emphasized that they preferred activities that had no monetary cost. Cheung stated:

*It is hard to take her out to different places. If you want to take her to Disneyland or the Ocean Park, I'll only mention these but not promise her. It costs a lot of money to go there each time. Sometimes, she wants to go there, and she learns these places from TV. I tell her that dad doesn't have the money, and will take her there later if I have the money.....again, it's a matter of money. It doesn't matter if I have money, and will take her there if I have holiday. It doesn't matter for spending a thousand dollars. I don't have any income, and I don't have extra money to spend. We rarely go out even on holidays, rarely do that. We seldom go to places like Kowloon Park where we have to spend on transportation. The open space nearby is the place we often visit. We seldom go to a place not nearby. (Cheung)*

Fathers like Cheung discussed the difficulty in bringing a somewhat materialistic life to their children. Because of financial difficulty, Cheung was unable to take his daughter wherever she wanted to go. It seems normal for fathers like Cheung to have hard feeling if one does not possess the ability to provide for the family. This further highlights the sense of entrapment that men experience. Men want to fulfill the provider

role and to make money for the family and this seems to be men's major family responsibility. When men find that they are unable to fulfill this role, they feel frustrated.

### **3. Constructing a Division of Household Labour**

As suggested previously, experience of the division of household labour is unique in a working-class family, and it is found that working-class families will uphold traditional gender ideologies (Pyke 1996; Legerski and Cornwall 2010). These families do not have the resources to outsource the domestic and caring duties to others or to hire a domestic helper to assist them in daily routine domestic work. This does not mean however, that working-class men must devote less time to household duties. With women becoming more involved in paid employment, it is suggested that working-class men should have more opportunities to participate in domestic work. This claim is at least supported by the qualitative data gathered in this study. Men in this study demonstrated that they had participated in certain domestic duties, such as taking care of the children, cooking and other household chores. In this section, discussions will be focused on the contents of men's household duties and how they construct such a division of labour.

Pyke (1996) suggests that although working-class families uphold a traditional gender ideology, working-class men are more equal in household work and child care practices. This could seem contradictory, since if working-class men are affected by the ideology the family is holding, they should stand firm to the gendered division of household labour. As Pyke (1996) argued, this is not exactly the case, as

working-class men are more willing than middle-class men to share household labour. Considering the change in increased labour force participation of women and the decreasing trend in men's labour force participation, it is understood that this change in the providing role has fostered men's increased participation in household labour. However, this is not to suggest that working-class men must necessarily be willing to participate in household duties. Some of them do this because they have such responsibility to the family in addition to financial obligation. As the data in this study suggested, men were sometimes reluctant to increase their domestic participation. For example, when Cheung was asked about his feelings on taking care of his daughter and doing the house chores after unemployment, expressed his dissatisfaction and offered the following statement:

*Sometimes looking after my daughter annoyed me, when teaching her to do the homework, I will get angry. Having a job is better than looking after her. If I have a job, I won't get irritated.....sometimes, the kid doesn't listen to me, the more time I spend on teaching her, the more irritated I get, but she is still young. If I work again, I might have to work hard, but I'll feel happier when I come home because I can make some money. Now, I don't make any money, [sigh.] The current situation is unlike the one in two years ago.....the mood.....nothing worth to talk about. (Cheung)*

He further commented that he was not happy staying in the role as a stay-at-home man. He was reluctant to take on that role, and if he had a choice, he preferred going to work. Re-entering the labour market would be a way to reclaim his financial autonomy; as he stated:

*If I have a job, I surely prefer to work.....well, I can at least*

*earn ten thousand a month. It is fine if I can work twenty days a month, I'm able to earn that. For now, I should earn ten thousand a month.....it is better than relying on my wife, she only gives me a few thousand.*

After his wife had begun full time employment in a restaurant, she began to give Cheung a sum as monthly household expenses, while he took up the full caring responsibility since then. He was however, uncomfortable to stay in a position where he had to use his wife's money. Legerski and Cornwall (2010) suggest that men are bothered if they are unable to provide for the family, and that their level of dissatisfaction grew in proportion to the degree of income gap between them and their wives. Cheung's case illustrated this argument, and though he had taken the care giver role, he was still clinging to a man's traditional providing role in a family.

Some informants disclosed that they did not participate a lot in household labour. Ng, for example, when he was asked the way he acted as a father, gave the following response:

*I seldom care for them, my wife will handle all these, that is related to schooling. Because I don't have the knowledge in these, and I have to let her handle all these.....about schooling, like parents' signature, parents' day, all these are handled by my wife.....I'm responsible for making money, and she looks after the family, just like parents' day, she's the one to attend. (Ng)*

His words emphasized the traditional gendered division of labour in a household. He was the one who was supposed to make money for the family while his wife took care of the daily living of the family members. In reality, his wife would assist him in the fruit stall in the morning. After

setting up the fruit stall, she would go to the market and do other household chores. Though Ng would do the cooking at night, his words and the division of labour in his family reflected the traditional gendered household division of labour.

As commented by other informants, cooking was a household labour that most men would take up. As discussed in previous paragraphs, some men reported that they would do the cooking, and they had a rationale behind these cooking activities. Ng was one of the informants who could tell the difference in the ways to prepare for the meals between his wife and him. He paid more attention to each step and he could explain the reason in each step. Lee shared similar experience, and he could tell the way to cook several dishes and to differentiate himself from his wife, and claimed that his children preferred to eat what was cooked by him. Although Tsui had lost his eyesight, he was able to tell why there was no need to add any oil when frying chicken wings. These examples illustrated that when men were to engage in a particular household duty, they tended to differentiate themselves from women. The ability to differentiate themselves from their respective wives was an attempt to claim their masculinity even when they were doing household tasks that were assumed to be dominated by women. This was also an attempt to construct an alternate masculinity when they were involved in duties that were considered feminine.

Some commented that they would do whatever other family members asked them to do, and they did not think they had presented a father figure who would not participate in any household duty. Tsang stated:

*Sometimes, when they asked me to do something, I'll do that, that's nothing special, they will ask me to get things for them, I'll do that. I don't care about that, and I won't show the father figure.....sometimes, my daughter says that she has no time to do the washing after dinner, I'll do that. I notice that she is doing homework, and I'll do the washing. Actually, she has been assigned to do the washing, for the cooking, will leave it to me. If I'm unable to come back, she'll do the cooking. She has to take on some of the duties in household chores. My son is also taught this way because both of us have to work to support the family. If we don't teach them this way, they will starve to death. (Tsang)*

In saying this, Tsang demonstrated that he would take the initiative to do the household chores like cooking and washing. What was not mentioned in the interview was that he had made much of the furniture at home and that he did all of the wood work and painting. In this way, apart from the kinds of caring duties he would perform, he would also do the tasks that remained gendered.

Men did not explicitly mention whether they considered that men should participate in household duties. Yet, men's participation in household labour could be considered part of their efforts in undoing gender (Deutsch 2007), even if this might be unintentional. Although men may tend to do the tasks that remained gendered, the kinds of household labours they had participated were beyond the financial provider role which was prioritized as men's major responsibility in a family. Even though there was no evidence that working-class men such as the informants in this study did spend more time in household labour if their spouses had paid employment, as suggested in the data, they did participate in certain tasks, and contributed to the family other than

financially providing for it. Nevertheless, this kind of contribution was perhaps only under certain conditions. Men in this study demonstrated that they still preferred to work outside and bring home money than to staying at home to do the household chores.

#### **4. Making decisions in the family**

Besides household chores, decision making in family is considered another kind of division of household labour; involving not only who is going to do what, but sometimes a resolution to a family issue. When men were asked who made a decision in family, examples of responses were *“we have discussions, no one is alone to make the decision”* and *“for the matters relating to the family, they will ask for my views”*. Although participants reported adopting a relatively open approach to decision making, men in this study were in general holding the power to make family decisions.

Some informants in this study commented that decisions in the family were made through discussion, and this decision was based on the difference in ability. Ng, for instance, would consider the variation in abilities. As the following exchange indicates:

*Interviewer: By the way, who is to make the decision in the family, you or your wife?*

*Ng: We have discussions, no one is alone to make the decision. For those things I can't handle, I'll ask my wife to do.*

*Interviewer: Any example? The children's homework?*

*Ng: Yes, she has been following that, and I'll let her follow that. I can't handle that. I can't even take care of myself, I had only studied for two years.*

*Interviewer: Is your wife educated?*



*Ng: She's educated.....and she knows a little English. I had only studied for two years, and I had not gone to school since then. Now, I can only read but not know the writing.....I don't have any time.*

Ng's words illustrated that he was not the one to make the final decision in the family, but that he took it as a responsibility to be shared with his wife. His words demonstrated that he considered his own poor education a limitation, and he further put this,

*I won't make the decision, I'll ask for her opinions in all aspects. I'll consult her, and I always do this. I'll do what she tells me to do. In most cases, when I go home, I'll do what she tells me to do. (Ng)*

There was no evidence to suggest that Ng did not want to make a decision, but his words demonstrated that he was more eager to act than to decide. Limited education was a factor affecting his motive to make a decision. Men in this study were in general not well-educated; the education attainment of their wives was generally even poorer. This made some informants eager to make decisions for the family. It was also considered that men preferred to use actions to express their feelings and concerns. In Ng's case, he used actions to display his participation in family issues.

In some cases, when it came to an important matter, some men claimed that their voices would be considered as a final decision. In describing decision making in family, Tsui mentioned that his wife would ask for his view when there was an important issue:

*If this is a trivial matter, she'll make the decision. If it is an important issue, she'll consult me, and we'll discuss about that. Sometimes, if I can't solve a problem, I'll also consult her, for*

*instance, as I can't see, I'll ask for her views.*

To Tsui, his health issue was the personal aspect he could not take control of, and he therefore needed his wife's assistance. Apart from this, he was able to make the final decision for the family, as he considered that he was better educated than his wife was.

Lee, another informant who considered that he had the final voice on various matters, claimed that as his wife did not have the ability to make a decision, she would consult him. This perceived lack of ability was related to his wife's literacy, and as Lee's wife had no formal education, he considered that he had to make a decision for her. As the following exchange explains:

*Interviewer: Are you the one to make the final decision on issues related to the family?*

*Lee: You can say so. For the matters relating to the family, she'll consult me because she has received fewer years of education than me do and she doesn't have the knowledge to make the decision on her own. She is uncertain to make the decision, and in certain occasions, she won't do anything before asking for my opinions.*

Lee's case was an extreme one, and he took control of the final decision in all domestic issues. This kind of dominance over family decisions was however, not obvious in the stories of other informants. Some fathers want to have more involvement in the family. Nevertheless, because of their providing role and the paid employment they have been engaged in, they are unable to be more involved in family life. Some men will use control in making decisions to allow them to get involved in family issues. Such an argument highlights the dilemma that men are separated from their family because of their engagement in employment (White,

1994). However, using discussion or negotiation as a way to come to a decision was still a common practice among the informants; and in their words, it was seen that decision making was a task required one's capability. To the men in this study, this capability was not only related to their intellectual capacity, but was extended to the availability to take part in making a decision. The process of decision making in the family has provided the means and opportunities for working-class men to safeguard their masculine identities (Vera-Sanso 2001). According to some men, their female partner would consult them or they would be the one to make a final decision.

## **5. Maintaining Family Bonds**

Although men in this study were engaged in their paid employment or maintaining the role as a financial provider, many of them participated in various household chores. In addition to doing a range of household duties, in understanding men's relationship with other family members, it was noticed that men in this study showed different degrees of participation in family gatherings and other activities. In studies about men and their families, the major focus lies on men's interaction with their immediate family members, such as spouse and children. Yet, the relationship between men and their extended families is as well an important aspect in a man's life. The data gathered in this study also provides insight into how men construct relationships with other family members such as siblings. The behaviours in maintaining family bonding as drawn from the qualitative data could be understood as engaging in family gatherings and taking care of family members.

## 5.1 Engaging in Family Gatherings

Engaging in family gatherings was not frequently mentioned by the informants; yet, this demonstrated that some men were using this as a way to maintain family relationships. Ng, for example, reported that his family would organize an outdoor activity at least once a year. He treasured this kind of experience and when I asked him if he would hang out with his friends, he responded thus:

*Interviewer: Will you go out to have a drink with others?*

*Ng: No, I don't drink, on the one hand, I don't drink, on the other, I don't have time. When I go home at night, after dinner and washing the dishes, not even have the time to read the newspaper, I have to go sleeping. I don't have time.....but will go out with the large family for catching the squid.*

*Interviewer: The chance to do that is also rare, you have to work all day.....*

*Ng: Once a year.....not everyone has joined the activity, but there are already more than 30 persons*

*Interviewer: Do you feel happy to have a chance to go out with the family for a day?*

*Ng: Yes, we suggested the activity this time. When the ship owner saw that I stood aside my brothers, he said that we did not have to worry about the losing one another, we looked alike. He then asked my brother why he looked so young, we told that he had his hair dyed.*

In addition to simply participating in gatherings, Ng would take part in organizing activities. In these gatherings, it was noticed that Ng would expect all family members to join in. Ng's experience was quite different from some men as many of them did not report to have joined this kind of activity. Cheung, for example, disclosed that he had not met his brother for years; and that he did not feel a sense of brotherhood towards him. He

stated:

*No, very rare, my sister-in-law will sometimes give me a call. We went to Chinese restaurant quite often last year. We went to the Chinese restaurant once every three to four months. After my wife has found a job, we rarely go to restaurant. I don't have any brotherhood with my elder brother, we didn't have that even when we were young. (Cheung)*

Brotherhood marked the difference in attitude in maintaining family relationship. As can be seen from the words of Ng and Cheung, there was an obvious difference in how they expressed brotherhood. Ng had a close bond, while Cheung did not.

## **5.2 Taking Care of Family Members**

To further explore their sense of brotherhood, taking care of family members in these men's accounts included taking care of their own siblings as well as their siblings' children. Tsang was a typical example. He was the first one among his siblings to move to Hong Kong from the Mainland. When he settled down, his siblings moved to Hong Kong, and he played the role as their guide. The following exchange illustrates Tsang's relationship with his siblings:

*Interviewer: You have mentioned that you have 7 brothers and sisters. Do you have any contacts with them who are in Hong Kong?*

*Tsang: For sure, I have contact with my younger sister, her son lives with us. I also have contact with my elder sister. I have been here for a longer period, and she may consult me on many issues, she's not familiar with the places, and as I work as a sam-hong worker, I have gone to many places. She's now working as a building security guard, she hurt her waist when she was working in a Chinese restaurant. We don't know much*

*about claiming industrial injuries, we have no knowledge in that, and we just keep on working. After she had recovered from the waist injury, she changed her job, and is now working as a security guard. She received medical treatment in the Mainland and not in Hong Kong. Security guard works rather long hours daily, and she may need to work in different places, and if she doesn't know how to go there, she will give me a call. Yes, I have contacts with the siblings, and our relationship is rather good. That's because they took care of me since I was a child, and I was dependent on them. Though it was my father to earn an income for the family, it was my siblings to take me to a doctor when I was not feeling well. My mother died when I was only 7 to 8 years old, and she was in the Mainland to take care of the family while my father was here to earn an income. Since my mother's death, the siblings had to help one another. When they came here, I insisted to live with them, so I rent a place in Tai Kok Tsui to live with them, and after they had found a job, they rent another place.*

Tsang further explained that as he was cared by his siblings in the Mainland when he was young; and that he took up the responsibility to rent a place for his siblings when they moved to Hong Kong.

*As I considered that my family had contributed a lot in letting me survive, when my elder sister came to Hong Kong, they did not earn much in the Mainland, I have been here for a longer period, I rent the place and let them live with me first. It was a difficult time. When they had found a job, and had stable income, they moved to another place. Although it was rather a difficult time, I felt happy. They were able to come to Hong Kong, and they could make a living, that's good. (Tsang)*

Acting as a guide for his sister, renting a roof top structure in an old urban district, and living with his siblings were the responsibilities Tsang had taken up when they moved to the city. Tsang continued living with his siblings until they had all found jobs. In addition, as his younger sister had

to work very long hours and could not take on the caring responsibility for her son, Tsang was living with his niece. Tsang's interview took place in his home, and his niece was there. Tsang related that he had specifically made a partition for his niece, so that he could have his own place. Jarrett, Roy and Burton (2002) suggest that "fathers help to create and sustain interhousehold connections among networks of family members who provide flexible and interchangeable care for children" (224). Tsang had provided care for his sister's child, and this served as an assistance that he could afford and which also enabled his sister to continue her employment. Apart from expressing appreciation for what his siblings had done for him, it was the sense of Chinese brotherhood that made Tsang contribute to his siblings.

Tsui was an informant who had taken on the responsibility to financially support his siblings at his young age. Tsui's wife shared that he had given what he earned to the family as a way to support his siblings' education. Tsui stated that as the eldest brother in the family, he had to act as a role model for the younger ones. Acting as a role model implied that he had to demonstrate how to take on family responsibility. He commented:

*The question is you're an elder brother, you have to set a model for other siblings, they would learn from me as the elder brother. If we're dispirited, and did not care about anything, this might be a bad model. (Tsui)*

As an elder brother in the family, Tsui had the responsibility to demonstrate to his siblings what they should do. His account presented another sense of brotherhood that focus only on responsibility but also on

values and attitudes.

Taking part in family gatherings and bearing some caring duties for extended family members reflected informants' attitude to their family, and sense of brotherhood. Even though informants' participation in family varied, their intention to keep a bond with their own family members was obvious. What they did was largely related to their financial contribution, as in the case of Tsang and Tsui. Expressive roles other than managing family relationship were not mentioned by the informants. Maintaining family bonds is considered a domestic practice for women, as women are considered to have the natural attributes to show care and concern. That being said, men were constructing their own way to show care and concern for the family, and engaging in family gatherings and taking care of family members were some ways to demonstrate this contribution.

## **6. Making Sense of Family and Fatherhood**

As discussed previously, the conduct of fatherhood and men's domestic duties were significantly different. This further emphasized the individuality of the informant, and the diversity of the meanings of family that they had brought with them. Some men in this study took the formation of family as a normal stage in their life, and most of the fathers linked up family with a stable financial resource.

Tin was the one who considered that formation of family was a normal stage in one's life. I asked Tin how he would relax himself when he experienced unemployment. His response was not to simply respond to the question but to further his views on family. He told that,



*How to relax myself? If things have happened, you have to face them. Why? You have your own family, you have no choice, but to face them. You can't just run away, and this is irresponsible. Having responsibility is very important, if you don't want to take on the responsibility, you shouldn't get married, and you shouldn't have kids. This is a stage you have to go through, you have no choice and can only face it. You need to think of ways to handle these. If someone can help you, you can solve part of the problems first, and can't leave the problems behind or give up. Problems will be solved one day, I hope so. These are what I say to relax myself, there won't be dead end. (Tin)*

Apart from relating the formation of family as a stage in one's life, Tin also considered that it was one's responsibility to maintain a family and not shirk this responsibility. Responsibility to the family is an important task to a man. Such responsibility is related to one's ability to financially provide for the family. As Tin was unable to provide for the family, he had struggled between the expected responsibility and what he could actually do.

Tin's attitude contrasted with Fun's, who had left the family after the closure of his business. Fun emphasized that all he did was for the family when he had a stable job and ran his own small business. His decision to run a restaurant was based on his intention to make a better living for his family. He recalled that his wife did not agree with his decision, but that he had had his reasons,

*My wife didn't agree with my decision to run a restaurant. In fact, my intention to run a restaurant was for my parents because they were old, and if the restaurant had good business, the whole family would have work, don't you think so? I own nothing, the taxi and the public housing unit were for my wife, and I did not have any share. She was named the household head of the public housing unit.....in fact, my*

*purpose for running the restaurant was to let all family members have work. Don't you think so? I told her that it was good for her to become a boss. (Fun)*

Thus, running a restaurant was a method for Fun to maintain the living of the family. Bringing home money was an act that Fun considered important and to fulfill his responsibility to family. After the closure of his restaurant however, he packed some clothes and left the family. His relationships with other family members degraded from that point on. While discussing this topic, he recalled another episode about his youngest son. Fun disclosed that he was sorry for his son. He stated:

*A teacher had called me, maybe I was really irresponsible, but I had to work, and didn't have the reason to take leave to go to school and take a look at him (his son). I told the teacher that I had no choice, and my wife also needed to work. The teacher said that as a father, I should spend more time to stay with my son, and to understand him more. I had once gone to school to meet the teacher and I told the teacher that my son was from a single parent family, and his character had developed and fixed. I also told the teacher that I also wanted to scold him, but I had not. I told the teacher that if my son blamed me for not caring for him for the past years, and asked me why I cared about him at that moment, I did not know how to answer him. Don't you think so? (Fun)*

Fun had in his mind what a father should do, but he was not eager to do that as he was concerned that having left the family, he was no longer in a position to offer his son advice. As a father, he still wanted to retain his pride; because of which, he did not have much conversation with his sons.

The cases of Fun and Tin showed that some men took family as a responsibility they had to fulfill. Others took family as a place of warmth and happiness. When I asked Tsui the meaning that family embodied he

replied:

*Family is important, it makes you.....if you're a normal person, you'll have a peace of mind. When you go home, you'll enjoy a meal under a warm environment, you can also stay with the kids. You'll feel happy when you go to work the other day. But, if your wife always blames you.....and says that the family is lacking of money, and you have to settle that, you'll find it an increased burden. If your wife is a thrifty person, you'll feel comfortable, and will give her all the money, and let her take charge of the usage of the money. I'll only take the amount that I need for transportation, going to Chinese restaurant and for entertainment, the rest of the money will be given to my wife... (Tsui)*

Family gave Tsui warmth and happiness; nonetheless, family also incurred a responsibility on him, and this responsibility was primarily financial.

Cheung shared similar views, and he stated that he enjoyed the experience as a father, but was not happy as he was unemployed and could not earn a living. He related happiness to his ability to earn a living for the family. We had the following conversation:

*Interviewer: what do you think is the importance of a family that has given men?*

*Cheung: A family.....a man should work and can earn an income, and is not like me, without a job and no income. If a man can have a job and can earn an income, his family will be happy. But now, I don't have a job and I don't have any income, and that makes me unhappy.*

To secure the family financially was important and men took it as their responsibility. When I asked Tsang if he could spend more time with the family as he could only work five and a half days per week, he had the following response,

*Yes, this is true. But, if you don't have sufficient income to support the family, it is a problem, this is a real problem. You can describe that in this way, because if you don't have enough money to maintain the living of the family, problems will arise. I've seen many, the woman will run away. Hong Kong is full of temptation, and she may consider that she can live a better life if she leaves the family. She may have some fantasies, but this is a gamble. If a woman really runs away, the family will break up. I think it is a problem if the financial condition of a family is not good. If you can't spend more time with the kids, it depends on the way you teach them. I don't think there is barrier between the kids and me. My daughter learnt how to cook when she was a child, it is difficult for most Hong Kong people to do that. To cook and do the laundry when she was still a child, and she has to take care of the family. The operation of the family is that she has to assist the parents to do certain things because the parents are not educated, and have to work seven days so as to make enough money for the family. (Tsang)*

This excerpt showed that men in this study were attempting to resolve the tension between the need to fulfill a breadwinner role and to be more involved as a parent (Williams, 2009). Working-class men such as the informants in this study were generally working as manual skill labour, and the more hours they worked, the higher the wage they would get. The case of Tsang showed that if he was only able to work five days per week, the wage he earned might not be sufficient for the expenses in the family. This reflected the experience of the working-class men in this industry. To them, working more days was a way to secure sufficient wages that they needed for maintaining the living of their family.

Men in this study generally considered fathering a good experience, frequently describing it with adjectives such as “happy” and “competent father”. Cheung, for example, considered himself a competent father and

was happy as a father. Yet, these feelings were overshadowed by his eagerness to take part again in paid employment. He stated:

*There were both happiness and unhappiness with the birth of my daughter. Sometimes, I feel happy, what makes me feel bad is that more money is used. All in all, it is a matter of money. I feel happy if I have a job and can make money, but now, I don't have a job. Without any job.....for sure, I feel unhappy because I can't make money (Cheung)*

Even though he was happy when he was able to make his daughter feel happy, this was not enough as he was unable to bring home financial resources. He added:

*To be able to please the daughter makes me feel happy, and it is always a matter of money. I'll feel happy if I have a job and an income. If not, I feel bad and unhappy. (Cheung)*

Money or financial resources were to him something much more important than making his daughter feel happy. He further stated his condition and that he was not happy with the fact that *"I have to depend on my wife, but she does not give sufficient amount, if the amount is enough, I don't have to ask the social worker for material assistance"*. Thus, having his wife take up the provider role for the family created hard feelings in him. As he considered that his wife did not provide sufficient money for the family expenses, he had to seek help from others for the things that the family needed. This further challenged his perceived responsibility as a father.

Whether or not to increase time spent with the family was seen as a dilemma between the need to provide for the family or to be involved as a parent. Men in this study demonstrated that they were more inclined to

take up the financial provider role than to taking up the fathering role. When analysing their choice, it was not surprising that many of them were not willing to act as a stay-at-home father, as this meant that they were required to hand the providing responsibility to their spouse or to someone else. Legerski and Cornwall, (2010) argue that paid work is a path to free men from being involving in household labours or other child-care duties, but even if men are unemployed, they do not necessarily participate more in household labour or in other caregiving duties. Men in this study did not necessarily want to free themselves from these tasks, but being heavily involved in these may be a threat to their perceived provider role, which in turn may also challenge their masculine identities in which paid employment occupied the central position in a man's identity (Miller 2011). Nonetheless, as shown in the data, men in this study still showed some degrees of fathering involvement.

## **7. Decline of the Male Breadwinner Image**

The concept of 'breadwinner' can be conceptualized as the main financial provider in a family, the main labour market participant, and a masculine identity (Warren 2007). The provider role can benefit a person in at least two ways (Vera-Sanso 2001). The first is that people are dependent on their ability to provide, while the second is that the role of provider places a person in a privileged position. Vera-Sanso (2001) further suggests however, that the provider role entails a heavy responsibility, and requires not only competence but also the courage to face the risks and difficulties in earning an income While capitalizing on the benefits being a breadwinner brings men also need to handle the

difficulty if they are unable to fulfill this breadwinner role.

Since this breadwinner role is closely related to paid work and it is situated at the central position of masculinity, it is crucial in shaping a man's masculine identity. As discussed however, working-class men encounter a plethora of challenges in relation to economic restructuring, increased women's labour force participation, changes in family structure, and loss of jobs. These challenges contribute to changes in men's economic position and position in family. Tin also shared his view on men's unemployment. He considered that men at middle-age were less able to compete with young graduates. He thought unemployed men would be harmful to society if they remained unemployed. He commented:

*I think the Hong Kong government should provide more assistance to men who are at their thirties to fifties, maybe to see if the employers can give any chance to these men. I know that many men at my age are unemployed, and the young graduates are competing with us every year, and they make us lag behind and have fewer chances. This is a burden for us. Don't you think so? Relying on CSSA is not a long-term solution, one should help the CSSA recipients to get a job, to help them set up a business or to see if there are chances for them. I think they should be given a chance and to allow them to re-enter the labour market. It is not that they can't work, I know many of them are still young and can work, but the fact is that they can't find a job. Besides, the Hong Kong government requires labours in different industries to obtain a license, this make the license fee (an increase).....this also allows the employers rooms to cut the labour's wage. If you don't have a particular skill, the employers will cut your wage. I think the government should tackle these issues, if these continue; it won't be good to Hong Kong. This will end up increasing the number of CSSA recipients. If men have nothing to do, tragedies may arise, and will lead to psychological problems, this is nothing good. I mean it. (Tin)*

Tin's words reflected the experience of some middle-aged men. With economic restructuring, men's physical ability was no longer a crucial factor in their work. More men were facing unemployment or under-employment, and they would not be considered as the main financial provider.

In relation to the decline of male breadwinner image, Cheung, whose wife had replaced him as the financial provider for the family. He stated: *"You know, it is fine for a man to support his wife's daily living but it is not good for a man to depend on his wife's income"*. Changing from a provider to a dependent was a difficult shift, and Cheung felt uncomfortable as he considered that he should be the one to earn a living for the family rather than his wife. He did not however, oppose the idea of a dual-breadwinner model, and if he could choose, he would rather have both of them going out for paid work. Nonetheless, he had his concerns. He stated: *"If we can choose, I'd rather that my wife and I have work, but it is a dilemma if none of us can take care of the daughter"*. If men were to relate their masculine identity as heavily linked to the financial provider role, and if they were unable to achieve what they had expected, this challenged their masculinity.

Cheung was the only man in this study who had taken up all of the household labours and child-caring duties. When I asked him how he felt as a stay-at-home father, he offered the following response:

*I don't have any choice right now, I want to go out to work, but my health condition is not good, I have foot pain, and can't work. I'm not very old, many of those who are at sixty or seventy are still working, the problem is that I can't do any job. Even if there is a chance, I still can't do that, I have to look*



*after my daughter, the situation is difficult, it seems that I don't have any choice.....if my foot pain has improved, I may work, but not now.....for the question of stay-at-home men, I don't mind if I have money. If I have sufficient money for the rest of my life, I'm happy to be a stay-at-home man. The problem is that I'm not this kind of man, I have used up what I had earned, I don't have any money, to be such a stay-at-home man, I'm not happy with that. (Cheung)*

It seemed that Cheung did not reject the idea of taking on the role as a stay-at-home father. Yet, he stated some conditions in taking on this obligation, and these were heavily related to one's financial condition and the status of having an employment. Given that Cheung's financial condition did not match with what was in his mind to be a stay-at-home father, he preferred to have an employment to re-establish his breadwinner role. Cheung only saw the shortfalls of staying at home, and did not consider what he had done for the family as an alternative form of appropriate male contribution.

Apart from losing the status as a financial provider, men can consider that the decline of patriarchal authority is another aspect related to the decline of their male breadwinner role. It may be a general perception to the working-class men that one of their major contributions is providing for the family. In return, these men also consider themselves entitled to the benefits that the provider responsibility has brought them. In this study, there were occasions when men found that they did not experience much of this benefit, and they frequently reported feeling that their authority had been challenged by others. Fun, a typical example, considered that he was the one to bring home money, and he should be eligible to get back part of the money he had given to his family. His wife and mother however,

did not fulfill this wish. He stated:

*No matter if this is your wife or your mother, maybe we're not in the same position. My point was that, firstly, I earned the money, secondly, even if the business was closed down, I wouldn't go bankrupt, I just wanted to get some from them to solve the problem. But, I couldn't. I had tried to ask them for money, and they did give me at the beginning, but when I asked them again, they asked me to close the restaurant. I was very angry at that time.....why.....what was my intention? I could just sell the taxi and find a job, and I could still make a living. The intention was for my parents, when they got older, they could still go back the restaurant to help. It was me to earn the money, although I had given them the money, I just wanted some back from them to solve part of the problem. I did think that it was meaningless to live like that, I did all these for them. The business still faced deficits after a few months, I could sell it to others, but my temper was bad. I gave up everything, and ran away after taking some clothes. I did not care about the business. Some might think that I was irresponsible, I had only left a mess. I had considered that if I lost everything, I could still find a job, and I could earn more than ten thousand a month. (Fun)*

This detailed quote showed that Fun was not able to get what he wanted, though he insisted that the money his wife and mother had was earned by him. Fun evidently felt that he should have the power to decide how the money he had earned should be used; especially since other family members were his dependents. His authority was challenged by his wife and mother, and that affected how he responded to their challenge. , Fun also reported that he wondered about what kind of man he was. When I asked him if he had thought of doing something to remedy the relationship with his wife and his sons, he replied:

*Fun: Frankly speaking, I'm rather discontented with my wife,*

*but why do I still.....she called me just now, asked me when I'll have a holiday, I think she wants to repair our relationship, but her temper is [bad] and we are unable to be together again.....I have to attend the training course in Kwai Chung, and I have to go there from Chai Wan. I'll wake up at six in the morning, I think this will be good to both of us. In fact, I don't want to go back there. You know why? It's just like depending on others for support. It's simple, and it's meaningless to a man like me.*

*Interviewer: What do you mean by depending on others for support?*

*Fun: What I mean is the place is not my home, you have to understand this. In fact, I don't mean that I don't want to, when I moved to her home a few years ago, if she wanted to save this relationship, and if we could accommodate to each other, the relationship might be better, but this is not the case. During that period, I had the feeling that the place was not my home, it is just that simple. If I don't have other choice but to move to there, I'd rather have no place to sleep. But I don't have other option, and sometimes.....I have mentioned, I don't want to push the relationship to a dead end. I don't know what I'll become later. I won't expect her to visit me, but things don't have to move to the extreme. We're not enemies, and no need to be like that.....I won't say I don't have any relationship with her, maybe she wants to repair our relationship, but our characters are not the same as we were years ago, and we have separated for many years. It's not a short period of time, my elder son is already 29. We separated when he was 12. How many years? I have tried to live with her again for some years, but it's meaningless, going back is just like depending on others for support. The family consists of five members, but it is like we have five households...*

Although Fun wanted to remedy the difficulties with the relationship, he did not feel comfortable being in the way when he was with his ex-wife and his sons. The feeling of becoming dependent on others made him feel that his ex-wife's living place was not exactly his home. He did not think he

got the kind of respect from his sons that a father 'should' have. In this way, his patriarchal authority was once again challenged by other family members, and thus, his masculinity was confronted.

It is becoming more prominent to adopt a dual-breadwinner model. Thus, in order to maintain the daily living of a family, working-class families are more realistic to adopt a dual-breadwinner model. Although this frequently challenges men's status as the major financial provider in a family, it also has its function. Women's financial contribution is seen as a way to share men's providing responsibility. This should have helped men to reduce the burden they experience. If men still adhere to the breadwinner role as their only contribution however, they will find it difficult to sustain this role, especially at the time when they face underemployment or unemployment.

## **8. Discussion**

Family is to men a place where they can display their masculinity and paternal influence. Bringing home money or to secure the financial condition of a family is always considered a way to safeguard men's position in a family. It is in this discourse that men stick to the breadwinning responsibility to the family and as such it becomes one of their major responsibilities in a family. Men in this study showed that they were eager to take on the responsibility as a breadwinner. They held this view as the result of interactions among the aspects of traditional Chinese culture, their own family, and societal expectations. Men believed that it was their responsibility to provide for the family. When men focus on this provider role, they are neglecting or disregarding the importance of other

duties. Doing gender is a way to safeguard their benefits in a family, and in many cases, these benefits are related to freeing themselves from household labours and caring duties. Men's role as a breadwinner has brought them not only status in the public sphere (Choi and Lee, 1997), they also enjoy privilege in the private sphere. Nonetheless, over-emphasizing men's role as a breadwinner causes gender inequality, and leaves women with the expectation of fulfilling a majority of household tasks and caring duties. The data in this study demonstrated that informants were willing to take part in household duties. However, informants might have over-emphasized the providing duties, and have overlooked other caring duties and contributions they had made.

Marsiglio and Pleck (2005) suggest that fathers' social class matters when they want to coordinate their paternal identity, fathering activities, and family arrangements. It is through these and with reference to what they have contributed to the family, that fathers can display their masculine identities. Fathers in this study however, were working-class men, and some of them were unemployed at the time of interviews. Their employment did not enable them to possess the hegemonic status and the privileges that men with higher socio-economic status had access to. As in Connell's (1995) typology, these working-class men were not considered as possessing hegemonic masculinity, but a marginalized type of masculinity. As such, these men would find it difficult to comply with what was expected as part of the traditional breadwinner role.

Nonetheless, men in this study did not only take on the breadwinner role as their sole contribution to their family. They were, in general, willing to take part in certain household labours and caring duties. As suggested

by the data, levels of participation and the tasks men committed in household duties carried different and distinctive meanings. Some men would take a minimal role in child caring while some would take on the sole responsibility in child caring and home making. Some would take preparing for meals as a kind of household involvement, while some would participate more in household tasks. Such variations showed that even though men in this study were all working-class men, they displayed distinct ways to participate in family duties. Given their socioeconomic status, these men did not have the adequate financial condition to employ a domestic helper to share their household tasks and child-caring duties, and thus, they had to share the tasks with their female partner. As discussed previously in this chapter, good fathering is, in practice, often related to middle-class behaviour as middle-class men often have more resources to arrange fathering activities with their children; while bad fathering is linked with poor fathers (Clarke & Popay, 1998). This perception however, disregards what fathers of lower socio-economic status are contributing to the family.

Lupton and Barclay (1997) claim that such polarization between good and bad fathering often results in a simplified description of fatherhood, and stresses only the father's ability in generating financial resource. They emphasize the importance of recognizing more elements of fatherhood to uncover the multiple aspects of men's fathering practices. It should be acknowledged for example, that men in this study did enjoy spending time with their children. On commenting on their situation, the following statement from Jarrett, Roy and Burton (2002) can best describe their situation:

Although financial contributions and fatherhood are tightly linked, many low income families reject singular definitions of fatherhood based on men's economic abilities. Instead, they construct a notion of fatherhood that encompasses the time men spend with their children as well as other expressions of care and concern. (Jarrett, Roy and Burton, 2002: 230)

One way to help these low-income fathers to emancipate themselves from the perceived shackles of the male breadwinner role is to broaden the definition of what it is meant to be a father when they cannot meet the said breadwinner responsibility.

Nevertheless, men would not find it easy to relinquish their breadwinner role no matter the amount of financial resources they have brought to the family. Thus, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, working-class men do not have the capital as their middle-class counterparts have, and keeping a breadwinner role is considered the symbolic capital they possess. It is this capital that carries benefits, even if these benefits are merely symbolic. As LaRossa (1988: 457) commented however, the model of man-as-breadwinner creates "structural barriers to men's involvement with their children, in that it legitimates inflexible and highly demanding job schedules which, in turn, increase the conflict between market work and family work". LaRossa's words highlight the dilemma that working-class men have to face; either engaging in paid employment or being involved more in child care.

Although men's account of their family responsibilities were similar to other studies in that they stressed a family breadwinner role and that they had participated in certain household labours and caring duties, men in this study provided held different perspectives on issues related to

women's work. The details of this discussion were addressed in the previous chapter.

Studies in western societies demonstrated that men felt that their masculinities were undermined as their female partners became self-reliant on their own income (Vera-Sanso, 2001), men in this study also reported to have held a negative attitude to their wives' work although some even considered that his wife's work would contribute to improving the financial condition of the family. This reflected that the cost of living in Hong Kong was relatively high, and a working-class family could barely afford the living expenses only by one family member's income. It also reflected that the level of income of the working-class men was so low that they could not support the family on their own.

Though they did not tell if this would help them reduce the burden that they had shouldered, in reality, women should have helped to share the provider responsibility. Thus, men might be able to free themselves from that responsibility and to devote more time in family and fathering (Cha and Thēbaud, 2009). However, men in this study were in a situation as Cha and Thēbaud have described whereby, "even though men perceive an economic benefit from being in dual-earner households, their appreciation of such benefits may be limited if a central part of their masculine identity hinges on maintaining primary breadwinner status" (Cha and Thēbaud, 2009: 219). This view echoed LaRossa's (1988) arguments. Thus, the 'men-as-breadwinner' archetype created a structural barrier to men's domestic participation. Men felt trapped in this breadwinner status however, and the ability to provide for the family was considered as an expected responsibility. Yet, not all men are able to meet



this demand adequately; this was accurate for the working-class men in this study.

Even though men in this study reported that they had participated in different household tasks and caring duties, these contributions were overshadowed by their perceived breadwinner identity. This further highlights the argument that men differentiate what is work and what is not. In focusing on defining paid employment as work, men undermine the values of domestic work and the caring duties, as these were not defined as real work. As commented by Doucet (2004), there is a social pressure in linking up earning and the quality of a good man. This has limited men's choice of a preferred life. Doucet (2004) therefore suggests that the meanings of work and home should be reconstructed to include "unpaid self-provisioning activities" (Doucet, 2004: 290). The self-provisioning activities constitute unpaid child-caring duties, unpaid household labour, and unpaid repairing work. Men in this study participated in these with varied degrees of engagement. It is noticed that informants were influenced by some factors when they decided the tasks and the amount of time they could involve. These factors which were related with their employment included flexibility in work, income and resources. Most informants indicated that they did not spend much time with their children and their families. Only a few informants actually took on more caring responsibilities, such as preparing for meals, taking children to schools and other caring duties. These duties were originally done by their wives. The swap of duties with their wives was seen by the informants a tension between fulfilling the traditional breadwinning duties and satisfying other fathering duties. The possibility to open up the meanings of fatherhood is

discussed in previous paragraphs. Informants in this research demonstrated that they were willing to get involved in their children's lives but their involvement was limited by their perceived duty as a breadwinner.

Doucet (2004) suggests that men who are living and working for periods as primary carers are in a position to create new forms of masculinity. Doucet (2004: 196) argues that they do so "through delicate balancing acts of simultaneously embracing and rejecting both femininity and hegemonic masculinity". Connell (2000: 13-14) also suggests that "masculinities are created in specific historical circumstances and, as those circumstances change, the gender practices can be contested and reconstructed". Both of them comment that masculinity will change. The new forms of masculinity will be different from the traditional model. It is possible that in the new forms of masculinity, men will not emphasize their financial contribution as the major responsibility to their children and families. Although the informants in this study did not prefer to focus on their caring roles and they wanted to have an employment, in doing the caring duties which are not considered as naturally occupied by men, some informants were undoing gender, and they were reconstructing an alternative form of masculinity.

## **Chapter Six**

### **MEN AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE**

#### **1. Introduction**

Discussions in the previous two chapters have focused on the two most widely discussed aspects in a man's life: work and family. These discussions have emphasized on why work is essential to men's sense of manliness, their involvement in family and their reluctance to relinquish their connections with work. In addition to one's work life and family life, social experience is also important in shaping a man's masculine identity and is closely related with men's conception of work. Men commit themselves to work, they may treat social relationships instrumentally. It is suggested that men treat social relationships as an attempt to expand their social capital, and that this may finally be linked with their work. As the following discussion will show, this is especially important to working-class men, as they tend to make use of various forms of social life as ways to look for job opportunities.

This chapter will discuss men's male bonding, lifestyles, perceptions of manhood and ways of doing gender. Examination of these concepts can help delineate how men's social practice is linked with their conception of work, and how men in this study construct their masculine identities in daily life experience.

## 2. Friendship and Social Networks

### 2.1 Maintaining Friendship

According to Walker (1994a, 1995) and Migliaccio (2009) friendship among men includes the content of and attitudes towards friendship. It is the traditional belief that friendship among men is less intimate than between women (Williams 1985), and this is maybe caused by men's practice of less self-disclosing oneself, especially one's feelings. As a result, men are less likely to develop an intimate friendship. Men tend to keep their friendship based on certain activities that they will do together rather than to communicate verbally. Friendship, as informants in this study described, was related to "*whether we can help one another*", "*if you're in need, I can offer you help. If I'm in need, you can offer me help*", and "*I'll first do what my friends have in need, and I'll handle my own businesses later*". Some men stated that they would spend their leisure time with their friends regularly. Liu, for example, stated that he would dine with his best friends, and had differentiated his friends from his colleagues. He stated:

*Liu: A colleague is a colleague, and friends are those who have known for a long time. We played near the hut where we used to live, and we all have a job.....*

*Interviewer: Do you intentionally separate friends from colleagues? Or it is just that there are some who have better communication.....*

*Liu: I don't intentionally do that. Only that I have been with this group since I was a child, and on Sunday, we'll go to Chinese restaurant, after then, we'll go to play mah-jong, and the relationship is like this. We'll either go swimming or play mah-jong on Sunday. We'll also go to the Repulse Bay, Shek O, and we can go fishing. I have made friends with them for*

*around 30 to 40 years. If you consider someone who is a friend but you don't contact him frequently, and you won't go out with him to a Chinese restaurant, sometimes you won't see him once every four to five months. Can you say this is friendship? These are only friends on a superficial level. We almost meet each other every month, even if we won't meet, we still have a phone contact.*

In this excerpt, Liu demonstrated that friendship carried the meaning of companionship, and he treasured engaging in activities with his friends. Thus, going to a Chinese restaurant, playing *mah-jong*, fishing and swimming were the activities that Liu would participate in with his friends. In addition to these activities, talking on the phone was also something he did regularly. The traditional belief that men are less involved in verbal communication was not applicable in Liu's story. Though it was not clear whether or not Liu had shared his deeper emotions with his friends, the behaviour and activities he would engage in did involve emotional support. The presence of this kind of interaction was beyond the understanding that working-class men's friendship was instrumental in nature, and only involved material or financial assistance.

Liu's words also illustrated his understanding to friendship and fellows in workplace. He evidently felt that fellows in the workplace were instrumental and as in a workplace, he had to be aware if others would say anything bad behind his back. In friendship however, Liu considered that this was another story, as he perceived that friendship should be a relationship that he was able to maintain for longer term. Thus, in Liu's perception, what differentiated friendship and fellows in the workplace was the instrumental nature or the expressive and emotive nature of the relationship.

Liu was one of the few informants who still kept constant contacts and participated in social activities with friends. His situation was different from other informants. Although considered as a working-class man, Liu had a rather stable job, and the salary he could earn was the highest amongst the informants in this study. Liu also did not have any children, and so did not have to worry about the living conditions of the children as other informants did. As a result, his provider burden was not as heavy as other informants. It was in this context that Liu had the ability to spend more time with his friends.

Some informants emphasized supportiveness in friendship. Walker (1994) suggests that supportiveness in friendship can be considered as doing anything for friends including financial assistance and even physical support when being confronted by others. Lee, who reported to have only a few close friends stated that he considered friendship would be a relationship whereby when his friends were in need, they could seek his assistance. In return, when he was in need, he could also rely on his friends. Thus, what he was emphasizing was a reciprocal relationship. He stated:

*If you're in need, I can help you. If I'm in need, you can help me. I'll help my friends if they are in need, and will put aside my own stuff. If I have promised a friend, I won't regret. (Lee)*

This reciprocal relationship was what Lee considered as a friendship should possess. When I asked him if he could talk about an experience of this, he could hardly re-tell any experience on this. Nevertheless, he emphasized that if one was his close friend, he would put his own matters aside and help his friends first. In addition to emphasizing instrumental

support, Lee was also mentioning a masculine way of emotional support, and this support was related to the sense of brotherhood.

## **2.2 Changing Friendship Resulted from Unemployment**

Some informants in this study suggested that there was a change in the behaviour of friendship before and after they became unemployed. Some of them reported that they had not contacted their friends after they became unemployed while some stated that they had maintained their relationships, as friendship provided a network that they sometimes found helpful in looking for jobs. Despite the advantages of maintaining network contacts, it would be inaccurate to conclude that friendship was based primarily on instrumental factors. Some informants expressed their regret to the changing behaviour in friendship. Tin, for example, stated that he had no contact with his friends after he was unemployed.

*...To be frank, since I have not worked in that industry and my health condition is getting poorer, I have not contacted others, and that others seem to be afraid of.....especially in the industry I worked before, many would like to take advantage on others, and they did not want to lose. I don't have the kind of friend who was my colleague. They were mean, and I was also that type of person. In that circle, everyone wants to take advantages of others, and they might want to harm others. In return, they might get more jobs. Everyone builds a wall to protect oneself, and it's also true among my friends and me. I only have three or more friends' contact, but I won't find them and ask them to go Chinese restaurant. I don't have the money to pay for them, and I don't want others to pay for me. This makes me keep a distance from others, I don't have many friends, and I don't have contacts with my ex-colleagues. They won't contact me as they know that I'm unemployed, and can't get any advantage from me, and they don't dare to treat me a*

*meal. I don't have any phone contact with my friends. (Tin)*

Tin's words reflected his attitude towards friendship. He believed that friends were instrumental, and he thought that as he could not give anything good to his friends, they did not keep any connection with him. Yet, his attitude was also a factor making him isolated from others. Apart from Tin, Fun also expressed the view that he did not want to maintain old friendships. In discussing friendship, we had the following exchange:

*Interviewer: Have you kept contact with your friends?*

*Fun: I'm a strange person, I have come across several stages in work, I didn't have contacts with my ex-colleagues in each break, and I'll know someone new. There are rare situations when I miss them, but I still keep contacts with some taxi drivers in Chai Wan. All other relationships were terminated in the past ten years.*

*Interviewer: Can I say that you took the initiative to terminate the relationship?*

*Fun: Yes.*

*Interviewer: Why did you make such decision?*

*Fun: Because I want to start a new life. Besides, it is meaningless. It is meaningless to let others know that you are so miserable right now, and you had a taxi, but you can no longer run the business, and the family has broken up. And.....I think relationship among people is based on whether one still has a value, if not, others will keep a distance with you.*

*Interviewer: I've heard some other men say that if others know one is unemployed, they might consider that they have to pay for him if they ask him to go the Chinese restaurant.*

*Fun: I have some of these friends, and if I really have the financial problem, it's meaningless to find others. Should we go chit chat in a park? No way. If we go to a restaurant, who will pay for the bill? I don't have the money to pay for that, and it's better not to find others. Don't you think so?*

*Interviewer: But, can we just pay for ourselves?*



*Fun: It's better to save the money if we have to pay for ourselves, I don't dare to waste the time, and it is not a question of whether you should pay for him or not, what's fundamental is you don't have this ability. Besides, what's more important is in what way can he help you? It seems that it's talking about one's value, that is if you want to find him, you might want him to offer you help in looking for a job. You won't call him if you don't have any problem, what's the meaning for that? You'd better not to find him. If you find him, he must be your best friend, am I right?*

Both Tin and Fun commented that financial conditions were a factor affecting the activities they would do with friends. Unlike Liu who had a more stable job, Tin and Fun were unemployed at the time of participating in this study, and they stated that they would not prefer to go out with friends because they did not have money to dine outside. Their experience demonstrated that unemployment had affected their social life. Both of them saw that poor financial condition was a factor leading them to reduce contacts with others. Both of them saw that friendship was instrumental, and that if they could not provide anything good to others, others would also reduce contact with them.

What Fun discussed reflected his view on his masculine identity. He did not think it useful to let others know of his misfortune, and he thought others would not be able to help him; hence his reluctance to share his experience. According to Migliaccio (2009), withdrawing from sharing with others one's own problems has traditionally been considered a man's practice in preserving one's masculinity. In Fun's narrative, he was performing this traditional masculine identity, and his way to keep knowing new friends was also an act to avoid letting others know his history.

Another informant, Cheung, commented on the changing experience

in friendship. He recalled the time when he had work; he was willing to help others, and others would comfort him. After he became unemployed however, his friends treated him differently. He related the following experience:

*December 2008, I got CSSA. I had asked my friends for assistance, but they did not help me. I had asked every friend I knew, I did feel upset when I recalled this. When I had work, if my friends asked me for financial assistance, I'd lend them money. But, when I was unemployed and asked for their assistance, no one helped me, no one helped me. I did feel upset when I recalled this, to make ends meet, I had received CSSA. (Cheung)*

*If your friends know that you have money, their attitude will be different, they will please you if they know that you have money. They will say something different. If you don't have money, others won't even take a look at you. That's the reality, there's difference if you have money or not. (Cheung)*

*No one has asked me to go to the Chinese restaurant for a year. I haven't gone to a Chinese restaurant with my friends or other fellows in the industry for more than a year. I haven't gone to a Chinese restaurant with my daughter since the Chinese New Year. Almost a year. (Cheung)*

Cheung reported that he had minimal contacts with his friends or ex-colleagues after he became unemployed, and his words highlighted his perceived difference in friendship after his unemployment. He was quite passive in this process. Due to unemployment, he was unable to go to a Chinese restaurant, and therefore, he did not ask his friends or ex-colleagues to have meals outside.

Cheung's words also reinforced the argument that friendship among working-class men would involve seeking help from friends especially in

financial assistance. Although this assistance was considered voluntary (Walker 1995), in Cheung's story, his friends had not reciprocated the support he had provided to them. Even though reciprocity is considered an interdependent characteristic in working-class friendship (Walker 1995), as seen in Cheung's story, this reciprocity was not taken for granted. As working-class men normally had contacts with other working-class men, they may find that when they were in need of financial assistance, others might be in similar situation, and were unable to provide the necessary assistance.

The majority of informants spent less time communicating with others than they did so in their work. The kinds of activities they would do with their friends depended on their financial resources. Given that the activities men in this study were involved in were not free of charge, unemployment had limited the occasions in participating in these activities. This would also limit their chances of developing a social network. Some informants reported that they did encounter changes in friendship, especially at the time when they were unemployed. Although some stated that their friends tended to reduce contacts with them, some revealed that they did not take the initiative to contact others. Financial conditions was a reason for keeping themselves at a distance with others, as some informants mentioned that they did not want others to pay for them. To a certain extent, this also reflected the culture of 'face' (*Mientze*) among Chinese. Work was a topic that men frequently talked about, but when they were unemployed, they considered that the only thing they could talk about was their caring work. This however, was not a preferred topic among the informants.

The nature of friendship among informants was similar, with most of them treating their fellows at their workplace as friends. Liu was the only one reported to differentiate friendship and fellowship in the workplace. Informants' friendship was largely instrumental. It was noted that many of the informants reported that their friends had sought assistance from them, and they expected their friends would reciprocate. This instrumental nature of friendship was a feature in working-class men's friendship. As in other studies, Walker (1995) suggests that working-class friendship emphasizes material assistance. Informants reported that they would lend money to their friends, and when they were in need, they expected they could borrow money from them. In addition to this, men in this study also reported that friends would sometimes help them to look for a job. On the other hand, some informants had chosen to withdraw from their friendship; and as in the stories of Fun and Tin, they did not want to let others know that much about their situation. The intention to disconnect from friendship was partly related to their masculine identities, as they were not eager to appear vulnerable before others and they wanted to appear competent and independent before others (Robertson, 2007).

### **2.3 Sensing the Importance of Social Network**

Friendship also reflects certain cultural ideologies. In the Chinese context, the bonding between one and others is considered a relationship called *guanxi*. *Guanxi*, a Chinese vernacular idiom, refers to "the existence of direct particularistic ties between an individual and others" (Farh et al. 1998). In other words, it represents personal connections (Zang 2006). Zang (2006) suggests that *guanxi* represents an informal relationship and

is viewed as instrumental. It is in this *guanxi*, one is able to pursue one's interest. Even though *guanxi* has been widely used in understanding organizational relationships, it can also be applied to describing individual ties. When one has developed *guanxi* with another person, it is believed that one will also develop a social network with that person's acquaintances. Thus, this network is another form of social resource that an individual can make use of to pursue further interests. Using social resource theory, Zang (2006) suggests that Chinese people start an interpersonal relation with instrumental purposes, and such relationships will then result in exchanges that are guided by a principle of equity and mutual benefits.

Informants in this study discussed their views on this *guanxi*, in similar terms. When informants talked about *guanxi*, the topics they covered were related to economic activities and other forms of relationships. Some informants reported that they were unable to earn much in certain jobs because they did not develop any *guanxi* with others. In recalling the days when he was working as a taxi driver, Tin told that he did not earn much because he did not have *guanxi* with other taxi drivers, He stated:

*...the income was not good, why? Because running a taxi in Hong Kong is a special business. If you don't form a small group or if you're not familiar with those who would give a discount to the passengers, you're doing the business on your own. Running a taxi on your own is a problem, unless you're a lucky guy, otherwise, in my case, I could earn very little money a day. After paying for the rental of the taxi, I could only earn 500 a day. But, the income became unsteady later on. Sometimes, I could just earn two to three hundred a day. The largest sum I could earn a day was slightly over five hundred. (Fun)*

In Tin's case, what he meant as *guanxi* was the association with some groups of taxi drivers. It was hard for him to earn a living as he did not develop any *guanxi* with other drivers. Other informants shared similar experiences, but theirs were more positive as they were the beneficiaries in *guanxi*. Fun reported that he got a job from the master of his ex-employer when he was attending a vocational training course. He stated:

*Later, a boss asked me to help him, and I went to work for him. I thought it would benefit me as I need 5 years of working experience before getting the license to work as an electric worker. I hope that he will issue me a letter to allow me get the license. I think in the long run, I will be a property security guard. I won't be able to take hold of heavy machine all day. If I'm unable to do that, no one will hire me. Besides, the nature of such job has no protection, apart from injuries, constant work is not safeguarded. Maybe you can only work one day but have to wait at home for another two days. I prefer to work in this field and to accumulate the experience to get a license at the same time.(Fun)*

Tsang also told that he used to join some gatherings, and these gatherings were the occasions where he could develop *guanxi* with others. He stated:

*...one needs associating with others in order to have work, if you don't have any association with others, you won't get any work. Some may have a project and want others to help him, but if you don't know him, you don't have any chance, I think this is the case. So, I'll have a drink with others, but I don't drink beer, I'll only have some tea. I feel something strange about this, but you need to live like this, and you'll be hired in some projects. This is the case in this industry, especially in interior decoration. Relying on one contractor is not enough to make a living, sometimes, you can only work in one project for*

*three to four days, and sometimes can work in a project for ten more days, after then, you have to go to another site... (Tsang)*

What the informants demonstrated was that they needed to develop *guanxi* with others in order to have a chance to get a job. Therefore, *guanxi* was to the informants a form of social network, which they considered as important in seeking for jobs. The amount of exchanges depended on the size of the network or the number of people who had *guanxi* with an individual. That was what Tsang had indicated in the previous excerpt. In order to keep himself in employment, he had to spend time with others who might have *guanxi* with an extended group, in the hope that he could get involved in another project if he was able to maintain such *guanxi*. The following comment by Lee could be regarded as illustrative of the feelings of the informants in general: *"it is something normal, you can achieve what you want to do if you're familiar with someone in office"*. This statement also highlighted his perceived importance in developing a network.

Such social relations in increasing an individual's privilege in pursuing one's interest is similar to Bourdieu's social capital in that it also emphasizes on power functions (Siisiäinen, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) specifies social capital as:

...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu, 1986: 248–249)

The resources one is able to access depends on the size and the

intensity of the capital that one is able to develop. This explains why some working-class men tend to spend time in gatherings. This social practice is to form a 'durable network' and to accumulate one's social capital, and in return, they can make use of this social capital to pursue their own interests. In the informants' stories, this might involve looking for job opportunities. The story of Tsang illustrated this point. He would dine out and join other activities with others. His intention was simple and that was to get acquainted with others, so that when others had any job opportunities, they would consider him.

In addition to *guanxi*, social capital is thus another concept that can help explaining for the social behaviour of working-class men. Although Bourdieu's social capital should not be limited to explaining the nature of instrumental relationships, men's emotional support was not emphasized in the data. Nevertheless, instrumental social relationships may be the case in working-class men's social relations. In accumulating social capital, working-class men in this study tended to treat social relationships in a more instrumental manner, and as seen in the discussion, they did focus on a network that would benefit them in getting a job. They rarely depended upon social capital for emotional support in non-work-related activities.

Informants' emphasis on accumulating social capital and developing *guanxi* in looking for job opportunities, reflected why some men expressed dissatisfaction at the inability to develop a network that would help them in finding a job. Hence, it was clear that men did understand that they had to rely on such informal job networks to find a job (Murphy 2003), and in most cases, the jobs available for them were not open in the labour market. In



other words, if they did not have the networks, they would be placed in an unfavourable situation in looking for jobs.

### **3. Sense of Brotherhood**

Social capital and *guanxi* were both observed in situations when the male informants demonstrated a sense of brotherhood in two aspects; namely in work relationships and in friendship. Some informants indicated that although they had a better living in Mainland China than they had in Hong Kong, they stated that they were unable to go back to the Mainland to continue their previous work, since their previous positions were now occupied by others. As such, if they went back to the Mainland, and had a chance to work in their previous position, they would make others lose their job. They considered that this was not righteous at all. Tsang, for example, reported that he managed to work as a section head in a factory before he migrated to Hong Kong, and that the job was more stable than working as a *sam-hong* worker in Hong Kong. He dared not go back to the Mainland to re-engage in the industry however. He explained:

*Because the way a Chinese maintains a relationship is not simply for one's own sake, you can live on if you can make a living. If you have chosen to leave.....as others might have taken your previous position, if you go back, you might get the position back, and others have to step down, and will feel that you have seized their chances. If you have chosen to come to Hong Kong, you should not go back to get the position from others. If I go back, I can work in the same position as I did, but the one replaced me have to leave the position, and it seems that you will make others lose their rice bowls. If you choose to live here, you should stay and live here.....I think this should be the case. Otherwise, you should not make such a decision*

*at the very beginning, it is for sure that you'll get back the position if you go back, but how to account for what I will do is a question. This is what I think. We were brought up in the Mainland, what we do is not all for our own sake. The education in Hong Kong is emphasizing the individual self, but in Mainland, we have to concern aspects from different levels. (Tsang)*

In Tsang's words, what he had to consider was more than simply an individual need. In addition to his own need, as a Chinese man, he also needed to consider the culture in his own clan. In another exchange, Tsang said that even though his previous employer did owe him wages, he chose to continue to work for that employer because he considered that he could at least keep working. If he chose however, to leave his previous employer, he would not only lose his job, he would have nothing. He stated:

*...Just like my ex-boss, he owed me the income that I should have some years ago, he asks me to work for him again, and he tells that he is unable to pay me back the income he owed me, but he will pay me in this current project. I dare to work for him, I'm so strange.....if you don't work for him, you might not find another chance to work. It is that even if we've been given a contract, we don't dare to have a deal with others, I don't dare to take the risk. I had taken the risk when I was young, and had done something wrong, I prefer to work for someone, this will be more stable. This enables me to bring up the children, but I won't make much money. Anyway, I'm using my hands to bring them up, and they have to spend more efforts in studying. I don't have the knowledge to teach them, I can only teach them maths, but not the language subjects. You don't know those words, but I can do the maths. The maths taught here and what I had learnt from the Mainland are similar, but not the Chinese and English language. (Tsang)*

It could be argued that Tsang had also considered for himself, and, he

could choose to sue his ex-employer but he had not done so. He even returned to work for his ex-employer, and thought this would at least guarantee him a job opportunity. Together with Tsang's consideration in not going back the Mainland to work in his previous post, he demonstrated that he was holding a sense of honor or sense of brotherhood (*yiqi*). This sense of brotherhood is a specific characteristic among working-class men.

In the discussion of Chinese masculinity, the *wen-wu* model is used in illustrating the characteristics in the Chinese masculine identities (Louie, 2000; Hirose and Pih, 2009). *Wu* is especially adopted to represent the class of men who are not considered social elites and are characterized by the aspect that these men are to use their bodily strength in daily life. *Wu* is, according to Louie (2002: 18), related more to the non-elite men who have less social power. The situation of the working-class men can best be contextualized in *wu* as they have less social power than the middle-class men have, and they are more prone to rely on their bodily strength to make a living. *Wu* also denotes another characteristic, and that is the sense of brotherhood. The origin of this sense of brotherhood could be traced back to the time of the Three Kingdoms in ancient China. The righteous *Guan Yu* represented a masculine figure with *wu* and *yiqi* (a sense of brotherhood). And, his image is still considered to have represented what is meant by sense of brotherhood. Although *wu* and this sense of brotherhood might not share exactly the same meanings nowadays, these have been embedded in Chinese men's mind. Working-class men know that they do not possess the characteristics as described in *wen*, they will rely on the capital they have and to live the way that suits their way of life.

As such, working-class men are more prone to demonstrate the sense of brotherhood or honor as a way to reiterate their masculine identity. In a practical sense, the chief function of the brotherhood among Chinese men was to provide security and assistance in times of trouble (Perry and Dillon, 2002: 280). This could also be noticed from Lee's understanding of male friendship as he emphasized helping his friends first and to put aside his own issues, as well as in Tsang's account for deciding to work for his ex-employer. When the informants said that they were there for their friends, they were not only conveying a message of helping their friends in material terms, but they were ready to give their friends emotional support.

#### **4. Men and Health**

In the chapter on *Men and Work*, I discussed men's deteriorating health conditions and limited chances to access employment. In this section, I will focus on the discussion of the informants' deteriorating health and their daily life, and discuss in what way working-class men are more vulnerable to activities that are risky to health.

##### **4.1 Employment and Health Issues**

Some informants in the study were disabled and such disability was caused by industrial accidents. Wah was involved in an accident when he was working as a construction site worker, and Tin had a problem with his eye-sight when he was working in a container pier. As suggested in some studies (Courtenay, 2000; Robertson, 2007), men are more vulnerable to suffer from industrial accidents as they are more likely to work in industries that are more dangerous to health. A majority of the informants in this

study had worked in industries that required manual skills and thus had a higher probability of suffering industrial accidents. Informants had varying degree of injuries due to their work. Apart from Wah and Tin, Fun hurt his waist when he was working as a *sam-hong* worker, Tsang hurt his head when he was working outside a building on a suspended work platform, and Cheung hurt his knee when he was working as a *sam-hong* worker. Their cases demonstrated that some working-class men were more vulnerable to injuries. There are however, discussions that working-class men tend to demonstrate their masculine identities by ways of getting involved in the kinds of job showing their prowess (Courtenay, 2000). Nevertheless, as the stories in this study had demonstrated, these jobs were often risking their health, and this can explain why working-class men were more likely to suffer from industrial injuries.

#### **4.2 Deteriorating Health Conditions and Daily Life**

In addition to the permanent injuries caused by industrial accidents, it was also noted that men in this study suffered from various other kinds of health problems. Some had chronic illness such as diabetes and nephrosis. Some had other health problems like aching backs, trachea problems, and knee problems. Although some health problems might cause inconvenience, most of the informants were able to take care of themselves. However, not every informant was able to do so when encountering severe deterioration in health. Tsui, for example, reported that he was not able to adapt to the changes in the early days when he became blind because of Retinitis Pigmentosa. He stated:

*Every time I went to the doctor, the doctor told me that my eye disease couldn't be cured.....and it's a matter of when I would be totally blind. When I heard this, I felt much more frightened. I was not old at that time, I was fifty something, and how to make my days as there is still a long way in my life? I couldn't work even if I desired to. I had to provide for the family, what could I do? I was very frightened at that time, and I had thought of suicide. (Tsui)*

This excerpt expressed Tsui's hopelessness as he was told by medical practitioners that he would be blind. The emotion was not only a matter of the inability to continue his breadwinning role, but the fear that he would become a burden to his family. Although his blindness was a gradual process, Tsui was unable to adapt to that change in the early days. His fear was understandable as he had lost the ability of self-care, and he could not do the same thing a man with proper eye-sight could do. He was unable to retain his freedom to do what he preferred to do. This did not only refer to engaging in employment, but also matters of independence and self-care in daily life. For instance, he recalled his feeling when he was jogging in the park near his home, but could not find the way out of the flower bush. He stated:

*I had tried to jog, but I would sometimes hardly see anything and I had to stop jogging. One day, when I was jogging, I went into the flower bush, and I couldn't see anything, and I couldn't find the way out, I felt nervous and frightened, but no one helped me, and no matter what I tried, I couldn't find the exit. Finally, a gardener found me and led me out of the flower bush. (Tsui)*

Fear and helplessness were the words he used to demonstrate his nervousness. Such feelings of nervousness also reflected his inability to take care of himself. In another excerpt, Tsui described how strange it was

when he could not distinguish whether it was daytime or night time.

*I can't see anything now, even if you have switched off the light, I can't distinguish whether the light was still on or not. Sometimes, when the sun is shining but what I see is dark, so horrible. I ask my wife why it is so hot even when it is dark. She said no, and the sun is shining.....I know that patients like me can only see some spots even if you have switched on the light, I don't know what has been placed in front of me. (Tsui)*

Blindness was an experience that made Tsui unable to handle daily life on his own. He could not even tell whether it was day or night, and that he had to depend on others in handling daily life issues. Such dependence made Tsui admit that he did not have the strength as well as the power in social relations. These feelings challenged Tsui's belief in his masculine identity. Inferiority was reproduced with his feeling of nervousness, helplessness and dependence. This inferiority was what challenged his masculinity, since if he had normal eye-sight, he would not need to be dependent on others and he could take care of himself. Charmaz (1995) argued that disability and illness "can reduce a man's status in masculine hierarchies, shift his power relations with women, and raise his self-doubts about masculinity" (Charmaz, 1995: 268). In Tsui's story, this process was obvious. He was no longer the breadwinner in the family and was unable to live independently; thus, he had to rely on his wife. The loss of independence meant that he could not do anything he wanted to do on his own. This was also observed in the scenario when he joined some social activities, and was stopped by his wife from eating something sweet and.

*Tsui's wife: .....if I follow him, I can control what he eats, and not to eat everything others give him.*

*Tsui: I want to eat whatever I want, as I have paid for the*

*activity, if some others give me food, I'll for sure eat them*  
*Tsui's wife: Others say that I'm dictating, I say it's fine to have*  
*enough food.....he felt unhappy at the beginning, and*  
*complained that I didn't give him anything to eat. I told him that*  
*I was not restricting him to eat anything, but would allow him*  
*try a little amount of various dishes.....*

Although Tsui was not content with his wife's behaviour in restraining him from eating what he liked in social activities, he did admit that if not for his wife, he could be unable to control his diet. Controlling his diet was not only necessary to maintain his weight, but to maintain his health condition. As he had diabetes, it was risky if he chose to eat the way he liked. Tsui disclosed that he was over 150 pounds before he had been diagnosed with diabetes and other illnesses, but that he had lost weight when it became necessary to control his diet. Such changes in life style was not a preferred option however, and Tsui admitted that he had to follow what he was told by his wife if he was to maintain his health condition to a controllable state.

Tsui's story illustrated that men with deteriorating health or disability might encounter loss of independence and loss of the breadwinner status. Nevertheless, if a disabled man could struggle through this, he might be able to renegotiate his masculine identity. Shakespeare (1999b) suggests that when a man has become disabled, he will reconsider his own masculine identity. Shakespeare (1999b) further suggests that when a man's masculine identity is mediated by health experiences, it is possible that disabled men could provide role models for renegotiating masculine identity through transitions in life course (Shakespeare, 1999b: 57).

Tsui disclosed that he was acting as a role model in the way that he



was breaking through the social construction that men must be strong and must not rely on others in solving daily life issues. He explained that he would go to share with university students his lived experience and the way blind people tackled ill-feelings. At the same time, he was demonstrating to other disabled men that he was doing something that could help the blind to re-gain their worth. Although Tsui was disabled, he was constructing an alternative masculinity in which he could re-assert his power over others by influencing others' perspectives on disability. In this way, even though Tsui was disabled, he was able to retain his masculinity by engaging in these volunteer activities. Even though this conduct of care is not a traditional masculine performance, Tsui was able to construct an alternative masculinity from his lived experience.

#### **4.3 Overlooking Risks to Health**

Pyke (1996) commented that working-class men can “use the physical endurance and tolerance of discomfort required of their manual labor as signifying true masculinity, [as] an alternative to the hegemonic form” (Pyke, 1996: 531). This comment points out that working-class men do not care about the activities or behaviours that may be risky to their health, as engaging in these activities will demonstrate their “true masculinity”. As in this study, some informants implicitly indicated that they had overlooked the health issue, and they took pride in the way they behaved as that would reveal their “true” masculine identity. Lee was an example of this type of man. While sharing his daily work, he expressed how physically strong he was and how he could tolerate the discomfort of his conditions. As the following exchange indicates:

*Lee: We have a strong physique, I'm able to work another ten years.....our jobs are hard to accomplish, and many are unable to meet the requirement of the job, just like the case that we have to deliver goods right after lunch at 1 pm. The sun shines bright and it is hot at that time. If you have delivered goods for two rounds, you'll get fainted. It's not a problem to us as we have get used to work under the bright sun.....if you have not get used to that, you'll get fainted even if you're asked to stand there.*

*Interviewer: Will you wear a hat?*

*Lee: No, I have got used to working under the sun for many years.*

Saying that others might be unable to tolerate the condition was to differentiate him from others, and to emphasize his tolerance in extreme conditions. Regardless of heat or rain, Lee was required to ride on a bicycle to deliver groceries. Yet, from what Lee had said, he did not think he would be susceptible to deteriorating health, and even in sunny days, he would not put on a hat when he was working outdoors. This would risk his health as he was exposed to the sun, and would get sun-burnt or heat-stroke. However, protecting himself from these risks was not his practice. His practice demonstrated that he was sticking to the discourse that men should be able to stand intolerable conditions. Given that working-class men did not possess the characteristics that an archetypal type of man possessed, such as higher educational attainment, they would construct an alternative masculinity that would fit them and would enable them to exhibit their masculine identities. In Lee's case, tolerance to changing work conditions and not caring about the possible risks to one's health were ways to demonstrate his masculinity.

Apart from this, Lee disclosed that he had conflict with some young

workers when he was delivering goods, and the young workers considered that Lee was blocking their way, and they had the inclination to solve the issue with violence. Although Lee and the young workers left without any physical contact, he expressed his feeling that he was ready to teach the young people a lesson as he thought that,

*“Using force is the only standard to measure what is true. If you have brawn and power, what you say is the truth.” (Lee)*

It was under this belief that Lee tried to demonstrate that he was even stronger than the younger men, and that violence was an acceptable way to settle disputes. Even though it was not clear if Lee would really use violence in solving conflicts, his words and his belief revealed that as a man, he was not eager to let others feel that he felt frustrated and he would withdraw. Power is always central in understanding men’s social relations with others. Exercise of power is not only targeted on females; men will exercise power over other men. As Lee said, he would exercise power over other young men if he was challenged.

Lee was not the only informant stating that he would use violence as a way to solve disputes. Liu also indicated that he would use violence to solve disputes with other drivers. Liu reported that he had once not given way to a van, and he had almost engaged in a fight with the van driver. Again, Liu’s behaviour demonstrated that he was displaying the attitude that he was not willing to be subordinated to others. These behaviours were more likely to result in injuries and were risky to health.

## **5. Doing Gender in Everyday Life**

In their landmark article “Doing Gender”, West and Zimmerman (1987)

reveal that gender is not something innate. They suggest that both men and women will behave in a ways that are influenced by social interaction, and are aware that they will be judged by others as to whether they are behaving in a proper masculine or feminine manner. It is my considered opinion that in understanding working-class men's masculinity, there is not only one type of working-class masculinity. One can consider that gender performance will change from time to time, and will vary across culture. Yet, if a man is to capitalize on the benefits of the dominant male group, he has to act in a way that is considered masculine, and is able to meet certain expectations about how a man should perform. Connell (2002b) also suggests that men are doing gender in everyday life, and that men are constructing their masculine identities in daily social practice. Thus, men's masculine identities will come into existence when they act (Connell, 2002b). While men in this study were working-class men, they did not share the same lived experience, and held various attitudes on issues related to their masculine identities. How they constructed their masculine identities depended on the daily social practices they were engaging in. In this study, men were asked to respond to several questions relating to their gender identities. From the data in this study, these working-class men constructed their own masculine identities. Some informants would construct an alternative working-class masculine identity. To begin with, male informants' perceptions on what a man should be will be discussed.

### **5.1 What a Man Should Be**

An individual will construct one's gender identity with reference to the interaction and the social relations one is engaged in. In this study, the

working-class men were asked a question on “What a man should be?”. In responding to this question, some were able to relate to their own experience while some could only tell what they considered a man should be. To those who were only able to talk about what they considered a man should be, their response was that they had never thought of this question, as they considered ‘a man is a man’. What they had in mind was the biological typology of men, but in telling what they considered a man should be, they related that to the expectations of their own self.

#### **5.1.1 Men Should Have the Strength and be Responsible to the Family**

Some informants showed that traditional masculine identities were embedded in their mind, and when they thought of the meaning of being a man, they related it to ‘having strength’, ‘can handle many things on one’s own’, ‘responsible to the family’, and ‘successful’. These descriptors were all related to what they felt society expects men to be. For example, Tin felt that to be a man, one should be strong and should have the responsibility to face difficult situations. He stated:

*...I think a man has to be much stronger and tougher than a woman does. A man has to deal with issues on one’s own. He has to be responsible for them, and has to solve them. One can’t just run away from it. I think a man can’t run away from many problems, especially in the family. A woman is not so determined as a man does, and they are more hesitant. Therefore, in a family, basically, the man has to take care of the woman, and has to solve the problems on his own. As a man, one has to be responsible to the family and to his work.....I think run away is not a good thing. There are many things a man has to face, and should think of resolution as a*

*principle in handling all these issues, can't just run away, irresponsible is not good. I think that a man has to face many issues, no matter these are related to family, related to work, one has to face them, to resolve them and be stronger and tougher. These are what I think a man should have. (Tin)*

Tin was referring to his life before his health condition deteriorated and before he was unemployed. Tin was the provider for the family and his wife was at home to take care of his son. After he became unemployed and had to live on welfare benefits however, there was a role reversal in his family. His wife went to earn a wage that could maintain her own living, and the welfare benefit could barely provide for a basic living for his family. Tin's words reflected that he still had the wish that he would find employment and would become the provider again. His motive to achieve this goal was that as a man, he should have the responsibility to protect his wife ("the woman" in his words) and his family. That was why he considered that as a man, one should have the responsibility both towards work and towards family. As discussed in Chapter Four, men placed work in close relation to their masculine identity. Even though Tin was the most educated among the informants in this study, he was still unable to secure a job for himself. Due to his deteriorating health conditions, he was also unable to make use of his physical capital to provide for his family. His words were sorrowful, but revealed that he still held the traditional belief in masculine identities. The construction of this belief to masculine identity was a matter of whether or not the ability to provide for the family and to protect the family should be the expected performance of a man.

Having strength and responsibility was a common belief among other informants in this study. Tsui and Cheung were among others who also

considered that a man should have a job and have responsibility. As this exchange indicates:

*Tsui: One should have work.....*

*Interviewer: Any more?*

*Tsui: Morally upright, have responsibility, follow regulations in every aspects of life.....*

Both Tin and Tsui had similar experiences in that they both had problems with eye-sight, and they had to partially depend on others' assistance in daily life. As such, when they said that a man should have a job have responsibility, they were not only talking about their previous lives. They were also conveying a hope that they could still perform what was socially expected.

Work has been constructed as a core aspect in a man's life, and the working-class men in this study also considered that having paid work was important to being a man. Work was also related to what responsibility meant to them and in general, referred to the ability to provide for the family. It was interesting to note that some of the informants were not actually playing the major provider role, despite expressing the belief that a man should be able to provide for the family. In doing so, they were describing something that they expected themselves to do, but were unable to achieve at that particular moment. What the informants discussed related to stable employment that could secure a stable living for the family. Most of the informants were working as casual or day labourers and they could not guarantee their family a living that they expected to provide. In other words, what they could actually do was different from what they had expected. It is argued therefore, that these

working-class men were still living under the pressure of adhering to dominant forms of masculinity. Although working-class men were unable to live up to the expectations of a man with dominant masculinity, they still considered that the traditional belief in masculinity was what one should hold on.

Although in their subjective experience, they could not meet the expectations, if they were to live as a man, they had to adhere to certain expectations that a man should behave. Bourdieu (1977) argued that an individual internalizes the demands of the dominant social group. The participants were behaving in a way that they thought a man should behave.

### **5.1.2 Men Should Have Confidence**

Some informants placed confidence as a characteristic men should have. By stating that a man should have confidence, one was actually implying that a man should handle the problem on his own. Fun, for example, stated that a man should have confidence.

*I think what is the most important is confidence. If you don't have confidence, you'll lose. Having confidence is the most important..... (Fun)*

He added that everyone must have one's weak time, but a man would rarely show his weakness before others. A man should solve the problem on his own. He stated:

*Everyone must have weak time, but to be weak before others or behind others, a man won't normally show his weakness before others, I'm quite sure about this. Many men when they face weakness, tend to avoid from letting others know it. The first thing is that others may not be able to help. No matter how*



worse you have described, what can others help you? Once you asked for help, others will withdraw. You would only ask for help when you're sure others can help you, or else, others will learn that you face difficulty and will tell others. In this case, I prefer not telling others. Unlike a woman, a woman may think that it is not anything like losing face when asking for help. And if she asks for help, others will help her. A man may think that even if I tell you, you may not be able to help, and you'll tell others my problems, then why I should tell you my problems. Unless he is the best friend, even if he's your best friend, he can't help you many times. Am I right? Of course if one can provide for his family and is rich, he has nothing to worry about. Not to mention one is rich, but one does not need to live in a place with only around thirty feet, has a tiny dining room, can watch TV, can take a rest, has a room for sleeping, it needs not be a big room, but has enough space, I can eat what I want to eat, no need to worry about money, and has a stable job. If one has all these, it is good, if not, will be as sad as what I face right now. I have not much to think about, just want to have a better job, and I can work for this job till I retire. This is not a wild hope, and my expectation is not very high, just want to be more stable. If I find a job again, I can make it. Now, I still have to manage the heavy tools, you know how heavy they are, and I'll hurt my waist..... (Fun)

These words reflected that he was dissatisfied with his life at the time of the interview. Other aspects he mentioned were: having a stable job, having a decent home (not only having a bed space or a room), and living a life that one did not have to worry about the basic living. In Fun's perspective, a man was different from a woman in the way that a woman was more eager to seek help, but that this was not acceptable for men. Therefore, just like other men who considered that men should have strength, Fun was also subscribing to this point of view. Men have been constructed to restrict one's emotionality (Good et al. 1989), and the

restriction of such will result in limiting one's options in handling life issues. As in Fun's situation, he believed that he should have the courage and the confidence to solve his own problems. Because of this constructed belief, many men do not attempt to seek help even when they are unable to handle difficult life events. Seeking help, as in men's perspective, is a sign of failure and this may violate their orientation to success, power, and competition (Good et al. 1989).

### **5.1.3 Men Should Have Success**

The orientation to success was discussed by some of the informants as an important aspect in relation to what a man should be. Tsang discussed why he considered success as important to a man. For Tsang, success related to his sense of family. He held the belief that a man should be able to maintain the stability of the family. This echoed what he had mentioned when he talked about his role in the family. The following excerpt showed how Tsang replied to the question of what he thought a man should be.

*Of course to be a successful man, especially for a man, you should have received higher education. But, what I'm doing is to maintain the family. No matter how high you've been educated, and how much money you can make, if the family breaks up, it is a guilt for the man. If a family breaks up after you have tried to maintain it, I think it is fine. There may be too many temptations here, if one's wife chose to run away with someone else, the family would break up. Even if you have achieved a very high status, it is no use. Family members have to complement one another. It is useless even if you're willing to do all things, you have to make the other party to work with you. My wife's willing to work with me, and I think I'm a lucky*

*guy. Although life is really hard, I can still wear a smile, haha.....there should be something to make the family more cohesive. If you don't know what your goals are, you'll live a hard life. This is especially true to a man, if he doesn't know what the goals are, he'll find life is hard. A man must have his own goals, and one should know why he has set such goals. If a man can do this, I think a man can live a happy life. If you don't have any cohesion, you'll find that problems will appear, and you must live a hard life. I have explained this to my children, and I told them that once they were born, they were to suffer. If they are to survive in this society, they have to cherish how the family is operated, and they have to match with such operation. (Tsang)*

Tsang moved to Hong Kong in his late twenties, and being married at the time, he had to leave his wife in Mainland China. The family reunited a few years later, and although their living was barely adequate, Tsang considered that he had put in his utmost effort to maintain the stability of the family. Family was to Tsang the core in his life, and even though he emphasized the importance of work, its primary purpose was to make it possible to maintain the family. To Tsang, the ability to maintain the family was a success.

The drive and the emphasis to make a living for the family also limited the time informants could spend with the family. For instance, Fun mentioned that he could hardly spend time with his children when they were young because he had to work long hours in order to have sufficient income. Tsang also murmured that he had earned less because the regulations in some estates did not allow him to work on Saturday afternoon and on Sunday; limiting the wage he could earn. Although informants such as Tsang said that maintaining the living of the family was a success, it was actually a dilemma for the working-class men as in doing

so, they ultimately had less time available time to spend with family.

#### **5.1.4 Money Matters**

While a few informants considered that maintaining a stable family was a success, some held the perspective that having money was important to be a man. The ability to make money was closely linked to having a stable job, and as most informants considered, their major contribution to the family was to provide for the family. Providing for the family, making money and having a stable job were embedded in most men's mind, and these were related to a man's financial contribution to the family as well as one's socio-economic status. Beyond this, financial independence was another aspect these men cared about.

Cheung, for example, emphasized the importance of having money, and what made him consider that having money was important to a man was his experience in unemployment. He reported how others treated him differently after he had become unemployed and had used up his savings. I asked him why he considered that money was so important to him, to which the following exchange ensued:

*Interviewer: I have heard this several times, and you have emphasized the importance of money.....*

*Cheung: Money is important.....*

*Interviewer: As a man, what are the differences between having money and without money?*

*Cheung: Have and without money.....having money is of course good, at least, you won't have that many conflicts in a family...if you're lacking of money, many conflicts will emerge in a family...to me, money comes first.*

*Interviewer: If you can settle the expenses in the family, you won't feel burdensome.*

*Cheung: Of course, don't you agree that money comes first? If you don't have money, you'll feel troubled. I'm troubled right now as I don't have any income. I can't work and I have illness frequently. If I have money and even if I have bronchitis, I can buy some nutritious food.....but I don't have money, and these diseases can be cured but require you to pay much money, and I don't have the money. I have sought for medical consultation for years, but I have not recovered from it...I can only go to government hospital, I don't mean that the medicine is not good, but the effectiveness of the medicine is not so good.*

*Interviewer: Is there any difference in the way your status in family is affected when you have money or not?*

*Cheung: There will be an obvious difference, you'll be more energetic if you have money.*

*Interviewer: Is there any change in your status in family? Is it that no matter you have money or not, you're still the one to make the decision?*

*Cheung: It's not the same if you have money. Not to mention my wife, others will treat you differently. If they know that you have money, they will treat you in a different manner. They will try to please you. But, if you don't have money, they won't even take a look at you. That's the reality.*

*Interviewer: Is this what you have experienced? When you have money, others would go to a Chinese restaurant with you. If you don't, no one would contact you?*

*Cheung: Yes, I have this experience. No one has asked me to go to the Chinese restaurant for a year. I haven't gone to a Chinese restaurant with my friends or other fellows in the industry for more than a year. I haven't gone to a Chinese restaurant with my daughter since the Chinese New Year. Almost a year.*

Cheung related having money to maintaining social relationships and one's status in family. As I have argued, unemployed men reported that they had poorer social networks, and this was related to their lacking financial resources. Cheung was, therefore, reasserting his belief that

without the ability to make money, one's social status would be lower. When saying that his friends treated him differently after he became unemployed, Cheung did not hide his sorrow. Losing financial independence also meant that he could no longer continue his habits interests. Cheung liked horse racing but after he had to rely on his wife's wages, he had discontinued this practice. Instead of betting on the horses, he would spend the day reading horse-racing news in newspapers.

The following excerpt reflects Cheung's mood about his status as unemployed.

*What's the most important is that you can find a job, and can make money, if you don't have a job and without any income, others will look down on you. It is just that simple...having money is the most important thing. If you can't make any money, others won't ask you to the Chinese restaurant. This is my point of view, and others may not think the same way. My current situation is like that, I don't have any income, and others do not contact me, they rarely contact me. Those who know me for long have contacted me occasionally. Those who have worked with me in a few projects have not called me. They know that I don't have any work, have no money, and they won't call me. Money comes first, if you don't have money, others will rarely contact you. (Cheung)*

The importance of having money was connected with whether or not Cheung could keep his friends or connections with others. This was closely linked with his perception on his changing social position. Given that he was unemployed and he had to rely on his wife to provide for him, he considered that this had changed his style of living, his social position and the way he could maintain connections with others. His points reiterated why men considered employment was important to them. A

man's ability to provide for the family is in close relation to asserting power in the family, and as Cheung was not in the provider role, he did not have that power, which increased his degree of self-criticism.

Informants in this study discussed their views on what a man should be. Their views demonstrated that they adhered to the perception that men should have bodily strength, men should have a paid work, and men should take on the provider role. In defining what a man should be, men in this study attempted to follow the dominant discourse and projected what they wanted to be into these descriptions. Their descriptions showed that they were confined by some discourses that were related to work. They had subsequently overlooked or had not recognized their achievements in other areas; for example their contribution in household and caring duties. Having internalized the belief that men should be engaged in paid employment, working-class men in this study, especially the unemployed, frequently found that they were unable to live up to what men were socially expected to be.

## **5.2 Formulating an Alternative Masculinity**

The discussions of the informants' perspectives on what a man should be reinforced the position that working-class men would not give up the association with the dominant discourse of masculinity. Yet, working-class informants found that they had difficulty in performing in the way that would match such a discourse. It should be noted however, that as there are multiple forms of masculinities (Connell 1995; Pyke 1996), it is in this sense that even if working-class men are unable to perform the dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity, they are still performing other

forms of masculinities. Pyke (1996) argues that men's masculinities are affected by the interaction of several aspects, one of which is social class. It is; therefore, middle-class and upper-class men who are exercising control in various institutions, and who produce a hegemonic masculinity, while working-class men are more likely to produce a marginalized masculinity. Connell (1995) suggests that the production of masculinity is a configuration of social practices and this happens not only in relation to men and women but also among men themselves. To include the interactionists' discussion that masculinity can as well be constructed through interacting with daily experience (West and Zimmerman 1987), it is also suggested that one's masculine identity is not static, and is subjected to transformation when one continues to interact with the surrounding social structures. A working-class man therefore, may not only produce the form of marginalized masculinity, but can as well produce other forms of masculinity when they are interacting with different social structures in different situations.

Pyke (1996) also suggests that as working-class men are situated in a subordinated position, they use "the physical endurance and tolerance of discomfort required of their manual labor as signifying true masculinity" (Pyke, 1996: 531). Working-class men are marginalized as they might not be able to enjoy the social power that men as a group should have. In order to express that they are men, and that they have access to some privileges, they attempt to reformulate an alternative masculine identity. It was in this sense that working-class men in this study used other resources that they valued to re-negotiate their masculine identities.



### 5.2.1 Emphasizing the Capital They Possessed

Data provided by the informants in this study showed that they produced various forms of masculinities. Fun, for example, emphasized something he thought he was good at. Although he had only received a few years of education, he conducted surveys to see whether or not a place was suitable for a business or not. He stated:

*When I ran the business before...although I had only studied for a few years, I still did some surveys, to see whether the place was crowded or not. I did this because I had a theory that no matter how tasty food you could cook, if the residents in that district would not dine out, even if the food was free, no one would come. If the food stall in your district was always full, only yours was always empty, you had to evaluate your food. Because of the quality of the food, and not that there was no customers. The point was you could not attract others' customers. If you wanted to attract others' customers, it was just like travelling in Hong Kong, what attracts the tourists come here? Am I right? It's that simple. If your food was at a good price and was tasty, others would come. (Fun)*

As I have discussed in Chapter Four, what Fun was demonstrating was a form of entrepreneurship. Though he was not well educated, and he was not trained to do any business, he knew what he had to prepare for the running of a business. His knowledge in running a business was related to his experience and his social exposure. Few working-class men had experience in running a business, and by stating this, Fun showed that he was doing something different from others. He said that he liked to do business, and apart from running a taxi as his business, he had also worked as a hawker and had owned a restaurant. Fun treasured such experience and this was capital that he thought others should value.

However, his perceived capital and contribution was not recognized by his ex-wife and other family members. With the failure of his business, he was unable to maintain the family. Fun's story indicated that he was somewhat different from other working-class men in that entrepreneurship was the kind of social capital that he valued.

The tendency to express something that a man is good at is rather common, and in this study, most men were able to express that they had certain strengths including techniques in doing household repairs and the ability to run a small business. Fun's story was just one of the examples to illustrate this. Even though working-class men know that they are unable to match with the middle-class men in the ability to generate financial resources, they are demonstrating that they have other forms of strength, and they also possess masculine characters.

### **5.2.2 Differentiating Oneself from Other Working-class Men**

Using a class habitus theory, Zang (2006) argues that "individuals who share similar attitudes and life orientations are more likely to become friends than those who do not" (Zang, 2006: 82). Zang's statement reflects male informants' aspirations for their children. Some informants explained why they wanted their children to study hard and to find a better job. They believed that their children would only know people of the same class, and cross-class friendship was not possible. When I was talking with Lee on how he would impart his attitude toward life to his children, he did not respond to the topic directly, but replied thus:

*When I'm at home, I'll tell them that they have to study well. If they have knowledge, others won't be able to get that*

*knowledge from them. That's one thing. The other is if you have the knowledge, you will be able to earn more money, and you can meet people of different social background. Because in that network, university students know other university students, and primary students know other primary students. The social classes are different, and this will affect which class of people they will work with when they start to work. So, my wish at this moment is to see if they are able to study in university, if they can study well. If they can connect with the society, they can live a better life. (Lee)*

In this excerpt, Lee stated why he expected his children to pursue better education, and thus, he considered that this would enable them to have a better connection with society. He emphasized that moving up to another social class would lead to a better life. Lee's words also reflected his drive to build up a relationship with someone in another social class. He considered that staying in his own class could do nothing to improve the family's living standard and therefore, he had these expectations of his children. Although Lee was living as a working-class man, he had inherited cultural assets from his grandfather who had influenced significantly. He said that his grandfather was a knowledgeable person, and that he considered him literate and cultivated. In differentiating his father and his grandfather, he considered his father often used physical punishment to teach them, while his grandfather would use his wisdom. He was more receptive to his grandfather's way of teaching.

Using the theory of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), we can understand why, as Lee had mentioned, a person who only had a primary education would associate with others who also had a primary education, while those who had studied at university would more likely associate with other university graduates. Working-class men may internalize what is expected from

them, which in turn affects their behaviour. Such behaviour is affected by their dispositions and resources in the working-class position. It is argued that an individual will internalize the objective chances that one has, and one will make choices according to options available at that moment (Maton, 2008). Therefore, a working-class man will choose to live the way that is available to him. How working-class men make choices of living can also be understood using more of Bourdieu's concepts – the logic of association and the logic of difference (Bourdieu, 1984). In the first, it is argued that people of similar social background will employ the same cultural logics of selection, and will make similar selections. However, the second concept asserts that, one may choose a distinct style of living because that style may not be chosen by the other. Therefore, although Lee was a working-class man, and he might live a working-class life style, in order to differentiate himself from others, he chose to display the other side of life that was not really related to working-class. As suggested by Moore (2008) however, this principle is not deterministic, but is able to help us further interpret why men of the same class may choose different life-styles.

As described in Lee's case, though he was a working-class man, he possessed a sense of cultural heritage from his grandfather. He spent time reading a variety of books, and this enabled him to be able to share his views on a number of topics. This also shaped his way of life. Thus, what he presented was somewhat different from other working-class men.

*Lee: I'll read all kinds of books because if I don't read, I won't understand the reasons. I don't read, I won't be able to differentiate between good and bad, I'll also read Bible.....*

*Interviewer: Can I say that when you have time, you'll read books?*

*Lee: Yes, I'll read if I have time.*

*Interviewer: That's why I notice that you have put a pair of spectacles in your pocket.*

*Lee: Apart from the spectacles, I must have a pen. I started to place a pen in my pocket when I was still a primary student. When I buy clothes, I have to select those with pockets, if not, I won't have that even if they are free of charge. I must get one that has a pocket for me to place a pen. This is a rule I have adopted for many years...to read when I have time is considered a habit. If I have free time, I'll make some tea and read some books.*

In Lee's daily work, chances for him to write were infrequent.

Nevertheless, he had the habit of carrying with him a pen and the pair of reading glasses. Reading was his leisure activity. This disposition differentiated him from other working-class men. However, with the resources he had, he could only provide his family a life that a working-class family could have.

In differentiating oneself from other working-class men, Lee stated that he would read a variety of books and in doing so demonstrated that he possessed the characteristics of *wen*. Lee was also different from other working-class men as he was more concerned about his weight. He was proud to report that his waist was kept at similar length for the past ten years. He remarked that this was a result of his continuous habit of doing exercise. Other working-class men said that they kept gaining weight. Tsang, for example, said that he and other fellows had to eat much in order to have sufficient energy to handle the manual work. Such habits had made them gain weight and though they kept doing manual work, the food they ate was always fatty. Tsang contended that if they did not eat such

food, they might not have sufficient energy to handle the manual work.

Although Tsang had mentioned some commonalities with other working-class men, he had attempted to differentiate himself from other working-class men by stating that he held a different attitude towards family. He said that he would place his family as first priority, and was unlike others in that he had no 'bad hobby'. He stated:

*Even if we don't eat, we'll still let the children have food first. My principle is that even if I have to suffer from hunger, I still have to allow the children to have sufficient food and clothing. In Hong Kong, some won't do this, I have seen this. In the sector of interior decoration, I've seen many strange things in those families. I think they won't behave in the way I treat my children, even if we don't have food, we'll ensure that the children have sufficient food and clothing. (Tsang)*

Horse racing and other forms of gambling, cigarette smoking and drinking were not Tsang's hobbies, and he further explained that he knew a number of *sam hong* workers who would spend much of their money in gambling and other areas, rather than for the benefit of the family. He talked about another experience when he was asked by his boss to go to Macau and to spend some time in the casino. Unlike the rest of his fellows however, he did not spend any time in the casino, and once he received his wages, returned to Hong Kong.

*Tsang: Those who work in this sector have uneven quality, I work in this sector, and I know that they have a wide variance in quality.*

*Interviewer: That's why I say that you're rare in this sector. You don't smoke, you don't drink, and you don't gamble.*

*Tsang: Because I had my past experience, and that experience had made me live this way. Some ask me how I can make it. My ex-boss had asked me to go to Macau. If I*

*didn't go, I wouldn't get the wage. I didn't gamble, and I went there simply for the wage. I got the wage in the hotel, and I took a ferry back to Hong Kong after that.*

*Interviewer: You still had to pay two hundred for the ferry tickets.*

*Tsang: Yes, but I have to follow the rule of the game, because I don't know many people, and I have a limited network. He was eager to hire me, and he would pay you. He's much better than those who wouldn't pay the wage. He would pay the wage, but he had his rule, and he's a playful person. What you could do was to follow the rule of his game, and he didn't blame you even if you went back Hong Kong right after getting the wage. He booked a hotel room, and he gave us the wage there. He paid us cash...*

Although Tsang was working with a group of working-class men who would spend time and money in casinos, his beliefs and behaviours were not the same. He did not participate in activities that were considered common among the group of working-class men. He was constructing a masculinity to counteract working-class masculine practices that his workplace fellows would have performed. Tsang's practice was largely related to his past experience in engaging in gang behavior when he was still a youngster. He said that as he had taken a wrong route when he was young, he knew what was the most important to him. He emphasized that he was brought up by his siblings, and that even when he had committed some illegal acts, his siblings were still there for him. It was this experience that made him develop his own beliefs and the way he differed himself from his fellow workers. He made the following remarks:

*Anyhow, if there is any disappointment or things won't turn out as what you have expected, I will think of my past experience, and this disappointment won't be any hardship, and I must be able to get through it, and there must be ways to solve it. In*

*this way, you can control your emotions. Some who had worked with me asked why I had such a high EQ, I smiled and said that we should not compare with others, some bought a flat, but some faced family break-up. I had certain experience, and I was cared and supported by my siblings, and this made me learn that I have to be responsible to my children. That's what I have in mind. (Tsang)*

Tsang emphasized that he had to be responsible for his family, and as he had mentioned in the interview, he considered the ability to maintain the family was a kind of success, which he set as the first priority in his life.

## **6. Discussion**

In western societies, some working-class men tend to drink with their fellows at bars and to openly engage in extramarital relationships. Pyke (1996) argues that by engaging in these, working-class men are demonstrating that they are not conforming to the existing power structure. They tend to display their independence from the control of their wives and higher-status men. Pyke comments:

This exaggerated masculinity compensates for their subordinated status in the hierarchy of their everyday work worlds. It gave them a sense of autonomy and self-gratification, entitlements that higher-status men acquire more easily and with greater impunity, thereby creating the illusion of ascendant masculinity.

(Pyke, 1996: 538)

Pyke's words might highlight the lives of some working-class men in western societies. The focus of the argument however, is that working-class men are reformulating a type of compensatory masculinity, and that they can reassert their autonomy in a relationship.



In Hong Kong, hanging out in a pub or bar is not common among working-class men. This does not mean however, that they will not spend their leisure time with their fellows. Informants told me that they would go out for dinner and would have a drink outside, but such activities were not only for leisure. It was in these activities that working-class men could expand their social capital and had a chance to seek a job. This was common in certain industries especially those that the informants had been engaged. Thus, informants in this study said that the experience in engaging in a social relationship was rather an instrumental one, and it was common that the relationship was a mixture of both friendship and a working relationship. Nonetheless, as the data from this study indicates, not all these relationships were instrumental. In some cases, men were still able to develop an emotional relationship with others, as in the case of Liu. Other men also reported to have a certain extent of emotional involvement in friendships, and this could be seen as they considered that they were there for their friends. This was a kind of masculine way of demonstrating emotional relationship, and men had the tendency to act before they were ready to demonstrate their emotions.

Some men felt sorrowful because they experienced a change of nature in the relationship with others after they became unemployed. In addition to their view that their friends had ceased to have contact with them, it was also these men who did not do anything to keep a relationship. Doing nothing carried the meaning that they were unable to give up the privileges they had had when they were employed. These privileges meant that they had the independence to choose their own way of life. If they used to go to Chinese restaurant, they could do so. If they were

requested by their friends to buy certain things, they could do so. However, unemployed working-class men might experience the sense of lack of autonomy in deciding their style of living, and they could not choose to do or to consume what they wanted to. The inability to do these was a threat to their autonomy in controlling one's life, and this had affected how a man could display his social power.

As these men reported that they had the culture to pay for others, on becoming unemployed, they would no longer be able to do this. They did not want others to pay for them all the time. Some of the informants' poor financial conditions were a hindrance to their social life, and as discussed in this chapter, informants considered that social networks or *guanxi* was important in looking for job opportunities. It was without the kind of social networks or *guanxi* that the informants thought that they were lacking a chance to have a job. As such, the inability to maintain their social life had not only limited working-class men's social life, but also their access to employment. Subsequently, the inability to maintain their social life threatened their masculinity.

Even though these men found that they were not in a preferred financial condition and that they did not possess a dominant masculine identity, they used other means to express their masculine identities. As Connell (1995) has suggested, dominant and subordinated masculinities are configuration of social practices (Connell, 1995: 72). The construction of one's masculine identity is therefore in relation to one's experience in social relations. In addition, as West and Zimmerman (1987) have argued, one's gender identity is not static, but is dynamic and will emerge from situated interactions. It was from their everyday lived experiences that

informants constructed and displayed their masculine identities. These were highlighted in the qualitative data provided by the informants. Fun tried to demonstrate that he was holding a kind of entrepreneurship and this was something different from other working-class men. Lee showed that he was a person with knowledge, and his habit and lifestyle were also different from other working-class men. Tsang also differentiated himself from other working-class men in that he put his family in first place, and had no other 'bad habits'. These men showed that they had something different from other working-class men and they were reproducing their masculine identity from their own social experiences, through which they gave their manhood a specific meaning.

Informants in this study were all working-class men, and they had certain similar characteristics in their living. Nevertheless, men in this study were found to have developed their own masculine identity. Although working-class men are considered to have lived within a marginalized masculinity, they were at the same time, situated in a sub-field where they could live a way that suited their disposition. It was in that sub-field, informants could construct their identities and could express something that they were good at, as in the case of Fun. Even so, as the data showed, informants were unable to completely rid themselves of a dominant discourse in masculinity, and this could be reflected from how they viewed what a man should be. They said that a man should have work, he should have physical endurance, he should have success, and he should have money. Although not all informants placed themselves in relation to the dominant type of masculinity, some were still trapped in the dominant type, and they would find that they were unable to meet these

requirements. These men might not be living with a dominant type of masculinity, but they were, at the same time, demonstrating that they had constructed an alternative masculinity and that their capital would be valued. Coles (2008) has suggested that men other than the hegemonic type are able to “reformulate what masculinity means to them in order to come up with their own dominant standard of masculinity” (Coles, 2008: 238). Coles further argues that in this reformulation, men are able to focus upon the elements that privilege them and to reject the rest (Coles, 2008: 238). The stories of the informants reminded us that they were reformulating their masculinities by emphasizing the aspects they valued and treasured. This did not mean however, that they were not conforming to the dominant discourse in masculinity. These men knew that they could hardly live up to the socially expected masculine identity, and they therefore chose to reinstate what they valued so that they could still display their masculinities.

As a concluding remark to this chapter, working-class men’s engagement in social life did not only involve the emotional side. Social life was to them an instrument, and this was particularly important in facilitating them to gain access to employment opportunities. If working-class men’s access to social life was hindered by their unemployment and their inability to pay for expenses, men could not maintain their social life. This would not only affect their autonomy to choose their preferred life style, but also the inability to look for a job would threaten their masculinity.

## Chapter Seven

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter provides a conclusion for this study and addresses the two core questions: *in what ways are employment and unemployment affecting men's masculine identities? And, how do men construct their masculine identities in relation to work?* Informants in this study were all working-class men. Some of them were engaged in a job and some were unemployed at the time of the study. Whether or not they were employed, they shared similar characteristics in work experience. They had been engaged in a number of jobs, many of which were manual skilled labour jobs. With the change in structure of the economy in the past decades, the industries these men had been engaged in no longer required as many manual labourers as they used to. In addition, the informants were at their middle stage of life, and had to face increasing competition with younger counterparts who were considered to be better educated than they are. Furthermore, the younger generation was more well-adapted to the changing economy. Their ability to maintain employment was further challenged with the influx of women's labour. Informants said that women were more suitable to work in the new economy as they had the attributes that were more welcomed by the employers. Also, as women were considered to be more deferent and docile, they were more suitable to work in the service industry.

The working experience of the informants had influences on their

family life and how they perceived their familial role. Noticeably though, they wanted to be involved more in caring and household duties, were much more eager to be engaged in employment, and they perceived the providing role as their major contribution to the family. There was conflict between the informants' will to participate in household and caring duties and their eagerness to participate in paid employment. This desire for paid employment however, also required that men give up certain caring duties. The limited chances to be engaged in paid employment and the inability to maintain their status as a family provider confronted their masculine identities.

In this concluding chapter, I will examine how the interactions of the aspects of work-centred belief in a man's life, one's class and their situation in Hong Kong have framed the masculinities of working-class men. To begin with, I discuss how work interacts with the various aspects in a man's life. Following this, a theoretical discussion together with the implications of this study will be presented. Based on the findings in this study, some suggestions for social policy and social services will be mentioned. Limitations of the current study and proposals for future studies will be dealt with in the final section.

## **2. Research Questions Revisited**

The nine informants in this study were all working-class men. Five were engaged in paid employment and the rest were unemployed at the time this study was carried out. Among the informants who had employment, none of them were earning a wage on a monthly basis. Except for Ng who was running his own fruit stall, the rest of the informants

were earning a wage on a daily basis. Similar to the situation of some low-income families, Ng had to apply for welfare payments as supplement to his low earnings. These jobs were mainly insecure casual labour and could not provide a stable income. In addition, many of these jobs required heavy manual labour. For example, informants had worked as construction site workers, brick-layers, *sam hong* workers, and delivery workers. Informants also reported that they had a long work history. They were all engaged in paid employment when they were at a young age, and none of them were well-educated. Only one had completed local secondary education, and two had received their secondary education in the Mainland. These factors not only affected their career development, but also forced the men to change their jobs or even to face unemployment in their middle age.

Changes in the economic structure of Hong Kong have affected the employment of working-class men. Some of the industries they were engaged in collapsed; contributing to their being laid off. Even though informants had opportunities to change to work in service industries, some informants reported that they were reluctant to change the nature of their job. Nixon (2009) suggests that working-class men do not prefer service work because they consider that service work stresses the feminine side of an employee, such as the ability to engage in interpersonal communication. Getting into service work is to a certain extent connected with effeminate practices, with which working-class men do not want to be associated. Working-class men's belief in service work has reinforced the argument that service work, like other forms of work, is not gender neutral (Acker, 1990). Some occupations are predominantly occupied by women,

such as caring and personal service, while some are predominantly occupied by men, such as the jobs informants in this study had occupied. Moreover, service work is considered to be more suitable for women than for men because of the characteristics underlying service work. In addition to the emphasis on interpersonal communication, docility, servility, and deference are also frequently required in lower end service jobs, and these are viewed as inherently feminine (Nixon, 2006).

Therefore, even if working-class men have to work in service job settings, they tend to work in areas where their masculinity can be displayed. For instance, they choose to work as drivers in delivering goods and security guards in buildings. Choosing these jobs may enable them to display their physical strength and maintain their sense of masculinity. Although men in this study did not say that they resisted the relationship to femininity, they admitted that service work was more suitable for women than for men. It is relevant to point out that the kinds of service work working-class men will engage in are mainly junior level service work. On the other hand, middle-class men or men who are better educated may occupy senior positions in service work. This is in contrast to working-class men's experience.

Men in this study did not really talk much about the availability to work in service jobs. What they valued was the kind of job that could express their manliness. Nevertheless, they had difficulty in maintaining their job as they grew older. Most of the jobs the informants had worked in, involved manual skill labour, and these jobs required physical strength. Men noticed that their capability was deteriorating with their advancing age, and it meant that they were less able to keep long working hours and to use their



physical power persistently. They also found that they were unable to compete with others such as the younger generation who had better physical strength than they did.

This sense of being excluded from the work they had been occupied with for so long challenged their personal belief and eroded their masculine identity if they could not find a job where their masculinity could be displayed. It is in this sense that when working-class men face unemployment, their physical strength is no longer recognized. Since physical strength is what they value, the inability to demonstrate this is a threat to their masculinity. To counter this, it has been suggested that if men are to adapt to the changes in the economic structure, they will have to make adjustments to make themselves fit into the changing work environment (O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000: 126). In this study, men reported that they had found ways to adapt to these changes by taking part in various job-skill enhancement courses or even to change their job orientation. However, this could not guarantee that they were able to work in other industries. For example, informants such as Tin, Wah and Fun had taken part in courses such as computer skills, security guard work, bricklaying and electrical work, but they still experienced difficulties in looking for a job.

In their struggle for employment, men did not only perform in a way that showed their eagerness to be engaged in paid employment. Their behaviour also reflected their belief that employment would enable them to achieve the expected societal and familial roles. While work is part of the class specific behaviours that can display working-class men's masculine identities, work is also considered a habit among this group of

working-class men. They are unlike middle-class men who will also commit themselves to other forms of cultural, familial and social activities. Work has formed the core in working-class men's life.

The virtue of hard work has been embedded in Chinese culture, and this also affects Chinese perspectives on work (Harrell, 1985). Harrell (1985) highlights that the Chinese work hard because they want to secure a better living for their family, and that this corresponds with the informants' stories. For example, Tsang reported that he wanted to work more days a month as he was working as a day labourer, and what was in his mind was to give his family a better living. Even if some informants were living on welfare benefits, they considered that it was only a temporary measure to relieve their difficult situation. Living on welfare is also not a preferred way as this contrasts with their belief in the ways a man should perform. It can also be argued that it is the imperative to have a regular wage that leads them to struggle for regular work (Castells, 2010). To these working-class men, work carried meanings of capability, dignity, responsibility, the way to make a living, and achievement as well as a virtue. Working-class men were defining their masculinity, and in defining their masculinity, they were making connection to paid work.

The jobs working-class male informants were involved in were predominantly occupied by men and these jobs required heavy physical strength. It is argued that this physical power is central to allowing working-class men to construct their masculinity as this physical ability matches with the traditional masculine attributes such as strength, bravery and mastery (Bishop, Cassell and Hoel, 2009). These attributes allow working-class men to avoid associating with servility, docility and

deference which are considered characteristics in service work. Tin, one of the informants, emphasized that women were more suitable for service jobs as they could develop better interpersonal relationship with others, and men sometimes could not tolerate others' words. Lee, another informant, asserted that he had the physical strength, and he could do any job that required his physical power. Their words remind us that men, especially the working-class men, are less likely to be deferent to others, and are more likely to display their physical strength, and this strength is largely associated with power. This can also explain why when working-class men choose lower end service jobs, they tend to choose those jobs that can display their physical strength.

### **3. Men's Work and the Negligence of Family Life**

When discussing how men construct their masculine identity in relation to work, it is also relevant to include the way a man's family life has contributed to the construction of their masculinity. The findings in this study suggest that family constitutes an important part in the informants' life. In this thesis, it is suggested that working-class men are not totally rejecting of the idea of participating in household duties. Nevertheless, when deciding the gender division of labour, some informants show that they are more eager to engage in paid employment than to solely handle domestic duties. It can be said that working-class men are still attempting to maintain the discourse that men should be the main provider in the family while women should take on the caring obligations. Some informants in this study were rather conservative in their attitudes to their wife's labour force engagement. They did not reject the idea of sharing

providing duties, as this helped ease their burden in breadwinning. However, they also did not want to be the one to take care of the daily living of the family members, and they did not want to be dependent on their wife's salary. Springer (2006) suggests that depending on one's wife's earnings will create a negative impact because this will induce disturbances in the structured advantages and social expectations associated with being the male breadwinner (Springer, 2006: 158). The findings in this study echo Springer's argument as informants expressed negative feelings to being a stay-at-home man. For example, Cheung, the only informant who was dependent on his wife's wages, mentioned that he was the one in the family to do all the household duties. He was unable to work because of his knee problem, and his age was another barrier that made him unable to continue his work as a *sam-hong* worker. Although his wife would give him some money for daily expenses, Cheung said that the sum was insufficient for the expenses, and he had to use his own savings to cover that. He was reluctant to be reliant on his wife's wage, and expressed the feeling that it is not tolerable for a man to rely on his wife, but it is acceptable for a woman to depend on her husband.

Even though it is suggested that men in general enjoy the structured advantages that being a male breadwinner has brought, this may not be true for all working-class men. Instead, working-class men are marginalized in society, and they do not have access to the same structural advantages of men of higher socio-economic status. It is in this sense that if working-class men still want to claim similar advantages, they have to find ways to exhibit their influence and power in family. If the family is a place where men can display their masculinity and paternal influence,

men need to contribute to their families to capitalize on this advantage. Although bringing home money or to securing the financial condition of a family is a way to safeguard men's position in, some working-class men may find that it is difficult for them to meet this obligation. In order to maintain their position in the family, it is a strategy for men to reclaim their symbolic power. Their way to achieve this is to maintain the breadwinner status. However, working-class men such as the informants in this study may not have the actual capital or resources to reclaim this status. It is; therefore, suggested that what these men do is to claim themselves to be the breadwinner in the family, so that they can make use of this symbolic capital to claim the advantages that being a breadwinner has brought them. Thus, symbolic capital is important to these working-class men as such capital does not only bring them privilege, it is something men perceive as a "general sign of social recognition" (Crossley, 2010: 88). It can account for why some men who do not have paid employment still claim that they want to be the breadwinner in the family. One of the advantages of maintaining breadwinner status is the reduction of time spent in household duties.

Although men in this study reported that they were eager to be the breadwinner in their family, they also reported that they would share household duties; however, their level of participation and the tasks committed varied. Some would take on responsibility in child caring, some would prepare meals and some would participate more in other household chores. Such variation shows that men display unique ways of participating in family duties. Some suggest that bad fathering is connected to fathers of low socio-economic status, and good fathers are

considered to be those who are able to arrange various activities for the children (Clarke & Popay, 1998). Such differentiation has only emphasized the father's ability in bringing financial resources to the family (Lupton and Barclay, 1997), thus disregarding the contribution of the fathers of lower socio-economic status who participate in caring duties. Lupton and Barclay (1997) remind us that the ability to generate financial resources is only one of the contributions father can make, and that fatherhood should be understood from broader perspectives. Roy and Burton (2002) suggest that fatherhood contains aspects other than the male breadwinner identity. An emphasis on male breadwinning can make the fathers who are unable to meet this expectation consider that they are not capable and responsible fathers. For instance, Fun said that he rarely spent time with his family when his sons were still young. What he did was to keep working and to make more money. Although his aim was to secure a living for the family, he had sacrificed his family life. After the closure of his business, he left his family, and he could no longer develop a closer relationship with his family members, including his sons.

Not all informants in this study were able to earn a wage to maintain the daily living of the family; some were even unemployed. What they said was that they still perceived that men should bear the providing responsibility for the family, and though they noticed that an over-emphasis on labour force participation might limit domestic participation or even to sacrifice family life, they still adhered to the breadwinner status, and the ability to provide for the family was considered an expected responsibility. Thus, to secure the living of the family is one of the values that working-class men value, and one they

aspire to. However, not all men can meet this demand adequately. Working-class men, such as the informants in this study face a dilemma. On the one hand, they want to work harder to make more money for the family, and on the other hand, they are sacrificing their family life.

#### **4. Men's Work and Social Life**

Discussion of the data collected in this study reveals why working-class men consider that work is important in their life. Work is important to these working-class men because it is through work, that men can demonstrate their dignity, capability, responsibility, achievement, their ability to make a living and maintain their autonomy. It is also crucial to point out that work is critical to whether or not these men can develop friendship or other forms of social relations. As reported by these men, if they were unemployed, they were unable to maintain friendships as they were unable to hang out with their friends. Informants also stated that if they were unable to maintain such relations, it would be more difficult for them to look for jobs. Some informants shared that they would keep a relationship and would spend leisure time with others because of the importance of making use of this relation to maintain access to jobs. To this point, it is shown that men's friendship seems to favour the instrumental side, and that means they make use of this relationship to pursue their personal interest. In the case of the working-class men in this study, their personal interest is in seeking for jobs. However, not all men treat their friendships as instrumental. Some reported that they enjoyed leisure activities when they were with their friends. This was demonstrated in the case of Liu. Liu would join activities, such as social gatherings or

even sports activities. The variance in friendship shows that even though informants in this study are all working-class men, their behaviours towards a particular issue may still be diverse.

Making use of a relationship is common among Chinese people. Farh et al (1998) and Zang (2006) discussed that Chinese people would use *guanxi* to pursue one's interest. Within Chinese culture, it is expected that *guanxi* will replace a formal relationship, and making use of *guanxi* will help one to get what one wants in an efficient way. As in the case of some informants such as Cheung and Tsang, they had never gained work from any formal channel, but could do so through their own networks. Most of the time, they got jobs when they were hanging out in a Chinese restaurant. With this in mind, one can find that if a working-class man is unable to spend his leisure time with his friends because of his financial condition, he cannot make use of these relations, and this will limit his opportunity to have access to a job. On the other hand, because some working-class men have over-emphasized work, they have overlooked other aspects in their life such as personal interest and personal development, and these are the aspects they rarely talk about.

Apart from the network in seeking for jobs, the findings in this study indicate that some working-class men would participate in social life other than working life. Some informants said that they had been engaged in some volunteer work. In participating in volunteer work, informants found that they could contribute to the community in another form. Similar to the findings of Doucet (2004), when men participated in volunteer work, they intended to display something they were good at and at the same time could demonstrate their traditional masculine identity. This is why they



would do some repair work for the elderly and for other single parent families. They would also help the elderly with removals. These kinds of volunteer work are seldom performed by women, and these activities can best express their masculinity. From their behaviour, it is suggested that volunteer work is a gendered activity. Some forms of volunteer work will be demonstrated by men and some other forms will be demonstrated by women. In doing volunteer work, men are doing gender.

Even when working-class men are unemployed and can only participate in unpaid volunteer work, they are not eager to engage in anything that they consider to be dominated by women. Carrying a traditional masculine identity where one can show his strength and the capability to work individually is important to these working-class men. This also explains why when informants were asked whether or not they were supportive of their wives having employment, their views were often conservative, and why they were reluctant to devote most of their time to household duties. It is because they have the belief that men should work outside and be the provider for the family.

Discussions in this thesis suggest that if a working-class man is unemployed, and if he is in his middle life, he will find it difficult to adjust to the changes in the economy. These men have been relying on using personal networks to have access to jobs, and the inability to continue this kind of network will limit their job opportunities. This thesis also suggests that in addition to financial contribution, there are other forms of contributions that working-class men can make to stress their masculinity. However, working-class men are so entrapped in the myth that men should work outside and provide for the family, and they have directly

associated their masculinity with work. The inability to achieve this makes them feel that they are not performing an expected role, and this has in turn become a threat to their masculinity.

## **5. Implications of this Study**

### **5.1 Understanding the Diversity of Working-class Men in Hong Kong**

This research is one of few studies focusing on working-class Chinese men's masculinities and the way they construct such identities. This study took place in Hong Kong where the majority population is Chinese. Although I have discussed working-class men's masculinities in relation to some aspects emphasizing Chinese issues, such as Chinese culture and *guanxi*, men's lives in Hong Kong are at the same time affected by certain specific cultures, such as the emphasis on work and productivity. Working-class men cannot rely on their physical strength to maintain employment in the service economy. It is in this context that when working-class men are constructing their masculinities, they have to negotiate with multiple aspects to make them able to survive in a changing society.

Following Connell's (1995, 2005) argument in masculinities, the hegemonic form is considered the dominant form of masculinity. Most men may treat it as the exemplary type of masculinity as it represents power and status. Connell accepts however, that only a small portion of men actually possess hegemonic masculinity. Among men, there are also the marginalized and the subordinated types. Even though the male informants in this study were demonstrating that they were eager to look for a job with better working condition and better pay, they were unable to

achieve this. Men in this study were neither able to present a hegemonic type of masculinity in the Western model nor the *wen* masculinity in the Chinese culture, but rather a marginalized type of masculinity.

Nevertheless, these men are performing a type of masculinity that can present their distinctive masculine identity. Some informants demonstrated that they were different from other working-class men in the way that they did not share the same life style as what had been perceived as a prevalent culture among the working-class. Lee, for example, said that he liked to read and prepare some tea for himself when he had leisure. Tsang said that even if he was asked to go to Macau, he would not join his fellows at the casino, but would go back Hong Kong once he got his wage. Tsui, the informant with a disability, demonstrated that he could live a meaningful life when he worked as a volunteer. Fun, the informant who had operated some businesses, possessed a sense of entrepreneurship. The stories of the informants demonstrate that the lived experiences of working-class men are diverse, and thus, it is appropriate to understand their masculinity from their own standpoint (Coltrane, 1994), and to understand in what way they construct their masculinity in relation to other social structures.

Masculinity is not seen to be fixed and static, but that it evolves over time and must be considered together with one's cultural background and social class. Connell (2005) states that "terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalized masculinities' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships" (Connell, 2005: 81). Considering the male informants in this study, even though they were all working-class

men, they had diverse life experiences, and constructed their masculinities in relation to their own social practices and interactions with other social structures. That was why even though they were all working-class men, they displayed a distinctive masculine identity. Their performance in social arenas also showed that they did not necessarily feel they were homogenous with working-class culture and identity. The stories of Lee, Tsang, Tsui and Fun supported this claim. Financially, Lee, Tsang, Tsui and Fun lived a working-class life style, but they differentiated themselves from other working-class men in other aspects, and thus showed that they had internalized the Chinese dominant masculinity *wen*, and attempted to enact this ideal in their social practice.

## **5.2 Implications for Theoretical Discussions**

In understanding how working-class men construct their masculinity, I have adopted the concepts and theories of Connell and Bourdieu. Though some other scholars have used these theories in understanding men (Willot and Griffin 2004; Nixon 2006, 2009), these previous works were addressing the issues in Western society. In focusing on working-class men in Hong Kong however, this study has put the emphasis on Chinese culture, to explore ways the theories can be applied to the local context.

### **5.2.1 Constructing Various Forms of Masculinity**

Connell's theory of masculinities has been the foundation of my understanding to the various masculine identities, and provides a framework that I have used for understanding how working-class men negotiate their masculinities with the social structures in relation to power,

production, emotional attachment and symbolism. In this thesis, I have discussed the relations of men with work, family, and their social life; thus, suggesting the ways working-class men construct their masculinities. Even though work, family life and social life are distinctive aspects, these represent some crucial features in social structures. Work relates to power and production, and through work men can express their power in social relations, and can demonstrate their dominance in the family. Family life is another aspect related to power and production, especially in the arena of the division of labour in domestic households. Such a gender division of labour reflects the status of women and men in the family, and it also reflects a man's view of household responsibility. Although cathexis or emotional relations in Connell's term refers to the sexual desire of a man, it also implies emotional attachment and intimacy, and in addition to familial relationship, friendship is another kind of emotional attachment that the informants have developed. In this study, informants revealed that they were reluctant to engage in changing social relations with their previous networks. They inferred that such changes are related to their status of unemployment. Instead of showing indifference to the changing social relations, most male informants disclosed that they were happy in maintaining a relationship with their fellows. Thus, they expressed sorrow when telling that they could no longer maintain their friendships.

It is noted that in Connell's model, power and structure are emphasized, and with this understanding, is appropriate for the discussion of why patriarchy has been normalized in society. Nevertheless, Connell has also highlighted that only very few men actually possess hegemonic masculinity, and the rest are displaying other types of masculinities. For

instance, the informants in this study are displaying working-class and marginalized masculinities. Connell (2005) has argued that an important way to understand masculinity is through recognizing the relations between the various forms of masculinity; how different forms of masculinity will become subordinated to the hegemonic form of masculinity. In other words, understanding the relation between these forms of masculinity and how a man constructs his masculinity in social practice is important. In this way, even for a working-class man, if he has the chance to be exposed to a new social relation other the one he has previously developed, he may demonstrate a new form of masculinity. For instance, in addition to his working-class social status, Fun had the chance to set up a small business, and he demonstrated a form of entrepreneurship, and this is something different from others' working-class experience.

Informants' stories tell us that they do not necessarily identify with what is understood by working-class masculinity, and even though they are experiencing marginalization, they do not necessarily identify with the form of marginalized masculinity. Informants are formulating a specific form of masculinity that is not only differentiating themselves from others, but living an individualized form of masculinity that can best represent their own self and the interaction with other social structures.

### **5.2.2 Embodying Symbolic Capital**

Informants in this study do not actually experience the structured advantages that being a man has brought them, and some do not actually take on a male breadwinner role. However, it is suggested from the data

that informants are not willing to relinquish their breadwinner status. This is similar to the findings of Willot and Griffin (2004). Adopting Bourdieu's concept of capital, I argue that these men are not willing to give up their provider role because they do not have the forms of capital that men of a higher social class have. They are unlike the middle-class men who have forms of cultural capital or economic capital. Furthermore, middle-class men can make use of their economic capital to pursue further cultural capital. Except for their physical strength, working-class men have limited access to other forms of capital that will enable them to express their power in the family or in society. It is in this way that working-class men claim that they are still the breadwinner in the family; and in claiming this breadwinner status, working-class men can express their symbolic power.

Even though working-class men may not have actual power, symbolic power enables them to share what other men are benefiting from; the gender division of domestic labour being an example. It is argued that working-class men have internalized what they consider to be the structured advantages that men have and that keeping a breadwinner status will enable them to have access to these advantages. Overall, the breadwinner status provides working-class men with symbolic capital that makes them feel they are socially recognized and they can express something they value. In Hong Kong society where an individual's success is frequently measured by one's ability to generate financial resources and productivity, other forms of contribution are rarely stressed. In this situation, when a working-class man faces difficulties in providing for the family, much pressure will be placed on him. Thus, it is logical to say that the way working-class men associate their masculinity with work is socially

constructed.

### **5.3 Implications for Social Policy and Social Services**

The policy and social service suggestions outlined below are mainly focused on working-class men who are middle-aged, and the suggestions are based on the findings of this research. These suggestions however, may also benefit men as a collective social group and women in general. The suggestions are tools to enhance the life chances of working-class men and the balance between work and family life.

#### **5.3.1 Directions of Social Policy and Social Service for Men**

Social policy debates on men and masculinity have recently caught attention in Hong Kong and one of the themes in these debates is on the 'cost of masculinity' (Messner, 1997). Emphasis on the cost of masculinity addresses only men's individual problems and will antagonize the gender relations between men and women. Debates about men's job opportunities being taken by women, and men being discriminated against in certain industries are some examples (Wen Wui Po, 2009; Sing Tao Daily, 2010). Such arguments stress that men's positions are taken by women and that men are no longer dominant in the labour market. However, such arguments are not representative, as not all men are being discriminated against in the labour market. The direction of social policy addressing the needs of men should focus on the implications of multiple masculinities (Connell, 1995, 2005; Hearn, 2010). Hearn (2010) argues that the different processes and forms of masculinity will present challenges for social policy development. Therefore, instead of addressing



men's problems individually or with an antagonistic stance against women, policy makers should develop policies that are able to tackle structural inequalities.

Chan (2001) and Leung, and Chan (2012), have discussed the limitations of social services for men in Hong Kong, with one of the main critiques again being related to the emphasis on the cost of masculinity, but seldom address the issues arising from the segregated gender roles and the diversity and differences among men. It is suggested that social service providers should enhance gender sensitivity and 'reconceptualize masculinity' (Dominelli (2002) as cited in Leung and Chan (2012)). This means service providers have to challenge men's domination over women, and to work towards restructuring men's relationship with other men and women (Leung and Chan, 2012). Service providers should also help men reflect on their masculinity, recognize their changing roles in society and in the family, and to re-think their conception of work.

### **5.3.2 Reviewing Work-first Principle in Employment Services**

Another condition leading to the situation in which working-class men are less likely to find a better job with more protection, relates to their poor educational background and the limited skills they possess. Though there are retraining programs, many of these may not be suitable for working-class men. As mentioned in this thesis, working-class men frequently hold a work-first principle, and they prefer to look for jobs that will enable them to express their masculinity. However, such a work-first principle will drive working-class men to work in settings that may have only very low wages. This has contributed to the exploitation of their labour

and the production of the 'cheap workforce' (Gorz, 1999). With this in mind, the delivery of retraining courses should also cater to the specific gender display of working-class men. However, emphasizing job retraining courses is not sufficient to help working-class men seek jobs, and the existing retraining courses stress the work-first principle. This means that the retraining organizations will push the trainees to the labour market even if the employment is on a short contract term. Thus, retraining organizations should review the indicators in evaluating the effectiveness of the retraining programs. It is suggested that some kinds of construction of infrastructure and government funded or subsidized public works should be kept in place. These may provide a more stable environment in the labour market that can suit the needs of the working-class men.

### **5.3.3 Tackling Casualization of Work**

Informants' unfavourable financial conditions are associated with employment. For those who have employment, they may encounter the problems of insufficient working hours, and as they work on a daily wage basis, the number of working days has severe influence on the monthly wage they can earn. Although the local economic environment is largely related to the global situation, measures should be enhanced to tackle the issues related to under-employment, self-employment and other forms of casualization of work. Measures like protecting the status of the workers to limit making use of self-employment as a way to minimize the commitment of the employers should be introduced. Since the implementation of the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) in the year end of 2000, employees in some industries have been forced to change their status of employment to

self-employment. In this way, employers do not have to pay the provident fund for the self-employed workers, and they do not have to take care of the workers' job welfare.

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, a large portion of self-employed workers are men. Most of the self-employed jobs are found in the construction industry and transportation industry, and as working-class men are occupying the lowest positions in these industries, they are the victims in self-employment. Informants such as Tsang and Liu are self-employed workers, and they are not entitled to enjoy any job welfare. Thus, self-employed workers are marginalized in the labour market. Increasing in the number of self-employed jobs is a form of casualization of work, and it is again an under-valuation of the workers' labour force. Increasing job benefits are possible initiatives that may alleviate the problems incurred from casualization of work. These directives are to make employers commit to the welfare of the workers.

#### **5.3.4 Standard Working Hours**

Although some men reported that they obtained insufficient working hours rather than extensive working hours, long working hours have also become a problem in the labour market. The worst situation is that when workers have worked over-time, they may not be entitled to receive extra wage payments, and thus employers are able to further exploit employees. Setting standard working hours is a means to make the employers recognize the rights of employees. At the same time, workers can choose not to work beyond normal working hours, and they can spend more time with their family or pursuing their interests. This may also encourage

paternal involvement and work-life balance.

#### **5.3.5 Enhancing Men's Awareness about Health**

Although men are in general less aware of their own health, this lack of awareness about health is similar to unemployment. Working-class men are working in jobs that require them to display their physical strength. In order to keep this physical strength, they have to keep put on weight. This is kind of unhealthy lifestyle. Men are also reluctant to participate in health checks. Even if they were to attempt to access health care, there is a lack of a health check-up service for men in the public health care system, and the lack of this service discourages men from taking action to preserve their own health. In addition to the proposals on confronting working-class men's unhealthy beliefs and life style, implementation of a health check-up service in the public health system is also important in allowing working-class men to take precautions at an affordable price.

#### **5.3.6 Supporting Men as Care Givers**

Some informants said that they were eager to seek jobs but that they had to take care of young children. Some stated that the charges of the existing child care or child support services were too expensive. This meant that if their wives were to enter the labour force, the wages might not be sufficient to cover the cost. If men and their spouse choose to work, adequate child support services should be delivered. The age limit of the children placed in child care and child support services should also be readjusted to fit the needs of families. It is proposed that child support services for various age groups of children should be provided and that

these should be subsidized by the government. This will further cater for the needs of families if the operating hours of these services can fit their working hours. The societal view on men as care giver still reflects rather conservative position, and men show reservations about taking on the role as a care giver because they think that they are expected to provide for the family. This conservative perspective on men's role has limited the development of other alternate roles for men.

### **5.3.7 Anti-poverty Policy**

The direction of the suggested anti-poverty policy is not only to alleviate employment difficulty, but also on helping the younger generation avoids poverty. As shared by informants in this study, they wanted their children to have a better education and to have a better job. However, with the limited resources of these working-class men, they might not be able to provide an environment that would be favourable to their children's education and life chances. Policy makers should consider a policy that will help the younger generation from poor families to develop their capacities.

### **5.3.8 Reconstruction of the Gendered Division of Labour**

At first glance, reconstruction of the gender division of labour may not be related to social policy. When looking into the embedded perspectives of both women and men however, it is clear that the gendered division of labour is a social construct and that this can be handled by social policy. Although gender equality has been promoted for years, the current situation does not show any improvement. At least, in the perspective of

the informants, they still consider that men should be the breadwinner, and women should be the care provider. In addition to this polarity in gender roles, there should be more options that women and men will find suitable in their situation. Suggestions in this section have raised issues in protecting the welfare and work conditions of the labourers, setting the standard working hours and to promote a work-life balance atmosphere, enhancing the delivery of child support services so that both women and men can have more options other than solely taking care of the family. If a work-centred ideology is still in force, this will not be favourable to reconstructing the gendered division of labour. Working-class men in this study are still clinging to the male breadwinner identity and the adherence to this identity makes their participation in domestic and caring duties something at a lower priority. Reconstruction of the gendered division of labour is an attempt to challenge the dominant discourse on masculinity. If this is achieved, this will help to free men from the shackles of traditional masculinity.

The essence in the reconstruction of the gendered division of labour is that apart from the breadwinning role, there should be other alternatives that men can find to position themselves in. Some men are unemployed and they are performing as family carers while some are working as volunteers. Although some men are working full-time, their wages are insufficient to maintain the living of their family, and their wife has to work to share the family responsibility. Some men try to redefine their familial roles by engaging in different forms of domestic duties. These examples illustrate that if men are given alternatives, they can be encouraged to take on roles that suit their lived experience.

#### **5.4 Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This study contributes to the research of the lived experiences of working-class men in Hong Kong by revealing men's voices in different aspects of life. These include the ways working-class men construct their sense of masculinity in relation to work, the interactions between work and their family life, and how their social experiences affect their chances of obtaining a job. Nevertheless, as with other studies, this thesis is not without limitations. Some of these limitations result from time pressure in writing the thesis, while others are the result of inherent limitations in the type of data collected. Throughout the discussion, I will also propose the possibilities to conduct future work based on the findings in this study.

Informants in this study were all working-class men. Though some were unemployed, it was not easy to arrange an appointment with them. For those who had a job, there was further difficulty in arranging interviews. The difficulty in arranging interviews reflected that they had to find something to be engaged in, so that they would not present themselves as being someone with too much free time. As a male researcher, I thought that I had the advantage to interview men, as we shared a common language and that I might be in a better position to understand their ways of thinking. When I began collecting data however, I realized that my biological sex as a male was not necessarily an advantage. Rather, the relationship with gate keepers was important in making men participate in this research. As the majority of the informants were social service users or volunteers, my acquaintance with the social service workers and the social service setting was an advantage to devise topics for discussions.

Involving myself in assisting informants was sometimes crucial in facilitating men to speak, especially when the informants did not know me. Before doing some interviews, I had done some fieldwork and had joined a men's group for a number of sessions. Two informants were from that men's group, and my presence helped them know me in advance of the interviews. Interviewing men was sometimes more difficult than interviewing women. In most cases, men were not so presentable, and instead of using language to express themselves, preferred to use their behaviour.

It is suggested therefore, that other than only conducting in-depth interviews, other forms of fieldwork such as observation or even ethnographic methods would further contribute to understanding men. It is important to adopt other research methods to supplement the difficulties and insufficiencies in interviewing men.

In addition to the aforesaid limitation, inadequacies of data are also observed and this is related to recruitment of informants. Such a limitation can be understood from two points, one of which is associated with the source of informants I could reach. I could only reach the potential informants through social workers and labour union organizers, and this affected the informants whom I could interview. The other is associated with the type of informants who had participated in this research. As mentioned, as I had to rely on the gate keepers to access the informants, it is unavoidable that most of the informants have experiences in social services; either in participating in volunteer work or receiving social services. This experience in social service might make them somewhat different from other working-class men who have not taken part in any



forms of social service.

This study aims to answer in what way working-class men construct their masculinities, and this question has itself limited the recruitment of informants. In this study, only working-class men who were in their middle age were selected to participate in interviews. It was expected that men in their middle age would be able to share more about their work experience and the meaning of work that these men had constructed. Instead, the selection of informants limited the adequacies of data. The present study has only discussed the life experience of the working-class men who are already at the stage of middle-age. The experience of the younger generation of men is not included. Though it is assumed that the younger generation may be better educated and that they are more adapted to the changing economy, whether or not this is really the situation is yet to be studied.

Gendering of work is probably another theme for future research. As I have mentioned throughout this thesis, working-class men admitted that they would inevitably be associated with service jobs if they wanted to maintain a paid work. Some of the informants were actually working in service work such as truck drivers and goods delivery workers. The current study has discussed the types of service jobs middle-age working-class men would engage in, whether or not they can reproduce their gender identities through service work is not covered.

Another limitation in this study is the lack of discussion of the lives of men of other social classes who are experiencing other forms of marginalization and subordination. The current study has only discussed the lives of working-class Chinese men, but men of other ethnicities,

sexual orientations and disabilities are not covered. Even though some informants were disabled, the focus of the study was not particularly on their disability but on how their disability had affected their employment. There is a lack of discussion of whether working-class men and middle-class men construct their masculinities in different ways, and whether middle-class men have different perspectives on work, family and other aspects in their life.

This study also has the limitation of topics covered in interviews. Cathexis in Connell's work carries the meaning of sexuality, but this aspect has not been covered in this study. This has inevitably affected the adequacy of data analysis, as sexuality is not only part of a man's life, it is also related to power and dominance. As most of the informants in this study are already in their middle-age, sexuality may carry an important meaning in how they perceive their masculinities. However, exploring the topic of sexuality in Chinese society could be difficult and sensitive, and it is uncommon for Chinese to talk about sex openly.

Responding to the limitations just mentioned, there are areas that can be covered in future research on men. First, instead of limiting the discussion to men at the stage of middle-life, it would be useful to explore the experience of men at different stages in their life cycle. Men at different stages are exposed to the confrontation of a mixture of cultures which, together with the configuration of the changes in the structure of economy, may influence the ways they construct their masculine identities. Second, since middle-class men have access to more resources and possess more forms of capital than working-class men do, how they construct their masculinities may contribute more specifically in identifying the diversities

among men. Expanding the scope to cover men in other socio-economic statuses would generate knowledge in understanding whether or not men of different social classes construct their masculinities in a different way and how their social class impact on their distinctive interpretation to various aspects of life. This may also offer an opportunity to investigate whether or not the risk of unemployment is equally shared by all men.

**Table 1**

Labour Force and Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPRs) by Sex  
In 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2011

Period	Male		Female		Both sexes	
	No. ('000)	LFPR (%)	No. ('000)	LFPR (%)	No. ('000)	LFPR (%)
1982	1 600.3	81.3	897.8	47.5	2 498.1	64.7
1987	1 727.5	80.3	1 000.7	48.7	2 728.2	64.9
1992	1 766.0	78.1	1 026.3	46.3	2 792.3	62.4
1997	1 954.9	75.1	1 279.9	47.9	3 234.8	61.3
2002	1 958.1	72.4	1 514.5	51.9	3 472.6	61.7
2007	1 953.6	70.4	1 668.7	53.1	3 622.3	61.2
2011	1 942.7	68.4	1 760.4	53.0	3 703.1	60.1

Source: Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR

**Table 2**

Unemployment Rate by Sex and Age (40 and over) in 1982, 1992, 2002, 2007, 2011

Period	Sex	Unemployment rate (%)		
		40 - 49	50 - 59	60 and over
1982	Male	3.0	4.3	2.7
	Female	1.9	1.6	1.3
	Both sexes	2.7	3.6	2.3
1992	Male	1.5	1.9	0.8
	Female	1.0	1.0	0.9
	Both sexes	1.3	1.7	0.8
2002	Male	7.1	9.1	5.5
	Female	6.0	6.5	2.9
	Both sexes	6.7	8.2	5.0
2007	Male	3.7	4.9	2.8
	Female	3.1	4.0	1.5
	Both sexes	3.5	4.6	2.5
2011	Male	3.0	3.9	2.0
	Female	2.5	2.2	2.0
	Both sexes	2.7	3.3	2.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR

**Table 3**

Underemployment Rate by Industry from 2008 to 2011

Period	Industry				
	Manufacturing	Construction	Import/export trade and wholesale	Retail, accommodation and food services	Transportation, storage, postal and courier services, information and communications
2008	1.5	10.6	0.4	1.6	2.1
2009	1.7	12.0	0.6	2.1	2.6
2010	1.5	9.5	0.5	2.0	2.2
2011	1.3	7.6	0.4	1.7	2.2

Source: Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR

**Table 4**

Unemployment Rate by Previous Industry from 2008 to 2011

Period	Previous Industry				
	Manufacturing	Construction	Import/export trade and wholesale	Retail, accommodation and food services	Transportation, storage, postal and courier services, information and communications
2008	4.5	6.7	2.6	5.0	3.0
2009	6.2	10.0	4.6	7.0	4.8
2010	4.7	6.9	4.1	5.8	3.8
2011	4.0	5.6	3.1	4.6	3.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department, HKSAR

## **Appendix One**

### **The Interview Guide**

1. The Opening Phrase
  - 1.1 Thanks for your willingness to help me in this research. Before I ask any questions, I wonder if you would like to know more about what I am interested in.
  - 1.2 I would like you to tell me the story of your life. Begin at the beginning. Tell me as much as you remember. After you have told me your story, I will ask you some questions.
2. Basic Demographic Data
  - 2.1 Informant's age
  - 2.2 Marital status
  - 2.3 Number of children
3. Schooling and Work History
  - 3.1 Any formal schooling
  - 3.2 Work history
  - 3.3 Meaning of work
  - 3.4 Length of unemployment
  - 3.5 Feelings of unemployment
  - 3.6 Ways to tackle unemployment
4. Social Welfare Experience and History
  - 4.1 Experience in seeking for assistance
  - 4.2 Experience in social welfare
  - 4.3 Views on receiving social welfare
  - 4.4 Other forms of social welfare experience
5. Health
  - 5.1 General health conditions
  - 5.2 Any disability
6. Family
  - 6.1 Relation with family members including extended family
  - 6.2 Role as a husband

- 6.3 Role as a father
- 6.4 Division of labour in household

7. Social Life and Social Relationship

- 7.1 Relation with friends/ workplace fellows
- 7.2 Any difficulty in maintaining a relationship with others
- 7.3 Forms of social life
- 7.4 Any personal interest

8. Gender Perspective

- 8.1 What a man should be
- 8.2 Views on women's labour force participation
- 8.3 Problems men are experiencing

9. Concluding Remarks

- 9.1 Before we come to the end of the interview, I would like to know if there would be any supplementary material you want to provide.
- 9.2 I may want to talk to you again if I find that I am unclear of some of the points.

## Appendix Two

### Brief Description of the Informants

(To protect the privacy of the informants, names of the informants are pseudonyms)

	Age	Marital status / Number of children	Schooling	Work history	Social welfare / volunteer experience
Tsui	64	Married/ one adult child	No schooling	Silk factory worker, bus ticket-selling worker, worker in a department store, thread factory worker	Had been receiving welfare payments since he lost his eye-sight, was a volunteer in an organization serving the blind
Fun	48	Divorced/ three adult children but not living with him	Primary level in Hong Kong	Apprentice in an shop repairing electrical appliance, apprentice in a factory, factory worker, tax-driver, a hawker, restaurant owner, lorry driver, worked in a bus company	Had been receiving welfare payment after unemployment, and attended employment retraining course, was a volunteer in a social service organization
Tin	50	Married/ two children with one studying in primary school and the other is	Secondary level in Hong Kong	Worked in container terminal, taxi driver	Had been receiving welfare payment since unemployment,



		at pre-school age			and was a volunteer in a social service organization
Tsang	43	Married/ two children, one studying in secondary school, the other in kindergarten	Junior secondary level in Mainland China	Factory worker, welding worker, worker distributing newspapers, repairing roads and disposing of domestic wastage, <i>sam hong</i> worker	Had received assistance from social worker in housing
Ng	63	Married/ three children, one was at work, the other two were studying in secondary school	No schooling	Factory worker, truck driver, fruit stall owner	Had been receiving welfare payment as a supplement to his low income
Liu	44	Married/ no child	Junior primary level in Vietnam	Worker in a zip factory, worker repairing electrical appliances, worker in kitchen utensil factory, and a truck driver	A volunteer in a workers' union
Cheung	60	Married/ one child studying in kindergarten	Primary level in Kong Kong	Apprentice in making furniture, sailor, <i>sam hong</i> worker	Had received welfare payment until his wife found a job
Lee	52	Married/ three children studying in	Secondary level in Mainland	Factory worker, hawker, goods-delivering	Had been receiving welfare

		secondary school	China	worker	payments to supplement his low income
Wah	51	Re-married/ lived with one child studying in primary school	Primary level in Mainland China	Hawker, goods-delivery worker, worker in a bus company, construction site worker, building security guard	Had been receiving welfare payment since he got hurt in an industrial incident

## Appendix Three

### Consent Form



THE HONG KONG  
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY  
香港理工大學

---

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

##### Masculinities at Risk? Life Experiences of Employment and Unemployment among Men in Hong Kong

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research  
conducted by Tam Kin Yuen.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research  
and published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e. my personal details  
will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I  
understand the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can  
withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



THE HONG KONG  
POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

香港理工大學

### 參與研究同意書

「男性特質」的危機：香港失業男士的經驗

本人\_\_\_\_\_同意參與由譚建元開展的上述研究。

本人知悉此研究所得的資料可能被用作日後的研究及發表，但本人的私隱權利將得以保留，即本人的個人資料不會被公開。

研究人員已向本人清楚解釋列在所附資料卡上的研究程序，本人明瞭當中涉及的利益及風險；本人自願參與研究項目。

本人知悉本人有權就程序的任何部分提出疑問，並有權隨時退出而不受任何懲處。

參與者姓名 \_\_\_\_\_

參與者簽署 \_\_\_\_\_

研究人員姓名 \_\_\_\_\_

研究人員簽署 \_\_\_\_\_

日期 \_\_\_\_\_

## References

- Aarseth, H. (2009). From modernized masculinity to degendered lifestyle projects : changes in men's narratives on domestic participation 1990 –2005. *Men and Masculinities*, 11 (4), June 2009, 424-440.
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4 (2), 139-158.
- Acker, J. (1992). Gendering organizational theory. In A. Mills and P. Tancred (Eds.). *Gendering organizational analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Alcock, P. (2003). The benefits system. In P. Alcock, C. Beatty, S. Fothergill, R. Macmillon, S. Yeandle (Eds.) (2003), *Work to welfare – How men become detached from the labour market*, pp. 56-78. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Arrighi, B. A. and Maume, D. J. Jr. (2000). Workplace subordination and men's avoidance of housework. *Journal of Family Issues*, 21 (4), 464 – 487.
- Alvesson, M. and Billing, Y. D. (1997). *Understanding gender and organizations*. London: Sage.
- Behnke, C. and Meuser, M. (2001). Gender and habitus. Fundamental securities and crisis tendencies among men. In B. Baron and H. Kotthoff (Eds.), *Gender in interaction: Perspectives on femininity and masculinity in ethnography and discourse*, pp. 153-174. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Beynon, J. (2002). *Masculinities and culture*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bishop, V., Cassell, C. M. and Hoel, H. (2009). Preserving masculinity in service work: An exploration of the underreporting of customer anti-social behavior. *Human Relations*, 62 (1), 5-25.

- Bochner, A. (1990). *Embracing contingencies of lived experience in the study of close relationships*. Keynote lecture to the International Conference on personal relationships, Oxford University.
- Borrero, I. M. (1980). Psychological and emotional impact of unemployment. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 7: 916-934.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1984 [1979]. *Distinction*, R. Nice (trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press, 241–258.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*, M. Adamson (trans.) UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bowring, F. (1999). Job scarcity: the perverted form of a potential blessing. *Sociology*, 33 (1), 69-84.
- Breugal, I. (2000). No more jobs for the boys? Gender and class in the restructuring of the British economy. *Capital & Class*, 24 (2), 79-102.
- Brickell, C. (2006). The sociological construction of gender and sexuality. *The Sociological Review*, 54 (1), 87-113.
- Carrigan, T., Connell, R. W., & Lee, J. (1985). Toward a new sociology of masculinity. *Theory and Society*, 14 (5), 551-604.
- Caritas Hong Kong (2003). *Report on the qualitative study of the grass-roots men's living situation (in Chinese)*. Hong Kong: Caritas Hong Kong.

- Caritas Hong Kong (2005). *Report on the study of grass-roots men and The breadwinning role in family (in Chinese)*. Hong Kong: Caritas Hong Kong.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. UK: Wiley & Blackwell.
- Cha, Y. & Thēbaud, S. (2009). Labour markets, breadwinning, and beliefs: how economic context shapes men's gender ideology. *Gender & Society*, 23 (2), 215-243.
- Chan, K. W. (2001). Gendering Men's Services in Hong Kong: Backlash or Pursuit of Gender Equality? In B. Pease and K. Pringle (Eds.). *A Man's World? Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World*, pp. 205-218. New York: Zed Books.
- Chan, K. W. & Yu, F. Y. (2005). *Rethinking gender: A research report on lone father (in Chinese)*. Research Report Series No.8, Centre for Social Policy Studies, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Hong Kong: Yan Oi Tong Community and Family Service Department and Centre for Social Policy Studies, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
- Chant, S. (2001). Men in crisis? Reflections on masculinities, work and family in North-West Costa Rica. In C. Jackson (Ed). *Men at work: Labour, masculinities, development*, pp. 119-218. London: Frank Cass.
- Charmaz, K. (1994). The grounded theory method: an explication and interpretation. In B. G. Glaser (Ed.), *More grounded theory methodology: a reader*, pp. 95-115. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Charmaz, K. (1995). Identity dilemmas of chronically ill men. In D. Sabo and D. F. Gordon (Eds.), *Men's health and illness: Gender, power and the body*, pp. 266-291. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Chase, S. E. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 651-680. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cheng, C. (1999). Marginalized masculinities and hegemonic masculinity: an introduction. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 7 (3), 295-315.
- Chiu, Stephen W. K. and Lui, T. L. (2004). Testing the global city—social polarisation thesis: Hong Kong since the 1990s. *Urban Studies*, 41(10), 1863-1888.
- Chiu, S., So, A. and Tam, M. (2008). Flexible employment in Hong Kong: trends and patterns in comparative perspective. *Asian Survey*, 18 (4), 673-702.
- Choi, P. K. and Lee, C. H. (1997). The Hidden abode of domestic labour: The case of Hong Kong. In F. M. Cheung (Ed.), *Engendering Hong Kong society: A gender perspective of women's status*, pp. 157-199. Chinese University Press.
- Clarke, S., & Popay, J. (1998). 'I'm just a bloke who's had kids': Men and women on parenthood. In J. Popay, J. Hearn and J. Edwards (Eds.), *Men, gender divisions and welfare*, pp. 196-230. London: Routledge.
- Clatterbaugh, K. (1998). What is problematic about masculinities? *Men and Masculinities*. 1 (1), 24-45.
- Coles, T. (2007). Negotiating the field of masculinity: The production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities. *Men and Masculinities Online First*; November 2007, 1-15.
- Coles, T. (2008). Finding space in the field of masculinity: Lived experience of men's masculinities. *Journal of Sociology*, 44(3), 233-248.
- Cole, A. L. and Knowles, J. G. (2001). *Lives in context: the art of life history research*. NY: AltaMira Press.



- Collier, R. (1998). *Masculinities, crime and criminology: men, heterosexuality and the criminal(ised) other*. London: Sage.
- Collier, R. (2002). Masculinities. *Sociology*, 36 (3), 737-742.
- Collinson, D. L. & Hearn, J. (1994a). Naming men as men: Implications for work, organization and management. *Gender, Work and Organization*; 1 (1), 2-22.
- Collinson, D. L. & Hearn, J. (1994b). Theorizing unities and differences between men and between masculinities. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing masculinities*, pp.97-118. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Collinson, D. L. & Hearn, J. (2005). Men and masculinities in work, organizations, and management. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn and R. W. Connell (Eds.). *The handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, pp.289-310. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coltrane, S. (1994). Theorizing Masculinities in Contemporary Social Science. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing masculinities*, pp. 39-60. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Connell, R. W. (1982). Class, patriarchy, and Sartre's theory of practice. *Theory and Society*, 11 (3), 305-320.
- Connell, R. W. (1983). *Which way is up? Essays on sex, class and culture*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1994). Psychoanalysis on masculinity. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing masculinities*, pp. 11-38. CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Connell, R. W. (2000). *The men and the boys*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2002a). *Gender*. Malden, US: Blackwell Publishers.
- Connell, R. W. (2002b). Understanding men: Gender sociology and the new international research on masculinities. *Social Thought & Research*, 24 (1 & 2), 13-31.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). CA: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W. (2008). Extracts from Southern Theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science. *Australian Humanities Review*, 44, March 2008, pp. 53-73.
- Connell, R. W. and Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19 (6), 829-859.
- Courtenay, W. H. (2000). Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50 (2000), 1385-1401.
- Craig, S. (1992). *Men, masculinity and the media*. London: Sage.
- Crompton, R. (Ed.) (1999). *Restructuring gender relations and employment: The decline of the male breadwinner*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crompton, R. (2006). *Employment and the family: The reconfiguration of work and family life in contemporary societies*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Crossley, N. (2008). Social Class. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu – Key Concepts*, pp. 87-100. Durham, UK: Auman Publishing Limited.
- Demetriou, D. Z. (2001). Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: a critique. *Theory and Society*, 30 (3), 337-361.

- Denzin, N. K. (1989a). *Interpretive biography*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989b). *The research act* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing gender. *Gender & Society*, 21 (1), 106-127.
- Diversi, M. (2007). A professor's fortune suggestion: an essay on the transformation power of interpretative epistemologies. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13 (8), 1177- 1188.
- Dortherty, W. J., Kounski, E. F., and Erickson, M. F. (1998). Responsible fathering: An overview and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 60 (2), 277-292.
- Doucet, A. (2004). "It's almost like I have a job, but I don't get paid": fathers at home reconfiguring work, care, and masculinity. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research & Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2 (3), 277-303.
- Edwards, T. (2006). *Cultures of masculinity*. NY: Routledge.
- Ellis, C. and Flaherty, M. G. (1992). An agenda for the interpretation of lived experience. In C. Ellis and M. G. Flaherty (Eds.) *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*, pp. 1-13. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Farh, J. L., Tsui, A. S., Xin, K., and Cheng, B. S. (1998). The influence of relational demography and *guanxi*: the Chinese case. *Organization Science*, 9 (4), 471-488.

- Fletcher, D. R. (2010). The workless class? Economic transformation, informal work and male working-class identity. *Social Policy & Society*, 9 (3), 325-336.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. London: Sage.
- Freeman, R. (1997). Working for nothing: The supply of volunteer labor. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 15 (1), 140-167.
- Fuller, N. (2001). Work and masculinity among Peruvian urban men. In C. Jackson (Ed), *Men at work: Labour, masculinities, development*, pp. 93-114. London: Frank Cass.
- Gerschick, T. J. and Miller, A. S. (1995). Coming to terms. In D. Sabo and D. Gordon (Ed), *Men's Health and Illness*, pp. 183-204. London: Sage.
- Gheradi, S. (1995). *Gender, symbolism and organizational cultures*. London: Sage.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Glaser, G. B. and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Good, G.E., Dell, D. M. and Mintz, L. B. (1989). Male role and gender role conflict: Relations to help-seeking in men, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 36 (3), 295–300.

- Gorz, A. (1999). *Reclaiming work: beyond the wage-based society*, Chris Turner (trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gubrium, J. F. and Holstein, J. A. (2003) Analyzing interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), pp. 214-248. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.), pp. 105 – 117. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), pp. 191 – 215. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Handel, G. (1994). Life course as reflexive object: some constituent elements in the life histories of working-class men. *Studies in Symbolic Interactions*, 16, 295-306.
- Hanlon, N. (2012). *Masculinities, care and equality : Identity and nurture in men's lives*. Hamsphire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hardy, C. (2008). Hysteresis. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu – Key Concepts*. Durham, UK: Auman Publishing Limited, 131-148.
- Harrell, S. (1985). Why do the Chinese work so Hard? : Reflections on an entrepreneurial ethic. *Modern China*, 11(2), 203-226.
- Hatch, J. A. and Wisneiwski, R. (1995). Life history and narrative: questions, issues, and exemplary works. In J. A. Hatch and R. Wisneiwski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative*, pp. 113-136. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Have, P. ten (2004). *Understanding qualitative research and ethnomethodology*. London: Sage.

- Haywood, C. and Mac an Ghaill, M. (2003). *Men and masculinities: theory, research, and social practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hearn, J. (2004). From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist Theory*, 5 (1), 49-72.
- Hearn, J. (2010). Reflecting on men and social policy: Contemporary critical debates and implications for social policy. *Critical Social Policy*, 30 (2), 165-188.
- Hirose, A. and Pih, K. K. H. (2009). Men who strike and men who submit: hegemonic and marginalized masculinities in mixed martial arts. *Men and Masculinities Online First*, September 23, 2009.
- HKSAR Census and Statistics Department (2006). *Social data collected via the General Household Survey: Special Topics Report No. 43*. HK: Census and Statistics Department.
- HKSAR Census and Statistics Department (2010). *Social data collected via the General Household Survey: Special Topics Report No. 52*. HK: Census and Statistics Department.
- HKSAR Census and Statistics Department (2012). *Social data collected via the General Household Survey: Special Topics Report No. 60*. HK: Census and Statistics Department.
- HKSAR Census and Statistics Department (2012). Retrieved 12 Nov 2012 from [http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong\\_kong\\_statistics/statistical\\_tables](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hong_kong_statistics/statistical_tables).
- Hoffmann, E. J. (2007). Open-ended interviews, power, and emotion labor. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36 (3), 318-346.
- Holter, Ø. G. (2005). Social theories for researching men and masculinities, Direct gender hierarchy and structural inequality. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, and R. W. Connell (Eds.), *The handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, pp. 15-34. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Jackson, C. (2001). Men at work. In C. Jackson (Ed). *Men at work: Labour, masculinities, development*, pp. 1-22. London: Frank Cass.
- Jarrett, R. L., Roy, K. M. and Burton, L. M. (2002). Fathers in the "Hood": Insights from qualitative research on low-income African-American Men. In C. S. Tamis-LeMonda and N. Cabrera (Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: multidisciplinary perspectives*, pp. 211-248. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Järviluoma, H., Moisala, P. and Vilkkio, A. (2003). *Gender and qualitative methods*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Juhn, C. (1992). Decline of male labor market participation: the role of declining market opportunities. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 107 (1), 79-121.
- Kan, M. Y., Sullivan, O., and Gershuny, J. (2011). Gender convergence in domestic work: Discerning the effects of interactional and institutional barriers from large-scale data. *Sociology*, 45 (2), 234-251.
- Kaufman, M. (1999). Men, feminism, and men's contradictory experiences of power. In A. K. Joseph (Ed.) *Men and power*, pp. 59-83. Halifax: Fernwood Books.
- Kimmel, M. S. (Ed.) (1987). *Changing men: new directions in research on men and masculinity*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Kimmel, M. S. (1994). Masculinity as homophobia: fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity. In H. Brod & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Theorizing masculinities*, pp. 119-141. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kimmel, M. S., Hearn, J., and Connell, R. W. (2005). Introduction. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn and R. W. Connell (Eds.) *The Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, pp. 1-12. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Lamb, M. E. (1987). Introduction: The emergent American father. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The father's role: Cross-cultural perspectives*, pp. 3-25. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- LaRossa, R. (1988). Fatherhood and social change. *Family Relations*, 37 (4), 451-457.
- Lee, K. M., Wong, H., and Law, K. Y. (2007). Social polarization and poverty in the global city: The case of Hong Kong. *China Report* 2007, 43 (1), 1- 30.
- Legerski, E. M. and Cornwall, M. (2010). Working-class job loss, gender, and the negotiation of household labor. *Gender & Society*, 24 (4), 447-474.
- Leung, L. C. and Chan, K. W. (2012). Understanding the masculinity crisis: Implications for men's services in Hong Kong. *British Journal of Social Work*, first published online August 10, 2012, 1-20.
- Lewis, G. & Sloggett, A. (1998). Suicide, deprivation, and unemployment: record linkage study. *British Medical Journal*, 317 (7168), 1283-1286..
- Lewis, J. (2001). The decline of the male breadwinner model: Implications for work and care. *Social Politics*, 8 (2), 152-169.
- Lincoln, Y. S. and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Louie, K. (2000). Constructing Chinese masculinity for the modern world: With particular reference to Lao She's *The Two Mas*. *The China Quarterly*, No. 164 (Dec, 2000), 1062-1078.
- Louie, K. (2002). *Theorising Chinese masculinity: society and gender in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lu, Z. Z., Maume, D. J. & Bellas, M. L. (2000). Chinese husbands' participation in household labor. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 31 (2), 191-215.



- Lupton, D. and Barclay, L. (1997). *Constructing fatherhood: discourses and experiences*. London: Sage.
- Lusher, D. & Robins, G. (2007). Hegemonic and other masculinities in local social contexts. *Men and Masculinities OnlineFirst*, May 18, 2007, 1-37.
- Marsiglio, W. and Pleck, J. H. (2005). Fatherhood and masculinity. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, and R. W. Connell (ed.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities*, pp. 249-269. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Martin, P. Y. (1998). Why can't man be more like a woman? Reflections on Connell's masculinities. *Gender & Society*, 12 (4), 472-474.
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G. (1989). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology*. London: Sage Publications.
- Maton, K. (2008). Habitus. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu – Key concepts*, pp. 49-65. Durham, UK: Auman Publishing Limited.
- McCracken, G. (1990). *The long interview*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Messner, M. A. (1997). *Politics of masculinities: men in movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Migliaccio, T. (2009). Men's Friendships: Performances of Masculinity. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 17 (3), 226 - 241.
- Miller, T. (2011). *Making sense of fatherhood: Gender, caring and work*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, R. (2008). Capital. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu – Key concepts*, p. 101-117. Durham, UK: Auman Publishing Limited.

- Morgan, D. H. J. (1992). *Discovering men*. London: Routledge.
- Murphy, E. U. (2003). *Men, poverty and social welfare policy*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. The Faculty of the Heller School for Social policy and Management, Brandies University, US.
- Ngo, H. Y. (2002). Part-time employment in Hong Kong: A gendered phenomenon? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13 (2), 361-377.
- Nixon, D. (2006). 'I just like working with my hands': Employment aspirations and the meaning of work for low-skilled unemployed men in Britain's service economy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19 (2), 201-217.
- Nixon, D. (2009). 'I can't put a smiley face on': Working-class masculinity, emotional labour and service work in the 'new economy'. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 16 (3), 301-322.
- Oakley, A. (1985). *Sex, gender and society*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.
- O'Donnell, M. and Sharpe, S. (2000). *Uncertain masculinities: Youth, ethnicity and class in contemporary Britain*. London: Routledge.
- Palmisano, J. M. (Ed.) (2000). *World of sociology*. New York: Gale.
- Pascall, G. (1997). *Social policy: A new feminist analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Pease, B. (2000). *Recreating men: Postmodern masculinity politics*. London: Sage.
- Pease, B. (2003). Men and masculinities: Profeminist approaches to changing men. In J. Allan, B. Pease and L. Briskman (eds), *Critical social work: An introduction to theories and practices*, pp. 124-138. Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

- Pease, B. (2010). *Undoing privilege: Unearned advantage in a divided world*. London: Zed Books.
- Perry, E. J. and Dillon, N. (2002). "Little Brothers" in the Cultural Revolution: The worker rebels of Shanghai. In S. Brownell and J. N. Wasserstrom (Eds.), *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities : A Reader*, pp. 269-286. CA: University of California Press.
- Perse, E. M. (2000). *Media effects and society* (electronic book). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. In J. A. Hatch and R. Wisniewski (Eds.), *Life history and narrative*, pp. 5-24. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Pyke, K. D. (1996). Class-based masculinities: the interdependence of gender, class, and interpersonal power. *Gender and Society*, 10 (5), 527-549.
- Ranson, G. (2001). Men at work: Change – or no change? – In the era of the "new father". *Men and Masculinities*, 4 (1), 3-26.
- Risseuw, C. (1991). Bourdieu, power and resistance: Gender transformation in Sri Lanka. In K. Davis, M. Leijenaar, and J. Oldersma (Eds.), *The gender of power*, pp. 54-79. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Robertson, S. (2007). *Understanding Men and Health: Masculinity, Identity and Well-being*. NY: Open University Press.
- Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Russell, H. (1999). Friends in low places: gender, unemployment, and sociability. *Work, Employment & Society*, 13(2), 205-224.
- Schwalbe, M. L. (1996). *Unlocking the iron cage: The men's movement, gender, politics, and American culture*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University

Press.

Schwalbe, M. and Wolkomir, M. (2001). The masculine self as problem and resource in interview studies of men. *Men and Masculinities*, 4 (1), 90-103.

Schwalbe, M. L. and Wolkomir, M. (2003). Interviewing Men. In J. A. Holstein and J. F. Gubrium (Eds.). *Inside interviewing: New lens, new concerns*, pp. 55 – 71. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Seidler, V. J. (2010). *Recreating sexual politics: Men, feminism and politics*. NY: Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (1999a). The sexual politics of disabled masculinity. *Sexuality and disability*, 17 (1), 53-64.

Shakespeare, T. (1999b). When is a man not a man? When he's disabled. In J. Wild (Ed.), *Working with men for change*, pp. 47-58. London: UCL Press.

Siisiäinen, M. (2000). Two concepts of social capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnum. Paper presented at ISTR Fourth International Conference, "*The Third Sector: For What and for Whom?*". Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland. July 5-8, 2000.

Silverman, D. (2000). Analyzing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), pp. 821-834. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sing Tao Daily (2010, October 25). Domestic conflicts will break out as men experience collapse in economic status and women work in higher position, p. A04. (in Chinese)

Sparke, A. C. and Smith, B. (2002). Sport, spinal cord injury, embodied masculinities, and the dilemmas of narrative identity. *Men and masculinities*, 4 (3), 258-285.

- Springer, K. W. (2006). *His and her marriage today: The impact of wives' employment on husband's later mid-life health*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Strauss, M. and Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Summers, J. A., Boller, K., Schiffman, R. F., and Raikes, H. H. (2006). The meaning of "good fatherhood": Low-income fathers' social constructions of their roles. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 6(2), 145-165.
- Sweetman, P. (2003). Twenty-first century dis-ease? Habitual reflexivity or the reflexive habitus. *The Sociological Review*, 51 (4), 528-549.
- Taniguchi, T. (2006). Men's and women's volunteering: gender differences in the effects of employment and family characteristics. *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 35 (1), 83-101.
- Thomson, P. (2008). Field. In M. Grenfell (Ed.), *Pierre Bourdieu – Key concepts*, pp. 67-81. Durham, UK: Auman Publishing Limited.
- Tierney, W. G. (2003). Undaunted courage: life history and the postmodern challenge. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), pp. 292-318. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tolson, A. (1977). *The limits of masculinity*. London: Tavistock.
- Vera-Sanso, P. (2001). Masculinity, male domestic authority and female labour participation in South India. In C. Jackson (Ed). *Men at work: Labour, masculinities, development*, pp. 179-197. London: Frank Cass.
- Wacquant, L. J. D. (1994). Toward a social praxeology: The structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology. In P. Bourdieu and L. J. D. Wacquant, *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, pp. 1-59. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Walker, K. (1994a). Men, women, and friendship: what they say, what they do. *Gender & Society*, 8 (2), 246-265.
- Walker, K. (1994b). "I'm not Friends the Way She's Friends": Ideological and Behavioral Constructions of Masculinity in Men's Friendships". In M. S. Kimmel & M. A. Messner (Eds) (2010). *Men's lives (8<sup>th</sup> Ed)*, pp. 303-315. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Walker, K. (1995). "Always there for me": friendship patterns and expectations among middle- and working-class men and women. *Sociological Forum*, 10 (2), 273-296.
- Walsh, D. (1998). Doing ethnography. In C. Seale (Ed.). *Researching society and culture*, pp. 217-232. London: Sage.
- Warren, T. (2007). Conceptualizing breadwinning work. *Work, Employment and Society*, 2 (2), 317-336.
- Waters, L. E. & Moore, K. A. (2002). Predicting self-esteem during unemployment: The effect of gender, financial deprivation, alternate roles, and social support. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 39 (4), 171-189.
- Wen Wei Po (2009, November 9). A hundred and sixty thousand jobs are replaced, men in Hong Kong are losing power and are becoming the weak. p. A13. (in Chinese)
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1 (2), 125-151.
- White, N. R. (1994). About fathers: Masculinity and the social construction of fatherhood. *Journal of Sociology*, 30 (2), 119-131.
- Whitehead, S. (2002a). *Men and masculinities: key themes and new directions*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Whitehead, S. (2002b). Social and political aspects of men's health. *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 6 (3), 267-285.

- Williams, D. G. (1985). Gender, masculinity-femininity, and emotional intimacy in same-sex friendship. *Sex Roles*, 12 (5/6), 587-600.
- Williams, R. A. (2009). Masculinities and fathering. *Community, Work & Family*, 12 (1), 57-73.
- Willis, P. (1979). Shop-floor culture, masculinity and the wage form. In J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson (Eds.), *Working class culture: Studies in history and theory*. London: Hutchinson, in Association with the CCCS, University of Birmingham .
- Willott, S. A. & Griffin, C. E. (1996). Men, masculinity and the challenge of long-term unemployment. In M. Mac An Ghail (Ed.), *Understanding masculinities: social relations and cultural arenas*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Willott, S. A. & Griffin, C. E. (1997). 'Wham bam, am I a man?': Unemployed men talk about masculinities. *Feminism & Psychology*, 7(1), 107-128.
- Willott, S. A. & Griffin, C. E. (2004). Redundant men: Constraints on identity change. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 14 (2), 53-69.
- Women's commission (2011). *What do Women and Men in Hong Kong Think about the Status of Women at Home, Work and in Social Environments?* HK: Women's Commission.
- Wright, C. R. (1986). *Mass communication: A sociological perspective* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Random House.
- Yeandle, S. (2003). Family, life course and labour market detachment. In P. Alcock, C. Beatty, S. Fothergill, R. Macmillon, S. Yeandle (Eds.), *Work to welfare – How men become detached from the labour market*, pp. 162-186. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Zang, X. W. (2006). Social resources, class habitus and friendship ties in urban China. *Journal of Sociology*, 42 (1), 79-92.

Zuo, Jiping. (1997). The effect of men's breadwinner status on their changing gender beliefs. *Sex Roles*, 37 (9/10), 799-816.