Gender roles and media images

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Introduction

When a baby is born, the first question people ask is, "A boy or a girl?"

Sex plays a central role in the formation of our identity. For young children, the colors of their clothing and toys are usually the first means of socializing them into boys and girls. When they grow up, parents, teachers, church leaders, and peers teach them specific personality traits that are desirable for males or for females. "Boys never cry," or "Girls should be kind and gentle," are examples of the personality traits assigned to a particular sex. Socialization takes place in the school setting. Boys take courses about use of tools while girls take home economics courses.

In modern society, the media plays a significant part in the construction of appropriate or inappropriate gender roles. For example, a strong male character is eager to provide physical protection for his girlfriend when she is being harassed. A single mother shows great persistence in raising a family. Through observing the rewards and punishments demonstrated in media content, young people are able to rehearse mentally what will happen to them if they are put in a similar situation. The media images we consume carry abundant information about gender roles.

Hong Kong has a media saturated environment. Television is an obvious source of commercial, social and entertainment messages. In Hong Kong televised messages can be found at home, in various forms of public transportation, inside lifts and lift lobbies, in large public areas such as shopping centers, and on the Internet. Hong Kong is a city with a rich diversity of print-based media outlets with newspapers and magazines being the traditional sources of editorial and advertising content. Posters and other forms of discrete printed advertisements are nearly ubiquitous in Hong Kong from billboards alongside the road to posters and screens in nearly all modes of public transportation. Finally, the Internet has become a staple of life and provides a wealth of text and image driven content from

traditionally formulated and produced commercial messages to user-generated content of every imaginable type and configuration.

People in Hong Kong are exposed to images, ideas and stereotypes and the sources go well beyond the perceived singular dominance of television that is found in media effects and content analysis research. Young people, and particularly young women, adolescent girls and tween girls (10–12 years olds who are not quite teens but have different interests than younger children), are exposed to messages that tell them how they should act, how they should look and who they should idolize. Primary among these messages are advertising, and content analysis research tells us that advertising is filled with gender-based stereotypes and role definitions that may or may not be consistent with social or cultural norms and the development of the woman or girl according to her potential (Moon and Chan, 2002).

Three main types of female stereotypes were found in Hong Kong's media (Fung and Yao, 2012). First, there was the prevalent emphasis of having a slim body figure as the ideal beauty standard (Lee and Fung, 2009). Second, females were portrayed as less knowledgeable as well as less logical than males (Bond, 1991). Third, the ideal modernized female was portrayed as someone who was achieving in work but at the same time caring and loving in the family context. These females were perfect workers and leaders, as well as perfect mothers and wives (Fung and Yao, 2012; Lee, 2004).

Media learning research, including Bandura's social learning theory (1986), Gerbner and his colleagues' cultivation theory (1994), as well as Hirschman and Thompson's media image interpretation strategies (1997) tell us that these messages have an effect on the individual's sense of self and behavior. What is missing is an understanding of the process from the message to cognition and behavior through the individual's exposure, attention and perception. This is particularly true in the multi-channel media environment that currently exists globally and is expressed fully in Hong Kong.

Consumers and advertisers are growing-up in a visual age, and are accustomed to using the computer as a portal into the worlds of information, entertainment, buying, selling, working, and communicating. Images play an important role in each of these spheres of activity (Belk and Kozinets, 2005).

This introductory chapter reports a study that asks girls aged 10 to 12 to collect images and discuss their interpretation of these images. Using a visual qualitative approach, the study reveals how processes such as social learning occur in the real world.

The Tween Market Segment

Tween is a sub-teen consumer segment (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003; Siegel *et al.*, 2004). The segment is defined by age and the concept is based on the idea that these children are "in-between" childhood and teen-hood (Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Siegel *et al.*, 2004). Most commonly tweens are defined as 8–12-year-olds (Siegel *et al.*, 2004). In the present chapter, we focus on the 10–12-year-olds, which we consider to be the older part of the tween segment. This phase of life is of particular interest because of the salience of sexuality during this phase, not just for the young people themselves, but for the adults who impose all sorts of disciplinary practices on them (Ho and Tsang, 2002). Tweens are also considered to be powerful influencers of their parents' consumption as well as consumers with a considerable direct consumption of their own (Andersen *et al.*, 2008). Lindstrom (2004) proposed that the global direct- and indirect-tweens' consumption was no less than 1.18 trillion US dollars in 2003. Although some scholars considered the tweens a global market segment, recent empirical studies found that tween consumption and responses to marketing communication were motivated differently in cultures of individualism and collectivism (Andersen *et al.*, 2008).

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Gender and Gender Equality

While sex is a biological phenomenon, gender is a psychological and social phenomenon that describes the cultural associations and expectations relating to one's biological sex (Rice and Dolgin, 2005). Sex differentiation takes place as children gradually learn to be masculine or feminine according to culturally established gender identification expectations (Trepanier-Street *et al*., 1990). Gender roles refer to the behaviors that men and women are expected to engage (Rice and Dolgin, 2005). According to the social learning theory, a child learns sex-appropriate behaviors through a combination of reward, punishment, direct instruction, and modeling (Bandura, 1986). Media offer many behavioral models for their audience and therefore have the potential to play a part in gender role socialization (Wong and Chan, 2006). Geen (1994) suggested that children might not imitate the behaviors shown in media immediately, but would store the information in memory and retrieve it later in real life situations. Children are more likely to imitate behaviors performed by the same-sex, which are defined as "gender appropriate" for them (Bandura *et al*., 1961), rather than those by the opposite-sex individuals (Bussey and Perry, 1982).

As a former British colony, Hong Kong has laws protecting women from gender bias in terms of education, employment and pay package (Chan, 2000). Hong Kong provides nine-year free education to all children, both males and females. In 2011, the proportion of females with tertiary education stood at 26%, close to that of males at 29% (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). Because of improvements in education, economic development, and the influence of the Western feminist movement, the status of women in Hong Kong has achieved significant improvements in the last two decades (Lee and Collins, 2008). In terms of social economical development and availability of education for women, Hong Kong is compatible with many western societies. The female labor participation rate for Hong Kong is 53% (Census and Statistics

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Department, 2012), which is lower than 58% in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The Hong Kong Government takes an active role in promoting gender equality. The Equal Opportunities Commission was established in 1996 and introduced the Sex Discrimination Ordinance. The Women's Commission was set up in 2001 to promote the well-being and interest of women in Hong Kong (Lee and Collins, 2008).

As a Chinese society, Hong Kong is paternal-oriented. The Confucian Chinese tradition favors males as they are responsible for passing down their family names. Chinese culture accords greater esteem, privileges, and status to males and there are more restrictive prescriptions for the role of women. Women are expected to submerge their individuality to the family, following the orders of their fathers when young, their husbands when married, and their sons when widowed. The virtues for a woman are defined narrowly in her role as a wife and a mother (Cheung, 1996). The first female elected member of the Legislative Council in Hong Kong occupied a seat on the body in 1991. In 2012, women occupied 29% of the elected member seats on the Legislative Council (Legislative Council, 2012). Females make up over half of the work force in the region but have difficulties in securing leadership positions. There was a sharp falloff in women at higher levels in business in 2006 (The Women's Foundation, 2006). At low income level jobs, female workers earn 15–25% less money than their male counterparts (Census and Statistics Department, 2012). A survey found that 50% of both male and female respondents agreed with the statement that women should focus more on the family than work, and 39% agreed that men performed better at political leadership than women (Women's Commission, 2010). Some scholars attributed the gender stereotypical attitudes to the deep-seated mindset that had been inherited from families, the education system, and the society (Fung and Ma, 2000). In another survey, only 28% of respondents considered that women could "fully realize their potential" (Women's Commission, 2003).

A recent review of the status of girls and women in Hong Kong by Choi and Cheung (2014) concluded both good and not so good news. On the one hand, there have been achievements in gender parity in terms of opportunities in receiving higher education, enrolment of females in science and engineering programmes at universities, economic gains in employment, general maternal health of mothers, as well as improved control in family issues such as decision to work and have children. However, Hong Kong females still have ways to go for advancement in politics and public life, leadership in employment, and an even distribution of domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, there are more females suffering from poverty than males. Women are often victims of physical abuse by their intimate partners. Migrants and ethnic minority females often suffer from social discrimination (Choi and Cheung, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This section reviews briefly theories about the relationship between gender representations and subsequent influence of the representations on the adolescents. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) and the cultivation theory (Gerbner *et al*., 1994) form the bases for a great deal of media effects research from the empirical social scientific perspective. These theories focus primarily on television effects, with little or no consideration of the matrix of media inputs that people encounter in everyday life. Williams' and Williams' (2000) studies of media consumption and effects in Southern Africa considered media consumption as a complex integration of multiple inputs that reached far beyond television alone. This recognition of multiple media inputs is becoming increasingly important in the Internet age as people around the globe are decreasing their use of television while increasing their use of the Internet and diversifying their sources of information and entertainment.

Gidden's theory of structuration (1991) proposes that the social structure, represented by traditions, institutions, moral codes, and norms of doing things, is the outcome of the repetition of the decisions of individual choices. However, when people opt to ignore the social structure, or replace them by alternative ways of doing things, the social structure will change (Gauntlett, 2008). The Equal Opportunity Commission advocates more gender-sensitive policy making, promoting gender equality at work and encouraging females to speak out against inequality (Lam, 2011). With the recent improvement in education of females, and the social environment toward a more gender equal society, male dominance and female submission may be changing in Hong Kong and across greater-China.

Compared to other socialization agents such as parents, teachers, and religious leaders, adolescents have more control over their media socialization. They can select media information that best suits their interest (Arnett, 1995). How do adolescent audiences respond to media images? Hirschman and Thompson (1997) proposed three interpretive strategies to create user-media relationships. Media users may aspire, reject, or personalize media images. The first strategy is aspiring: a media image is perceived as an ideal self-image that media users can aspire to. It contributes to the development of a desired and ideal self-concept, value, belief, and characteristic similar to the ideal image. The second strategy is rejecting: media users criticize the media image. It emphasizes the separation of the self-concept and the undesired media images. As a result, the media users do not want to be the person in the media. The third strategy is identifying: media users relate their self-concept to the ideal images found in the media. They reflect and personalize their own values and beliefs, and conceive them to be united with the person portrayed in the media (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997).

What will be the consequences of the media users exposing to stereotypical female media images? Smith and Granados (2009) proposed three possible effects. First, as females are less often

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portrayed as central figures in the media, media users may think that women are less valuable than men in the society. Second, the portrayal of gendered occupations in the media will lead to a strong belief that certain jobs are appropriate for females while other jobs are appropriate for males (Herrett-Skjellum and Allen, 1996). This view may affect the choice of education and career for the females. Third, the perfect beauty standards and body images for females may lead to female dissatisfaction of their own body (Grabe *et al.*, 2008). It may create the belief among boys and men that females are to be valued for their physical beauty. Males may have unrealistic expectation about the beauty standards of their female partners (Fung and Yao, 2012).

Tween Girls' Gender Roles and Media Images

A study was conducted in March 2009 in Hong Kong. Altogether 16 girls aged 10 to 12 participated in the study. Prior to a face-to-face interview, each interviewee was asked to take 7 to 10 digital photographs each day for a week. The instruction was "please take images from any media that are about what girls or women should be or should not be, and what girls or women should do or should not do. These images can come from all sorts of media, including newspapers, magazines, outdoor posters, television programmes, MTR posters, web sites, books and so on. The media should be the one you will expose to or sometimes use in your daily lives. The media can be aiming at people like you or aiming at people who are different from you."

The image collection week was followed by an interview. The interview involves a review of the photos and the interviewees' interpretation of these images. Results of the study have been published in three journal articles and a book chapter. They have been rewritten and updated to form Chapters 1 to 4 of this book. Further details of the study and the published works can be found in the Appendix.

What Girls Should or Should Not Be

Interviewees were asked what girls or women should be or should not be, with reference to the digital images that they had taken. Table 1.1 summarizes the results. Altogether 62 responses were reported and were classified into five major themes. The themes were:

(1) Personality;
(2) Skills and vocation;
(3) Appearance;
(4) Manner and relationships;
(5) Healthy and natural

Table 1.1 Summary of results for
"What girls or women should be or should not be?"

Theme (total frequency)		Frequency
Appearance (12)	graceful and presentable	3
	tidy appearance	3
	hair not messy or too short	2
	not too skinny	2
	white teeth	2
Healthy and natural (7)	have a healthy and vital image	4
	strong physically and mentally	3
Manner and relationships (8)	courteous and patient	4
	not promiscuous	3
	not out-of-sense in idol worship	1
Personality (22)	be yourself, be what she want to be, not artificial	7
	brave	6
	caring	4
	gentle	3
	cheerful	2
Skills and vocation (13)	knowledgeable and sensible	6
	hardworking and organized	4
	engage in profession	2
	be a good housekeeper	1

Theme 1: Personality

The theme that received the largest number of responses was about personality, i.e., *what kind of person the interviewee should be*. Interviewees mentioned eleven different personality traits for girls and women. The personality traits that appeared the most frequently in the interviews were: be yourself, be brave, and be gentle. Seven out of sixteen interviewees mentioned that girls should be themselves. Here is how they think about "being yourself":

> *"They should be what they want to be. Like in the past, girls could not go to school, and they couldn't play sports. But now they can play sports and they can go to school. People think girls are dumb. If they could go to school, girls can show that they are smart. If you play sports, you can be strong. If boys bully you, you can beat them up." (age 10, an international school student)*

> *"She seems to be confident. It is about sometimes you have to be yourself and you don't need to pretend. If girls do not be themselves, they will look artificial.*

> *Sometimes they will twist their voices and pretend to be nice but this is not the way they usually talk. For example, when they are having a job interview, they pretend to be very, very nice so that people will hire her. Or when they are talking to the customers, they pretend to be very nice and try to please the customers." (age 10, a local school student)*

In the first quote, being oneself means the right to choose her path. Education and physical well-being are the basis for girls to pursue their dreams. In the second quote, being oneself means not trying to pretend to be somebody else in order to please others. Both quotes emphasize autonomy and independence.

Six interviewees reported that girls should be brave. An interviewee showed a picture of a female air traffic control officer

from a newspaper and commented that she is brave. She also showed the picture of a female actor and commented that she was brave.

> *"The air traffic control officer is always a job for boys. She doesn't mind being teased by others and takes the job. She works day and night and is very hard working. I think girls can take up all kinds of job. There should be no problem if she can do it"* (age 10, a local school student).

In this quote, the interviewee perceived that a girl should show no fear in facing difficulties and adversity, including criticism and mistreatment. Another interviewee commented that girls should not be frightened in any situation and should do what is right.

Three interviewees reported that girls should be gentle and not rude. An interviewee mentioned that girls should not use violence to solve problems. Other personality traits brought up by interviewees indicated that girls should be caring and cheerful.

Theme 2: Skills and vocation

The theme that received the second largest number of responses was about skills and vocation. This category covers *what kind of job she should take and what kind of skill set she should have.* Six interviewees mentioned that women should be knowledgeable and sensible. Being knowledgeable and sensible refers to possessing the knowledge, having good judgment, and creative. Four mentioned that women should be hard working. One interviewee said that a woman should be a good housekeeper as "boys have absolutely no talent in housekeeping." Here are two typical quotes:

> *"I think girls should be knowledgeable. Being knowledgeable makes it easier to gain recognition in society"* (age 12, a local school student).

> *"I think women should have good judgment because there are many big and small things in life that require*

women to make decisions. [What are examples of big and small things?] Big things, such as teaching children; small things, such as buying clothes and shoes" (age 12, a local school student).

Theme 3: Appearance

The theme that received the third largest number of responses was about physical appearance. This category *describes how girls and women should look*. Interviewees thought that girls should be good-looking and presentable. They felt a girl should be neat and tidy, as well as not messy. From the adjectives they used, interviewees seem to emphasize the social aspects of physical appearance. They perceived that a girl or a woman's appearance should be acceptable to others. An interviewee showed a model in a fashion magazine and commented,

> *"Girls should not look horrible. Look at this picture. Her hair covers her eyes and her clothes are weird. She is really ugly." (age 10, a local school student)*

An interview paid a great deal of attention to the details of appearance. Here is the image and her comments:

> *"Girls should have a presentable image. Their teeth should not be yellowish and should be white. The outlook should be tidy and not dirty. I think they should have vitality. Girls should not look sleepy. A sloppy outlook will have bad impression on others. The ladies in this picture look graceful and poised, with proper and*

Figure 1.1 This trendy fashion model is considered ugly to some interviewees

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Figure 1.2   Women with feminine-looking are considered beautiful by most interviewees

neat dresses." (age 12, a local school student)

Most of the pictures considered as good appearance by interviewees demonstrated a classical type of beauty. The models were usually in the age range of 20 to 25, feminine-looking, wore soft and feminine apparel, and with some make-up. The photos and the transcripts showed that interviewees were conservative. Trendy fashion models were often considered as deviant from the norm, and therefore inappropriate.

The ways Hong Kong tween girls' perceived gender roles and gender identities are based on a mixture of traditional and contemporary role models. On the one hand, they believe that girls and women should pursue their dreams, be themselves, and enjoy life. They are looking for egalitarianism, independence, and liberation. On the other hand, they believe that girls and women should have a presentable appearance, good manners, and be nice to others. All of which fall within the traditional image of femininity. It reflects both a western individualistic culture that assesses the identity of self and others based on personality traits as well as a collectivistic culture that assesses the ability of maintaining harmonious relationships with others (de Mooij, 2010).

Tween girls demonstrate an understanding of the social pressure exerted on females in society and the difficulties for females to excel. Good physical appearance is highly desirable and interviewees hold vivid and detailed definitions of it. Drastic body movement is considered rude and inappropriate along with dramatically colored

hair, heavy makeup and intensely colored fingernail polish. In the western culture, the body is viewed as part of the identity and desirable appearance is related with greater self-esteem (de Mooij, 2010). Tween girls' perception of desirable appearance is related mainly with social acceptance. It again reflects the influence of collectivistic culture that one's identity is the group (de Mooij, 2010). The overwhelming acceptance of a classical definition of beauty may be related to prevalence of such images in the print media. A content analysis of advertisements in a popular Hong Kong weekly magazine found that two thirds of the advertisements with female characters portrayed them in classic/feminine type of beauty (Chan and Cheng, 2010).

The social learning process was demonstrated by interviewees in this study through modeling and identification. The interviewees paid much attention to media celebrities, and often made reference to them in defining physical beauty and moral codes. The finding is consistent with previous observation on adult men that celebrities provide a reference point through which personal identity can be understood (Horsley, 2006). Further elaboration of the influence of media celebrities on tween girls can be found in Chapter 3.

Theme 4: Manners and relationships

This theme describes *what girls and women should be in the public sphere and when they interact with others.* Interviewees reported that girls and women should be courteous, refrained, conservative in sexual relationships, and not out-of-control in the worship of celebrities, music stars and film stars. Here are two quotes:

> *"This is a picture of two characters in the novel 'Pride and Prejudice.' They are shameless and they always do something annoying in the public. And they talk about everything without knowing right or wrong. Woman should not be like that." (age 12, a local school student)*

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"There was news several months ago about a girl who worshiped an idol. She counted down the days of her idol showing up in a function. Before the function started, the girl fainted. I don't remember if she fainted or died. I think idol worshiping is OK, as long as they don't go crazy about it." (age 12, a local school student)

In the first quote, the interviewee suggested that girls and women should watch out for their manner in the public. In the second quote, the interviewee commented that girls should exercise self-control. In other transcripts not quoted, interviewees mentioned that girls should not be promiscuous and should not have too many sex partners.

Theme 5: Healthy and natural

This theme *describes the physical and mental well-being of girls and women.* Interviewees reported that girls and women should be healthy, strong, drug-free, engaging in exercise, and energetic. They should not have an eating disorder. Some girls took images of public services health campaigns to support their viewpoints.

What Girls Should or Should Not Do

Interviewees were asked *what girls or women should do or should not do, with references to the digital images that they had captured.* Table 1.2 summarizes the results. Altogether 168 responses were collected and classified into six major themes. Just the sheer number of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors reported gives us the impression that interviewees have strong and vivid pictures about "dos" and "don'ts" of being a girl or a woman. The themes were:

(1) Appearance;
(2) Health and safety;

(3) Relationships;

(4) Activities, interest, and lifestyle

(5) Caring for people and environment;

(6) Work and others

Theme 1: Appearance

The theme that received the largest number of responses was about appearance, i.e., *what kind of clothes a girl should wear, whether a girl should use make-up, or how should a girl look*. Interviewees demonstrated a strong rejection of sexy clothes, heavy make-up, and the alteration of body through cosmetic surgery. The definition of sexy clothing varied among interviewees. One considered clothing that exposed the belly and the shoulder sexy while another considered any clothes that were revealing in nature to be sexy. Regardless of their specific definitions of the concept, interviewees indicated that wearing sexy clothes was indecent, weird, or dangerous. This is a comment made on sexy clothes by an interviewee,

Table 1.2 Summary of results for
"What girls or women should do or should not do?"

Theme (total frequency)		Frequency
Appearance (48)	not wear heavy make-up	8
	not wear sexy clothes	8
	dress properly and tidily	6
	natural hair (not messy/not dyeing/not too short)	5
	not have cosmetic surgery	5
	not make too big body movement	4
	wear smile	4
	have tidy nails	3
	wear bright-color clothes	3
	proper posture and eye contact	2

Table 1.2—*continued*

Activities, interest, and lifestyle (24)	enjoy life and have fun	14
	not fighting / not engage in contact sports / not use violence	4
	express feelings	3
	read books	3
Theme (total frequency)		**Frequency**
Care people and environment (23)	take care of the family members	8
	help the needy	6
	look after the environment	4
	take care of animals	3
	not use violence	2
Health and safety (33)	not smoke / not drink / not take drug	13
	stay healthy / do exercise	10
	eat properly / not lose weight drastically / not take weight loss pills	5
	hurt herself or commit suicide	3
	not encounter with strangers	2
Relationships (28)	maintain good relationship with husbands and family members	7
	not being taken in nude pictures	5
	not have sexual relationship or pregnant before marriage	5
	possess honesty in courtship	4
	develop and maintain friendship	3
	marry and have a family / children	3
	have a religion	1
Work (6)	have achievement and integrity at work	4
	focus on school work	2
Others (6)	not get into debts	4
	not break the rules	2

"They should not wear so few clothes. Exposing too much of the body for others to see is not right." (age 10, a local school student)

The wearing of make-up was generally acceptable among the respondents. Heavy make-up and cosmetic surgery were not acceptable because it made a girl or woman look unnatural. They also considered fashion trends such as dying hair, wearing colorful nail polish and any exaggeration of particular features were not acceptable. Drastic body movement was considered as rude and not gentle. Here are two examples,

"This girl spreads her legs apart. She should not do it." (age 10, a local school student)

"This model is walking with the hip swinging from side to side. The movement is too drastic and is not natural." (age 12, a local school student)

Figure 1.3   Drastic body movement is considered as rude by some interviewees

Despite attempts by parents, government and society to restrict access to sexually explicit materials, these materials are present and available to the tween girls in Hong Kong. Images showing a naked man and a naked woman embracing together were collected by the interviewees from newspapers and magazines. The interviewee who took the images described them as disgusting or ugly.

The tween girls in Hong Kong demonstrated conservative attitudes toward sexuality. They rejected sexy clothes, heavy make-up, and cosmetic surgery. In spite of heavy bombardment of slimming advertisements in Hong Kong, tween girls rejected practices that claimed to reduce weight drastically. All these suggest that tween girls aspire to "natural" beauty.

Interviewees' definition of sexiness showed a wide range of standards. Sexy clothes were rejected because of potential danger or indecency. Images suggesting homosexuality were scorned by interviewees. These findings are consistent with the dominant discourses on parenting and education in Hong Kong that put emphasis on female chastity (Ho and Tsang, 2002). Adolescent sexual expression is constructed as "deviant" and is usually associated with danger, moral problems, crime and psychological disorder (Ng, 1998; Wong, 2000). A few interviewees took photos of explicit sexual materials that they came across. Even though they condemned the images for indecency, the taking of these photos indicated that tween girls had interest and curiosity to know more about their own sexual identity and sexual life-world.

Several interviewees brought up that it was inappropriate for females to allow others to take nude pictures of them. This was probably triggered by a sex scandal involving Edison Chen, a popular Hong Kong singer. Nude and more than suggestive photos of his sexual partners were released through the Internet. The female popular singers involved in the scandal suffered immediate damage to their careers as companies pulled out product endorsements and performance contracts. At the time of the data collection,

the scandal was revitalized with the press reports of the court testimony and the public apology of a female singer involved. The scandal appeared to be a real-life social learning experience for the tweens. Several interviewees reported that females should not allow others to take nude pictures of them and another interviewee said girls and women should never put 100% trust in their boyfriends. Interviewees seemed to perceive that females were vulnerable and suffered great loss in reputation in a sex scandal.

Theme 2: Health and safety

The theme that received the second largest number of responses in terms of "dos" and "don'ts" was about health and safety issues. This category covers *what kind of activities may enhance or threaten the well-being of females*. Nearly all interviewees mentioned that girls and women should not engage in unhealthy behaviors including smoking, drinking, and taking drugs. Ten interviewees mentioned that women should do exercise to keep them healthy. Five interviewees commented that females should not adopt dramatic measures in losing weight.

Theme 3: Relationships

The theme receiving the third largest number of responses was about relationships. This category describes *how girls and women should interact with others*. Family plays an important role among interviewees as seven of them mentioned that females should love their husbands and children. Interviewees were concerned about protecting themselves from hurts in courtship or sexual relationships. Several reported that they should never let their boyfriends take nude pictures of them. Five interviewees disapproved of pre-marital sex or pre-marital pregnancy. Kissing another girl in public was considered disgusting because it violated the social norms about marriage.
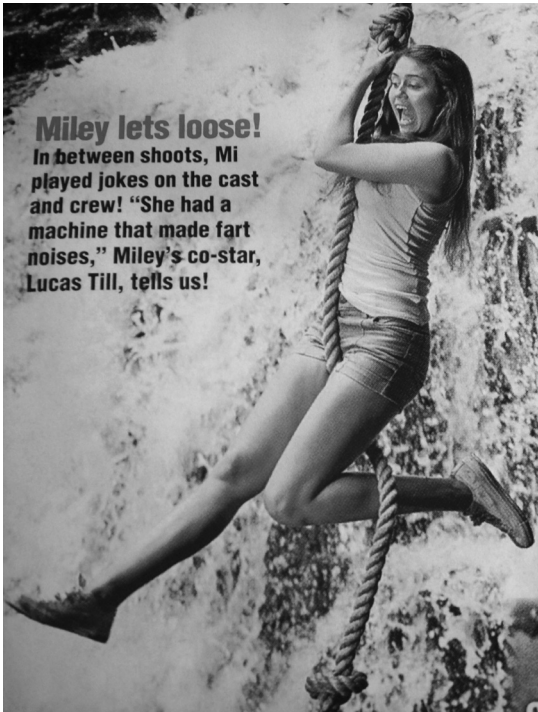
Theme 4: Activities, interest, and lifestyle

Interviewees mentioned this theme 24 times. They remarked that *girls should engage in leisure activities, go out with friends and enjoy life.* Having fun and enjoying life were mentioned 14 times. Interviewees commented that girls deserve a life full of fun and excitement. Girls should travel, eat, read and try to be happy. Even when they were in bad mood or adversity, they should not hurt themselves but have a positive attitude toward life. Four interviewees disapproved of rough activities, including fighting and contact sports.

Figure 1.4   Interviewees remark that girls should engage in leisure activities

One typical quote for girls to enjoy life was:

> *"She (Miley) is an actress. This is a beach vacation where you can do water sports or things that are fun to do. Another thing that's really fun to do is writing or singing songs that have good meanings. These things are what girls should do." (age 11, an international school student)*

Theme 5: Caring for people and environment

Twenty-three responses brought up by interviewees were about caring. The theme describes the love and concern for others and

the willingness to make an effort for social causes. Interviewees reported that girls and women should take care of their loved ones. In-marriage pregnancy was considered as a demonstration of caring, while pre-marital pregnancy as too much uncertainty. One interviewee said,

> *"If she's gonna give birth to kids, they should be ready. They should be older than 18. Otherwise, the kid may need to be sent to the foster home and you don't know what may happen to the kid." (age 12, an international school student)*

One interviewee reported that females should help the needy such as those who have suffered from earthquakes. Four interviewees mentioned that girls and women should take a part in protecting the environment.

Tween girls in Hong Kong showed concern about global as well as domestic social agendas. Traditional stereotypes portray females as dependent, submissive, and primarily interested in her home life (Rice and Dolgin, 2005). The interest in non-domestic issues should be good news to educators and parents as less rigid gender roles may encourage tween girls to gain freedom to pursue their interests.

Environmental awareness coupled with the awareness of undesirable consequences associated with taking drugs, drinking and driving, and smoking may point to the effectiveness of the Hong Kong government's public health and safety publicity channeled through the schools and the mass media. Previous study indicated that adolescents and young adults in Hong Kong place a great deal of trust in public services advertisements. The government was perceived as a credible source for health and safety related advices (Chan, 2010). The government should therefore use their apparent influence to design age-specific communication messages for the tween segment to advocate a position on important social causes and advance global improvement for humanity and the environment.

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Theme 6: Work and others

The last theme groups together *how girls and women should approach their studies and work*. Interviewees reported that girls and women should make every possible effort in their school work and excel in their occupation. Four interviewees commented that females should not spend lavishly while shopping and get stuck in credit-card debts.

Tween girls in Hong Kong consume a variety of media, including cable TV, television, newspapers, magazines, books, subway posters, outdoor billboards, video games and the Internet. Interviewees showed tremendous interest in adult-oriented contents across media. Lack of print media specifically for the teenagers and tweens may account for the heavy use of media for adults. An interviewee reported that girls should not be caught up in debt. She cited a Cable TV programme about a female financial analyst helping a couple to face the family financial crisis. Some of them were also exposed to explicit sexual content and pornography. Parents and educators should be aware of the accessibility of these materials for tween girls and should take initiative to discuss with them the meaning of these images and contents.

The social learning process was demonstrated by interviewees in this study through modeling and identification. There is empirical support of Hirschman and Thompson's (1997) interpretive strategies. For example, a female interviewee showed aspiration of a female traffic control officer who survived a tough career choice. The interviewee wanted to be brave in finding her own dream. Interviewees criticizing the sexy female media images demonstrated the rejecting strategy. They thought that the values and behaviors of these females were undesirable. Interviewees' appreciation of vital and presentable female images demonstrated the identification strategy. Interviewees perceived that the way these females in media dressed and behaved aligned with their own values and beliefs. The interviewees paid much attention to media celebrities, and often made references to them in defining physical beauty and moral

codes. The finding is consistent with previous observation on adult men that celebrities provided a reference point through which personal identity could be understood (Horsley, 2006). Further elaboration of the influence of media celebrities on tween girls can be found in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis of interviews and images found that tween girls' perceived gender roles for females reflected a mixture of traditional and contemporary beliefs and values. Interviewees were looking for liberation as well as presentable physical beauty in their consumption of media content. The desire to follow their dreams reflects the expression of individuality while the desire for social acceptance reflects the conformity to norms and expectations. The tween girls in Hong Kong demonstrated conservatism in sexuality. Sexy appearance and pre-marital sexual relations were considered inappropriate. Tween girls showed concern about global as well as domestic social agendas. They used a variety of media and showed interest in content primarily created for adults.

In the next three chapters, we are going to elaborate the findings from the same study, putting emphasis on sexuality of girls, the role of celebrities in socialization, and interviewees' evaluation of these images.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: Details of Methodology for Chapters 1 to 4

Contents of Chapters 1 to 4 are generated from a study of 16 Hong Kong girls between the ages of 10 and 12. They were recruited through personal networks. Ten interviewees were studying at local Chinese medium schools and the other six were studying at international schools that use English as the language of instruction. Two interviewees were Caucasians and the remaining 14 were Chinese. Because of the high tuition fees charged, interviewees studying at the international schools mostly come from families with middle to high economic status.

These girls were asked to take photographs of images from any media that shows what girls or women should be or should not be, and what girls or women should do or should not do. The interviews took place at public and private venues including sports centers, schools, and interviewees' homes. The interviews were conducted by the author in a language that the interviewees feel most comfortable with. The interviews took 20 to 36 minutes.

The list of questions asked is:

(1) From these pictures, what do you think about what girls or women should be or should not be?

(2) From these pictures, what behavior(s) do you think are appropriate or inappropriate for girls or women?

(3) Who create these images and why do they create them in this way?

(4) Are you satisfied with the way the images of girls or women are created now?

(5) If you were a media owner and/or a media producer, what would you do in constructing images of young girls or women?

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed or translated into English by a female graduate research assistant

hired for the project. All the responses generated from the first two questions were listed out and input into an excel file. The author sorted the answers into what girls or women should be if it was a description of a person and likewise sort the answers into what girls or women should do if it involved a specific action or behavior. The findings from the photos and the interviews were compared across the sample. Marshall and Rossman's (1999) comparison analysis method was used throughout the data analysis process to link data by constantly comparing and contrasting them (Strauss, 1987). The transcripts were analyzed question by question for dominant themes in the interview protocol.

Results of the study have been published in the following publications. We have permissions from the publishers to rewrite them and incorporate them in this book.

Chan, K. (2012). "Pre-pubescent girls' evaluation of female images in media," *Journal of Children and Media, 6*(3), 384–399.

Chan, K. (2011). "What pre-teen girls learn about gender roles from celebrities," *Journalism and Mass Communication, 1*(2), 79–87.

Chan, K., Tufte, B., Cappello, G., and Williams, R. B. (2011). "Tween girls' perception of gender roles and gender identities: A qualitative study," *Young Consumers, 12*(1), 66–81.

Chan, K. (2011). "Tween girls' sexuality and a media scandal in Hong Kong," in Feilitzen, C., Carlsson, U. and Bucht, C. (Eds.) *Yearbook 2011 New Questions, New Insights, New Approaches: Contributions to the Research Forum at the World Summit on Media for Children and Youth 2010* (pp. 109–122), Sweden: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, ISBM 978-91-86523-21-3

We have made effort to recruit interviewees from a diversified background. Due to our limited social network, six out of the 16 interviewees had Christian background. They either studied in Christian schools or were raised by Christian parents. This may account for their sexual conservatism.

Autovideography

The method adopted in chapters 1 to 7 stemmed from the videographic method introduced by scholars Russell Belk and Robert Kozinets. Together they have hosted the Film Festivals at the Association for Consumer Research since 2002. Videographic data can be collected by videotaping group or individual interviews, by engaging in naturalistic observation, by using autovideography (where informants videotapes themselves and their lived experiences), by using concealed camera methods, and by taking advantage of opportunities to use interactive video and computer-mediated communications (Belk and Kozinets, 2005). The method used is a visual adaptation of the autovideography method.

Auto-videography approach was adopted, followed by an individual interview (Belk and Kozinets, 2005). Videographic data were collected by asking interviewees to take photos from the media in their everyday experience. Taking photos is an integral part of contemporary life for today's youth. The advantage of using this approach is that the videographers are more self-directive in their photo-taking, showing what is important to them and what they are interested in rather than what may be of interest to the researchers. It can lead us to see the world as the interviewees see it and to better understand what they want to tell us (Mizen, 2005). Visual elicitation can be conducted from the previous photos the interviewees took in the individual interviews (Belk and Kozinets, 2005).