

**The Making of Taiwanese Young Men:
(De)traditionalization, Consumption, and Blogging in
Late Modernity**

by

Po-Wei Chen

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RESEARCH THESIS

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Abstract

This research explores a particular group of Taiwanese young men and their gendered experiences. It draws upon theories of late modernity, cultural studies, and feminist research. A primary aim is to explore the dialectical interplay between the existing gender configuration and how it is culturally lived out. This thesis argues that through processes of detraditionalization, young men are able to lead a life outside of a traditional gendered route, such as that of an earlier generation. Rather than the 'norm-al' biography, what is endorsed by the younger generation is a 'do-it-yourself' biography. This will be illustrated by the young men's narratives about their gendered experiences in the context of consumption and blogging. However, local tradition does not disappear in contemporary Taiwanese society. Tradition is understood as a complex resource, in making sense of their gendered lives, in relation to a notion of filial responsibility. A generational self-awareness, marked by difference and continuity, is intensified by a tension between existing tradition and processes of detraditionalization. Deriving from cultural understandings of the younger research participants, in comparison to those of the elder generation, this qualitative study endeavours to contribute to the under-theorized notion of tradition in a late modernity framework. It also considers the importance of how gendered reflexivity is unevenly embodied, and has become a contemporary strategy for the continuation of local tradition. By emphasizing the significance of understanding (late modernity) gender and (traditional) culture via their lived experience, this research wishes to bring together some of the experiential, theoretical, and methodological complexity involved in the making of young Taiwanese men.

Keywords: *Taiwanese young men, masculinities, structure and agency, gender reflexivity, strong tradition, detraditionalization, 'do-it-yourself' biography, the reflexive project of the self, consumption and blogging.*

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1.1. What is this thesis about?

‘Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by them, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past’.

(Marx, 1976:72)

This research sets out to understand how a particular group of Taiwanese young men¹ actively make sense of who they are with reference to local tradition and modern technology in contemporary Taiwanese society. More specifically, it is about the stories of young men and their gendered experiences of *being* and *becoming*: sons, fathers, husbands/partners, or simply young men. It is also about how Taiwanese young men constitute their selfhood through an emerging biographical route, i.e. a ‘do-it-yourself’ biography (Beck, 1992) and ‘a reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens, 1991). My specific focus is on consumption and the internet as central to their gendered formation that were not available to men from an earlier generation. Moreover, alongside the generational differences in terms of gendered relations and practices, this research also wishes to uncover the existing social and cultural conditions that lead these young men to experience a particular way of life that is meaningful to them; a way that shares a similar cultural route with Taiwanese men from an earlier generation. In short, this research intends to understand how Taiwanese tradition and cultural materials are selected, reinterpreted, and used by reflexive Taiwanese young men, who are made

¹The term ‘young men’ here refers to research participants from a younger generation in relation to those from an earlier generation in my research. This generational difference is less associated with age differences, but more with the changing generational understandings towards certain concepts such as marriage, family, kinship and consumption (for further discussion see section 3.6.1.) where gendered reflexivity is a key issue. This leads me to maintain that the cultural understanding of what it means to be a young man cannot be fully explained by chronological differences. More specifically, Chris, a 39-year-old research participant (a father of two daughters) may be considered as ‘young’ in the sense that he may experience a similar tension between tradition and detraditionalization as a 28-year-old research participant, DuoDuo when they both talked about what it means to be a man in contemporary Taiwanese society (see section 4.3.2.3. for detail discussion).

simultaneously by this cultural repository they draw upon (also see Archer, 2003; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2003).

1.2. The trajectory of my research

1.2.1. Before my fieldwork: my changing research question and my original theoretical position

As Mac an Ghaill argues (1991:102):‘All ...ethnographies have a hidden history; a narrative of what really happened while “doing ...research”.’ My research originally set out to answer: ‘How can Taiwanese gay men successfully “come out” to their families?’, as a reflection of my own biography (see section 3.5 for further discussion). Scholars such as Mary McIntosh (1968, 1981) provided me with an intellectual spur to critically challenge my original conception: that homosexuality was a natural condition that some people had and others did not. I also learnt how such a label, a relatively recent western invention of sexologists and psychologists, operates as a mechanism of control that defines what is normal and deviant (Bristow, 1997; Foucault, 1979). Rather than attempting to find out the causation of homosexuality, I started to develop a language to think about (homo)sexuality as a *relational* term, and as a continuing process where ‘in terms of behaviour, the polarization between the heterosexual man and the homosexual man is far from complete in our society’ (McIntosh,1981:43; Sedgwick, 1990).

Although social constructionist approaches provided me with a critical framework to rethink my own identity, what remained less explored was the cultural particularity of ‘coming out’ in the context of Taiwan. More specifically, as a Taiwanese gay activist scholar suggests, ‘Can it be that in Taiwan only orphans can “come out”?’ (Ni, quoted in Liu and Ding, 2005: 31). In other words, what if in a society the door of the *closet* is not locked by western notion of ‘homophobia’, but by *the familiar and benevolent hands of the kinship apparatus*. While being

enlightened by (western) identity politics and the insight of poststructuralist scholars, such as Judith Butler's sex as 'a performatively enacted signification' (1990:33), my own cultural experience urged me to ask how the 'performativity' proposed by Butler could be played within the context of family politics in Taiwan. The usefulness of one's own cultural experience is suggested here; it can function as a creative energy for one to examine his/her theoretical position (for further discussion of *experience present perfect* see section 3.5.). At that time, I realized that there was a need to go beyond sexualities, and to relocate myself in a broader context of understanding how contemporary gender structures were operating in Taiwanese society. This particular move repositioned my theoretical inquiry from sexuality to gender and theories of patriarchy. It also shifted my research focus to explore the contemporary gender configuration in Taiwan.

Pro-feminist scholars' understandings of patriarchy and masculinities provided me with a satisfactory, although partial, account of how gendered relations were organized by the ideology of male domination over women and 'other' subordinated men (Hearn, 1987; Brittan, 1989) (for discussion see section 2.2.) In particular, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity was a useful starting point; it helped to explain how Confucian values, as a persisting ideology, shaped traditional male roles in specific ways. For example, I could begin to understand why men from my father's generation had to work so hard in order to support their own families; why boys were treated differently from girls in a traditional family; and why it could be difficult for a gay man to 'come out' to his family since he might be accused of not being a filial son. However, what theories of patriarchy did not explain to me was why many young men from my generation began to pay more attention to their looks or care for their bodies; practices that were traditionally considered as unmanly. What was also left

unexplored, as I learned later on, was how complex multiple male subjectivities are overlooked by pro-feminist scholars' predominant concern with structural determination (Archer, 2004; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003; Middleton, 1992).

Therefore, this curiosity encouraged me to try to make sense of generational differences in terms of gendered practices and helped my research towards studies of young men, masculinities and consumption. What I benefited significantly from the texts I was reading at this time was the recognition of the existing tension between structure and agency. More specifically, while some argue the need to understand changing male imagery originating from young men's changing gendered experiences (Mort, 1989), others insist upon new man imagery as the creation of consumer society (Edwards, 1997), or the production of inter-connected consumer institutions (Nixon, 1996,1997). What further differentiates these scholarly positions is their methodological stances. For instance, speaking from his ethnographic work, Mort (1989; 1996) suggests that it is necessary to understand how the gendered practices of consumption can be actively made sense of by those who engage with them. I came to understand that the notion of consumption can be easily portrayed as the ideological power of cultural industries, which seeks manipulation and domination, if consumption is explored only by formal analysis alone. We may find this tendency in both Nixon's and Edwards's analysis.

Meanwhile, I encountered the CCCS's (Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies) understanding of consumption, where it was suggested that the productive tension between structure and agency needs to be maintained (Storey 1999). Rather than simply celebrating agency or detailing the structure(s) of power, it is necessary to keep in mind the dialectical interplay between agency and structure. This particular stance seems to echo the notion of

consumption postulated by Mort. In particular, both Mort and the CCCS perceive culture as a constructed and contested terrain (Hall, 1980; Willis, 1977). What further articulates Mort's and the CCCS's explanations are their shared ethnographical approach, as to how consumption is made personally meaningful, rather than a totalizing notion that we know all the answers before we ask the questions. One way of operationalizing this is to understand consumption via lived experiences. Accordingly, while Mort set out to understand how new man imagery as a particular gendered form of life is lived out by young men, cultural consumption is perceived as 'a particular way of life' (Williams, 1961) by CCCS (for example see Cohen's study of subculture, 1980 and Willis's study of music use, 1978).

From this perspective, both CCCS and Mort suggest an ethnographical understanding of cultural consumption, where researchers closely observe or directly engage in the daily life of the studied culture. However, this does not suggest that ethnography can give direct access to why and how people consume and turn particular practices into culture. What it does provide access to is people's accounts of what they are doing and why they do it (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Story, 1999). This is a salient point for me in terms of my own research question. Rather than simply asking how gendered structures are operating in Taiwanese society, I wished to understand how such structures are culturally lived out and made sense by agency via negotiation, resistance and appropriation. Accordingly, I reformed my main research question to explore Taiwanese men and masculinities.

1.2.2. During the fieldwork: my current research question and my changing understanding of the self

Entering the field was significant for me in two senses. Firstly, it shifted my theoretical position, and, secondly, it enabled me to perceive the inter-relationship between my theoretical framework and my fieldwork experience as something dialectical that

complexly enacts with each other (Mac an Ghail, 1990). For example, after talking to both younger and elder research participants, I was able to identify their generational differences and similarities in terms of gendered practices; this generational emphasis leads me to propose my current and pivotal research question: 'What does it mean to be a Taiwanese young man?' This was not the original research focus I set out with, and thus there was a need to seek a different theoretical paradigm in order to understand how gender relations are lived out in contemporary societies amongst young men and women. This is where a late modernity framework comes into play (for further discussion see section 1.4.).

Nevertheless, this is only one side of the story. While appropriating analytical concepts such as reflexivity (Giddens, 1991, 1992) and individualization (Beck and Beck-Germersheim, 2002) in order to explore younger research participants' self-related biographies via processes of detraditionalization, what has constantly remained evident was the continuation of certain gendered practices derived from the local tradition. In fact, the continuing legacy of strong tradition, such as kin values as *meaningful practice* was a 'surprise' (Willis, 1980) for me. More specifically, it challenged my original conceptualization of Confucianism as something derogatory, dogmatic and out-of-date. For example, my research participants constantly reminded me how they perceived certain kin practices as *cultural conformity* that helped them make sense of who they were, while simultaneously rejecting other kin practices as *cultural formality* that one ought to carry out (see discussion in section 4.3.3.1). By talking to these research participants, who shared a similar 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) with me, I was able to critically reflect upon my own cultural experience.

The local tradition for a researcher, such as me, who once conceptualized my own cultural experience and upbringing in a negative sense, became a creative energy. It also

enabled me to critically engage with my acquired western academic experience in a more meaningful way. In response to my research participants' narratives, I began to think about the notion of reflexivity postulated by Beck and Giddens. Through Beck, I learned that 'the more societies are modernized, the more agents (subjects) acquire the ability to reflect on the conditions of their existence and to change them accordingly' (Beck, 1994:174). However, what Beck did not tell me was why these research participants, who came from a relatively advantaged social and economic position were able to reflect upon local tradition as a familiar cultural route and meaningful practice; a route that might not be so different from men from their fathers' generation. Through Giddens, I learned how an increasing self-monitoring capacity enabled an individual through agency to reflect upon his/her self, where identity is a state of making: 'we are, not what we are, but what we make ourselves' (Giddens, 1991:75). However, what was left unexplained by Giddens was why younger research participants were able to appropriate the existing Taiwanese tradition as useful cultural material, rather than simply dismissing it, in making their own reflexive project of the self.

While C. Wright Mills (1959) has suggested the need for researchers to reflect on their biographical experiences in producing their intellectual work, Williams (1989) explains how the *ordinary* culture of one's own can function as a meaningful interpretive scheme that helps one to make sense of the social world he or she inhabits. Hall (1990, 1996) also informs us how one's own cultural roots can empower one to begin to make sense or intelligibility of one's historical situation, where identity is not only a process of being but also of becoming. However, all these insights only made sense after my fieldwork experience. I shall discuss my theoretical perspective and my methodological stance in later sections (1.5 and 1.6). At this point, I want to maintain that, unlike the scientific object-subject monitoring relationship, my

fieldwork findings do not serve as the testimony of any pre-existing theoretical framework. Rather, my fieldwork experience has actively constituted and challenged my own analytical framework and theoretical disciplines, while simultaneously being interpreted and made sense of by them. Rabinow (1977:5) is right to suggest the significance of 'the comprehension of self by the detour of the comprehension of the other'. It is through the detour of my own cultural experience and the comprehension of *familiar others* that I have developed my own position.

1.3. The trajectory of Taiwanese research on men and masculinities

The Electronic Theses and Dissertations System (ETDS 全國碩博士論文資訊網) is usually the place where Taiwanese academics begin their research. Implemented by the National Central Library in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, the ETDS - as one of the most comprehensive research systems - includes studies from the 1950s to the present time. However, in comparison with feminist studies, it does not take one long to realize that the study of men and masculinities in Taiwan is relatively underdeveloped (most of the texts are masters dissertations). This may be explained by the rapid development of feminist movements in Taiwan since the end of the 1980s (Chang, 2003), whereas studies of men and masculinities did not come into mainstream academic discussion until 2000 (Bi, 2003).

1.3.1. From sex role theories to theories of patriarchy

In terms of Taiwanese studies on men and masculinities, there has been a theoretical shift from sex role theories to theories of patriarchy. For example, early research, particularly within departments of education, tended to focus on the development of sex roles and their attendant factors amongst adolescents (Che, 2003; Kuang, 1994; Kang, 2004). In a recent

context, rather than adopting the usual quantitative approach, researchers have used qualitative methods to focus on exploring masculinities within the context of sexual politics in primary school life (Li, 2007), the high school's gendered curriculum (Lin, 2005), the interplay between anti-sexual harassment and boyhood (Chen, H.-F. 2006), and male (head) teachers' pedagogical experiences (Hung, 2006; Chi, 2001).

1.3.2. From traditional areas of sociology to culturally based consumption

In terms of research focused on men and masculinities, there is also a shift in emphasis from more traditional areas of sociology to a culturally-based consumption. In terms of the former, fatherhood is one of the most researched areas, where researchers have examined the continuation of traditional male values (Tsai, 2006), ethnicity (Chen, P.-C. 2007), and father-daughter relationships (Chen, P.-J., 2006). Others have examined changing fatherhood, such as men's gendered awareness of equal parenting (Hsu, 2005), and unconventional fathering amongst single father families (Wang, 2005). Researchers have also identified the process of feminization and its potential indication of a changing gendered configuration. For example, some have explored how male cosmeticians actively challenge heterosexual normality (Guo, 2008), whereas others have explored how men, who participate in conventionally female orientated occupations, such as home-carers (Chen, K-j. 2002) or social workers (Yeh, 1998), negotiate their gendered positions in relation to traditional male norms. Researchers have also argued how gendered hierarchy is still maintained in male-dominant occupations, such as the army (Kao, 2005), or police force (Wu, 2007).

Since 2004, research on men and masculinities has increasingly focused on consumption with particular reference to men's lifestyle magazines. For example, Yuan's

(2007) quantitative research suggests how the changing front page male imagery of men's lifestyle magazines has challenged traditional understandings of male codes. However, derived from Connell (1995), Yuan further argues that what is simultaneously embodied by such a change is a new form of dominant male imagery, associated with globalization and its hegemony. A different account is provided in Pei's (2004) comparative study of textual analysis between men's and women's periodicals. Pei argues that there has been little change in the representations of men and women. By this, she means that male and female imagery is anchored by conventional gendered codes in men's lifestyle magazines, where men are portrayed as rational consumers and secure their heterosexuality by sexualizing or objectifying women. A similar line of argument is put forward by Hsu's (2006) textual analysis on male periodicals for younger male readers. Unlike Pei's insistence on persisting conventional gendered roles, Hsu acknowledges the changing imagery of young men. However, similarly to Nixon (1996), Hsu argues that what organizes these new male representations are *old* gendered hierarchies (exemplified by homophobia or 'sissy-phobia'), that maintain the prerogative of heterosexual normality.

Chang (2006) deploys textual analysis, but adopts a very different position from the previous researchers. His postmodernist reading of male periodicals suggests that the imagery of young men has changed, implying a loosened gender binary in contemporary Taiwan (also see Sun, 2008). In other words, gender has been denaturalized and androgyny is now available as fashion signs for young men to appropriate. Underlying this denaturalization is a narcissistic maleness; a new gendered male code that amplifies the pleasures of consumption rather the obligations of economic production for men. This narcissistic maleness is further examined by K.- L. Chen's (2007) exploration of the interplay for men between reading

lifestyle magazines and their practices of consumption in everyday life. As one of the few qualitative studies in Taiwan, in terms of consumption and masculinities, Chen explores how Taiwanese young men enjoy new types of gendered practice (e.g. the application of skincare, make-up, or fashion consciousness), while simultaneously negotiating their gendered position within traditional male values. For Chen, these new gendered practices are justified by his research participants as a necessary artifice to fulfil the new demands of the labour market. More specifically, Taiwanese young men realize that their appearances and looks are part of the product being sold. Therefore, to take care of one's looks is to make one more employable and successful in the workplace; a value that is endorsed by the traditional male norm. Consequently, it may be argued that young men's practices of consumption and their narcissistic maleness are more to do with consumerism and market demand; it is less to do with the changing gendered configuration in contemporary Taiwanese society. This methodological stance has also resonated with my own research.

1.3.3. Research methods on consumption and masculinities: from textual analysis to ethnographic research

Throughout the overview above, one can suggest that consumption has increasingly become an important cultural tenant for researchers to examine the contemporary gender configuration in Taiwanese society. In terms of methods, most studies are based on textual analysis, and tend to understand masculinity and consumption via male imagery. Few of them (except Chen, K.-L. 2007) have situated their research among young men and their daily experiences. (We can also find a similar pattern amongst English scholars on masculinities and consumption, see section 2.3.) Consequently, as McNay (1999) argues, research of this sort tends to equate the epistemological position or politics of the researcher with actual

cultural practices, while simultaneously conflating complex processes of social and political transformation with the researcher's own presumptions. Accordingly, textual analysis may overlook how the complexity of gender configuration is lived out by young men; consumption becomes a cultural practice that can be carried out without the subject, or being theoretically interpreted by the subjective position of the researcher in terms of either voluntarism or structural determination.

K.-L. Chen's (2007) analysis, by contrast, has attempted to overcome this conceptual inadequacy by exploring male readers' experiences of consumption and their cultural reading of men's lifestyle magazines (see Lin, 2006 for female experiences). However, Chen's insistence upon a pro-feminist framework (with reference to Connell, 1995) leads him to perceive new man imagery as a strategic inclusion of hegemonic masculinity. In turn, he discounts the complex gendered awareness of his research participants, who can reflexively comment upon and distance themselves from misogynist messages and stereotypical heterosexual discourses produced by male periodicals (see K.- L. Chen's discussion 2007:64-73). Perhaps, if one wishes to unpack the gender configuration and gender relations in contemporary Taiwanese society via consumption, one needs to ask, why in this particular historical juncture consumption has become an important cultural repertoire for young men to make sense of who they are. In other words, rather than unpacking gendered relations primarily via changing male representations, it is important to examine changing the social conditions that enable young men to choose consumption as a gendered practice (rather than traditional ones), as of primary significance in shaping their particular way of life. In so doing, one is able to provide a systematic understanding of how the gendered configuration is lived out in contemporary Taiwanese society, where consumption is not the catalyst, but the effect

of such social transformations. This particular stance will be elaborated in my own data analysis (see **Chapter 4** for discussion).

1.3.4. The absence of a late modernity framework

Late modernity theorists (Beck et al, 1994; Giddens, 1991, 1992; Lash and Urry, 1994) have suggested that lifestyle consumption, alongside information and communication flows, have become important cultural fields to make sense of identity formation in contemporary western societies. To some extent, this echoes the research trajectory on young men and masculinities in Taiwan. More specifically, alongside consumption, the internet in general and online games in particular have also drawn researchers' attention to explore the assumed shifting gendered configuration in contemporary Taiwanese society (Chiu 2007), or assumed changing male identity formation (S. - T. Chen, 2004; Y.- Y. Chen, 2007). Although Taiwanese research focusing on men and masculinities has explored the prominent features of late modernity, such as consumption and information and communication structures, late modernity theorists, such as Beck, Giddens, and Lash are *seldom* deployed by these researchers (see Y.- L. Chen, 2003 for exception). In particular, key terms such as detraditionalization, individualization, a 'do-it-yourself' biography, and reflexivity appear to contribute little to the studies I have discussed earlier. This is not to suggest that the processes of detraditionalization are not occurring in Taiwanese contemporary society. Rather, it is suggested that a late modernity framework seems to be left out from the intellectual map in contemporary Taiwanese society in relation to studies of men and masculinities. This is not surprising if one realises that the diasporian intelligentsia, who returned to Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and contributed significantly to the infrastructure of the academic landscape in Taiwan, were mainly from America. European

and English theorists seem to draw less attention within Taiwanese mainstream academic discourse. One example is the significant contributions from queer studies², feminist research and identity politics in Taiwan during the early 1990s, whereas cultural studies (CCCS) did not make its presence in academic discussion until 1998, in which class analysis was absent (K.-S Chen, 2000). The absence of class analysis is an important issue and I shall discuss this in the following section.

1.4. 'Middle class' or a 'socially and economically advantaged group'?

The concept of 'class' appears to be a less visible category for most Taiwanese researchers carrying out studies on men and masculinities. For example, I found only one research study via ETDS that directly addresses masculinity and class (and two are about masculinity and 'brotherhood' in labour movements, see Chen, 1995; Hu, 2006). In *Gender, Class and the Making of Motorcycle/Scooter Users in Taiwan*, (2006) Liu argues that gender and class relations are embedded in social history through the ownership of motorcycles/scooters in Taiwan. In other words, through a historical analysis of the accessibility and the design of the motorcycle, Liu attempts to demystify how the motorcycle in different historical junctures signifies the social status, class production, and female participation in the workplace in Taiwan. Although Liu continually addresses the significant role of class, he did not define it clearly. Firstly, Liu argues that the motorcycle is 'a toy for rich men' (2006:26). By a rich man, based on his interviewees' occupations, he means a medical doctor, a butcher, a shop owner, or a yeoman. Later on, derived from Xu (1987), Liu defines the

² For Taiwanese studies on men and masculinities with reference to gay men see Pei's (2001) study on gay men's experiences in the military service, Tsai's (2006) problematization of heterosexual normality via 'Ge-Di' complex and 'gay brotherhood', and C.-C. Chen's (2006) research on how feminine gay men challenge hegemonic masculinity.

middle class in Taiwan after 1960s as 'public servants' and 'petite bourgeoisie'. Based upon Bourdieu (1984), Liu further argues that the particular brand of motorcycle has become a distinctive taste for the middle class to differentiate themselves from the working class.

However, whether or not we can directly apply western definitions of class and its assumed political consciousness to specific social groups in order to understand class consciousness and practice in Taiwan is an unsettled debate amongst Taiwanese sociologists, who are interested in social inequalities (Huang, 1999; Qu, 1998; Xiao, 1989; Xue, 1997; also see Devine et al.'s discussion of complexity of understanding class in the Western context, 2005). More specifically, due to its own historicity and the economic structure, the definition of class and class consciousness in Taiwan appear to be more ambiguous than that in western societies. In terms of historicity, after the Kuomintang-led Republic of China government was defeated by Communist forces and fled to Taiwan, martial law was imposed from 1949 in order to suppress Communist activities and was not lifted until 1987. During this period, major national corporations were mainly government owned and therefore under the control of the Kuomintang party (and Mainlanders). Consequently, the major conflict between workers and employers in Taiwan was more to do with ethnic inequality between Mainlanders and local Taiwanese. Therefore, it is not surprising that the nationalist discourse (i.e. the Taiwan independent movement) and anti-Kuomintang campaign were appropriated by the early labour movements in Taiwan (Hu, 2006).

Unlike the long history of the industrial revolution in the West, before the 1960s, economic activities in Taiwan were based mainly on agriculture. It was not until the 1970s that Taiwan developed an industrialized economy. In the 1980s, the economy in Taiwan

flourished due to small and medium sized enterprises. An ambiguous class consciousness was further contributed to by this particular economic structuring in Taiwan. Guang's (2001) quantitative research on class consciousness in Taiwan suggests that Taiwanese entrepreneurs from traditional or small and medium sized enterprises, who tended to perceive themselves as working class rather than middle class, due to their participation in frontline production (Huang, 1999; also see Archer and Francis, 2006)

The analytical invisibility of class also leads Kuan-Hsing Chen (2000), one of the initiators of cultural studies in Asia, to wonder why class analysis, which functions as a creative and critical framework for cultural studies in England makes a limited theoretical contribution to Taiwan scholarship.

Is it because class has not become the major conflict in Taiwan? Is it because labour movements were not as successful as women's movement in terms of constitutional impact? Or is it because of the researcher's blindness of class consciousness? Or is it because the communist-phobia in Taiwan where as long as one has mentioned the labour movement, one is perceived as the member of the Communist Party of China?

(Chen.2000:10, my own translation)

Chen did not provide us with an answer to his questions, yet we can understand, perhaps, the definition of class is less straightforward than Taiwanese researchers often assume, particularly for qualitative researchers who may wish to ask what class means in particular social and cultural contexts before applying it.

However, in suggesting this, I am not arguing that social and economic positions play insignificant roles in shaping one's gendered understandings. Rather, as I shall demonstrate in my own analysis, a shared privileged social and economic position enables my research participants to articulate the notion of a gendered reflexivity in a particular cultural

way. More specifically, what I am suggesting here is that the researcher should not simply impose his or her own analytical classification upon the researched and produce an analysis that is a self-filling prophecy. Therefore, rather than directly deploying class, one needs to uncover the *shared biographical routes* amongst these research participants that enable them to actively select, appropriate, and use existing cultural values and materials to make sense of the world they inhabit.

My discussion of the significance of the economic level is productive to the extent that one needs to bear in mind how particular social and economic positions provide the raw materials of thoughts and cultural artifices for a specific group of people. However what the economic cannot do, as Stuart Hall (1996:44) reminds us, is to determine ‘the contents’ of the particular thoughts of particular social groups or to fix or guarantee which ideas will be used by particular groups. For the reasons I have discussed so far, I decided to use ‘socially and economically advantaged group’ rather than ‘middle class’ to describe the shared position amongst my research participants. Accordingly, I do not include middle class in my thesis title, not only because of its ambiguity in the context of Taiwan, but also since the intention of this research is to discover the nature of gendered practices amongst Taiwanese young men and then the conditions that help to produce such practices (Williams,1980), rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, in my own analysis, I shall illustrate these conditions by situating gendered reflexivity in context.

1.5. The theoretical perspective of my research

I have discussed so far the substantive issues and the trajectory of my research, and provided a brief review on Taiwanese studies of masculinities. In terms of discussions of masculinities and consumption, Taiwanese researchers tend to provide a textual analysis with

reference to pro-feminist or post-modernist frameworks. In response, I have identified the need to include the insights of qualitative research in order to explain what consumption and its gendered practices mean to Taiwanese young men. I have also suggested that there is a need to examine consumption beyond male representations. In other words, one needs to explain why in this particular historical juncture lifestyle consumption has become an emerging cultural way of being for Taiwanese young men to realize 'a life of one's own' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:55). In order to do so, I theoretically locate myself within a late modernity framework, alongside cultural studies and late modernity feminists, in order to provide a different gender lens to interrogate how changing social conditions are understood and lived out by my research participants.

This analytical move is not simply a reflection of my own academic biography. Rather, it emerges from both (i) experiential and (ii) analytical experiences. In terms of experiential (i), as I have discussed earlier, deploying a late modernity framework is an outcome of my fieldwork experience. After listening to both younger and elder research participants' life stories, I have learned how gendered concepts such as marriage, family and kinship are interpreted differently. More specifically, when I asked the elder participants: 'What are the obligations for men from your generation?' All of them suggested a coherent answer: to be a man is to get married, work hard and support your family, and have a son that carries on the family name. When I asked younger research participants about the obligations for men from their fathers' generation, their answers were congruent with the one given by elder research participants. However, when I asked the research participants from both generations about young men's obligations in contemporary Taiwanese society, few of them could give me a straightforward answer, despite the fact that the elder research

participants often commented upon young men for being irresponsible, hedonistic, and individualistic. As a researcher, it is worth asking 'what is going on' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), when a similar question is understood in very different ways. My fieldwork experience urged me to search for a new theoretical paradigm in order to explain the generational differences in the Taiwanese men's gendered practices.

At an analytical level (ii), a late modernity framework is particularly productive in my research context. First of all, it recognizes processes of detraditionalization that free agency from the existing social structures (Beck, et al. 1994; Lash, 1994). In the context of my research, this can usefully explain why younger research participants are enabled to choose *not* to get married and therefore have no need to support their own family when they reach their 20s; the 'norm-al biography' usually performed by men from an elder generation. It also provides an analytical framework that allows reflexive agency to come into play (Beck, et al, 1994). Consequently, a late modernity framework can help identify the signs of changing gender relations by allowing one to reflect upon the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991, 1992) and the social conditions of their existence (Beck, 1992).

However, this is only the beginning of my analysis. To primarily base my analysis upon a late modernity notion of freed agency means that I am not able to explain the tension between existing local tradition and the drive for individualization. An overemphasis on freed agency, that can transcend the disembedding tradition without constraints, leads to an under-theorized notion of tradition in late modernity (Delanty, 2005). Accordingly, Beck's and Giddens's late modernity theories fail to explain why the community values and collective activities continue to constitute a particular way of life among young Taiwanese men based

on the local tradition (see Lash's reflexive communities for exception, 1994). This is where late modernity feminists, alongside cultural studies (Williams, 1961, 1976), come into play. Scholars such as McNay (1999) and Adkins (2002) provide a critical analysis of the *uneven* processes of detraditionalization. In particular, McNay (1999:103) has suggested how gendered reflexivity and its sense of uneasiness are rendered by an existing tension between 'entrenched' gendered experience, and the ideal of performing an individualized life. This sense of uneasiness is particularly useful to capture how my research participants are constrained, on the one hand, by existing traditional expectations towards men, and are wrenched, on the other hand, by the desire of 'a life of one's own'. It is through this gendered reflexivity that I hope to develop an understanding of what it means to be a (young) man in contemporary Taiwanese society.

Gendered reflexivity further highlights not only the articulation of reflexive agency, but also the continuation of local tradition. Derived from Williams (1977:112), one can understand how strong tradition and its hegemonic position are 'continuingly renewed, recreated, defended and modified' through its contemporary strategies. At the same times, tradition in its weak form is also 'continually resisted, limited, altered challenged'. (I shall explain these two processes in the next chapter.) Therefore, strong tradition, as an interpretative scheme, opens itself up for selection, use, and reinterpretation, where reflexive agency can come into play. Moreover, by synthesising McNay's gendered reflexivity and William's notion of tradition, I argue that gendered reflexivity is a necessary creative energy and a contemporary strategy for the existence of strong tradition. Paradoxically, however, it is also through this gendered reflexivity that one can document how the processes of detraditionalization *unevenly* take place.

Accordingly, a main argument of this thesis is that a late modernity framework is most fruitful if one maintains the productive tension between structure and agency by understanding gendered reflexivity as the production of the interplay between tradition and detraditionalization. In so doing, I have endeavoured to recognize existing gendered structures and cultural norms, alongside the limits and uneven embodiment of reflexivity, while simultaneously documenting how research participants actively appropriate cultural meanings to make sense of the gendered self. Central to my examination is an exploration of the theoretical tensions that have become apparent by *simultaneously* examining approaches to gender relations in late modernity, including feminism, studies on masculinities and cultural studies (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007).

1.6. My methodological position: reflexivity in context: experience present perfect

A key contribution of my research is to demonstrate that the *ordinary* culture of one's own can be appropriated as a creative energy for *doing* research (Mills, 1959; William and Gable, 1989). In particular, this is illustrated by my methodological attempt to capture the gendered experiences of Taiwanese research participants and how they understand gender relations in changing social conditions. The shared 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) between the researcher and the researched informs from where I am speaking (Hall, 1990). However, the appropriation of one's own cultural experience can be less critical than one may intend. Feminists usefully remind us not to rely only on one's own experience as the most immediate means of reasoning as this can exclude other kinds of "authentic" experience (Scott, 1991). The appropriation of experience may further lead to a *moving scholarly self* but *stationary others* (Probyn, 1993), where the authorized experience only allows certain people, not all, to make a reflexive claim (Adkins, 2002). Bearing these issues in mind, I have

attempted to provide a situated methodological framework that enables me to theorize research participants' gendered lives and their cultural experiences.

I understand experience from two of its prominent features: (i) *experience past* and (ii) *experience present* (Williams, 1976). The former (i) emphasizes the materiality of experience, providing the conditions or systems that shape how one unconsciously makes sense of the world. This can be understood, as I shall discuss in detail in **Chapter 3**, by what Bourdieu terms the 'scholarly gaze' (see Wacquant, 1989), where he endeavours to overcome the epistemological authority via participant objectivation (Bourdieu, 2003). The latter (ii) - originating from personal experiences - is often articulated by the fullest, most open, and active kind of consciousness, and claims to provide the most authentic kind of truth. I will critically evaluate experience of this sort via feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1987, 1991) and anthropologists' notions of *author-ity* (Malinowski, 1922; Rabinow, 1977; Clifford, 1983).

In developing my methodological position, I argue that there is a need to synthesize *experience past* and *experience present* by conceiving experience in terms of present perfect. In so doing, I have endeavoured to critically examine, firstly the interplay between structure and agency, and, secondly, the dialectical enactment between my academic and cultural experience. The emphasis on dialectical interplay is important since it enables me to postulate a kind of a materialised experience that is never fully incorporated with structures (Bulter, 1999). Accordingly, by *experience present perfect*, I understand how past experience, operating as a source of knowledge, continually has its impact upon how one perceives the world at the present time. Knowledge of this sort can open itself up for selection and interpretation for

one's own appropriation. It is always ready to be challenged and altered. From this perspective, *experience present perfect* is understood synonymously as one's analytical 'habit' rather than the scholarly habitus (Adkins, 2003), that forms one's conceptualization. We can also explore *experience present perfect* through the gendered reflexivity amongst the research participants, as I hope to develop throughout my own analysis.

Through *experience present perfect*, I intend to show the trajectory of my research; a trajectory that is constituted by the tension between my analytical framework and my cultural experience (including my upbringing, daily practices and fieldwork experience). In so doing, I am able to capture the dialectical interplay between these two experiences, while simultaneously allowing me to critically examine from where I am speaking or writing (Hall, 1990), and 'how it is that I am speaking' (Probyn, 1993:80). Furthermore, the speaking position of the researcher is examined by cultural feminist techniques of telling the self (Probyn, 1993; Skaggs, 1997, 2002), and Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence (1992). In other words, through the critical intervention of my *experience present perfect* and the relationship between the researcher/researched, I hope to sketch out a reflexive *self* and *moving others* that makes my research transparent and responsible.

1.7. Structure of the thesis

This research endeavours to provide a social and cultural understanding of what it means to be a young man in contemporary Taiwanese society. The generational emphasis, as a reflection of the academic and cultural biography of the researcher, has helped shape the questions that this thesis addresses through a critical examination: how is gender lived out by the research participants in their everyday life practices? To what extent have the young men's lives been transformed? How can we provide an explanatory framework for the

(dis)continuity in relation to the local tradition and the changing social conditions in a global context? How does gendered reflexivity in late modernity help us to make sense of the gendered configuration in contemporary Taiwanese society? Similar questions in a western context have been answered by a growing number of popular and academic texts adopting late modernity theoretical frameworks (e.g. Adkins, 2002; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Jamison, 1998; McNay, 1999). Accordingly, what is continually enacted is an existing tension between social (structural) and cultural (agentic) studies of masculinities and gender practices in late modernity. As I have argued earlier, a late modernity framework can provide an insightful account, if one maintains this productive tension between structure and agency. Therefore, this productive tension will be documented throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2, **Literature Review** critically examines the main sociological and cultural studies approaches to understanding men and women within a broader context of social changes. I provide a systematic overview of the field, in an attempt to produce a theoretical synthesis of the main approaches to masculinities and gender practices with particular reference to (i) pro-feminist positions (ii) consumption, (iii) detraditionalization, and intimacy. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide my analytical framework, which signposts the usefulness of maintaining the productive tension between structure and agency in making sense of masculinities and gender practices in contemporary societies.

Chapter 3, **Methodology** documents the trajectory of my research and provides my situated reflexivity that helps me to theorize research participants' experience, to identify the relationship between my theoretical framework and fieldwork experience, and to critically examine the relationship between the researcher/researched. This chapter continues to

explore the tension between *experience past* (structure) and *experience present* (agency). As a response to my analytical position, I have attempted to synthesize these two experiences in order to trace the trajectory of my research, while simultaneously problematizing my own academic and cultural experience.

Chapters 4 and 5 are presentations of my **Data Analysis**. In **Chapter 4**, **Data Analysis I**: “From ‘A Life for Others’ to ‘A Life of One’s Own’- Taiwanese Young Men, Masculinities and Consumption in Late Modernity”, I have illustrated young men’s gendered practices of consumption as an effect of late modernity. This can be explained by younger research participants and their endorsements of a ‘do-it-yourself’ biography, where consumption is one of its key articulations. At the same time, I have documented the existence of strong tradition as a meaningful practice. By synthesizing a late modernity framework with cultural studies, I argue that gendered reflexivity has become a creative energy, allowing one to actively select, reinterpret, and use available cultural materials to make sense of the social world one inhabits.

Chapter 5 **Data Analysis II** “Blogging Masculinities: Young Men, Identity Formation and Cyber Flâneuring” demonstrates, from an experiential level, ‘the reflexive project of the self’ via younger research participants and their cultural practice of online blogging. It also provides a critical analysis of male identity formation in late modernity by developing a feminist framework, in order to understand the gendered structure of the blog world. A main aim here is to perceive blogging as a gendering /gendered practice that the research participants actively negotiate, resist, or comply with in the context of a male order in the blog-world.

Chapter 6, the **Conclusion** provides an overview of my research by discussing its theoretical, cultural, and methodological implications. This is followed by a critical examination of the limitations of my research. Reflecting upon my own study, two directions for further research are suggested: (i) from responsibility to respectability (Skeggs, 1997; 2005) – a cultural understanding of a respectable Taiwanese young man, and (ii) implications for social inequality and policy in terms of care-giver for the elderly in Taiwan.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

- 2.1. Introduction
 - 2.2. Patriarchy and masculinities
 - 2.2.1. Jeff Hearn: gender oppression
 - 2.2.2. Arthur Brittan: masculinism and power
 - 2.2.3. R. W. Connell: hegemonic masculinity
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 - 2.3. Masculinities and consumption
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 - 2.4.1. 'Reflexivity' in late modernity
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 - 2.4.4.1. Antony Giddens: disclosing intimacy and gender equality
 - 2.4.4.2. Lynn Jamieson: intimacy as care
 - 2.5. Conclusion
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2.1. Introduction:

In this chapter, a critical review of earlier and more contemporary studies of masculinities and gender practices will be provided. Through this, I hope to map out an analytical framework in which to situate my own research. This chapter will be divided into three sections: (i) structural analysis of patriarchy, (ii) social and cultural analysis of consumption, and (iii) gender relations in late modernity. At the beginning of the literature review, (i) I will examine pro-feminist scholars' accounts of a more complex relationship *within* and *between* genders. One of the strengths of looking at masculinities orchestrated by patriarchy is that it enables us to perceive different male experiences in relation to male domination. Paradoxically, though, this can lead to a dualistic gender division that excludes, on the one hand, multiple and reflexive male subjectivities, and perpetuates, on the other hand, a collective social position of male domination. In response to this conceptual limit, Connell initiates a more dynamic understanding of gender configuration that makes possible an internal transformation of gender structures. By referring to the dominant male position as a cultural ideal, Connell's hegemonic masculinity is always the outcome of struggles, reached by consensus, and readily contestable. This prompts us to perceive gender configuration as something unsettling rather than static. This particular stance will be relevant to my understanding of local tradition and its hegemonic position in contemporary Taiwanese society. The discussion of pro-feminist scholars contributes a critical framework for my research in the sense that they illustrate the importance of maintaining a structuralist position for exploring gender and masculinities.

In the second part of the literature review, (ii) I will discuss the existing theoretical tension between structure and agency in relation to consumption and masculinities. Throughout the review, it is suggested that new man imagery can be interpreted differently in

accordance with researchers' different responses to a suggested contemporary crisis in masculinity. The unsettled debate about changing masculinities via new man imagery is further contributed to by the methodological position of the researcher. In terms of my research, as a response to such a theoretical tension, it is important to maintain that one should not perceive consumption simply as structural domination or the celebration of agentic practices. One also needs to recognize how gender relations are actively lived out rather than being simply *read off* by social researchers. In short, what we need to bear in mind is the dialectical interplay between structure and agency (Storey, 1999).

The last part of my literature review focuses upon processes of detraditionalization in late modernity, where the tension between structure and agency continues to be documented. In a late modernity framework, agency is perceived as something freed and reflexive in the sense that traditional values and cultural norms are no longer applicable - one is able to and has to live the life of one's own. This can be understood in relation to the changing concept of family and kinship. However, in the context of my research, it is argued that a Taiwanese strong tradition does not disappear; it reinvents itself as a contemporary strategy and becomes *meaningful practice*. Accordingly, I shall provide a theoretical account of what I understand by strong tradition. This can be further explored by my theorization of family practice and responsibility. As a main argument for my research, a late modernity framework is most useful when the location of culture is identified via the processes of detraditionalization. It is through reflexivity that local tradition has reinvented itself and is been lived out in its contemporary form. In what follows, I shall begin with pro-feminist discussions of masculinities, gender and power.

2.2. Patriarchy and masculinities

2.2.1. Jeff Hearn and gender oppression

Working on the established model of patriarchy, pro-feminists endeavour to illustrate a more complex picture of male domination. For example, scholars such as Jeff Hearn (1989) call for the need to intervene in the overinflated concept of patriarchy (also see Walby, 1990). As a response to second wave feminism and men's movements, Hearn (1987) interrogates, on the one hand, how a structured relation of oppression is secured by men's domination over women, and, on the other hand, how this structured relation is complicated by the oppression that men experience, especially from each other.

Hearn's analysis rests predominantly on a Marxist tradition. However, rather than simply understanding patriarchy through economic inequality, Hearn innovatively understands women's oppression not from a perspective of economic production but biological reproduction. Building upon Marxism's relations of production, Hearn suggests that male domination is perpetuated by sexual classes and by the appropriation of women's reproductive labour. The attempt here is to indicate symptomatically how birth is conceived as a 'natural' fact that normalizes the hierarchical relationship amongst different sex classes. In particular, as Hearn points out, through reproduction, one can uncover how patriarchy and heterosexual normality are maintained by men's exploitation of women's bodies and their reproductive labour.

In addition, for Hearn, it is this shared experience of exploitation amongst women rather than a class division that provides a pathway to the logic of patriarchy. For example, an upper class woman can be materially better off than her working class counterpart, yet if we consider gender exploitation from a sexual class division perspective, we can analyze the

exploitation of female sexuality, body and fertility across social groups. From this particular stance, Hearn is able to provide a gender theory of the social totality without being constrained by economic determination.

If biological reproduction provides an explanation for women's oppression, it is the institutions of patriarchy that keep men themselves under the surveillance of a gendered hierarchy. By institutions of patriarchy, Hearn refers to the socially constructive ideology of being an appropriate man in both public and private worlds through hierarchical heterosexuality, fatherhood, professions and the state. It is through institutions of patriarchy that men dominate and oppress women, while simultaneously competing with each other. For example, gay men or feminine men can be accused of not being straight enough. Working class fathers may be blamed for not being as successful as David Beckham or Bill Gates. Masculinity therefore is understood by Hearn as a set of signs that indicates the social position of a man in negative terms in relation to others; by proving that he is *not* a woman, *not* a child, or *not* gay. Thus, masculinity is diverse, socially constructed, and is not reducible to personal traits. Accordingly, through institutions of patriarchy, one can understand how different men and masculinities are orchestrated by a structured gender configuration. Consequently, it is necessary to address differentiated forms of male domination and masculinity by examining the specific conditions that give rise to those situations.

Hearn is aware of different lived experiences of men. Yet, even though men can be soft, liberal, and sympathetic towards, their children, colleagues, and women, the institutions of patriarchy remain 'intact as a potential or actual means of oppression' (Hearn, 1987:96). In

order to provide a materialist analysis that resolves the tensions between structural determination and agency and its diverse lived experiences, Hearn postulates that '[while] "men" persist in the base of reproduction, masculinities persist in the "ideology" of production' (ibid:98). Therefore despite class differences amongst men, it is the shared structural location of them in both production and reproduction that determines their masculine prerogative within patriarchal societies.

The usefulness of Hearn's analysis is to identify the complexity of different men's experiences in relation to a single ideology. This particular stance may help us to understand that Confucianism, for example, can be lived out in different forms amongst social groups of men, while explaining that although sons are more likely to be expected to take care of the elderly in Confucian societies, it is the daughter-in-law, who carries out the actual practice of care-giving (Bian et al, 1998; Choi, 1993; Shi, 1993; Wolf, 1985; Yamamoto and Wallhagen, 1997). Throughout the previous discussion, it is suggested that for Hearn gender relations appear to be oppositional rather than relational. This dualistic understanding makes it difficult to recognize a gender configuration that may go beyond a static notion of male domination. This particular stance will continue to be examined in the coming paragraph.

2.2.2. Arthur Brittan and masculinism

Working within broadly pro-feminist approaches, the notion of patriarchy is continually interrogated by Arthur Brittan (1989). Similar to Hearn, Brittan asserts that 'the category of "man" is not neutral - it implies power and domination' (ibid: 109). In order to accommodate more complicated relationships *between* and *within* gender, Brittan differentiates masculinity from masculinism: the former refers to male behaviour that fluctuates over time, whereas the latter is male ideology and its obsession with power and male domination.

In terms of masculinity, Brittan suggests, it is important to talk about masculinity in the plural, since it is always subject to change and needs to be culturally contextualized. In this sense, masculinity is almost like a fashion trend, historically constructed and locally diversified. The changing concept of fatherhood can be a good example (Pleak and Pleak, 1997). Moreover, how men behave will depend upon existing gender relations; the changing definition of masculinity will not only mirror these changing gender relations but also the power operating within the gendered structure. However, according to Brittan, styles of masculinity may change, yet men's obsession with power does not since the ideology of male domination maintains that gender is not negotiable. From this perspective, paternity may change but such a change does not signal men's general abdication of power.

Brittan's explorations of masculinity and masculinism are a critical response to a traditional Marxist analysis of patriarchy. More specifically, similar position to Hearn, Brittan argues that one cannot fully understand patriarchy only through relations of production. Brittan also agrees with Hearn that biological differences between men and women, and men's appropriation of women's reproductive labour are central to understanding how masculinism is played out. This masculine ideology further provides a rationale for gendered oppression and violation. What makes Brittan different from Hearn and other traditional Marxist analysis is his antithetical application of base/superstructure. In other words, rather than the economic base determining the ideological superstructure, for Brittan, masculinism is a transcending ideology over class relations. This conceptual shift in his analysis is able to open up the notion of multiple masculinities while simultaneously maintaining a consistent ideology of patriarchy.

Brittan's insightful account explains to the compulsion of ideology that can transgress class boundaries. Derived from this position, we may further suggest how the persistence of Confucianism and its kin values exists across different social and economic groups in contemporary South East Asian societies (Ng et al, 2002; Sung, 2007; Sung and Kim, 2009). However, Brittan's premise seems to suggest that masculinism cannot be altered or challenged. This leaves no room for individual manoeuvres and negotiations, where agency is conceived as mere submission to a dominant ideology. In the following section, a more dialectical understanding of patriarchy will be discussed through Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity, where gendered configuration is perceived as something dynamic and capable of being internally generated.

2.2.3. R. W. Connell and hegemonic masculinity

Holding on to the centrality of women's oppression, and working against the biological determinism of sex role theory and its inability to grasp concepts of power, Connell's (1987) early work endeavours to explain how masculinities as personal life and collective social arrangements are linked in a fundamental and constitutive way. Rejecting masculinity as a set of fixed normative behaviours, passively internalized and enacted by individuals, Connell (1995, 2005:77) defines masculinity as 'a configuration of gender practices' that does not precede, but is *constituted* through human action. In other words, an understanding of masculinity needs to address how gender experiences are lived out by people rather than simply focusing upon social norms and cultural imagination.

In addition, masculinity and femininity can exist within different historical and cultural contexts, and can be articulated differently amongst social categories of race, class and generation; therefore, it is necessary to talk about complex masculinities in the plural. Yet

for Connell, this is just the beginning of the analysis. Without acknowledging relations of domination and subordination *between* and *within* genders, masculinities risk being pictured as a typology of characteristics or alternative lifestyle choices rather than a *sociological* category that needs to be scrutinized in terms of power relations. Accordingly, similar to Hearn and Brittan, who work with feminist insights into gender oppression, Connell suggests that the existing gender system and accompanying social inequalities between men and women are based on a single structural fact of “the global dominance of men over women” (1987:183).

How then do men strategically achieve this dominance over women? This is answered by what Connell terms ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Derived from Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony, as ascendancy based on balance rather than force, the notion of hegemonic masculinity for Connell implies the establishment of *consensus* amongst different forms of masculinity and femininity rather than simple domination of subordinated categories. In addition, hegemonic masculinity is not only maintained by men’s dominance over women. It is also reinforced by the supremacy of certain groups of masculinity over others. Men do not constitute a homogenous and internally coherent bloc. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is important in understanding how a patriarchal social order is implemented (Connell 1987). Accordingly, Connell (1995, 2005) has categorized men’s social positions into: (i) hegemony, (ii) subordination, (iii) complicity and (iv) marginalization.

By hegemony (i), Connell suggests the cultural promotion of exemplary masculinities, particularly those consistent with the reproduction of patriarchy. Hegemony from this perspective is understood as a ‘cultural ideal’. For Connell, gay men, and, albeit to a less extent, effeminate masculinity (i.e. feminized heterosexual men), constitute a subordinate

group (ii) in the current western world, while others such as (iv) working class and black masculinities are considered as marginalized. As 'femininity' is an antonym of 'masculinity', the subordination of gay men who have femininity ascribed to them reinforces the domination of hegemonic masculinity. From this perspective, Connell seems to suggest that the social position of gay men echoes gender relations between men's dominance and women's subordination within a patriarchal framework. The structural interplay between gender and other social categories such as class and ethnicity is described by the concept of marginalization.

As mentioned earlier, hegemonic masculinity is a 'cultural ideal' that is amplified by exemplary masculinities. Hegemony therefore appears as a normative definition of masculinity rather than what is actually lived out by the majority of men. Accordingly, the concept of (iii) 'complicity' plays an important role in Connell's theoretical framework since '...hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support' (Connell, 1987:185). In other words, those men who collude with each other and contribute to the hegemonic project, without embodying such hegemonic masculinity, are theorized by Connell as acting in complicity with the dominant mode of masculinity. From this perspective, hegemonic masculinity wins its dominant position not simply through domination or eradication but cooperation.

What makes Connell's hegemonic masculinity different from Hearn's and Brittan's static notion of patriarchy is its embodiment of a "currently accepted" strategy' (2005:77). In other words, Changes of masculinity result from 'a dialectic arising within gender relations

themselves' (1987:53). By this, he means that if the infrastructure of a patriarchal society crumbles with the conditions of existing male domination altered, then the existing male domination can be challenged by new groups who are emerging, and a new hegemony can therefore be constructed. Hegemonic masculinity, from this perspective, is always a continuing process of being made, and is open to being contested. Unlike Hearn or Brittan, Connell has analytically initiated a more dynamic power configuration, and opens up the possibility of internally generated changes of the gender structure.

2.2.4. Reflection and appropriation: tradition and its hegemonic position

In the previous section, I have discussed how pro-feminist scholars elucidate theoretically the notion of masculinities in the plural. Scholars such as Hearn, Brittan and Connell systematically demystify male domination in the context of multi-faceted power relations. This allows pro-feminists to both identify different forms of power in relation to other social structures (e.g. sexuality, ethnicity and class etc.), and to produce a analytical account faithful to feminism. However, for pro-feminist scholars, there is a tendency to assume that men in general are the beneficiaries of a gendered system that determines women's oppression (see Hearn, 1987: xiv; Brittan, 1980:116 Connell, 1987: xi), which has been critiqued by poststructuralists (Middleton, 1992).

I find Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity useful, in terms of its original premise of a gendered configuration that is capable of regenerating itself. One way of achieving this is to discuss hegemonic masculinity as a plural term. In other words, rather than hegemonic masculinity, one should talk about 'a range of possible "hegemonic masculinities", which can be drawn upon, aligned with or shifted between' (Archer, 2002:15). This enables the existence of '... dominant and dominating modes of masculinity which claim

the highest status and exercise the greatest influence and authority' (Skelton, 2001:50). Accordingly, the hegemonic position is the outcome of constant struggles and competitions amongst different social groups, which are concerned with the preservation or the improvement of their own dominations. The gender configuration of this sort can therefore be perceived as an active gender 'field of struggles' (in Bourdieu's sense), where different male forms are strategically battling for winning (Jenkins, 2002; Wacquant, 1989).

Another way of maintaining hegemonic masculinity as an internally generating gender configuration is to perceive hegemony as an active form of inclusion (Williams, 1977). More specifically, this allows reflexive agency to actively come into play, where the 'cultural ideal' is open to challenge, negotiation, and resistance. In this context, hegemonic masculinity serves as an interpretive scheme; it opens itself up for individuals' interpretations, selections and uses. At the same time, it also functions as a dominant gendered lens for one to understand social relationships within the social world that one inhabits. We can further understand this via Confucianism and its kin practice. Local tradition, like a cultural text, is always a site of struggle and negotiation because different meanings can be ascribed to the same cultural text. However, we also learn from Hall's (1996) *articulation* that two different practices, under certain conditions can make connections through ideology. This may particularly be the case when the local tradition (or ideology in Hall's term) empowers the locals, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, despite different social and economic conditions. Accordingly, the practices of filial piety may be articulated differently due to one's social and economic position; however, what articulates these different kin practices is the continuation of traditional kin values (see Lan, 2002 for example).

Indeed, the cultural meanings of tradition are not inscribed, but need to be articulated, to be *made* to mean something by those who practice them. By opening itself up for interpretations, selections, and appropriations, tradition always risks losing its hegemonic position through challenges and resistances from new forms of life that seek to articulate their legitimacies. However, it is precisely the inclusion of reflexive agency, as its contemporary strategy, that enables strong tradition to continue its existence. The cultural meaning of tradition is not indicating what one ought to do. Rather, tradition is interpreted as *meaningful* practice. This is an important stance for my research. I shall discuss this in more detail via processes of detraditionization in the later part of this chapter.

2.3. Masculinities and consumption

To imagine a language means to imagine a new form of life
(Wittgenstein 1988:23)

...while an older generation of men were arguing over the causes of men's emotional inarticulacy, younger men were playing around with style, blurring the gender dividing line. They were practicing something different.

(Rutherford, 1998:41)

In the previous section, I discussed how pro-feminist scholars theorise masculinities within the framework of patriarchy. For earlier scholars of masculinities, the primary goal was to develop a theoretical language that accommodated, on the one hand, the multiple social positions of men and their diverse lived experience, and, to maintain, on the other, an understanding of women's oppression as an ultimate political position. Accordingly, the relationship between men and women was inevitably explained within a gendered dualistic framework, in which a changing configuration appeared to be almost impossible.

More specifically, as Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) argue, this dualistic gendered language was not able to grasp the generational specificities of emerging femininities and masculinities in western advanced societies. The following section endeavours to understand such conceptual changes by critically exploring studies of masculinities and consumption. The discussion will be encompassed by three different perspectives to unwrap the cultural phenomenon of the 'new man' as: (i) the legacy of sexual politics (Mort, 1988, 1996), (ii) the production of a new cultural regime (Nixon, 1996, 1997), and (iii) the consequence of consumer society (Edwards, 1997).

Although these three bodies of work represent quite different traditions and different approaches, what connects them is consumption and the cultural representations of the 'new man'. What makes them significant for the particular concern of this research is the fact that, despite their differences, these three positions document a methodological tension between structure and agency, between institutional ideology and subjectivity. Moreover, alongside Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007), I argue here, and throughout the thesis, that it is necessary to hold on to a productive tension that demonstrates that the structure of consumption is actively played out through individual lived experiences in which negotiations, appropriations, and resistances have necessarily come into play (Storey, 1999).

2.3.1. Frank Mort: new man and his sexual politics

What differentiates Mort from previous pro-feminist scholars is, firstly his generational focus on young men and their experiences; and secondly his cultural understanding of masculinities through consumption and representation (rather than production and sexual divisions). As Mort suggests: 'If we are looking for a different vocabulary of masculinity, which speaks of some potentially progressive renegotiations of

maleness, then we should at least pay attention to the ways young men are representing themselves and being represented in the culture of popular consumerism' (1988:197).

However, this is not to suggest that sexual politics are insignificant for Mort. Writing from a perspective shaped by the second wave feminists and post-1968 politics, one of the main questions Mort endeavours to answer is: 'how can we negotiate a new settlement around sexual relations, a settlement which problematises men's identities and lays the ground for a different version of masculinity?'(ibid: 195). The concept of the 'new man' and accompanying imagery seem to provide Mort with a suggested way forward.

For Mort, the representations of the 'new man' inform us of the *changing* sexual politics of society in general and the marketplace in particular. He suggests this new code of masculinity -the fracturing and sexualisation of the male body - is conjured up through the commodity. More specifically, this new male coding is less to do with traditional macho images of strength or virility, and more with the fetishised and narcissistic display- a visual erotic. Importantly, for Mort, the 'new man' and his more self-conscious maleness is where traditional codes of masculinity are fractured. One can suggest that Mort's understanding of the 'new man' seems to echo the suggested contemporary crisis in masculinities (Morgan, 2006). Masculinity is not a fixed male norm that defines everything else. For a younger generation, the gendered structure is less to do with oppression, and more with negotiation, in the sense that young men and women may already be negotiating their personal and sexual relations (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Mort, 1988).

Where does the 'new man' come from? It is the lived experiences of young men that tell us the origin of the 'new man'. As Mort suggests, 'the new man marketing explosion is

precisely that it does speak to men through their gender-as a community of men', rather than 'speaking to young men *as men*' (original emphasis, 1988:212). Accordingly, new man imagery is not perceived to be a 'cultural regime' (Nixon, 1996, 1997) or as simply driven by 'consumer society' (Edwards, 1997), but as cultural indexes, which indicate where young men are actually at (Mort, 1988).

This can be further illustrated by Ray Petri's (one of the leading 80s fashion stylists) buffalo style. Buffalo style suggests 'not the assertion of a fixed masculine identity, but a self-conscious assemblage of style' (Mort, 1988:205). What is represented by buffalo style is a gendered binary in flux through which young men are able to bricolage their self-embrace of fashion in accordance with the rich cultural repertoire available to them. Moreover, the buffalo style is not simply a cultural invention of Petri. 'When Petri himself was asked by *The Face* in 1985 where he found his Buffalo Look, his nonchalant reply was, "Oh, just around"' (Mort, 1996:75). Petri particularly refers to fashion styles lived out by young gay men and urban flâneurs during the 1980s in Soho. Moreover, Mort reminds us, that these contemporary male images and their accentuation of homosociability or more hybrid forms of male culture that emerged from leisure or entertainment environments in Soho are less to do with the general coding of gay identity, but rather, 'the consciousness of a generation of young people who had been educated into consumer style' (Mort, 1996:71, also see Beynon, 2002).

As mentioned earlier, the lived experiences of young men provide Mort with a crucial understanding of changing sexual politics. Mort tells us that listening to his interviewees enables him to piece together what it means to be young men in the late 1980s. More

specifically, the autobiographical dimension of young men's city life experiences provide insightful accounts *not* so much in the sense that they guarantee the most authentic accounts of the interplay between consumption and masculinities. Rather they provide a way to explore a more complex notion of male subjectivity, often constituted by tensions and fragilities, alongside the realization of self satisfaction. Therefore, for Mort, male subjectivity is something unsettled and contingent, a continuing process of making, through negotiation between individuals and the diverse social, and geographical locations they inhabit. Accordingly, one can understand how the cultural meaning of consumption is produced in flux and needs to be unpacked via one's own biographical route. Because of such diverse understandings, one also needs to recognize multiple social categories such as age, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and geographical differences actively contribute to young men's cultural practices of consumption.

By listening to young men's stories, Mort endeavours to bring agency into his analysis of gender structure and the culture of consumption. This approach is close to the theoretical frameworks provided by cultural studies (Hall, 2006; Story 1999), in which young men are not perceived as 'cultural dupes' as Adorno (1990) or Marcus (1968) once suggested. Rather, they are continually negotiating, appropriating, and resisting the grammar and rules written in the structure of the consumer city. From this perspective, one should not over-generalize consumption as a meta-concept without much analytical clarity, and conceive power as something essentially exterior rather than discursively interdependent (Mort, 1996). In addition, young men's stories also provide Mort with an illuminating example of the contemporary organization of masculinity. Reflecting upon his interview experiences, Mort (1988:216) suggests that,

‘observing people is also about exercising power...Working with young men points up just how powerful some of the discourses of masculinity are...These structures tend to work behind your back, policing what can be said and what must remain silenced...Interviewing young men draws observer and observed into mutual dependencies and obligations, what I call forms of “male contract”...

In other words, the relationship between the researcher/researched is rather precarious. The contract needs to be explored carefully, and in particular the personal dimensions of sexuality. During one of Mort’s interviews, a black respondent appeared to play with the ambiguity of his sexuality and welcomed the researcher’s inquisitiveness. ‘Excited by a fruitful research lead’, as Mort confessed, ‘I tried to push him further...His response became hostile... “Do you think I’m queer or something?” With these words the contract between us was broken’ (Mort, 1996:198). For Mort, this ‘surprising moment’, in Willis’s (1980) sense, can offer insights into the social relations of masculinity (see **Chapter 3** for further discussion). More specifically, this gentlemanly agreement is orchestrated along a heterosexual normative axis, which decides what can be said or must be kept silent, and is powerful enough to cut against the authority of the researcher. This incident illustrates a clear binary that separates the ‘heterosexual’ from the ‘homosexual’ and keeps the black sexual object (the respondent) under the surveillance of the white pathologising gaze (of the researcher).

For Mort, the gender configuration is changing. This change is lived out by young men and their cultural experiences of consumption. By focusing on this generational change and the cultural phenomenon of the ‘new man’, Mort is able to postulate that it is possible for young men to live out their gendered experiences outside of conventional masculinity. Therefore, to portray men as gendered oppressors is not enough to explain gender relations in a contemporary situation in which neither men nor women are simply dominant or

subordinate. Rather, it should be perceived as a continual process of (re)negotiation that resonates with the gendered experiences of young men and young women in late modernity.

Indeed, as Mort (1996) explains to us in his conclusion, Giddens's (1991) understanding of identity in late modernity has offered him some extremely suggestive ways of framing the inter-relationship between consumption and identity. Drawing upon Giddens's concept of lifestyle choice as the reflexive project of the self, Mort is able to explain why the celebrated narcissistic maleness and its embracement of individualization - 'has displaced more external rules of authority', and the traditional male norms it inherited (Mort, 1996:206). This echoes a wider discussion of reflexive gender relations and the search for their meanings in the context of detraditionalizing sexual politics (see Hennessy, 2000). This position is important for my research, at an analytical level, in the sense that I intend to explore the major social and cultural transformations of late modernity in Taiwan, and what they mean in relation to the gendered lives of the young men in my studies. In other words, I want to understand the interplay between consumption and changing masculinities as an effect of the processes of detraditionalization.

The uniqueness of Mort's research (1996) lies in his combination of qualitative approaches and cultural history to make sense of masculinities and consumption. Young men and their cultural experiences of consumption enable him to sketch out a more complicated interplay between structure and agency. Agreeing with Mort, my research intends to recognize young men as *reflexive* subjects in order to articulate a new gendered language to capture young men and their 'do-it-yourself' biographies – a language that goes beyond oppression and manipulation. One way of achieving this as exemplified by Mort is to talk to

young men and listen to their life experiences. I shall discuss this methodological stance in detail in **Chapter 3**.

In the next section, I will discuss another interpretation of the 'new man' provided by Sean Nixon (1996, 1997). The similarity between Nixon and Mort lies in their conceptual framework; both endeavour to understand contemporary masculinities and sexual politics through the 'new man' and an accompanying cultural representation. Although Nixon and Mort tend to agree that masculinities are changing, for Nixon such changes embody simultaneously a new gendered hierarchy of male representations.

2.3.2. Sean Nixon: the 'new man' and his cultural regime

Masculinities are understood by Sean Nixon as invented categories (1997, also see Weeks, 1991). To investigate this invention, Nixon addresses the historicity and the cultural meanings given to certain attributes, capacities, and forms of practices that define what it means to be a man. Since this is historically specific, and needs to be understood culturally - to talk about masculinities in the plural is a necessary starting point (Weeks, 1985).

A central aim for Nixon's research is to uncover 'the constitutive role of representation in the formation of the attributes and characteristics of masculinity through which real historical men come to live out their identities as gendered individuals' (Nixon, 1997:301). In particular, he endeavours to make sense of how masculinities are constructed and operated symbolically through interconnected consumer institutions (i.e. marketing and retailing) and cultural mediums (i.e. male periodicals). He further argues that the system of representation – as the cultural regime - actively constructs the cultural meanings given to masculinity, and thereby shapes images of men (Nixon, 1996). From this perspective, the

origin of the 'new man' has less to do with the lived experiences of young men than Mort suggests (1988). For Nixon the 'new man' is rooted within specific commercial institutional practices, and forces us to be alerted to the particular forms of knowledge and expertise that shape our understanding of celebrated male images.

Alongside Mort (1988, 1996), Nixon agrees that new man imagery provides a wider interpretation of sexual politics. However, derived from Foucauldian analysis, Nixon (1997) reminds us that what lies behind new man imagery and visual codes of masculinity are indeed shared loose family resemblances and the regularity of particular male forms. Through these privileged male forms, one can uncover consumer institutions that produce normal, attractive, and healthy male images in contrast to abnormal, unattractive and unhealthy ones.

What does this 'new man' look like? Based on Nixon's (1997:304-315) textual analysis of fashion photos in men's magazines, the images of the 'new man' share a similar configuration of male codings encompassed by both soft and hard assertive masculinity such as black/hyper masculinity embodied with a boyish look and body. This oxymoronic male coding is enhanced further by the casting, the style of clothes, and more importantly, a new form of spectatorship, in which a narcissistic subjectivity is rendered through visualization. '[It] is clear that the imagined male spectator is literally invited to buy into the "look" of the model; that is, to identify with his "look"' (Nixon, 1997:314). This particular stance echoes Fuss's notion of 'vamperic identification', 'a having through a becoming' (Fuss 1992:730), that may explain why 'Top Shop' or 'H & M' employ celebrities such as Kate Moss (the fashion icon) or Madonna to be their fashion representatives. If you want to become like Kate Moss, come to Top Shop and get a pair of trousers she has endorsed.



The cultural regime of the 'new man' is further enforced *spatially* by what Nixon identifies as 'techniques of retailing' (1997). The display of shop interiors, similar to men's periodicals that manifest and regulate particular versions or motifs of masculinity, attempts to fix a set of cultural values, which are congruent with the 'new man' and his male norms. Therefore, particular forms of masculinity are embedded and exploited, in highly visual ways, to be sold successfully through an established set of ways visually apprehending the shop environment and the clothes within it through techniques of retailing. If this is the case, then what is the relationship between the consumer subjectivity of men and 'techniques of retailing'? This is where Nixon's concept of the 'technologies of looking' comes into play. Derived from Walter Benjamin's (1973) concept of the *flâneur*, Nixon argues that spectatorial consumer subjectivities are shaped in the formation of modern forms of consumption, such as a leisurely way of looking, and specific spectatorship organized by menswear retailers. Through consumption, male subjectivity,

like that of the *flâneur*, is 'not only established by a series of looks at the display of goods and the detail of the shop interiors, but also by inviting the consumer to look at themselves amidst this spectacle - often literally, through catching sight of their reflection in a mirror or shop window'

(Nixon, 1996:64)

From this perspective, technologies of looking, like the inviting spectatorship existing between the photographs of male models in men's magazines and the male reader, are a gendering process in which a narcissistic male spectatorship is underlined. As Nixon reminds us, it is important to remember, that this narcissistic way of looking is not a sense of a fixed gaze in that the '*flâneur* articulates and produces a masculine sexuality which in the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess' (Pollock 1988 cited in Wilson, 1992:101). Rather, it is an interrupted or broken series of looks via a contemporary

leisure form of strolling and looking (Nixon, 1996). What lies behind this consumer spectatorship, moreover, is not only a sense of self-monitoring by checking if the image to-be-consumed is conventionally congruent with the male codings displayed in the shop, but also the very principle of 'new man' imagery.

For Nixon, to understand new man imagery is to understand how particular male codings are produced by interconnected consumer institutions. As Nixon tells us: 'I have deliberately bent the stick of the analysis towards an account of the production and circulation of "new man" imagery and have put to one side important questions about its consumption' (1996:6). By privileging the production of 'new man' imagery, Nixon is able to sketch out how the cultural regime of the 'new man' operates in the institutional nexus in which certain kinds of masculinities are produced discursively, and then ready to be sold through visualization.

Locating himself within a Foucauldian framework, new man imagery – similar to Foucault's 'docile body' (1977:136), which can identify how the technique of power transforms into specific types of knowledge and cultural disciplines that regulate the body - enables Nixon to trace how certain represented male norms are produced and implemented by techniques of retailing and technologies of looking. However, unlike Foucault (1979:95) who suggests that '[where] there is power, there is resistance'; Nixon (1996) is sceptical about the emphasis on consumption as resistance. Hence, the focus on institutional practice leads Nixon, similarly to the Frankfurt School, to perceive consumption as manipulation and standardization for those who practice it (see Storey, 1999). What is constantly eschewed by Nixon's analysis is the dialectical interplay between the *lived* experiences of young men and

interconnected consumer institutions. Consequently, for Nixon, masculinities are changing; however, such change is immediately controlled by a new cultural regime –that of ‘new man’ imagery.

It is important to note here, although Nixon’s research shares quite a different methodological tradition from my own research, his appropriation of Benjamin’s *flâneur* provides a useful account for me to make sense of how male identity formation is constructed through online blogging. In other words, I intend to understand how the weblog, as an invention of modern technology, like the invention of the arcade, enables young Taiwanese research participants to construct their male identities and to speak a more reflexive gendered language via blogging and cyber flâneuring.

In the final part of my discussion of consumption and masculinities, I will turn to Tim Edwards’s discussion of the ‘new man’ (1997). In terms of the ‘new man’ imagery, where Nixon and Mort emphasize sexual politics, Edwards highlights the significance of consumer society. He provides a materialist account, with links to the pro-feminist perspective outlined earlier, examining the power relationship behind the ‘new men’ and his ideological image: ‘the corporative power look’.

2.3.3. Tim Edwards: the new man and his corporative look

Adopting a very different position from Mort and Nixon, Tim Edwards shifts the analysis of new man imagery from sexual politics and cultural representation back to a classic Marxist tradition (1997). In other words, he refuses to perceive the notion of ‘new man’ and contemporary images of masculinity merely as a cultural phenomenon triggered by second wave feminism. Men are indeed in the mirror (as Edward’s title suggests), yet, this is less to

do with narcissistic maleness or an implication of contemporary masculinities in crisis (Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Mort, 1988, Nixon, 1996), but rather the consequence of consumer society. In other words, the changing social, political, and economic conditions of consumer society render a new normative definition of masculinity.

Take the 'new man' as an example. Unlike Mort and Nixon who highlight a mixture of male codings, Edwards (1997) points out that the most prominent representation of new man imagery is what he terms 'the corporate power look'- a look played out ubiquitously in Wall Street or the City of London. According to Edwards, this corporate power look indicates, firstly and economically, the developmentalism (i.e. Reaganism and Thatcherism) of the 80s, in which the culture of employment fostered a group of young men hungry for quick financial success. As Edwards observes, this group of young men often share a similar fashion need - to display their ambitions through formal outfits such as the suit.

Secondly, and socially, the culture of aspiration is reinforced by advertising, marketing, and image-making sectors in which the 'corporate power look' is sold via the promotion of lifestyle choice (i.e. that of a yuppie). The important message sent here is the significance of maintaining or developing the correct corporate identity through consumption. You are not only what you financially earn; you are what you buy and own. Thirdly, politically and ideologically, the corporate power look suggests an underlying tendency that moves towards 'individualism and aspirationalism linked to materialism' (Edwards, 1997:50). In other words, no matter what you want out of life, you can earn it, and you can purchase it. As a result, successful masculinity is increasingly defined in terms of personal possessions rather than traditional provision. This self-orientated lifestyle, the life of one's own, indicates a

demographic change amongst men, in particular those from a younger generation. Rather than saving money for children's education or working hard to support the family, for young men, to spend money on oneself becomes the new norm.

Consequently, as Edwards comments, the rise of consumer society and the deregulation of financial production (via the free market) have forcefully cultivated the ideology of consumerism. What is introduced to men is a necessarily distinct lifestyle that associates itself with the 'new man' and his corporative power look. Paradoxically, this influential male image seems to indicate 'a return to traditional masculine values of money, work and success' (ibid: 42). Men are indeed in the mirror, but it is 'a mirror that the world around them is holding up to scrutinize their appearances' (ibid: 134); they are asked by the market to dress for acceptance, and dress for success. From this perspective, '[ironically]... the New Man expressed many very old views and values' (ibid: 43).

What makes Edwards's analysis of the 'new man' different from the previous two scholars is his emphasis on the material conditions of consumer society. For example, Mort suggests the 'new man' is a catalyst to initiate a new direction in sexual politics. For Edwards, it is not surprising that there are not many elderly or poor people with minimal discretionary income who can afford the lifestyle consumption discussed by Mort. Accordingly, for Edwards, scholarly interpretations of the new man can be easily subsumed within an interpretation based on elitism, if a materialist analysis is not sufficiently addressed. By this, he means particularly the young men, who Mort refers to, are usually fashion avant-gardes such as active participants in the Soho commercial culture. What is excluded by Mort's account is phenomenon such as a working class fashion consciousness of the *New Laddism*

(e.g. chav or hoodie, also see Francis, 1999). To eschew a materialist analysis, as Edwards suggests, is to put one side an important issue of social totality. Scholars, such as, Mort appear to neglect the fact that agency is already ‘the product of wider social, economic, and political developments around consumerism’ (ibid: 118).

Edwards further argues that if transgressions of the gender configuration do potentially occur, as opposed to the erasing of social boundaries or creation of hybridized forms of masculinities, they are followed by an inaugurated new social division that perpetuates the hierarchy of socially approved forms of masculinity and manhood. In other words, the reconstruction of a *new* social division is often centred on *older, traditional* social categories such as class, race, age and gender. What makes ‘waif’ become a fashion style depends on the person who carries it: a white, slim, trendy young man rather than a scrawny, poor boy. Despite the fluidity of identities presented by the media or marketing and practiced amongst fashion avant-gardes, as Edwards maintains, ‘the categories of male and female, straight and gay, black and white remain remarkably stable’ (ibid:117). To sum up, for Edwards, consumer society is not at all about equal opportunities. The cultural practices of consumption are far from autonomous. The proliferation of visualized consumer male subjectivities, as a goldmine for marketers, retailers and producers, is driven *less* by the narcissistic consciousness of young men, than by the materiality of consumer society. Those who do not have equal access to consumption are constantly excluded.

In relation to my research, Edward’s materialist approach is useful to the extent that the interplay between consumer society and the hierarchy of masculinities can be unpacked socially, economically and politically. One can therefore uncover how the dominating male

form is implemented ideologically via consumption in late capitalist society. Yet the materialist position of this approach is open to criticism. For example, consumption appears to Edwards as something always passive, and endlessly repetitive, confirming the world 'as it is'. Cultural consumption can be simply *read off* by 'our (presumed) knowledge' (Docker, 1994: 46). From this perspective, Edward's materialist understanding of consumption and the corporative power look of the 'new man' leaves very little room for a critical engagement with agency, subjectivity, or meaning (since they all turn into silence).

Despite his economic determinism, Edwards raises an important issue in terms of consumption and masculinities in his prescription of the social and economic locations of the 'new man'. When celebrating the fluidity of gender identities through fashion practices, it is worth considering from *where* one is claiming this. In particular, at the present time, it is right to suggest that more choices are available for people; however, to suggest that these choices are equally available for everyone is another matter completely. Consumption is not just about sensibilities and tastes, but also choices. Yet, for some, certain choices are simply not available in the first place since 'the capacity for hyperconsumption promoted by appeals to lifestyle [is] "class" specific' (Hennessy, 1995:166 , Lash and Urry, 1994 and the discussion in next section). As Edwards reminds us, men can look in certain ways; 'the one and the only limit here is money' (133).

2.3.4. Reflection and application: negotiating consumption and masculinities

In previous discussions, I have endeavoured to sketch out different theoretical positions on masculinities and consumption. It is documented that the debate over whether contemporary masculinities are changing will remain unresolved. This tension results from different scholarly conceptualizations of consumption in general and the interplay between

structure (i.e. power and ideology) and agency (i.e. subjectivity) in particular. As a main contention postulated in my research, it is necessary to hold on to this productive tension in order to provide a more situated knowledge of explaining how contemporary masculinities are actively lived out by young men and their gendered understandings of consumption. In this sense, I understand the notion of consumption as 'production in use' (Storey, 1997:129, Hall, 2006), where 'determination by the economic' needs to be recognized 'in the *first* instance', rather than the absolute predictability that defines everything else (Hall, 1996:45, Golding and Ferguson, 1997). What has to be addressed, however, are accounts of how people select and appropriate the practices of consumption, thereby making them into culture.

Despite their differences, the studies of new man imagery also indicate a potentially fruitful way of explaining the gendered configuration amongst a younger generation via consumption. A late modernity framework is particularly useful to explain how consumption can be seen as a key dynamic in shaping contemporary identities, meanings, and self-expression via what we now understand as lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991; Bocoock, 1993). It can also provide a potential framework to understand consumption not merely as social or cultural but both social and culture (Adkins, 2002). In other words, one can recognize a self-fashioned lifestyle that challenges conventional gender roles, while at the same time acknowledging the social conditions for such gendered mobility.

In the context of late modernity, one needs to expand the accepted language of gender to capture major social and cultural transformations in late modernity, whereby individuals are now becoming the centre of their biographies (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood,

2007). Scholars such as Mort, Nixon and Edwards are right to explore contemporary masculinities and accompanying cultural representations via consumption and new man imagery. However, what is constantly missing from Nixon's and Edwards' analyses is a more thorough understanding of social transformation, with changing gender relations enabling consumption to become the pivotal part of young men's lives. In response to this conceptual limit, it is suggested that if one wishes to understand (changing) gender relations in contemporary societies, there is a need to go beyond male imagery by examining *both* the social and cultural conditions that enable consumption to become an emerging biographical route for young men to bricolage their gendered identities in the first place. Therefore, in the next section of my literature review, I want to theorize changing masculinities and changing gender relations in late modernity by critically examining the social processes of detraditionalization, individualization, and the transformation of intimacy.

2.4. Gender relations in late modernity

As with analyses of masculinities and consumption, the question of whether gender identities and sexualities are in need of socio-economic analysis, or can be understood mainly through culture and representations continues to be contested (Fraser, 1997; Butler, 1998; Adkins, 2002). However, a late modernity framework is useful in exploring this issue, in the sense that it does not separate out and analyse some issues such as sexuality as merely cultural, and nor does it position *others* (i.e. broad scale inequality) as a social historical phenomenon (Adkins, 2002). More specifically, it recognizes the operation of individualization within specific social economic conditions, and the possibility of a self-fashioned lifestyle in consumer culture as a specific class production in late capitalism (Hennessy, 1995). From this perspective, a late modernity framework is particularly useful to correct an overly structuralist

conception of social processes by focusing upon subjectivity and an increasingly reflexive agency (Lash and Urry, 1994).

I do not, however, want to postulate a notion of reflexive agency that is freed from institutional inequality, such as economic status (Beck, 1992, Giddens, 1991), although reflexive agency plays an important role in shaping my interpretation of contemporary young men and their subjectivities. As Lash (1994; 120) reminds us 'how much freedom from the "necessity" of "structure" and structural poverty does this ghetto mother have to self-construct her own life narratives.' In other words, it is right to suggest that the binding power of tradition and social structures has receded in late modernity. Yet this does not explain the emerging structural conditions that are creating not only 'reflexive winners', but also 'reflexive losers'. The latter are marginalized by new information and communication structures, which empower only those who have access to these structures.

In response to reflexive agency in late modernity, feminist scholars have begun to theorize the uneven consequence of late modernity where reflexive agency and its 'uneasiness' (e.g. women entering the workforce after child-rearing) is the production of a discontinuous social process that is fragmented and needs to be contextualized. Unlike Millis's (1959) discussion of 'trapped' individuals in the 1950s, agency of this sort is able to 'stand back' from constitutive structures and even transform them (see McNay, 1999). Others have begun to understand late modernity as process of aestheticization that incorporates itself into everyday life. Reflexivity here is interpreted as an alternative to dominant ways of knowing gender or sexuality, a gendered artifice, which may posit potential challenges to traditional norms. Rather than transcending societal structure, what is articulated by reflexivity of this sort is a

new kind of gendered hierarchy (Adkins, 2002). I shall turn my discussion to reflexivity in late modernity in the following section. Gendered reflexivity with reference to late modernity feminists such as McNay and Adkins will be discussed in detail in **Chapter 4**.

2.4.1. Reflexivity in late modernity

During the 1970s and 1980s, the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism have called into question the nature of the Enlightenment, and representations of knowledge (Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1976, 1989; Lyotard, 1984; Marcus and Fisher, 1986; Said, 1978). Consequently, (i) some scholars have begun to rethink the trajectory of modernity and its consequences (Beck, 1992, 1994 et al., Giddens, 1991), whereas (ii) others are looking for a reflexive method for producing a more objective knowledge (Bourdieu, 2003; Wacquant, 1989; May, 1998). Both definitions of reflexivity play an important role in my research. In this chapter, I want to focus on the first definition used by Beck, Giddens and Lash, in order to capture societal transformation in late modernity. I shall return to the second definition in the next chapter.

According to Adkins (2002), reflexivity as an analytical framework for the reconfiguration of (western) modernity is articulated in a traditional language of structure and agency. This understanding is also echoed by Scott Lash who usefully defined two forms of reflexivity generally at play in analyses of late modernity. More specifically, as Lash (1994) suggests, Beck's (i) structural reflexivity explains how agency is freed from the constraints of social structure in the sense that one is able to reflect on the rules and sources of such structure, whereas for Giddens, (ii) self reflexivity occurs when agency reflects on itself.

We can find examples of structural reflexivity (i) in Beck's *Risk Society* (1992) For instance, at the present time, scientific explanations may appear to be contradictory due to the development of technology and different analytical positions of social/natural phenomena, such as the controversial debates on the establishment of nuclear power or whether gay identities are inborn or acquired. The greater the development of science and technology, the more diverse are the sources of knowledge that one can obtain, and the less authoritarian the role science itself can become. Accordingly, science that appeared to be an absolute objective of knowledge in earlier modernity is now becoming 'consciousness knowledge' in reflexive societies (Beck, 1992). What is suggested here is a highlighted awareness that 'self-mastery is impossible' (Latour, quoted in Beck, et al., 2003:3) Self confrontation becomes synonymous with reflexivity for Beck, in the sense that one needs to constantly reflect upon and deal with the risks, uncertain rules and resources of social structure, and his/her own existence in late modernity (Beck,1994).

Giddens's 'self reflexivity' (ii) can be understood via what he terms 'the reflexive project of the self' (1991). By this, he means a constant self evaluation practiced by agency through asking: what is happening right now? What am I thinking? What am I doing? For Giddens (1990:36-37), reflexivity is 'reflexive monitoring of action' that enables the routinisation of people's daily life behaviours. The character of reflexivity has changed in accordance with the process of modernization. In pre-modern civilisations, reflexivity was predominately bound to traditions or wisdoms, which were perceived as formulaic truths accessible only to selective guardians and practiced dogmatically by the lay person. In this context, traditions were essentially unthinking rituals, necessary for the cohesion of simpler societies.

However, with the advent of modernity, reflexivity has developed a different character. 'The reflexivity of modern social life' according to Giddens 'consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character' (1990:38; also see Harvey, 1989). People's routinisations in modern societies have no intrinsic connection with tradition in the pre-modern sense, although traditions still play a less significant role. Traditions in the modern context are not dogmas. Rather, they become necessarily active and interpretative and open to change (1994, also see Williams, 1961).

Without traditional routes to follow, 'we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (Giddens, 1991:75). The constitution of the self has become increasingly a reflexive project: individuals are now responsible for their own autobiographies, in which self-reflexivity plays the essential role. Individuals are able to live out their lifestyle projects in accordance with personal tastes and preferences of which 'sexuality' and 'intimacy' are two epitomes. (See the discussion of 'intimacy' in this chapter.)

What is emphasized in Beck's and Giddens's notion of reflexivity is a decline in the significance of structural forms of determination. Indeed, 'reflexive modernization is a theory of the ever-increasing powers of social actors, or "agency", in regard to structure' (Lash, 1994:111). Agency is understood as being progressively *freed* in late modernity, where societal rules and norms are disembedding, while new forms of social control from consumption, to the labour market and welfare state are re-embedding (see Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Beck et al., 1994). Two key terms are central to make sense of this process of disembedding: (i) individualization, and (ii) detraditionalization. These terms suggest new types of personal

bonds and communications (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim, 2002, Beck-Gernsheim, 1998; Giddens, 1992; Weeks et. al 1998). They provide an important insight into our understanding of late modernity. I shall return to them in the next section.

At this point, I want to suggest that the Beck's and Giddens's concept of reflexivity is analytically useful to the extent that it enables me to re-conceptualize the relationship between structure and agency in general and generational changing gender relations of late modernity in particular. More specifically, through a late modernity framework, I am able to make sense of how this particular group of young men I have interviewed live out their gendered experiences, which are outside the traditional cultural routes followed by Taiwanese men from an older generation. (See **Chapter 4** for further discussion.).

Giddens's notion of tradition as reinterpretations is particularly useful. It also resonates with Williams's 'structure of feeling' in the sense that the ' [traditional] culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its contemporary system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation...' (1961:52-53). However, unlike Williams's cultural-materialist analysis of social totality, social structure and its inherited cultural norms are under-theorized by Giddens in his preoccupation with individual autonomy. In other words, tradition is understood in its weakest sense, as isolated cultural elements which are no longer relevant. Accordingly, this leaves little room for understanding the complex interplay between existing cultural values and lived experiences that demonstrate the contradictory and uneven processes of detraditionalization in late modernity (Jamieson, 1998; Delanty, 2005). If a late modernity framework provides a sociological explanation, then we need tease out the extent to which this theoretical

framework permits us to analyse and demystify how Taiwanese young men live out their gendered experiences in contemporary society. Accordingly, for me this will be achieved by holding onto the productive tension between structure and agency in order to map out a more complex picture of gender relations in contemporary Taiwanese society.

2.4.2. Tradition before detraditionalization

In the following section, I want to discuss two distinct concepts closely related to late modernity: detraditionalization and individualization. Indeed, in late modernity, detraditionalization and individualization are the consequences of reflexive modernization. As Beck (1992) comments, the *freeing* of agency from social structure often indicates the disintegration of traditional forms of organization on one hand, and individuals being increasingly freed from the taken-for-granted rules, expectations and forms of authority associated with modernity, on the other (Heelas et al.,1996).

However, theoretical debates on the process of detraditionalization remain contested (Luke, 1996; King, 1991). This partly is a result of different ways of defining *tradition*. Therefore, before discussing detraditionalization and individualization in late modernity, there is a need to briefly provide my understanding of the term. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1973), the word *tradition* came into English in the 14th century, from the French word *tradicion* and originated from its Latin root – *tràditio* meaning ‘handover’ or ‘deliver’. These earliest meanings were preserved in later English interpretations. Tradition, in English, has at least four different but sometimes overlapping meanings (i) delivery, (ii) the process of handing down knowledge from generation to generation , (iii) the belief, statement or doctrine that has been passed from generation to generation, and (iv) surrender or betrayal (also see Willilams, 1976). The general sense of delivery was used in English during the mid

16th century, whereas the sense of surrender or betrayal (in particular) was in use from the 15th century to the 17th century. However, the main etymological development of tradition is found in the second and third meanings. It is necessary, at least at an analytical level, to differentiate the differences between these two meanings: the former (ii) suggests a active process of continuation as action of transmitting or handing down, whereas the latter (iii) indicates a passive sense of an idea of necessary respect and duty.

Derived from this etymological distinction, we can understand tradition in contemporary English in two ways as: a more *weak*, static and historicized segment of a social structure; something in explicit contrast to innovation and the contemporary i.e. traditional habits or dogmas. Tradition of this sort often works through exclusion and sacred authority. Tradition, on the other hand, can also be seen as a *strong* active shaping force that is articulated by the selected past through its contemporary correspondences. 'Tradition', from this perspective, 'is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits' (Williams, 1977:115). It is often understood as the significant past - as cultural ideals - and operates not by exclusion, but strategic *incorporation* (see the definition of hegemony in Connell, 1995).

A weak sense of tradition can be further understood by what John Thompson (1996:91-93) refers to as the *normative* and *legitimative aspects* of tradition. The former refers to assumptions, beliefs or patterns of actions handed down from the past, which serve as a normative guide for present practices involving little reflection. Since it is traditionally grounded, *normative* tradition can often be used to justify and authorize itself when it is coterminous with challenges: 'That's what we've always believed'. The latter describes how

tradition, in certain circumstances, is appropriated for the exercise of power and authority. Following Weber, Thompson suggests that this can be enabled through impersonal systems of rules or immemorial traditions. For example, Confucianism, which once was a political system that maintained the social hierarchy, has now become the predominant cultural value in many contemporary Chinese societies and is lived out in everyday practice. Sanctity is the mechanism for tradition of this sort in which individuals are 'obedient' to impersonal rules or selected guardians.

A *strong* sense of tradition can also be demystified by what Thompson terms the *hermeneutic*, and *identity* aspects of tradition. By hermeneutic, he implies the taken-for-granted values transmitted by individuals from generation to generation. However, this does not function as dogma, which denies what one is not accustomed to. Rather, it 'is an interpretative scheme, a framework for understanding the world' (ibid: 91). Tradition, from this perspective, is the (re)interpretations of the past, that are open to future change. In terms of an identity aspect, Thompson wishes to appropriate this term both individually and collectively. More specifically, tradition associated with identity enables one to make sense of questions such as 'who I am?' and 'what are we really?' A sense of belonging is necessary to be sought in the identity aspect of tradition. Tradition in this sense is a matter of *being* as well as *becoming* (see Hall, 1990). In short, weak sense of tradition denies reflexivity of agency. By contrast, strong tradition retains its significance through the inclusion of agency. It is further understood as the meaningful past that offers collective identities or a sense of belonging.

Tradition and its contemporary correspondence can be further explored by Thompson's tradition in the media-ated world. In particular, the existence of mass media uproots and de-localizes tradition to re-moor it in a contemporary global context. For instance, the development of television in the 1950s, made it possible for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth - the royal rituals that have been celebrating the symbol of Englishness and Monarchy in unprecedented splendor since 1887 - to be seen by the public at large for the first time. Today, with the invention of YouTube, one can see the Coronation at anytime and in anyplace. Tradition and its contemporary hegemonic position have been 'refashioned by the expansion of mediated forms of communication' (91).

To identify different dimensions of tradition is important for at least three reasons in my research. (i) Firstly, and analytically, in talking of weak and strong tradition, we are able to ask ourselves, if the process of detraditionalization has been occurring, and then which tradition does this process refer to? (ii) Secondly, we can understand, at least at a theoretical level, weak tradition and its structural orientation, in contrast *strong* tradition that intensifies the involvement of agency is understood as a particular and meaningful way of life. (iii) The third dimension leads me to think about the location of culture in late modernity. By this, I mean, what is the interplay between detraditionanlization and *strong* tradition? This question is particularly relevant to inform how I conceptualize and analyze my research findings. It enables me to critically interrogate the current literature of late modernity via the lens of my own cultural experience. (See the **Chapter 3** for the discussion of *experience present perfect*.) It is argued that a late modernity framework becomes most useful when it is appropriated *culturally* and contextualized within a particular social and historical juncture.

In this research, it is suggested that the process of detraditionalization is likely to be more uneven and contradictory than Beck and Giddens suggest. For the Taiwanese young men interviewed (who are socially and economically advantaged, and understood as the subjects of late modernity, referred to by Giddens and Beck), tradition is a continuing process of negotiation, selection, and interpretation of the past, that is situated within their reflexive project of the self. Tradition is not simply disembedding and completely freeing agency; it is reflexively appropriated and articulated by the young men's lived experiences. Often this kind of gendered reflexivity, as a contemporary strategy for strong tradition, is an uneasy self-awareness that is strained by the processes of detraditionalization and by the continuation of strong tradition. I shall provide, from an experiential level, a more detailed analysis of this in **Chapter 4 and 5**. In the following section I want to turn to the theoretical examination of gender relations lived out via the processes of detraditionalization and individualization.

2.4.3. Detraditionalization, individualization, and gender relations

'One of the most powerful legacies of classical social thought', as Thompson(1996:89) observes, 'is the idea that, with the development of modern societies, tradition gradually declines in significance and eventually ceases to play a meaningful role in the lives of most individuals'. By classical social thought, he is particularly referring to the optimistic rationality of the Enlightenment. Given this powerful legacy, it is not surprising that many contemporary thinkers are still willing to advocate a radical end-of-tradition thesis that postulates another trajectory of modernity (Beck, 1992, 1994 et.al; Giddens, 1991, 1992; Heelas, et al. 1996).

In this section, I want to discuss some prominent features that explain the process of detraditionalization and individualization, including a changing concept of (i) family, (ii) kinship, (iii) and the transformation of intimacy. These features have been identified for three reasons: firstly, these three domains are gender-related. Accordingly, I hope to critically examine, at a theoretical level, current debates about gender relations in late modernity (Adkins, 2002; Finch and Mason, 1993; Giddens, 1992; Jameson, 1998; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2006; Morgan, 1996; 1997; Silva and Smort, 1999 Weeks, 2002). Secondly, this particular selection is developed in the light of the interplay between my academic and cultural experiences (see **Chapter 3** for further discussion). By specifically discussing these social features, as a signpost, I attempt to sketch out the relationship between my analytical and conceptual framework. Thirdly, a central contention of this research is to argue for the need to hold onto the productive tension between structure and agency in a late modernity framework. This productive tension becomes apparent, if one traces the location of *strong* tradition and its hegemonic cultural forms in late modernity. In what follows, I shall discuss, in turn, the changing notion of family, kinship, and intimacy.

2.4.3.1. Families of choice

It is suggested that we are witnessing a radical unsettling of traditional forms and values in the Western world (Giddens, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Social and cultural changes on a global scale, accelerated by rapid economic growth, undermine many of the traditional bastions that authorities lay claim to (Weeks, 1998). This can be understood, for instance, in relation to families of choice. In their study of non-heterosexual relationships, Weeks et al, (2000), suggest how gay, lesbian, and bisexual life stories about 'pretended families' contest the 'normal way' of having a family - as a group consisting of parents

(usually a father and a mother) and their children. Family, in the conventional context, as a powerful and pervasive cultural concept, is blood related and heterosexually orientated. However, in contemporary western advanced societies, family is becoming an ambiguous and contested term, the subject of continual polemics, anxiety and political concern. Family has become plural in its nature: it can go beyond blood (Wakeling and Bradstock, 1995); and be based on personal networks, rather than blood relatives, although it can sometimes incorporate both (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Children are not a necessity for the constitution of a family. One can establish his/her own family with a same-sex partner. What is necessary, however, is a sense of *belonging* for those who participate in it.

For non-heterosexual people, good friends can often constitute an 'idealised family', preferable to their family of origin, since they provide a strong sense of affiliation and affection although like any other kind of relationship, it involves necessary afflictions (Weeks et al., 2001). Closely bonded friendship may not be everyone's definition of an ideal family, nor is it closely related to the legal definition of kin. Yet for those who have chosen to organise their relationship around the 'idealised family', it implies intense convictions and new forms of commitment. This can be understood, as indicated below, through the exercise of choice.

The nature of family has changed, and so has its practices and choices. Choice, for example, as the choice of one's own, suggests a pro-active sense of decision-making carried out by the individual. In other words, it is the individual who defines what family means. In a traditional context, we do not associate familial relationships as options to be chosen. In a strict sense, one could not choose, but was born as someone's brother or sister. However, in

the non-heterosexual world, families of choice address the freedom of agency that is able to create elective familial relationships (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998:54). Choice, from this perspective, as the power to choose, has become closely synonymous with self-autonomy. Paradoxically, choice - as the result of *preference* - makes a chosen relationship need more care to maintain: one who makes the choice is also subject to that made by the other. As one of Weeks's respondents suggests: 'I take my family [of origin] for granted, where my friendships are, to a degree, chosen, and therefore they are created. And I feel a greater responsibility to nourish them, where my family will always be there' (Weeks et al., 2001:11). Consequently, the *choice of families* of non-heterosexual relationships embodies both creative composition and dedicatory responsibility (Giddens, 1992).

What we have learned from non-heterosexual relationships is to rethink the term family not as a *noun/norm* but an *adjective* (Morgan, 1996). Terms such as undecided character, ambivalence, and diversity are often used to describe familial patterns in an age of uncertainty (Stacey, 1996). For Weeks et al. (2001), as a wider sociological implication, the broadened concept of family seems to resonate with the eroding binary of homo/heterosexuality in general and the disintegration of traditional institutions i.e. the family in particular. Consequently, the destabilizing category of family can lead to the possibility of democratization of the (homo) sexual citizen (Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 1998). As Weeks et al. concludes that, the language of family used by many contemporary non-heterosexual people can be seen as a challenge to conventional definitions. Moreover, non-heterosexual men and women's families of choices 'are creating a new public space where old and new forms jostle for meaning, and where new patterns of relationship are being invented' (Weeks, et al., 2001:11)

The argument about family and its fragmentation is also a contemporary theme in heterosexual relationships. Beck-Gernsheim (2002) has suggested that we are 'on the way to a post-familial family'. By this she means, in terms of a familial relationship, 'a community of need is becoming an elective relationship. Family is not breaking up as a result; it is requiring a new historical form' (ibid:85-86). Here, this historic transformation refers to the emerging process of individualization. Alongside Beck (1992), Beck-Gernsheim does not talk about individuation in the sense of an 'unfettered logic of action' or an individual, who refuses to acknowledge that beneath the surface of contemporary life, there is a highly efficient, densely woven institutional society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996). Individualization, in this context, is better understood as 'institutionalized individualization', where individuals are free from previous or *old* social forms (e.g. class, gender, kinship, and family etc.), while *new* forms of social order such as the labour market, consumption and the welfare state are simultaneously intervening in people's everyday lives.

Due to the destabilization of traditional institutions, individuals are forced to become the centre of their biography, where the 'norm-al biography' has become the 'reflexive' biography, and the 'do-it-yourself' biography. One *is able* to and *has to* make his/her own life-choices, since traditional rules are no longer available to follow. But this is far from an ultimate freedom. Rather, it is a 'precarious freedom', in the sense that we may suffer from the consequence of not being given choice to make in the first place (Beck, 1992; 1996; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

As a response to individualization, family has lost its original functions and its regularities. For instance, the demand from women for a 'life of their own' does not

guarantee anymore that the mother will always prepare dinner for her children every evening. She may have to be in the office at 7 pm instead of being in the kitchen. Flexible working hours do not mean flexible parenting hours. In fact, they are flexible only to the extent that you can work whenever you like as long as you meet the deadline. Since it is flexible, it is your own time and your own failure. There is no extra pay for your extra working hours. This can take parents' time away from children without justification needed. Family life is like a 'jigsaw' - a difficult rather than a fun one- joining together what is moving apart (Beck-Gersheim, 2000). Certain familial functions are gradually being replaced by nurseries, restaurants or cinemas. The original picture of the family has been changing; it requires a daily 'balancing act' and constant (re)adjustments. Taken-for-granted background actions are now exposed for scrutiny.

Both Weeks et al. (2001) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) talk about the transformation of family life in general, and the process of detraditionalization in particular. Their shared contention is the destabilising of the institutional controls of the family in relation to domestic ties and gendered expectations as symptomatic of a declining weak tradition. However, there is another dimension of tradition that is often under-theorized by the thesis of detraditionalization: the notion of *strong* tradition that ritualizes itself through contemporary correspondences. This can be understood in relation to Morgan's *family practices* (1996, 1997).

As Morgan suggests, family practices are actively and regularly conducted by individuals in their everyday life. Although a sense of regularity is conveyed by the term practices, they also have an open-ended character. This is derived from the fact that the same practice, at least at an analytical level, can be described in more than one way (e.g.

feeding children can be either a gendered practice or a consumption practice, see Morgan,1996). Moreover, 'family practices' are not just old practices. They provide the individual with a familiar cultural route, which enables one to grasp a sense of one's social position in the world:

...family practices are... practices which matter to the persons concerned and which are seen in some way as being 'special' or 'different'. To 'mean' something to somebody is not simply to be able to identify, but also to invest that object of identification with a degree of emotional significance. It shall be stressed that this emotional/evaluative aspect need not be positive; in family matters, as many have noted, we are dealing with love and hate, attraction and repulsion, approval and disapproval.

(Morgan, 1997:19)

In fact, *meaning* is an important facet in understanding Morgan's concept of family practices. By meaning, in English, we understand a sense of intention or purpose as well as significance. In other words, family 'practices' are not simply cognitively constructed. They also include emotional and moral dimensions which can be articulated by significant family events such as births, marriages and deaths. Therefore, when we talk about family practices as something meaningful, we suggest a degree of significance in recognizing such practices.

What is the interplay between family practices and late modernity? In his discussion of family practices and risk, Morgan (1997) suggests that family practices are not weakened by reflexive modernity. Rather, they have some affinities and similarities. For example, talking about family practices, rather than family structures, gives at a theoretical level a flexibility to understand the structural configuration that is articulated routinely in daily life practices. Therefore, instead of 'reading off' its meaning, we can contextualize the notion of patriarchy within specific contexts of domestic practices, where there is a possibility to witness

contradictions between gender identity and gender order (e.g. the career woman becoming a full time mother, see McNay, 1999; Jemison, 1998).

It is possible, therefore, through family practices, for individuals (at least in western advanced societies) to critically evaluate and imaginatively respond to the forces and processes that confront them (Morgan, 1996; McNay, 1999; Thorne and Yalom, 1992). This self-evaluation or self confrontation resonates with self-monitoring and provides an opportunity to assess the growing significance of risks or conflicts in late modernity. Moreover, as a wider implication for institutional structures, both 'family practices' and 'reflexive modernity' suggest 'rigid structures and oppositions being dissolved into overlaps and ambiguities' (Morgan, 1997:24).

As a response to the processes of detraditionalization, Morgan (1996, 1997) argues that to suggest changes in family practices is one thing. Yet, it is completely different matter to assume that family practices are discontinued. The latter description often perceives family as a static notion, and is supported by a demographic analysis of societies where the rates of divorce, single-person households or cohabitation etc. are high. However, if one merely studies family relations through statistics, there is a tendency 'to collapse or conflate the levels of everyday experiences and practices with the more abstracted descriptions of these practices' (1997:15).

To recognise the flexibility of family practices is conceivably to take one step closer to a more comprehensive description of everyday life in late modernity. However, this does not necessarily reject the continuation of *strong* tradition and its contemporary forms that are still lived out through meaningful family practices. *Strong* tradition is always an *active* process. It

must be especially aware and responsive to the alternatives and oppositions which question or threaten its dominance (Williams, 1977). It relates itself through whole social processes, and thus becomes a particular way of life. Therefore, meaningful family practices, like strong tradition, are not transcended through individual choices or through the development of ideas of community and friendship. Rather, they embody a currently accepted strategy that is ready to be changed and to be challenged, and are *transformed* through ‘steady development of a kind of fluidity in everyday practices that embrace, while transforming, both...’ (Morgan, 1997:27). Equating individualization with the discontinuity of tradition and family practices, however, can leave little room for understanding the existing tension between the choice of one’s own and the meaningful/right choice for life in late modernity.

In this research, I argue that a late modernity framework is most useful when one holds onto the productive tension between detraditionalization and the existing local strong tradition. In other words, one needs to recognise the process of individualization as unevenly distributed, and needing to be contextualized by cultural locality and individual biography. This is more than just a theoretical premise. As I shall illustrate in **Chapter 4**, *strong* tradition is actively lived out in the existing tension between ‘individual choices’ and the ‘right’ choices for life. More specifically, when we talk about the proliferated choices for life (e.g. those of marriage, kinship or family), we also need to ask: what does choice mean to research participants? Who can have particular choices? Why are some choices more meaningful than others? And why are certain choices simply not available to some in the first place?

2.4.3.2. Kinship and family responsibilities

Alongside family, the changing concept of kinship is often used to explain processes of detraditionalization and individualization. I have discussed so far how *strong* tradition

actively and strategically embeds itself via family practices in late modernity. In what follows, I want to illustrate how strong tradition such as kin support is perceived as meaningful practice in everyday life. This can be further explored by the notion of *family responsibilities*.

Kinship, in the English language, can be understood in two general senses: (i) a group of people descended from a common ancestry, and connected by a blood-relationship, or (ii) a feeling of being close to somebody because you have similar origin or attitude, where a sense of belonging is found. The first definition of kinship - as the recognized ties of social relations *within* a family - echoes the system of relationships traditionally accepted in a culture and the rights and obligations which they imply. The second definition of kinship can be understood via concepts such as, marriage or community, which are relationships developed from respect or affinity. Moreover, as either consanguinity or affinity, the term kinship articulates a feeling of togetherness that is maintained by one's obligations, duties or responsibilities towards the familiar/familial others.

In terms of kinship as with family, I have already discussed its changing concept within a contemporary context. In this section, I want to focus on kinship as family responsibilities. It is argued that individuals in late modernity shifted beyond tradition. In response, I argue that *strong* tradition understood as meaningful or significant practices continues to play an important cultural for my research participants. Kinship, as part of *strong* tradition, implies the sharing, not necessarily harmoniously, of memories of past events and transitions of family life between family members. It constitutes or reconstitutes itself through one's own memories or what John Urry (1990:170) terms the 'imaginary co-presence'

of family: 'the family that one carries around with one even when the actual members of it are geographically distant or even dead' (also see Morgan, 1995).

In the western pre-industrial period, people maintained a relationship with kin not through intimacy or the privileged knowledge of each other (Giddens, 1992), but through the necessity of survival. The sense of *belonging* did not result from shared interests, but from mutual material dependences and the common good. Geographical boundaries were important in defining neighbours, friends, or enemies. The individual's life was anchored by family obligations, religions, and traditional festivals of community life. Personal choice was often out of the question (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Heelas, et al. 1996). It would have been bizarre to ask: 'who is going to look after us, when we get old?' Family was firmly secured by kinship as the safety net. Taking care of the elderly was merely the inevitable sociability that one should obey unquestioningly.

However, in contemporary societies, the nature of family is changing in the sense that it is the self who defines what family means to him/her (Stacey, 1996; Weeks et al., 2002). Through the process of individualization, the 'norm-al biography' is giving way to the 'do-it-yourself' biography. 'Everyone must be independent, free for the demands of the market... [where] the single individual [is] "unhindered" by... family' (Beck, 1992:116). In western advanced societies, the classic model of the bourgeois family does not always resonate with lifestyle choices, such as living alone, single parenthood, non-marital cohabitation, childless marriage, serial marriage or living apart together. Nor can a partnership or family necessarily provide certainty for the future. Therefore, the personal resources and familial aids hitherto deployed in taking care of the elderly are clearly becoming less dependable. This is also be

echoed by emerging public and political anxieties of care for the ageing generation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002): who will look after us in old age?

Before we rush to the conclusion that family connections are undermined, while the support offered by kinship is in decline, we may want to look at what kinds of support are offered through kinship in the first place. In her research on family obligations and social changes, Finch (1989:3) reminds us that it is important to ask ‘who does what, for whom and in what circumstances?’ By asking this question, we may be able to unpack a more complex net of support woven by kinship. For instance, in terms of economic support, research in both England and America indicates a persistent pattern showing direct transfers of money from parents to children at specific points in the life course, particularly in the early years of child-rearing (Cooney and Uhlenberg, 1992; Wilson, 1987). In the context of English families, the importance of financial support appears to be more significant amongst the middle class in enabling family members, especially the younger generation, to maintain a particular and suitable lifestyle (Bell, 1968; Finch, 1989). In my research, a similar pattern can also be found amongst the younger Taiwanese participants who come from relatively advantaged social and economic backgrounds (see **Chapter 4** for further discussion).

The direct transfer of money from parents to children exists also in non-Western contexts, and may even be more prevalent. Although there is a growing tension between individualization (e.g. women’s participation in the labour market) and traditional duties (e.g. care-giving provided by the daughter-in-law) (Martin, 1990), in developing or early post-industrial countries, intergenerational financial support still plays a critical role, especially when social welfare systems are different from some advanced western societies (Agree. et al.,

2002). For example, in Taiwan, the majority of married children still provide financial support for their parents. In many cases, this results from parents' early financial investments in their children (Lee et al. 1994). In addition, sons are still expected to take greater financial responsibility than daughters; although, the more support daughters receive from parents, the more responsibilities they may subsequently take (Parish et al., 1993). Such practices persist, despite recent research indicating a decline in Taiwanese elderly parents whose financial incomes are mainly from their adult children, due to economic growth and the subsequent rise in financial wealth. But there are few signs to indicate the decline of intergenerational financial exchange in Taiwan. In particular, for the elderly, who provide resources to their children and in turn receive financial support from the younger generation (Agree et al., 2002:289).

In terms of personal care, children remain the major source of support for the elderly. But women are more likely than men to be expected to carry out the physical practice of care-giving for their elderly parents (Bornat et al., 1999; Lewis and Meredith, 1988), relatives or children (Finch, 1989; Jamieson, 1998). Yet, in certain cultures, for example, in urban China, to live with married sons continues to be seen as a desirable option, even though it is women who are still the major source of personal care (Wolf, 1985; Bian et al, 1998). Particularly in Eastern cultures, including Japan, China, and South Korea, it is still the daughter-in-law, who is mainly responsible for care-giving to the elderly family members (Choi, 1993; Shi, 1993; Yamamoto and Wallhagen, 1997).

The level of direct involvement in personal care can, of course, vary, yet, despite cultural differences, examples of this sort are valuable in specifying the continuation of filiality. Paradoxically however, research in England also shows a trend toward greater independence

amongst the elderly, as a result of social policy, and increasing self-esteem amongst elderly people (Secker et al. 2003). This can be understood by what Rosenmayr and Kockeis (1963) term 'intimacy at a distance', which describes a desirable relationship between elderly people and their relatives, particularly their children. In addition, Wenger (1984) in discussing her North Wales data argues that this *desirable* relationship is still appropriated by family members, in terms of the description of an ideal familial relationship between the elderly and their children. This can be further supported by Thompson and West's study on preferences for sheltered housing, which includes a sample of all ages who suffered from rheumatism and arthritis. Thompson and West (1984:318) suggest that from their research findings, there is 'a strong feeling of not wanting to impose on relatives'. Such reluctance is relatively more apparent amongst the elderly than the younger, and becomes significant when more dependent parents need to rely on their children.

The growing independence amongst the elderly in the West is not a culturally isolated phenomenon. For example, in more recent research on attitudes towards supporting parents in Taiwan, Hsu et al. (2001:749) suggest that the agreement on living with sons or children has slowly decreased, particularly among those who are older³. This indicates that 'filial piety is no longer limited to co-residence of parents and children', although the research also shows that attitudes towards support by sons have remained stable. If the elderly *do* receive help from the family - the more they are given, the more they give back in return. According to Verbrugge and Chan's (2008:5) study on family reciprocity in Singapore: 'the results show that

³ One of the possible explanations is that people over 40-year-old need to deal with their marriages, jobs and children, while their parents are getting old and begin to demand some care. The other possibility is that people under 40-year-old are more affected by social desirability and are more willing to give an answer that does not follow convention (Hsu,2001:749)

the more financial support Singapore seniors received from kin, the more baby-sitting and chores they provide...Singapore seniors are maintaining family reciprocity by giving time in return for money.'

Throughout this examination of kinship in relation to economic support and personal care, we may understand that family obligation is not simply a question of social norms imposed upon individuals. Rather, reliability and reciprocity seem to play important roles in maintaining support between kin (Finch, 1989). Reliability implies a sense of 'knowing that there is something to fall back on, with family support acting as a safety net if really needed' (ibid: 54). A sense of mutual-trust is suggested here. However, reliability in its actual practice is more unsettled, since one cannot take the support of kin for granted. Similar to trust, reliability needs to be earned. Mutual acknowledgement between two parties needs to be shown if family support is provided. One cannot take family support for granted - it needs to be negotiated. Accordingly, this leads us to further understand what Finch refers to as 'reciprocity'.

Reciprocity can be articulated by financial exchange or paying back of emotional support or practical care. However a deeper root of reciprocity is a continual interplay between external ideas of moral obligations from the wider culture, and personal assessments about one's own circumstances. For instance, I do not expect myself to take care of my father simply because he is my father. He is my father, and our relationship has a past, a present and a possible anticipated future, all of which will affect the terms upon the extent to which responsibilities I shall choose to take.

The responsibility for taking care of my father may become a duty if my father financially supports me or I may inherit his estate in the future. This duty can turn into an obligation, if my father were to become physical impaired, and I happen to come from Taiwan, where a social welfare system is not fully developed. Confucian values of filial piety are still significant in informing how a son should behave. The significance and the legitimacy of filial piety will become more morally compelling if I am the *only boy* in the family and there is no one left to help me to take care of my father. Paradoxically, in this context, this obligation maybe the most *meaningful* practice for me, since it articulates my indebtedness to my father, who took care of me and supported me when I was young. This may be an extreme example. In everyday practices, the context of family support is more complex and there is considerable room for manoeuvre. However, what we can learn from this example is that perhaps we should not perceive family obligation as the most natural thing or an axiomatic concept that informs what we *ought* to do in terms of kin practices. In addition, if we want to talk about weakening family obligations as an indicator of the process of detraditionalization, then we need to understand what 'family obligation' means culturally, and how it is lived out by individuals in their everyday practices.

From this perspective, it is useful to differentiate, at least at an analytical level, the extent to which family support is founded upon obligation, duty, or responsibility (Finch, 1989; Finch and Mason, 1993). More specifically, what differentiates family responsibilities from obligations or duties is that the actual practices of kin support involve a continuing negotiation of who should do what for whom and under what circumstances. Negotiation, as the process of reaching an agreement, and involving the discussion of two parties allows the individual agency to come into play. It is argued that support between kin does not simply

follow a compelling moral structure, and that excludes agency. Rather, family *responsibilities* are indeed meaningful practices, and are culturally understood by those who carry those shared values. To illustrate this point, I want to first of all discuss the concepts of obligation, duty, and responsibility.

In terms of obligation and duty, these two terms can mean morally right or legally necessary. Yet to understand obligation as a binding power of morality without agency is different from duty. For the early anthropologists, obligation (to give assistance when it is needed, without thought of personal gain/pain) distinctively characterised what kinship meant - an inescapable moral binding (Fortes, 1969). Contrastingly, others perceived kinship, in a more practical way, as the material and economic exchanges of individuals' interests, whereas the term kinship was understood synonymously as duty (Bloch, 1973, Leach, 1961). However, both moral obligation and duty implied a hidden rule that suggested how kinship should work, and therefore overlooked the complex picture of family support in its everyday practices. Consequently, what was constantly eschewed is a cultural understanding of agency.

In addition, existing research suggests that people's practices of family support in everyday life are more fluid than the ideals of moral rules associated with kinship would traditionally allow (Finch and Mason, 1993). However, people also acknowledge their shared values as a cultural repository to 'properly' exercise family support. Therefore, it is useful to talk about *guidelines* rather than rules, when family support is the outcome of negotiation and mutual dependence between two parties. The former is perceived as the criteria one can apply in deciding what to do, whereas the latter implies rigidity and compulsion. From this perspective, what is emphasized by family responsibilities is reflexive agency.

We can understand this particular stance by looking at what responsibility means. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1973), the term *responsible* can be defined by four facets: (i.) answerable, (ii.) trustworthy, (iii.) morally accountable and (iv) capable of rational conduct. It is the first definition (i) that indicates an overlapping meaning shared by obligation, duty and responsibility. More specifically, ‘answering something’, for example, ‘I answer your question’ means that I am accountable for what I said to you. At the same time, I am expected to give explanations if you ask me to clarify, particularly when you have authority over me. A sense of obligation is suggested here. Being responsible is also to fulfil one’s job, and one should be ready to receive punishment or criticism if something goes wrong. This particular meaning continues to exist in a contemporary understanding of responsibility as *blame* for something bad that has happened. From this perspective, responsibility is synonymously understood as duty or obligation, meaning something that one has to do because it is morally right or legally necessary. An underlined theme shared by these three terms is the existence of authority.

Secondly, *responsible* can also mean (ii) the quality of being trustworthy. This can be understood in Jane Austin’s *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion III*, ‘Could not be a better time, Sir Walter, for having a choice of tenants, very responsible tenants’ (see ‘responsible’ in OED, *ibid*: 1810.). A sense of virtue is suggested here to describe a person who has good credit or repute. However, trustworthiness, like good reputation or respectability, needs to be earned. We can understand this sense of deserving of respect through responsibility in Edmund Burk’s (1920) *A Letter to a Noble Lord* where responsibility is used by Burk to describe the duty of faithful and trusted political representatives to make people’s true voice heard. However, if one fails to do so, it is not people but politicians who are answerable. Accordingly,

responsibility has dualistic meanings: praise or blame for fulfilling or failing in responsibilities attached to a particular role.

Unlike the previous definitions resulting from the consequence of external judgments, the concept of *being responsible* was subject to a distinctive development in the 19th century, which emphasizes the capability of agency that can *act independently* or *take decisions without authorization*. This leads us to the third and forth definitions of responsible. More specifically, (iii) being morally accountable, responsible is understood synonymously as righteous, in the sense that the individual is able to conduct actions that are morally acceptable. Responsible behaviours of this sort are often derived from a theological understanding of ‘right reason’ that is universally practiced (Williams, 1976).

We can also understand another sense of ‘responsible’ that is less to do with righteousness, duty, or virtue, and more concerned with (iv) rational conduct as Alexander Bain describes in *Mental and Moral Science* (1884): a man is considered responsible if his motives still continue to have power over him. For Bain, ‘responsible’ is synonymously understood as reasonable. It is used to describe one who can make sensible judgments and evaluations of encountered conditions without going beyond reason-giving. Responsible in this context does not refer to the condition that one has to report to someone with authority. Rather, it emphasizes reflexive agency focusing on, who is in charge of decision-making (e.g. I am the one who is responsible for my life, not my parents), although external moral standards may to a certain degree contribute to such a decision. This *active* sense of being responsible can be traced via a contemporary understanding of *responsibility* as power, choice, and control (e.g. it is the chairperson’s responsibility to decide when the funding will arrive).

Thus, we can identify responsibility and its synonymous connections with duty and obligation to the extent that one can be blamed if s/he does not fulfil her/his role. However, what differentiates responsibility from the other two concepts is the possibility of being respectable if one fulfils her/his responsibility. This is important in the sense that family responsibilities are fostered by external recognition that one should not take kin support for granted but that acknowledgements need to be expressed when one fulfils the required role/s. What is also absent from the concepts of obligation and duty are reasons that go beyond moral or legal grounds. More specifically, for those who perceive family support as obligation or duty, to take care of the elderly represents a doctrinaire tradition to be obeyed. By contrast, for one who perceives the support between kin as one's own responsibility, there is plenty of room for manoeuvre that allows individuals to decide whether such practices are necessary or reasonable, or morally significant (even if the outcomes might be the same) (Sevenhuijsen, 2000).

An immediate difficulty encountered by this analytical differentiation is the extent to which family responsibilities are based on rationality or morality, and are thus driven by individual decisions or moral dimensions. Perhaps, one needs to perceive responsibility as being woven by the interplay between public virtues and private interactions. In other words, one needs to perceive family responsibilities as a continual process of negotiation, where the pressures and limits of local tradition can be further identified. By negotiation, in line with Finch and Mason (1993), I understand that agency does not simply follow a set of pre-ordained social rules, such as moral obligations or family duties. Her or his family responsibilities cannot straightforwardly be explained by the position which s/he occupies in the social world. It is important to recognize social space for individuals, who can practice

family responsibilities differently, though it is never entirely open-ended and sometimes it can be quite tightly constrained. Through negotiating family responsibilities, a common understanding of what a particular course of action will mean can be developed between people. Family responsibilities, therefore, are more than social norms that one needs to obey; they are grounded by the shared cultural route that informs the individual on how to do things 'properly'.

We can understand this from Lin's (2010) research on masculinities amongst male peasant workers in contemporary southern China. According to Lin, the traditional kinship concept plays an important role in shaping young rural male peasant workers' understandings of what it means to be a man in the context of migration. More specifically, to be a son is to work hard, in order to take care of the elderly, to get married, and establish one's own family. Thus, to provide better material conditions back home is the main reason why male peasant workers need to migrate to urban cities in the first place. Therefore, for many young peasant workers, to send money back to their parents is meaningful in the sense that they want to show their gratitude. However, as Lin further suggests, the elder generation do not take the younger generation's indebtedness for granted. Often, parents only receive money in order to save it for the sons' futures as they are more 'deserving' cases (Finch and Mason, 1993). Here we can see how strong tradition - as meaningful family responsibility - is articulated by the negotiation between two generations. It is lived out only when mutual understandings and agreements have been reached. Through family responsibilities, we can understand how the younger generation interprets existing tradition as something that can be sometimes contradictory, but also as a source of useful cultural explanations for making sense of their biographies.

It is important to note here, that to deny family responsibilities as obligation is not to deny that family responsibilities can be sometimes morally compelling. Rather it is to deny the passivity of agency which cannot make sense of such practice. To emphasize the possibility of reflexive agency is not to celebrate the voluntarism in which individuals can lead their life simply on the basis of their own choices without any moral constraints. I want to suggest that the processes of detraditionalization enable younger research participants to lead a life outside of the traditional route of being a man. However, the traditional route does not disappear. It has become the cultural detour and leads one to anticipate the future; a detour that accommodates tensions and contradictions between the entrenched gendered experience and more individualized gendered practice - the struggle between *being* and *becoming* a Taiwanese young man.

So far, I have argued for the need to perceive family responsibilities as a product of negotiation, more than one of moral duty or obligation. By negotiation, we are able to understand how an active sense of tradition is culturally lived out and reflexively understood by agency. What I have not discussed is a passive moral dimension of family responsibilities, where responsibilities are associated with blame if one does not fulfil family responsibilities. I shall discuss both senses of family responsibilities in **Chapter 4**.

2.4.3.3. Reflexivity and tradition

While Beck talks about institutionalized individualization and Giddens discusses the reflexive project of the self; both accounts arrive at individualized subject-object forms of knowledge that presume a subject who exists outside of their social world and for whom the social world is conceptually mediated. Few accounts are given to explain the shared meaning and routine background of cultural practices. The overly cognitive or rationalistic

understanding of the late modern self and human action articulated by Beck and Giddens may neglect how a shared cultural 'field' (in Bourdieu's sense, 1977) constitutes our collective tastes or actions. As Lash (1994) points out, reflexivity is not necessarily derived from reflection on structure or agency. In line with Bourdieu, for Lash, reflexivity comes from situating knowers *in* their life-world.

Reflexivity of this sort enables one to make sense of the common practices of a community where everyday activities are about the routine achievement of meaning, about the production of substantive goods, that are not guided by calculating subjects, but 'guided by an understanding of more generally what is regarded as substantively good by that community' (Lash, 1994:157). In short, reflexivity for Lash is not a subject-object monitoring relation, but an *interpretative* scheme that constitutes collective identities, a cultural 'we', and is accountable for a particular way of life. Since it is hermeneutic in nature, reflexivity for Lash is always ready to be (re)interpreted by those who appropriate it.

If we recall Thompson's (1996) emphasis on hermeneutic and identity based aspects of tradition, we can see how strong tradition resonates with Lash's hermeneutic reflexivity, in the sense that both are a means of knowing and a sense of belonging that constitute a particular way of life. Whereas Lash talks about reflexive communities, which are widely stretched over abstract space and perhaps time through new forms of communication and informational fields, Thompson has discussed the 'uprooting' and 're-mooring' of traditions that are dislodged from particular locales, and have re-embedded themselves in the fabric of everyday life through the mass media.

Moreover, the new forms of collective lived experience described by Lash are reflexive in the sense that members of the communities 'are typically quite aware of the symbols central to the creation of their new identities' (1993:205). Accordingly, members of the reflexive communities are likely to ask themselves: shall I opt to support, for example, deep ecology or radical lesbian feminism? Consequently, 'reflexive communities' consciously pose themselves 'the problem of their own creation, and constant re-invention' (Lash, 1994:161). A similar dilemma is also encountered in Thompson's discussion of *strong* tradition (1996:102), where that wish has 'become so dependent on the media should also be vulnerable to them'. For example, on one hand, the English monarchy and its temporal representations of royal rituals are re-enforced through TV broadcasting. On the other, the scandals of the royal family are paradoxically central to the media's interests. The resultant public scrutiny exposes the same temptations and weaknesses they shared with ordinary people (Thompson, 1996).

What differentiates Lash's reflexive communities from Thompson's *mediated* tradition is that the former emphasizes how 'one is not born or "thrown", but "throws" oneself into [them]' (Lash, 1994:161), whereas the latter articulates a shared 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961; 1977) in which traditions, as shared meanings and values, are actively lived out by its contemporary correspondents, namely, media representations of tradition. For example, one is not only born but learns to become English. Yet both accounts emphasize a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which give the sense of a group, a generation or a period. Both Lash's and Thompson's accounts enable agency to come into play either through active choice or active interpretation. Moreover, Thompson's understanding of tradition, with an emphasis on its temporal continuation, indicates a frequent tension between the received interpretation and the actual

lived experience. It is through the pressures and limits of strong tradition that one can sketch out the trajectory of its hegemonic position. Nevertheless, neither of these two theoretical positions dismiss the need to conceptualize the shared cultural field that informs or explains a particular way of life.

The notion of late modernity, as Beck (et al., 2003:7) tells us, is 'completely Eurocentric', in the sense that the distinction of modernity and late modernity is derived from *one* historical constellation, namely Europe. Beck suggests that '[different] *non- European routes to and through second modernity* still have to be described, discovered, compared and analysed' (Beck et al, 2003:8 original emphasis). Derived from this position, one can suggest that there is a need to contemplate the location of culture in late modernity. I understand culture in terms of shared meanings and values within a specific society that inform the dis/continuity of hegemonic social and cultural formations lived out by people in ordinary contexts; through their particular way of life. More specifically, alongside individualization and detraditionalization, we also need to ask why particular cultural practices of tradition (that do not necessarily resonate theoretically with the 'do-it-yourself' biography or the reflexive project of the self) are still actively interpreted by those who live out those traditions as meaningful practices. This was emphasized in my earlier discussion of family and kinship. Through a qualitative lens, I will continue to elaborate this complex and uneven interplay between (strong) tradition and late modernity via my own analysis of the Taiwanese young men that I interviewed and their choices and changing understandings of marriage, kinship, and family in contemporary society.

2.4.4. Intimacy in late modernity

I have discussed so far the interplay between late modernity and (strong) tradition by critically exploring at the concepts of family and kinship in the context of detraditionalization. In what follows, I want to build on the discussion of gender relations in late modernity by addressing Giddens's concept of disclosing intimacy. As a theoretical initiation, Giddens's concept of agentic understanding of gender relationships provides a useful starting point of departure to capture changing gender configuration in late modernity. However, I have argued that the late modernity framework can be most useful if one can hold on to the productive theoretical tension between structure and agency. Therefore, I will critically examine Giddens's transformation of intimacy by exploring Jameson's discussion of the materiality of intimacy and its gendered configuration.

2.4.4.1. Antony Giddens: disclosing intimacy and gender equality

In describing recent transformations in gender relations, Giddens suggests that, '[today], for the first time in history, women claim equality with men' (1992:1). However, he is less concerned about gender equality in the domains of politics or economics, than with that operating in intimacy and sexuality. This can be understood by the ascendancy of what Giddens terms the pure relationship and confluent love. The pure relationship refers to a relationship that is entered into for its own sake, and is solely formed by the decisions of the two parties without any external intervention. Confluent love is contingent on both parties delivering enough satisfaction for each individual to remain committed.

What maintains the pure relationship and confluent love is not an overarching structure, but mutual self-disclosure and the appreciation of each other's unique qualities in that relationship. Accordingly, the types of intimacy involved in the pure relationship and

confluent love require equality and self-autonomy, where the consensus of the two parties is necessarily to be reached via (re)negotiations. Intimacy, from this perspective, is not only the recognition of the other. It is the key site where men and women find self-identity and where moral construction is explored and constituted (Giddens, 1991; 1992).

The concept of the pure relationship cannot be fully understood if one neglects the roles played by sexuality. In fact, the pure relationship is not about sexual purity. Rather, it is fostered by a creative and responsive form of sexuality, which liberates sexual behaviours from any prerequisite way of being sexual, namely 'the needs of reproduction' (1992:2). As Giddens observes, in sexual behaviour, distinction has always been drawn between pleasure and procreation. However, the more sexuality and intimacy were bounded, the more sexuality became completely separated from procreation. Therefore, '[sexuality] became doubly constituted as a medium of self-realisation and as a prime means, as well as an expression, of intimacy' (1991:164). Sexual behaviours are primarily defined in terms of mutual physical and emotional satisfactions. For women, in advanced western societies in particular, sexual intimacy no longer necessarily associates itself with concepts such as marriage or family. Rather, women can explore their own bodies and sexual pleasures in ways which are not dictated by men.

Sexuality, from this perspective, is not fixed by biological conditions, or by social norms that define acceptability. Sexuality has become malleable, and can be moulded as a trait of personality or be cultivated through lifestyle choices that satisfy one's own needs. This is crucial in the sense that (sexual) choices are not anymore external or marginal aspects of an individual's attributes. Rather, they define who the individual is. Plastic sexuality, from this

perspective, is intrinsically bound up with the self, in the sense that one can decide how to live out one's sexuality in accordance to personal tastes (1992). The flexibility of sexuality and the changing concept of intimacy are not only responsible for a revolution in female sexual autonomy, but also challenge the assumption of gender inequality and the notion of 'heterosexual normality'.

This is further evident in the flourishing of gay and lesbian identities (also see Weeks, 1998). Sexual pluralism, as Giddens argues, is to recognise that "normal sexuality" is simply one type of lifestyle choice among others' (1992:179). In fact, lesbianism is considered by Giddens as one of the epitomes of the pure relationship for its egalitarianism. For him, this equality is exemplified by lesbians, who challenge the stereotype of women as being 'naturally' monogamous. In addition, the higher level of communication found in the female-to-female relationship suggests that lesbians are more willing to acknowledge their sexual liaisons outside of relationship. Such practices are often performed with the consensus or acquiescence of the partner.

However, the pure relationship and its necessary processes of self-disclosure can lead the relationship to be coterminous with increased emotional fragilities, tensions, and traumas. This internal tension makes the pure relationship become reflexive for Giddens, in the sense that the two parties are bounded together contingently only when each gains sufficient benefit from the relationship. The relationship has become voluntary and is only good 'until further notice' (1992:63). Since there are no external boundaries for one to rely on, what is underlined by the pure relationship is the reflexive agency that needs to constantly carry out

self-examination. For example: is everything alright in my relationship? What do I want from this relationship? How does s/he feel about our relationship?

The reflexive self in the pure relationship can be further understood through the concept of trust. Unlike faith, trust, according to Giddens (1990), shows an awareness of expectations that can be frustrated or cast down. In other words, trust recognises contingency. Trust, unlike confidence, describes how one reacts to disappointment, not by blaming the other, but by partly shouldering the blame, or indeed by regretting having placed trust in the first place. In other words, trust relies on self evaluation.

In the context of the pure relationship, trust is 'mobilised by the process of mutual-disclosure' (1992:6). Intimacy can only be achieved if requisite personal knowledge is given. For Giddens, trust needs to be earned, particularly on a personal level. In other words, trust 'becomes a project, to be "worked at" by the parties involved, and demands the *opening out of the individual to the other*' (original emphasis, 1990:121). This implies, in a wider context, the dissolving of pre-given sociability where, 'the pure relationship' is established within 'the mutual process of self-disclosure'.

Dialogical openness and shared knowledge enable either party to decide if a relationship is worth maintaining. As a process of decision-making, trust becomes an *active* choice. It is 'invested in the light of the selection of alternatives' (1994:91), where to trust someone is the consequence of self-evaluation of the potential consequence that one may encounter. From this perspective, trust is directly linked with the reflexive project of the self – one constantly and actively seeks for reasons to trust the other in the pure relationship.

From discussion of the pure relationship, plastic sexuality and trust, we can understand that agency is portrayed by Giddens as something considerably empowered and thereby capable of shaping reflexive project/s of the self (Delanty, 2005). This stance is derived from Giddens's (1992:74-75) conceptualization of high modernity:

[where] large areas of a person's life are no longer set by pre-existing patterns and habits, the individual is continually obliged to negotiate lifestyle options. Moreover - and this is crucial - such choices are not just 'external' or marginal aspects of the individual's attitudes, but define who the individual 'is'. In other words, lifestyle choices are constitutive of the reflexive narrative of self.

As far as Giddens is concerned, the disembedding of traditional norms and cultural values in the global context forces individuals to become the centre of their decision making. Democratization of knowledge and accessibility of information allow expert knowledge to be re-appropriated by *anyone* who has the necessary time and training (1994:91). The gap between the expert and the lay person therefore becomes less significant (Giddens, 1990), and individuals are able to reflexively decide whether the knowledge itself is trustworthy. Modernization, therefore, is understood by Giddens as an *equally* distributed process of individual empowerment.

Giddens's democratization of the professional and the lay is inherited from his analysis of the transformation of intimacy. More specifically, for him, the transformation of personal intimacy 'means the promise of democracy' (Giddens, 1992:188, also see Weeks, 1995, 1998). Giddens's skilful manoeuvre on intimacy enables him to postulate a more egalitarian gender configuration that is faithful to his reflexive project of the self. It also allows a more dialectic interplay between men and women as continuing a process of (re)negotiation and communication. The ultimate goal here is to provide the social conditions

(mainly from a psychological perspective), for a reconciliation of the sexes in contemporary society. This opens up new conceptual possibilities that question the 'economic poverty for women, emotional poverty for men' (Giddens, 1992:149).

The usefulness of Giddens's notion of intimacy for my research lies in its recognition of new forms of gender relations that allow agency to actively participate in the process of gendering via the disclosure of the self. He also recognizes the transformation of late modernity, in which the existing gender order is losing its legitimacy and therefore allows men and women to live out their gendered experiences outside conventional gendered routes. In other words, it is possible to discuss different kinds of gender configurations that do not simply resonate with the notion of western patriarchy and male domination. This particular stance indicates an analytical position that serves as a departure for my research. By this I mean there is a need to tease out the extent to which Giddens's transformation of intimacy is lived out reflexively in daily life practices. This is an important question and I shall endeavour to answer it in Chapter 5, where I critically explore the interplay between reflexive male subjectivity and the existing gendered structure through online blogging. For Giddens, disclosing intimacy dissolves the gendered hierarchy and promises the transformation of gender equality. However, I want to address, for my research, is albeit necessarily in a modest way, I will look for signs and cues as to how Taiwanese young men actively construct their reflexive project of the self, by (not) talking about their relationship experiences through online blogging.

A main purpose of the literature review is to illustrate a productive tension between structure and agency in terms of the existing gendered configuration and how it is culturally

lived out through everyday practice. So far, I have discussed Giddens's notion of disclosing intimacy, where reflexive agency is paramount. What is constantly eschewed by his analysis is the materiality of the gendered structure of intimacy that is lived out in everyday practice. In addition, Giddens's understanding of (disclosing) intimacy through *words* rather than *things* appears to resonate with the methodological shift advocated by post-structuralism and post-modernism feminists (Barrett, 1992). However, this analytical inclination shared by Giddens and feminists such as Butler can be criticized for its trans-historical account and the incapability of capturing 'the actual contradictory character of specific social relations' (Fraser, 1998:149; also see Edwards, 1998; Jackson, 1998). Despite this omission, Giddens goes so far as to argue that '[disclosing intimacy] implies a wholesale democratising of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere' (1992:3). Rather than problematizing heteronormativity, Giddens's celebration of disclosing intimacy that leads to possible gender democracy is deceptively camouflaged by his conventional understanding of gendered norms (Jackson, 1999). This becomes apparent when one examines his choice of lesbianism as the epitome of the pure relationship. Moreover, as Lynn Jamieson asks (1999): does the transformation of intimacy in both sexual and emotional spheres mean the transformation of intimacy in all personal relationships with radical consequences for the gender order?

Although Giddens's postulation is supported by popular discourse (e.g. self-help books and novels about contemporary relationships between men and women), there appears to be a disconnection between the stories of everyday lives told to researchers and Giddens's pure relationship. Personal life seems to remain structured by inequality, regardless of the increased creative energy that seeks to achieve and maintain an ideal type of intimacy and

gender equality. In what follows, I wish to turn my discussion to another dimension of intimacy, one that is less to do with what intimacy *speaks*, and more to do with what intimacy actually *does*. This can be explored through Jamieson and her discussion of intimacy as care.

2.4.4.2. Lynn Jamieson: intimacy as care

Jamieson (1998, 1999) problematizes Giddens's one-dimensional notion of 'disclosing intimacy' – focused on the *words* that reveal the self - by suggesting that intimacy needs to be considered as multi-dimensional and in terms of *actions*. Intimacy is not simply the revealing of self and the feelings of love. As Jamieson (1998) argues, *feelings of love*, at least at an analytical level, are very different from *actions of care*. What is necessarily included in disclosing intimacy is a privileged way of knowing the innermost feelings, thoughts and love. This does *not* need to include practical caring and sharing. Therefore, to perceive intimacy simply as mutual self-disclosure provides a delusion that *words* are *actions*, and that *words* speak louder than *actions*. What is eschewed by Giddens's analysis is that social institutions actively constitute the actual gender practices in the first place.

Agreeing with Giddens, Jamieson suggests that gender configurations in late modernity are inherently unstable due to women's shifting social positions in the economy and education. Yet, located within a feminist framework and equipped with rich qualitative and quantitative research findings, Jamieson is sceptical about Giddens's optimism and his promise of gender democracy in general and with changing heterosexual relationships in particular (Brannen and Moss 1991; Morris, 1990; Vogler, 1994). As she argues:

It is important to note that feminist-informed work of the last few decades has not typically concluded that if sufficient men and women can live together as equals and intimates then how other institutions, work-places, the state, the street, and the like, 'do gender' will automatically radically unravel.

(1999:490)

...empirical work on heterosexual couples routinely continues to find that men exercise more power than women in the partnerships...But at the same time, research continues to find couples exhibiting such inequalities who collaboratively generate a sense of caring, intimate, equal relationships...

(1999:484)

Here, Jamieson argues that it is not adequate to understand intimacy without *materializing* it. Gender inequality is not necessarily articulated through aggressive domination or direct exploitation. It can be camouflaged by consensuses between couples and individual rationales. For example, institutionalized gender inequality can be disguised as a family myth for heterosexual couples (i.e. 'I-do-the-upstairs-he-does-the-down stairs, where the upstairs is the house and the downstairs is merely the garage', Hochschild, 1990:67).

This is further evident in Mansfield and Collard's (1989) research on housework distribution amongst newly-wed couples. It is suggested that when couples do discuss domestic arrangements, many of them come to the conclusion that *things just fell into place* according to circumstance, competence, and preference. For instance, women happened to enjoy cooking or cooked better than men, but there were few signs suggesting that the men attempted to learn how to cook. Men may be progressing to do their share of domestic chores but can more easily excuse themselves from doing such duties. As one of Mansfield and Collard's male participants suggests: 'I would do the washing up normally. I mean she did that Wednesday morning because we were both very tired after a busy day on Tuesday' (Mansfield and Collard, 1988:123). This also leads some scholars to argue, from a quantitative perspective, that although married women in paid labour have increased in the past several decades, these women still do the majority of housework (Bianchi et al., 2000; Fuwa, 2004).

Women may not necessarily express their dissatisfactions with uneven domestic distribution, although they may have to commit themselves to both paid work and domestic tasks. This is a predictable result of conventional views of gender and of ideas of the 'good mother' as a carer and good father as a provider (Brannen and Moss, 1991). Gender inequality can be further masked by expressions of traditional symbols of love and care assigned to different genders i.e. time and domestic dedication for women, and wage and 'complementary gifts' for men (Cheal, 1988; Jamison, 1998). Yet, it does appear that men have become more involved in helping out with housework. However, helping is different from sharing. The former implies the job really belongs to the person being helped, the latter suggests that responsibilities are routinely organized or rostered (Goodnow and Bowes, 1994). This becomes even more complicated if we understand the distribution of domestic tasks resulting from consensus and negotiation without actually understanding how the agreement is reached. This can obscure persistent gender exploitation, where consensus is an actual means to maintain hegemonic domination (Connell, 1995; Morgan, 1996).

This is a somewhat pessimistic view that resonates with *old* stories of patriarchy. Jamieson (1999) reminds us that even for those couples, who claim to work out their domestic lives without conforming to dominant gender stereotypes, the gender equality and unexploitative relationship depend on how couples develop 'fair' ways to get things done rather than simply the process of mutual self-disclosure. For couples, the processes of establishing basic principles of fairness needs to be reflexively negotiated and reworked on the basis of who, when, where, why and how this was done fairly (see Goodnow and Bowes, 1994). The consequence of negotiating is often *painful* and filled with conflicts. This can hardly be reached by simply accepting each other's unique quality. Intimacy is fostered by

practicality. One cannot reduce it to the connection of two people's inner thoughts and feelings. It is also about two adults who share responsibility for food, bills, and mortgage.

Giddens teaches us an important lesson. Through his idea of disclosing intimacy, we can observe a changing social structure where reflexive agency plays an important role in interpreting gender relations in contemporary society. Yet it is equally important to remember, as Jamieson suggests, that we cannot achieve gender equality simply through pure-relationships or plastic sexuality. One also needs to tackle the materiality of intimacy that perpetuates the existing gendered configuration in late modernity. These two sides of the intimacy story are indeed significant in my research. I want to hold on to this theoretical tension between structure and reflexive agency, in order to demystify the interplay between the lived experiences of Taiwanese young men, and a changing gender configuration in late modernity. One way of critically exploring this is to understand how younger research participants constructed their reflexive project of the self through blogging in the gendered blog-world (see **Chapter 5** for further discussion). Moreover, rather than embracing the idea that personal intimacy promises gender equality, I view gender configuration in late modernity in terms of flux, confusion, and uneven transition (Adkins, 2002; Jamieson, 1998, McNay, 1999). From this perspective, I attempt to sketch out how a particular group of Taiwanese young men actively and diversely construct their reflexive projects of the self by tactically resisting and actively negotiating with the gendered blog world.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to provide a systematic understanding of structure and agency via pro-feminists' structural analysis, followed by a discussion of the methodological tension between scholars' position on consumption and masculinities, and

finally, exploring gender relations in late modernity. I have highlighted the significance of reflexive agency in order to demonstrate how local tradition as a particular way of life is continuing to be lived out by individuals as meaningful practice. In so doing, I hope to provide a theoretical explanation to contribute to the under-theorized notion of tradition in a late modernity framework. At the same time, I do not postulate voluntarism. I have continually asked how contemporary gendered configuration and agency is lived out via negotiation, resistance and complicity. It is important to remember that to challenge the passivity of agency is not to deny that sometimes agency is passive. To challenge that individuals who practice the local tradition are not cultural dupes is not to deny that local tradition may seek to manipulate. But it is to challenge that tradition is little more than a degraded landscape of cultural and ideological manipulation, imposed from above in order to maintain its authority and secure social control (Storey, 1997).

As one of the central contentions of my research, I argue that the notion of gender can be most insightfully explored when the productive tension between structure and agency is maintained. That is to understand how the gender order is culturally lived out in a specific historical juncture as a complex interplay between the existing gender configuration and everyday gendered practices. In particular, one cannot simply assume that the local tradition and its gendered norms are simply followed dogmatically by those who inhabit such a culture. It is equally important to note here - by rephrasing Marx's quote - we are actively doing gender, but we do not do it just as we please, we do not make it under circumstances chosen by us, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. This particular stance echoes the theoretical stance I have endeavoured to sketch out in this chapter. In short, there is structure and there is agency. Bearing this in mind, while

exploring gender, one needs to continually and critically seek for what cultural studies terms 'Gramscian resistance' (Storey,1999). I shall demonstrate the dialectical interplay between structure and agency and the existing tension at a methodological level in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology

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3.7. Conclusion

3.1. Introduction:

A main aim of my research is to understand how gender configuration and gender practices are *culturally lived out* by young men and their gendered experience. The primary concern of this chapter is to provide an explanatory account of how I make sense of the experiences of the research participants and researcher, both *theoretically* and *culturally*. In short, I want to demonstrate the trajectory of my research, where my academic and cultural experiences have critically enacted *between* and *within* each other.

I understand experience in two ways: *experience past* and *experience present*. The former refers to the structural influence of knowledge, such as one's theoretical disciplines or entrenched cultural experiences, which unconsciously shapes one's particular way of thinking. The latter, as agentic understanding, often originating from personal experience and a more comprehensive consciousness, offers an immediate grounding of reasoning. Hence, in the first part of this chapter, I shall provide an explanation of how reflexive knowledge is produced through the problematization/appropriation of *experience past* and *experience present*.

In the second part of this chapter, I shall contextualize reflexivity in my own research by discussing what I term *experience present perfect*. By *experience present perfect*, I endeavour to demonstrate how reflexivity is a continuing production of the dialectical interplay between structure (*experience past*) and agency (*experience present*). Locating myself within cultural studies, I argue that there is a need to maintain the methodological tension between materiality and consciousness with regard to experience in order to articulate from where I am speaking and how I am speaking (Hall et al, 1980; Probyn, 1993). One way of doing this is to perceive experience in its *present perfect* tense: to understand past experience, operating as an

interpretive scheme that continually informs how one perceives the social world s/he inhabits. Knowledge of this sort is derived from self-awareness, and is never fully incorporated into norms. *Experience present perfect* is always ready to open itself up for challenges and changes. Firstly, I shall elaborate a more detailed account of what I understand as *experience past* and *experience present* before discussing reflexivity and situated knowledge.

3.2. Conceptual interconnections: experience past/present

Until the 18th century, *experience* was interchangeable with *experiment* – meaning ‘to try’ or ‘to put to the test’. Both meanings designated how knowledge was created through observation and testing (see ‘experience’ in OED, *ibid*: 705). However, in Middle English, ‘experience’ developed a general meaning to include knowledge deriving from real events in the past as well as particular observations, whereas the simple sense of ‘the action of trying’ (a test or a trial) was still retained in ‘experiment’. This can be understood in a more daily context, such as ‘we all learn by experience’. Implied in *experience past* (in William’s understanding of the term, 1976) are either conscious observations or considerations and reflections upon past events. Like lessons that we have learned, ‘the general usefulness of *experience past* isthat it is difficult to know who would want to challenge it while it remains neutral and permitting radical conclusions to be drawn from diversely gathered and interpreted observations’ (*ibid*:127).

In the 20th century, as Hall (1980) suggests, Marxist structuralists have endeavoured to disengage experience from consciousnesses. This perspective emphasizes particularly the materiality of experience where *experience past* ‘is seen as the product of social conditions or

systems of belief or of fundamental systems of perception, and thus not as material for truths but as evidence of conditions or systems which by definition it cannot itself explain' (Williams, *ibid*: 128). Accordingly, we can also understand experience of this sort as the ideological ground of one's knowledge. As far as this chapter is concerned, *experience past* is useful to the extent that it provides a possible structural reflection upon pre-reflexive experiences. I will discuss this particular stance in terms of Bourdieu's exploration of participant objectivation (see section 3.3.2.).

Williams refers to another sense of experience - *experience present* – which developed in the 14th century. This refers to 'the...most open, most active kind of consciousness' (Williams, 1976:127) and sometimes differentiates itself from objective reason or knowledge. This can be understood by Baumgarten's understanding of *Æsthetica* (aesthetic), where beauty as a perception was apprehended more by sense rather than thought (see 'aesthetic' in OED, *ibid*:32). For Williams, *experience present* includes feeling as well as thought and allows sensibility (e.g. inner, personal or emotional elements) to come into play. This kind of consciousness, particularly directly associated with experience of life, often serves some kind of testimony as 'the most authentic kind of truths' (Williams, *ibid*: 128). As Geoffrey Chaucer once suggested in the *Wife of Bath*: 'Experience, though noon auctoritee/ Were in this world, is right ynough for me? To Speke of wo that is in marriage...' (Chaucer, 1400 quoted in Bérubé, 2005 a: 122). In other words, there is no one more convincing than a woman who has married five times to tell you what marriage is like. A sense of the eyewitness is suggested here, in which *experience present* claims its authority.

In this chapter, *experience present* – as the necessary grounding for all subsequent reasoning and analysis - plays a central role in understanding feminist standpoint epistemology (section 3.3.1) and anthropological *author-ity*, such as Malinowski's device or Rabinow's reflexivity (section 3.4.).

I have discussed so far the two major conceptions of experience and their relations to knowledge. The discussion will now focus on how a reflexive knowledge is produced. To begin with, I will focus on feminist standpoint epistemology⁴ and Bourdieu's participant objectivation. As a legacy of positivism, objective findings are the ultimate goal sought by these two approaches in which feminist standpoint epistemology and Bourdieu's objectivation endeavour to unpack social reality via *scientific* approaches. However, feminist standpoint epistemology questions the gendered exclusion of women as the consequence of modernity and its masculinist epistemology, whereas Bourdieu is sceptical about the objectivist claim that neglects the position of the observer. In response, a *situated* objectivity was endorsed by feminist standpoint epistemology and its appropriation of women's experience (consciousness), whereas Bourdieu's reflexivity introduced a critical examination of pre-reflexive experiences of the researcher and their social conditions.

3.3 Positivist legacy and its situated reflection

3.3.1. Feminist standpoint epistemology and gender reflection

Since the age of the Enlightenment and the flourishing of empiricism and scientific movements, positivism became the only valid way of knowing; scientific experiments were

⁴ Although Harding's feminist standpoint epistemology, as I will discuss in the following section, is an relatively early research on what Haraway (1988) terms 'situated knowledges', yet the purpose of discussing Harding, alongside Bourdieu, here is to introduce their critical responses towards positivism and its 'biased' objectivity by the appropriation/problematisation of *experiences past* and *experiences present*.

counted as the primary source of reliable knowledge (Bérubé, 2006b; Shapin, 2006). However, one may ask *who* carried out the experiments and *whose* knowledge counted? As Haraway (1997:27) suggests, the Enlightenment project was carried out by the self-invisible and modest witness, who 'is the legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world, adding nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment.' His subjectivity is his objectivity. His 'objectivity' guarantees the clarity and purity of objects, and therefore endows him with a remarkable power to establish the facts. It was precisely this kind of modesty and self-invisibility that provided the founding virtues of what we understand as western modernity.

Who is this witness of modernity? First of all, he could not be an artist, who did not inhabit 'the culture of no culture' (Traweek, 1988:162). He also could not be a poet, who was not able to present the naked way of writing. To write nakedly was to celebrate the credibility of transparency - a capacity to demonstrate knowledge via objectivity and rationality. This witness could not be a woman since she was not allowed to work in the scientific institution, where the virtues of modernity and its epistemology were fostered. *He* has to be someone like Robert Boyle (or his followers), a modest scientist and an invisible man, who could reveal impersonal facts produced through experiments. In short, (western) modernity is gendered. It is precisely this gendered modernity and its masculinist epistemology that drew a critique from feminist standpoint epistemology.

Rather than positivism and scientific inquiry itself, it is the 'sexist and andocentric biases' (Harding, 1987:182) of making science as gendered-free knowledge that have become the central dispute of feminist standpoint epistemology. As Harding suggests, the deficiency

of positivism is that it is not scientific enough. As a solution, it is not sufficient to overcome the gendered distortion by simply adding women, i.e. female researchers or research on women into the research. This will only address gendered research methods. What is left unexamined are the wider gendered presumptions towards women (Harding, 1993). The effective alternative was to reflect upon research *methodologically* from a feminist standpoint. For Harding (1987, 1993), it is women's experiences that can provide a critical reflexivity or a 'stronger objectivity' (in her own words) that scrutinizes the process of scientific-knowledge-in-making.

Why are *women's experiences* more objective? This is to do with the social position in which women are located, as an oppressed group in a patriarchal society, and the consciousness assigned for such a position. In other words, 'many phenomena which appear problematic from the perspective of men's characteristic experiences do not appear problematic at all from the perspective of women's experiences..., [but] women experience many phenomena which they think *do* need explanations' (Harding, 1987:6 original emphasis). For instance, why is the issue of death a matter of a human act, whereas child-rearing for women is considered as an inevitable 'natural' fact? Harding continues to suggest that female consciousness as 'a more complete and less distorting kind of social experience' (ibid: 8) - enables female researchers, as strangers, to observe the science inhabited by its native men at a distance. In other words, a stranger is able to bring to the research her own remoteness that can maximize objectivity. Moreover, she can detect patterns of belief and behaviour that are hard for those natives to detect (Harding, 1991). For feminist standpoint epistemology, this unique female consciousness seems to become the last refuge for objective science.

Yet in this 'authentic' female consciousness, one can find a deficiency in feminist standpoint epistemology. As mentioned earlier, *experience present* – the sense of subjective witness offered to be shared – is powerful since it provides an authentic kind of truth that declares its own authority: what could be truer than a subject's account of what she or he has been through? However, if the insistence on gender differences and women's experiences, as the incontestable evidence and unique gender sensibility towards science, becomes the only origin of knowledge, then scholars such as Harding may risk reiterating the knowledge of patriarchy rather than fundamentally challenging it. As Scott argues (1991), documenting the experiences of others, or, women in this context, in the way that the direct experience of others can provide an authentic account and therefore legitimize its authority. This has been at once a highly successful and limiting strategy for historians of difference:

It has been successful because...it remains so comfortably within the disciplinary framework of history, working according to rules that permit calling old narratives into question when new evidence is discovered... [however, by] remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded consideration of difference in the first place.

(Scott, 1991:776-777)

Hence, for feminist standpoint epistemology, female consciousness becomes something assigned and further appropriated to naturalize differences between women and men. If we only rely on experience present as the origin of our explanation, what has been left out is the opportunity to scrutinize how social conditions construct gendered experiences. What is also left unexamined is how subjects are constructed as different in the first place. In addition, due to the understanding of women's collective experience of oppression, social relations are perceived by feminist standpoint epistemology as something 'oppositional' rather than 'relational'. In other words, for Harding society is primarily orchestrated by male domination

and female subordination. Other kinds of social category, such as race, ethnicity, class, or sexuality are mentioned, but not recognized analytically. The complex social relationship and the interplay between and within each social category are inevitably neglected (see Archer, 2003).

This analytical tendency can also be found in E. P. Thompson (1978) and his analysis of working class experience (as internal consciousness) and (external) social conditions. Unlike the ossified account of class provided by Marxist structuralism, through experience, Thompson is able to bring subjective feeling (agency) into the analysis of class struggle. However, his insistence on “social being” has determined “social consciousness” (1978:171) and experience as a distinctive and coherent whole makes the exclusion of different subject-positions inevitable. As a result, Thompson’s manoeuvre to bring agentic analysis via experience to a historical picture of class ends up arriving at the place where he originally intended to depart from.

Feminist standpoint epistemology has shared this dilemma. For Harding, scientific objectivity is rescued by women’s unique consciousness. Paradoxically, to rely predominantly on *experience present*, with its inclination to emphasise the quality of a unique wholeness, is to firstly exclude the possibility of analysing things that happened differently in the past. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this also excludes other kinds of *authentic* experiences. In maintaining that women’s experiences are a totalising, coherent, and oppressed entity; different kinds of subject and social positions are inevitably subsumed by it. Harding’s appeal to experience seems to bypass objectivity by not asking if women’s experiences are also the production of a larger gendered configuration. It also rests firmly on

an assumption of a transparency arising from women and their essentialising/universalising gendered experience (Scott, 1991).

Consequently, rather than women's experiences, it is the *feminist* experience that has now become the primary ontological foundation of gender identity, politics and history. Harding's suggested 'subjective objectivity' (1987:9) is a more *situated* knowledge, and seems to make feminist standpoint epistemology more reflexive than masculinist scientific research. Harding, however, fails to explain why her reflexivity is no more than a particular feminist gaze on society. Neither does she describe how feminists could observe the 'natives' from a distance if they are already embedded within the culture and values of the 'native' without realizing it. This can be further explained by black feminist critiques of the lack of consciousness in racially structured societies among white feminists in relation to racism (Collins, 1990; Archer, 2002).

3.3.2. Bourdieu's participant objectivation and structural reflection

A key lesson we have learned from feminist standpoint epistemology is how to *situate* knowledge in accordance with experience (present). However, to understand reflexivity via the notion of experience is not only found within feminist critique. Some male post-positivists such as Pierre Bourdieu have manoeuvred to develop a more reflexive way of uncovering social reality. (By referring to Bourdieu as a post-positivist, I imply the scepticism *toward* and legacy *of* positivism that can be simultaneously traced in his scientific analysis of society, Wacquant, 1989.)

Bourdieu is more sceptical than feminist standpoint epistemology about the endorsement of *experience present* that provides the most authentic truths. For him, the risk to

do so is to equate the researcher's epistemology as the same as the researched, and therefore commit what he calls 'the scholarly gaze'. 'In my view', Bourdieu maintains in an interview with Wacquant, 'one of the chief sources of error in the social sciences resides in an uncontrolled relation to the object which results in the projection of this relation into the object' (1989:33). This is not to suggest, however, that Bourdieu disputes the use of experience. What needs to be explored is the 'pre-reflexive social and academic experiences of the social world that [the analyst] tends to project unconsciously onto ordinary social agents' (Bourdieu, 2003:281). It is through structural reflection or 'participant objectivation' in Bourdieu's term, that one can conduct more reflexive and social-scientific research.

By participant objectivation, Bourdieu proposes that researchers examine how their fields or networks shape their particular ways of understanding. Reflecting upon his multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Kabylia, Algeria - as a *foreign* social researcher - and then in Béarn (his childhood hometown) as a legitimate member - Bourdieu (2003:282) argues that his past experiences are an 'irreplaceable scientific resource' for him to make sense of the hidden logic of social practice. By this, he means that through the unconscious appropriation of his past experiences, he is able to make sense of his 'preconceptions' and 'presuppositions'. This appears to echo what Peter Winch (1970:93) suggests, that it is through one's 'category-mistake' towards the others that one learns why the self thinks in a particular way. In order to mobilize this scientific resource reflexively, rather than to simply observe others via the gaze from afar, it is the scholar him/herself who should be subjected to close scrutiny. This is where participant objectivation comes into play. Participant objectivation, Bourdieu suggests, undertakes to critically explore the relationship between the researchers' academic discipline and the knowledge he or she produces. In other words, a reflexive researcher must try to

identify how the field - or the materiality of *experience (past)*, as Scott (1991) and Williams (1976) point out – shapes his or her understanding of research. For Bourdieu, fields here refer to the social, political, and historical conditions of his childhood and academic experiences. The latter includes his occupied position in academic space, and embodied theoretical discipline. Bourdieu's recognition of the field is something often overlooked by feminist standpoint epistemology (see Adkins and Skeggs, 2004).

Tim May (1998) suggests that Bourdieu's participant objectivation represents what he calls referential reflexivity as 'the consequence that arises from a meeting between the reflexivity exhibited by actors as part of a lifeworld and that exhibited by the researcher as part of a social scientific community' (8). From this perspective, feminist standpoint epistemology cannot be understood as referential reflexivity since it fails to recognize the possible reflexivity exhibited by a male counterpart, and the researcher's own epistemology as the production of a particular discipline. Through referential reflexivity, the researcher is able to reflect *upon* rather than within social research, where the latter can lead researchers to produce self-prophesized explanations. More specifically, what May and Bourdieu are talking about is a kind of self-awareness - a methodological strategy rather than a self-indulgent egocentrism - to *position* the researcher/research, and to situate knowledge in the social world. In so doing, as a manoeuvre to retain the objectivity of social research, they hope to critically re-examine not only the intellectual structure inherited, but the sociological knowledge enacted and produced by such a structure.

However, for May and Bourdieu, the inherited intellectual structure is perceived as something gender-free. This assumption is challenged by feminists such as Lisa Adkins

(2002). Reflecting upon a review article (Williams, 1997) about the reflexivity presented in her study on sexuality and labour, and Roper's (1993) study of masculinity in British corporate culture, Adkins sets out to make sense of why her study is *less* reflexive than her male counterpart.

There are two main criticisms. Firstly, Adkins was not able to empathize with her male interviewees to the same extent as Roper did. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly: Adkins was not able to think beyond her experience of being a woman and feminist (i.e. 'as a young woman, Adkins no doubt had difficulty seeing the world from the vantage point of the sexist managers and ride operators she interviewed' Williams, 1997, quoted in Adkins, 2002:92). In other words, Adkins failed to demonstrate a kind of self-reflexivity that recognized how her intellectual discipline and personal experience intervened in or influenced her own research. Consequently, she was not able to recognize the possible reflexivity exhibited by male participants she had interviewed. This leads Adkins (2002:93-94) to ask:

...Why is my research discounted on the grounds of a logic which my own positioning did not allow me to 'see', while Roper's positioning is understood to be constitutive of both reflexivity and the kind of [referential] reflexivity between knower and known[?].....Why doesn't the reviewer see similar problems in Roper's research with respect to his relationship with the women executive managers he interviewed to those she accredits to mine in relation to interviewing men? In short why does my sex (and age) matter while Roper's does not?

As a response, Adkins argues that the kind of self-reflexivity she was criticized for lacking has embedded within it a particular mobile relation to identity in the (gendered) world. What she means by this is that the concept of reflexivity postulated by Bourdieu or May – as specific resources or accesses to become a legitimate knowledge-maker - is predominantly available for male scholars. Women, due to their (sex/gender) identity, are excluded from obtaining

this epistemological mobility . This gendered exclusion has already been pointed out in feminist standpoint epistemology. It is also evident, according to Felski (1995), in studies of the late 19th century literary texts, where middle-class femininities (e.g. with reference to describe notion of consumerism, narcissism, or vanity), on the one hand, were appropriated by male avant-garde writers such as Oscar Wilde in their writing as artifice to express self reflexivity and challenge the fixed gender binary and dominant masculinity within modernist writing. On the other hand, ironically, for these bourgeois male writers, this feminized reflexivity hardly be applied to women since ‘women...lived on their emotions. They only thought of their emotions’ (Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* quoted in Felski , 1995:107-108)

Therefore, while male scholars are simply exhibiting their reflexivity, female scholars have to first of all justify their gender identity in order to become a reflexive researcher (Adkins, 2002). If we understand masculinity and femininity as constituted relationally in ways, that (re)define each other in the same gendered configuration, and if reflexivity between knower and known is constituted via a mobile relation to identity and problematises the nature of women and their experiences; then perhaps male scholars such as Bourdieu need to explain why their gender identity is not an obstacle for self-evident reflexivity. From this perspective, ‘the politics of reflexivity only allows some people to speak’ (Adkins, *ibid*: 101)..

What is also excluded in Bourdieu’s reflexivity is consciousness of agency, although this is not to suggest the exclusion of agency in his analysis. Rather, being influenced by phenomenology, including Sartre’s existentialism, Bourdieu’s meticulous exploration of agency can be traced via his emphasis on how individuals constantly manoeuvre and resist

symbolic power in fields (Wacquant, 1989). However, derived from structuralist materialism such as Lévi-Strauss, the kind of agency discussed by Bourdieu is already culturally prescribed. Therefore, agency and his or her consciousness are to be eschewed since norms, understood by Bourdieu, are to be generally incorporated, and hence close off any possibility of ambivalence. Accordingly, this omission of a more active sense of agency, perhaps expresses the positivist legacy in Bourdieu's premise.

Alongside Adkins (2003:37), perhaps, we need to conceptualize agency through 'habit' rather than habitus in the sense of 'norms as never fully occupied'. This allows conceiving of a more active sense of subjectivity and subject formation that does not fully incorporate with the field (Butler, 1999). This is an important argument that I shall develop in more detail within my discussion of *experience present perfect*. In response to feminist standpoint epistemology and Bourdieu's participant objectivation, we understand the strengths and limits of appropriating/problematising experience past/present. It is important to note here, through *experience present*, it is not the most authentic but situated knowledge that one can provide; knowledge that informs from where one is speaking. Through *experience past*, one needs to recognize how his or her intellectual dispositions may shape the way how s/he speaks and thinks. Nevertheless, there is always room for manoeuvre, although such space is never entirely open-ended and sometimes it can be quite tightly constrained.

In what follows, I want to turn to a different kind of reflection to that of Bourdieu, a reflexivity that is constituted by the researcher's confession. More specifically, I want to understand how the authority of the ethnographer is constructed by his/her experiences *out*

there (in the field) and *back here* (the monological tone of ethnographic work) by discussion of Malinowski's and Raibinow's work. This is followed by an exploration of Clifford's insistence on the dialogical modes of textual strategy. Although these three scholars represent very different kinds of tradition, what connects them together is a kind of reflexivity that is derived from their thinking as well as feelings - their *experience present*.

3.4. Reflexivity and the ethnographer's self

3.4.1. Malinowski's device: rationality and sensibility

Experience present, that is revealing personal feelings as well as thoughts, can sometimes become an alibi for positivist rationality and its scientific authority. In particular, earlier anthropologist, such as Malinowski, manoeuvred to convince the reader of their findings and scientific rationales with a deeply, personal confession of their fieldwork, in order to convey their objectivity. What often inspired their research was both positivist thinking and the use of literary devices. In so doing, they wished to recognize that 'man is a creature of emotion at least as much as reason' (Frazer 1922: ix). In fact, in the introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922:25), Malinowski states that the ultimate goal of his ethnographic work '...is...to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world' (original emphasis). In other words, as a 'true' ethnographer, one needs to grasp the exotic not only by the scientific analysis of the natives. One also grasps it by almost losing one's self, perhaps one's soul, to mesmeric others. This is only the beginning of the analysis. As a positivist practitioner, Malinowski also maintains the necessity to understand the natives' lives scientifically.

Nevertheless, it was not a dilemma for Malinowski to simultaneously cling tightly onto rationality and sensibility. On the one hand, assimilation with *the natives* was a necessary

move in order to provide the most authentic accounts of the natives' lives. On the other hand, the distinction between the observer/observed had to be maintained in order to secure his positivist certitude. Malinowski had to pass as a native but could not be recognized as one. The oscillation between sensibility and rationality is where Malinowski's reflexivity plays out. Yet, Malinowski does not explain to us how one could '... [live] a multiplex life: sailing at once in several seas' (Geertz, 1988:77). It seems that Malinowski's reflexivity can only occur when he eschews this methodological dilemma: to understand scientific knowledge sociologically. As Woolger (1988) reminds us, this methodological synthesis (i.e. a scientific framework with literary devices) can lead positivist anthropologists to what we now understand as relativism. Relativists in this context are those who understand scientific knowledge as something socially constructed and culturally and historically diverse. However, if one accepts that knowledge is the production of human activities, it then also makes such claims less reliable and becomes 'self-defeating'. The universality of natural law does not accept any cultural variety.

Methods mean very different things for scientists and social constructionists. More specifically, research methods for the natural sciences are perceived as something neutral and independent. If one's findings are scientifically proven, then changing the method will not lead to a changed result - replicability is where a scientific approach stamps its authority. Moreover, for natural sciences, methods are designated to improve 'the adequacy of the connection between analysts' statements and the objects of those statements' (Woolger, *ibid*: 20). The chosen method does not imply subjective interference from the researcher. Rather, it encourages the need to provide a 'benign introspection' – an inspection upon the research process which tells the inside story about how the research was conducted.

By contrast, for constructionist approaches, such as in literary criticism, methods are like the *signature* of an author, which indicates ‘the fact that the author constitutes and forms part of the “reality” she creates is axiomatic to the analytic styles’ (ibid: 22). Articulated by the signature are both the position of the researcher and the particular interpretations implied by such a position. In short, the methodological tension lies in advocating the absence/presence of the researcher’s subjective position, and a method that is interdependent on or independent of the produced knowledge.

Malinowski, however, attempts to convince us of his notion of objectivity partly through his insistence on a scientific approach, and perhaps, more importantly, through his *experience present*. In other words, his fieldwork experience - as a kind of ‘I-witness’ magic – provides him with the most authentic truth: I know because I was there (for ‘Malinowski’s magic’ see Stocking’s discussion, 1983). This convincing magic is further appropriated by Malinowski’s ethnographic text - to translate from what he has been through *out there* (in the field) to what he says *back here* (in his writing). Moreover, what is articulated by his fieldwork confession is the author-izing *self* via ‘the prestige of “sincerity” (to express yourself, to explain yourself, to judge yourself)’ as Roland Barthes (1982:480-81) once suggested. Consequently, whether accurately or not Malinowski appears to speak to us convincingly through his texts. However, ‘[when] the subject so expands does not the object shrink?’ (Greetz 1988:78). In contrast to those who do not know themselves inside or how they wish to be seen outside, Malinowski is too sure of both; through his constant reminders of his own fieldwork experience and his *experience present*.

I now want to turn my discussion to a younger generation of anthropologists, who have also reflected upon their fieldwork experiences via confession. For these later anthropologists, Malinowski's skeleton has turned into a discursive imagery. However, unlike Malinowski, their sense of I-witnessing is less certain, and the relation between researcher and the researched is less hierarchical. Within this analytical trend, I want to focus particularly on a more ambivalent and less straightforward I-witness writer: Paul Rabinow (1977).

3.4.2. Paul Rabinow: the comprehension of the self

A primary aim for the earlier generation of anthropologists was to make exotic others quotidian. However, this is not the first priority for Paul Rabinow. For him, the priority is to find something new, perhaps something more to do with the *self* of the researcher, particularly when one's traditional cultural repertoire is not available for personal appropriation. It is the exasperated self that both intellectually and politically initiates Rabinow's ethnographic journey in Morocco. Intellectually, Rabinow (1977) refers to his dissatisfaction with the great tradition at the University of Chicago as well as 'a [general] sense of crisis about the [western] older sciences and disciplines' (2), and the 'positivistic view of science' (ibid: 5) from anthropology in particular. Politically, Rabinow experienced the apolitical impotence after Robert Kennedy's assassination and the political impact of the 68 movement in Paris. Therefore, before entering the field, (in contrast to Malinowski, who carried a clear self-portrait informed by positivist thinking), the self for Rabinow is more fragmented and opaque, a self that was more sceptical about the scientific understanding of anthropology, a self that hopes to be continually sketched out via the cultural experience of otherness.

Deriving from the French hermeneutic phenomenologist, Paul Ricoeur, the central contention in Rabinow's work is 'the comprehension of self by the detour of the comprehension of the other' (5). Rabinow attempts to provide an interpretational framework that situates the cultural experience in which the consciousness of agency is articulated. However, he reminds us that the self is neither personal nor psychological. It is the *cultural* self; a self being made, and being situated in a contentiously changing world of meaning. It is a mistake to assume that the self for Rabinow refers simply to the ethnographer. The self is better understood in the plural; that is the self from both sides – ethnographer and informants. Accordingly, the contemplation of the self does not refer to the researcher only, the informants are also (forced) to reflect upon their take-it-for-granted cultural experience. So far as Rabinow is concerned, the latter is a major component of the ethnographic process. Commenting on his informants, Ali, Rabinow (1997:38-39) suggests:

He was constantly being forced to reflect on his own activities and objectify them...he soon began to develop an art of presenting his world to me. The better he became at it, the more we shared together. But the more we engaged in such activity, the more he experienced aspects of his own life in new ways. Under my systematic questioning, Ali was taking realms of his own world and interpreting them for an outsider...This was the beginning of the dialectic process of fieldwork.

As Rabinow acknowledges, for Ali, this was an unnatural process and a difficult and trying experience. In other words, rather than to *make the exotic quotidian* (a motto that informs much ethnography), the fieldwork experience for Ali is to make *the familiar strange*. This is significant. By focusing on the informant, Rabinow is able to conceptualize ethnographic interpretation in a more dialectical way, whereby the cultural experience of otherness needs to be articulated and interpreted firstly by the researched.

How about the researcher? For Rabinow, being in the field is an accelerated dialectical experience in the sense that the exotic is not only being made mundane, but that also challenges his common-sense world and furthermore becomes part of his world. Consequently, through the double-dialectic - as the denaturalization of 'the-familiar-self' for the researcher/researched - 'there began to emerge a mutually constructed ground of experience and understanding, a realm of tenuous common sense which was constantly breaking down, being patched-up, and examined' (ibid:39). It is this shaky ground built upon tensions between cultural differences and shared mutual-understandings between the researcher/researched through which Rabinow's reflexivity is played out.

Rabinow's concept of reflexivity becomes clear if one draws a comparison with Malinowski's magic. For Rabinow, rather than the oscillation between scientific rationality and literary sensibility, what needs to be cultivated is a cultural sensibility that can *make the familiar strange* and *exotic quotidian* (Winch, 1970). Indeed, for Rabinow, a reflexive ethnography is carried out by a continuous interplay of cultural (re)interpretation between the researcher/researched. In addition, for Malinowski, anthropological facts are something that can be objectively observed. However, as Rabinow reminds us, 'fact' is made, as its Latin root *factum* (meaning 'made' in English) suggests; and 'the facts we interpret are made and remade...cannot to be collected as if they were a rock, picked up and put into cartons and shipped home to be analyzed in the laboratory' (1977:150). Ethnographers need to recognize that we cannot study the culturally mediated meanings of people whose culture we have come to explore through a method that excludes their understandings.

Furthermore, Rabinow maintains the tension between the self and others, whereas Malinowski manoeuvred to propose a kind of togetherness with the natives – to amalgamate the (scientific) skeleton of his fieldwork with the flesh, blood, and spirit of the natives. Indeed, Rabinow asserts that he could only share a *partial* togetherness with the others; the togetherness that is bounded by an unsteady mutual-understanding:

I could understand Ben Mohammed [a close local Moroccan friend] only to the extent that he could understand me - that is to say, partially...He grew up in an historical situation which provided him with meaningful but only partially satisfactory interpretations of his world, as did I. Our otherness was not an ineffable essence, but rather the sum of different historical experiences. Different webs of signification separated us, but these webs were now at least partially intertwined...

(Rabinow, 1976:162)

It is the partiality of knowing the self and the others that further differentiates Rabinow from Malinowski. More specifically, for Malinowski, a rather static and prerequisite self is gradually played out by his anthropological magic; a self, who was able to scientifically capture the completeness of the exotic via the immersion in the native's life without being influenced by it. However, for Rabinow the self for the researcher is constituted throughout interpersonal interaction with the others during the fieldwork where the self is less certain, and always in a constant process of changing. Therefore, for Rabinow, the ethnographer's self becomes intersubjective in the sense that during the fieldwork there is 'literally more than one subject, but being situated neither quite here nor quite there, the subjects involved do not share a common set of assumptions, experiences, or traditions' (ibid:155). By this he means that the different positions of the researcher have been developed or are challenged through the fieldwork experience. It is through the process of writing up for publication, that these separated selves meet. Has Rabinow's journey of finding himself been completed at the

moment we read his work? The answer is not clear. For Rabinow, the comprehension of the self is an ongoing process. We only know that the Morocco sojourn is represented as an ethnographic interlude for Rabinow; there is a life after fieldwork: 'Writing this book seems to have enabled me to go on to another type of fieldwork, to begin again on a different terrain' (ibid: 149).

I have discussed so far the significance of fieldwork experience for Malinowski and Rabinow. Through the 'I-witness' experiences, Malinowski and Rabinow have intended to convince us 'not merely that they themselves have truly "been there," but ... that had we been there we should have seen what they saw, felt what they felt, concluded what they concluded'(Geertz,1988:16). This *author-ity* is more likely to be established if the static relation between the author and the reader is maintained by the monopoly of the authorship. It is precisely this authority of the ethnographer that draws critiques from deconstructionist ethnographers such as James Clifford.

3.4.3. James Clifford: ethnographer of the text

In 'On Ethnographic Authority', Clifford's (1983) central contention is to uncover how anthropologists construct their authority via fieldwork confession and 'I witnessing' experience. As he points out, by suppressing the dialogic dimension of fieldwork (in order to gain full control of the text), anthropologists often speak in a monological tone. Consequently, scholars such as Malinowski fail to perceive the fieldwork experience as 'a constructive negotiation involving at least two, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects' (ibid: 133).

In response, Clifford advocates a more dialogical textual construction, which allows a possible plurality of authorship. However, in terms of dialogical mode, Clifford does not simply mean the inclusion of dialogues in texts. Rather, following Bakhtin (2006), Clifford (1983) suggests that one needs to deploy what he understands as a 'polyphonic' textual strategy in order to accommodate equally the voice of the ethnographer and that of the natives. This can only be achieved if ethnographers expect themselves to be 'ventriloquists', who work with the control of their own authoritarian and suppressing voice. At the same time, they need to invite the natives to speak for themselves not merely as independent enunciators, but as co-authors of ethnographic texts. In so doing, ethnographers are able to recognise that any speaker (even an illiterate peasant) can break through their own conceptual horizons, where the alien concept is allowed to construct its own utterance on the author's territory. In short, through this dialogical mode, Clifford wishes to democratize monopolised authorship, to eradicate the hierarchy between researcher/researched, and to make invisible subjects become visible, and put the marginalized centre staged (Clifford 1983, 1986).

Although Clifford's textual strategy is able to challenge the dominating single authorship, he never actually explains how he makes 'natives' into active authors of cultural representations. Rather, he has turned to a deconstructive textual device; to become 'the ethnographer of the text' (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Woolgar, 1988). In so doing, Clifford wishes to avoid the 'I-witnessing' authority constructed through fieldwork experience. He has further attempted to reveal a certain relationship, unperceived by ethnographers, such as Malinowski, between what they command and what they do not command in the language that they use, 'to make the not seen accessible to sight' (Derrida, 1976:41). However, neither Clifford's dialogical mode nor deconstructive device can resolve the authority he sets out to

overcome. Rather, his innovative textual strategies seem to display at least three methodological dilemmas. Firstly, the question of the unsettled monopolised authorship. Clifford acknowledges that the suggested dialogical mode cannot solve the problem of single authorship in the sense that 'quotations are always staged by the quoter' (1983:139). Thus it is the ethnographer who still confirms the final orchestration of his/her ethnographic text. From this perspective, Clifford's dialogical ethnography seemingly promises a possible textual democratization, but does not guarantee it.

Secondly, Clifford's deconstructive device suggests a hidden author-ity. In other words, through deconstructive readings, the marginalized are empowered to speak only if it is suitable for the ethnographer's purposes. The marginalized subjects do not perform for themselves; rather they serve as Clifford's critics to vindicate what he criticizes. A previous hierarchy is undermined; however, it is followed immediately by a new kind of textual order orchestrated by the deconstructive approach (Rabinow, 1986). This leads scholars like Probyn (1993) to comment that Clifford's reflexivity is built upon the example of the other, only then to ignore him/her. The other is indeed sought, but it is the self for postmodernist intelligentsia that is materialized in the actual text. What remains unexamined is an even more centred researcher's self.

Thirdly, Clifford commits what Bourdieu (1989) refers to as the scholarly gaze'. Clifford asserts that his textual interpretation, as well as those of other ethnographic authorities, provides merely a partial truth (1983, 1986). He does not hesitate to endorse the dialogical (de)construction of ethnographic texts as 'inescapably, a matter of strategic choice' (1983:142). His textual strategy is an elegant move; however, it is purely a decisionist one.

What he has not recognized is that his strategy, as the echo of 'the crisis of representation' (Marcus and Fisher, 1986), is indeed a specific historical production of a postmodern discourse. Following Fredric Jameson, Paul Rabinow (1986:252) points out that the 'post-modernist is blind to her [or his] own situation and situateness because, qua post-modernist, [s/he] is committed to a doctrine of partiality and flux for which even such things as one's own situation are so unstable, so without identity, that they cannot serve as objects of situated reflection'. Therefore, Clifford is clear about his preferred analytical approach, yet is not aware of his academic disposition, as a naturalized research decision, and his deficient understanding of power in a wider social context (Bourdieu 1989).

Through the above discussion of structural reflection from a feminist stand point epistemology, of Bourdieu, and then of the 'I-witnessing' authority, to Clifford's ethnographer of the text, we can see a continuing tension between *experience past* and *experience present*. These texts have provided us with an insightful understanding of experience and how it is related to the production of reflexive knowledge. However, *experience past* and *experience present* are two sides of a coin, to hold onto only one side is to ignore how the other side of experience can also come into play. Drawing upon either *experience past* or *experience present* leads to a reductionist explanation, where experience is perceived as either a structural production or a voluntary practice. Moreover, both positions need to be articulated, and at the same time need to be critically interlinked. In other words, one needs to deny the complete domination of structure and the ultimate freedom of agency. To deny *experience past* and its understanding of submissive agency is not to deny that experience past can sometimes develop into an entrenched cultural experience that informs one's own dominant view. To deny *experience present* and its celebration of free will is not to deny the possibility of agency

that can reflect upon his or her existing social conditions and make decisions accordingly. It is to deny how *experience past* is interpreted as a norm that is inevitably incorporated by agency without resistance; to deny agency can construct identity positions without the constraints of social conditions that limit and position them as social actors (Archer, 2002). Perhaps there is a need to conceptualize ‘experience’, as the continuation of the *past* that has an impact at the present time. However, the outcome is more ambivalent in the sense that it neither reaches the certainty of *experience present*, nor is it fully materialized as *experience past*. I refer to experience of this sort as *experience present perfect*. In what follows, I shall contextualize *experience present perfect* via my own (research) experiences.

3.5. Experience present perfect: reflexivity in context

To begin with, it is necessary to define what I mean by *experience present perfect*. In *A Handbook of English Grammar*, Zandvoort (1957:58, original emphasis) explains that: ‘tense’, as a temporal indicator, is used ‘to denote the *Time* at which an action takes place’ (in the past, present, and future). The articulation of a past event within the present moment is what we call *present perfect*. According to Zandvoort, there are three main usages for the perfect tense: (i) the continuative perfect, (ii) the resultative perfect, and (iii) the perfect of experience. Continuative perfect may be understood as a single, continuous action or state beginning at sometime in the past, and continuing up to the moment of speaking. For instance, ‘Tom has known Mary for years’.

The resultative perfect is applied when one wants to ‘[denote] a past action connected, through its result, with the present moment’ (ibid:61). (For instance, I have bought a new car.) If one wants to express ‘what has happened, once or more than once, within the speaker’s or writer’s experience’, s/he can use the perfect tense of experience. This can be

illustrated by Zandvoort's example: 'When I have asked a London policeman the way, I have invariably received a polite answer' (ibid: 62). The use of perfect tense in resultative or continuative terms may depend upon the character of the verb, and the contextual elements it applies to (see Baurer, 1970; Crystal, 1966). However, what is relevant here, as *present perfect* suggests, is the temporal connection. Through the usages of *past* and *present* tense in English, one can suggest that there is a need for the existence of *present perfect*. For example, if one wants to describe an isolated event in the past with little relevance at the moment of speaking, one usually uses *simple past* (e.g. Tom went out two weeks ago). Although the *present perfect* is related to the past, it is deployed mainly for the description of *present* circumstances (e.g. Tom has just gone out; it has just struck 12).

Both *present simple* and *present perfect* could be used for future references, however, the former implies something such as permanent facts or consistent behaviours (e.g. 'the sun rises in the east'; I go swimming three times a week), whereas generalization and certainty is less pronounced in the latter (e.g. I will come when I have written this letter). Moreover, *present perfect* suggests a sense of experience; one that is grounded in the *past* and continues to play out in the present - one that is open to future uncertainty and flexibility (a sense which is ruled out by the use of *present simple*). It is precisely this kind of *experience-present-perfect* that I find useful in my own (research) experience (for example see section 3.5.3.).

3.5.1. My cultural experience: the value of Confucianism and my upbringing

I understand *experience past*, following Williams (1976), as the materiality of experience or 'pre-reflexive social and academic experience of the social world', in Bourdieu's phrase (2003:281). Hence, two distinct features constitute my *experience past*: (i) my cultural experience, and (ii) my academic experience. The former, including my upbringing, refers to

the traditional influence of Confucianism in general and kinship in particular, my daily life experience, and the fieldwork experience. The latter, including the experience of being an overseas student in England, is fostered theoretically by the study of men and masculinities, a late modernity framework, feminism, and cultural studies. However, I want to capture *experience past* in the term *present perfect*, that is, the experience that happened in the past that *continuingly* has its impact upon my current way of thinking. Through *experience present perfect* I endeavour to sketch out the trajectory of my research. Moreover, what is articulated by the dialectical interplay between my cultural experience and academic experience is the *experience present perfect* as situated reflexivity for my research (see section 3.5.3. for example).

My childhood memory provided the first taste of what I mean by cultural experience. I grew up in a small town in Taiwan and was the only boy in the family. I knew that I was treated differently from my sisters. My mother told me when I was born, there was no need for my father to tell the neighbours he had a boy since everyone could tell from the joy expressed in his face. Before I went to high school, I spent almost every Saturday with my grandparents because my father went back to help my grandfather to work in his tea tree plantation. It was a very demanding job, but I hardly ever heard my father complain; even during the monsoon season when he and I had to ride on his motorcycle, hiding in a raincoat for almost two hours to get to my grandparents. After visiting my grandparents, we would call in to visit my *a bei* (the respectful way to address a father's elder brother). My father and *a bei* liked to drink tea together, and to chat about their lives. I knew that my father respected my uncle greatly because he often asked advice from his elder brother. Other aunties (my father's sisters) felt the same way about *a bei*, as the first boy and the eldest child in the family.

Chinese New Year was very important for me when I was a child. My grandmother had to spend most of the day preparing the meal with my mother. I asked why *a M'ng* (a respectful way to address a bei's wife) hardly needed to help out. She didn't explain to me, however, I felt that my grandmother treated *a M'ng* better, since my cousins performed better in school than us. Women in a traditional family such as mine had few things to say; if women were allowed to say something, it had already been spoken by the eldest and most respected woman; in this case, it was my grandmother.

When I was 10 years old, my grandmother became very ill and was in and out of hospital. A bei and my father took turns taking care of her. They could have paid someone to do so, but they didn't. I knew from my mother that if we paid someone else to take care of my grandmother, it wouldn't look good in front of relatives. After my grandmother passed away, my father went back to visit my grandfather almost once every two days till my father's own health failed. He has lately recuperated a little and is now able to drive again, allowing him to continue to visit my grandfather. This is how I understand filial piety, the son's duty to take care of his parents when they are old. My parents never told me explicitly what a son should do or who he ought to be. My father's behaviour explained it all and was seared in my mind.

There has only ever been one major conflict between my father and I. It was about the decision for my future studies when I graduated from high school. I had two choices: one was to go to the conventional high school and then to university; the other was to go to one of the prestigious language colleges where I had been accepted. I insisted on going to the latter, since I developed an interest in English when I was young. However, my father

firmly rejected my choice. He told me he had no money, although he has been supporting my study till now; yet I knew the real reason was that for him, as a traditional man, a college was not appropriate for a son in terms of status, and particularly one specializing in language. That was the only time when he interfered with my study. He never complained later to me when I went to private university, which cost him much more than if I had gone to a public one. I knew he worked very hard to support me; and he subsequently sent me to study abroad with little hesitation. I knew I was privileged and that this privilege was mainly dependent on my father's support. Yet his benevolence and sacrifice have kept me away from telling him something about myself.

People always told me I was like a girl. But I didn't feel much difference between other boys and myself. I didn't understand what it meant to be 'homosexual' until I read a magazine in a bookshop when I was 14 years old. At that time, I still liked one girl in my class, although I also liked another boy, who was close to me. I didn't feel that kind of affection was anything sexual. That was my first encounter with the term 'homosexuality' with a narrow definition: a male who likes other males both physically and emotionally. Looking back, had I read a magazine which had another term, perhaps something such as 'bi-sexual', it may have changed how I perceived myself during puberty. Nevertheless, this label firmly grasped my attention and encouraged me to categorize myself in a particular way: I was gay because I liked boys. This identity formation significantly influenced me as I became older. I decided not to discuss my sexuality with my parents; I worried they wouldn't understand. They loved me dearly, and I thought it better to keep quiet and leave this unspoken. The price of recognition was too high to pay, and I felt no urge to resolve this. I found similar stories amongst some young men I interviewed. I decided to tell these stories

about young gay men and the cultural dilemmas they encountered through my fieldwork, not only because I could empathize with their experiences, but also because I knew that I could only do so through writing, not directly in front of my parents.

3.5.2. My academic experience

My first academic experience of studying people occurred during my masters program in England. My dissertation was about motivation theories. At that time I endeavoured to understand people's motivations with regard to second language acquisition. Human beings, I learned, are complex creatures; one cannot expect a grandiose theory to explain all human behaviours. For example, rather than being static, one's motivations can change over time. In addition, people can be motivated, as they often are, by more than one factor in which different social positions and cultural backgrounds can come into play. In other words, if one wants to understand 'motivation', s/he needs to understand it in relation to gender, age, economic position, family background, personal life experience and so on. This *relational* thinking for me was particularly helpful in making sense of the sociological framework I later acquired.

While coming to the end of my MA program I was introduced, by chance, to Mary McIntosh's 'The Homosexual Role'. This was my first encounter with a social constructionist approach to homosexuality as referred to earlier. Reading this work helped me to ease the angst of homosexuality. But this particular stance, a cultural relativist one, did not help me in terms of discussing my sexuality with my parents. I was hoping to find a theory that could explain how to *confess* one's homosexuality to one's parents in a family such as mine. It was this hope, alongside my father's expectations, that motivated me to undertake a PhD study in

the first place. Accordingly, my original research question was: ‘how do Taiwanese gay men *successfully* “come out” to their families?’

3.5.3. Examples of experience present perfect: the interplay between cultural and academic experience

Queer theory was very popular amongst feminist studies and gay movements back home in Taiwan during the 1990s. Since 2000, there was a much discussion about the politics of ‘coming out’. I also began to read queer theorists, such as Judith Butler. I found Butler’s work difficult, not only the opacity of her language, but also the distance I felt pertaining to the *performative* experience she talked about. I asked myself, could I really perform my sexuality as described with reference to her discussion of drag? With my parent’s financial support, the answer would perhaps be yes, but I would not do it in front of them. Queer politics seeks to destabilize heterosexual normality, to open up the closet, to gain political visibility for minorities, to ‘come out’, and to ‘be proud’. However, what if in a society the door is not locked by so-called homophobia, but by the familiar and benevolent hands of the kinship apparatus? One must be present to and then be recognized. The *invisibility* of homosexuality becomes the unspoken subject, which is mutually sealed by the ‘tolerance and reticence’ within many Chinese families (Liu and Ding, 2005).

Perhaps, the first priority is not the recognition of (homo) sexuality, but the core of kinship and family, where the subject of homosexuality cannot be recognized. This is my first encounter with the *experience of present perfect* in which my cultural upbringing is coterminous with my academic training. My *cultural experience* provides me with a critical reading of theorists such as Butler or McIntosh. It also rendered the detour of my conceptual framework, from sexuality to gender. In other words, to understand a man is not only to

understand his sexual orientation. It is also to understand him through his gendered roles such as being a father, a son, or a husband/partner.

This conceptual change was fostered by two further *academic experiences*. Firstly, it was the language of patriarchy as developed by second wave feminism and pro-feminist studies on men and masculinities. The language of patriarchy enabled me to understand why I was treated differently as the only boy in the family (Hearn, 1987; Brittan, 1989). Studies of men and masculinities, and in particular Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, helped me to make sense of how a particular male norm is reinforced by a combination of consensus and domination, in which my sexuality became silent within the operation of the benevolent kinship apparatus. However, I did not feel this gendered language entirely resonated with my generation. For example, unlike men from my father's generation, who got married in their early twenties, many young men I know have very different lifestyles. This becomes apparent if one looks at the practices of consumption, the use of the internet, and choices of (gay/bi/straight) relationships amongst young men.

Therefore, as a second turning point of academic experience, this dissatisfaction with and distance from the male image portrayed by theories of western patriarchy urged me to study more recent research on young men via consumption and masculinities. Reading studies on masculinities and consumption, I was constantly reminded of the methodological tension between structure and agency. More specifically, I learned it was necessary to unpack consumption via an ethnographical understanding of *lived experience* rather than the textual analysis of male imagery (see **Chapter 1**, section 1.2. for detailed discussion). Thus, rather than my original research question aiming at a successful 'coming out' strategy, that leads to a

static conclusion, I turned to a hermeneutics framework in order to demystify the cultural meaning of 'men' and 'masculinities'.

Fieldwork experience is significant since it can render the re-conceptualization of one's own analytical framework in order to make sense of the unexpected researched phenomena that challenge the researcher's theoretical understanding (Willis, 1980). This can be understood via my shifting position from studies of consumption and masculinities to a late modernity framework. In other words, alongside my early interrogation of gendered relations via changing male imagery, I have also attempted to understand the social conditions that enable consumption to become a meaningful practice in the first place. More specifically, rather than resting on a textual analysis of marketing or advertising, I endeavoured to understand both socially and culturally what consumption as a gendered practice means to young men in late modernity. This particular shift was triggered by my first fieldwork experience (for this particular trajectory, see section 1.2. and 1.5.). In particular, there are generational differences in terms of certain gendered practices, such as family, kinship and marriage. These generational differences lead me to ask why particular gendered obligations have become now *options* for the young men I interviewed. What are the sociological implications for changing gendered norms? How do I understand 'consumption' via this mode of social and culture change?

These questions were raised, after my first fieldwork, in a meeting with my supervisor. It is in this context that I was introduced to Beck's (1992) and Giddens's (1991, 1992) work on late modernity and reflexive modernization (Beck, 1994 et al.). Through a late modernity framework, I was able to make sense of how Taiwanese young men constructed their 'do-it-

yourself' biography through changing choices for life, e.g. marriage, family and kinship, rather than simply following the 'norm-al biography', one that was often taken by Taiwanese men from an earlier generation. The notion of reflexive modernization (Beck et al. 1994) helped me to capture a transforming Taiwanese society in which traditional social norms are losing their legitimacy. Giddens's (1992) notion of 'pure-relationship' has precisely echoed some younger interviewees' perspectives towards marriage and personal relationships. I have also benefited from Beck's concept of individualization how individuals now become the centre of their biographies. This work provided a new explanatory framework to understand consumption and masculinities in contemporary Taiwanese society.

However, while I was trying to explore this framework in my own analysis, I was simultaneously questioning it on the basis of the shared cultural experiences between my research participants and I. For instance, when many young research participants talked about changing choices in their lives, there were still some choices that were better than others, and some choices that people could hardly ever have or make in the first place. This leads me to wonder if the processes of detraditionalization were occurring as evenly as Beck and Giddens suggest. More specifically, could the notions of reflexivity postulated by these two scholars explain the collective cultural practices existing in my research? What was the sociological explanation of the tension between 'the life of one's own' and 'a life for others' culturally lived out by research participants? Moreover, where was the notion of tradition and the location of culture in a late modernity framework postulated by Beck or Giddens? The boundary of a late modernity framework enables me to examine own cultural experience. When my academic experience is coterminous with my own cultural experience, I began to recognize *experience present perfect*.

3.5.4. The limits of cultural experience

Paradoxically, to rely only on one's own cultural experience is not always useful in carrying out a research project. Often one is not able to go beyond the familiar cultural routes one is used to taking. My exploration of the culture of the internet provides a good example. The reason I decided to try to understand 'masculinities' via internet is derived from my daily life experience. For me, the internet was a significant cultural repository in which I was allowed to exercise my homosexual practices. More specifically, I had been using the internet, particularly online gay chat rooms, for more than five years before I carried out my first fieldwork. To some extent, I was quite familiar with the web culture, at least a particular facet of web culture. However, this entrenched familiarity also brought me to categorize others' cultural practices in my own terms. I realized, at an early stage in my fieldwork, my findings seemed simultaneously predictable but also little different from my own experience. In other words, most of the interviewees' accounts were unconsciously predetermined, by the research questions and my own experiences. For instance, the interview questions were centred on the experience of (homo) sexuality via online practices. Few of them addressed how such online practices were linked to wider gendered issues, such as 'kinship' or 'family relations'. The limits of my conceptual language reflected the inadequacy of my cultural knowledge. Consequently, I often asked questions to which I already knew the answer, or asked questions that were derived only from my own entrenched cultural experience. Unlike Rabinow, I did not make the familiar become strange. By contrast, I made the strange sound familiar.

3.5.5. The usefulness of cultural experience: my conceptual detour through my fieldwork

Not until I met DuoDuo, a 28-year-old PhD student in IT, at that time, was I guided to take a new conceptual journey. While talking about the culture of gay chat rooms, DuoDuo also introduced me to another popular online communication: blogging. What makes blogging different from online chatting is that blogging documents one's own life:

..., requite and upload are two important concepts in the Web 2.0... in other words, rather than the shared interests that gathered the web users together, it is the individual user of the internet that now becomes the centre of online activities...Take the weblog as an example, you can create your own space through blogging, you can use it as your online diary, or simply a showcase that demonstrates your personal tastes.... after all, the blog documents one's life.

In addition, as DuoDuo informed me, to blog was not only to bricolage one's own cyber world. To blog was also to have conversations with others. For him, it was a more sophisticated way of making friends:

D28: Through blogging, you not only can read but also respond to them...such interaction can help readers communicate with blog owners...Through blogging, bloggers become the centre of the communication. If I read your blog and think you are an interesting person, I may invite you and add you into my good friend list. Like the preview function of TV program in which you can find something you want to see easily rather than spending the first 20 minutes watching and then decide whether you like it, the weblog can give you a better understanding of people you want to talk to. I know I can make friends with someone more easily because there are some shared interests or experience amongst us...And of course you can also realize that some blogs you won't visit for the second time.

As a 'foreigner' to blogging, I was intrigued by two ideas this interviewee had introduced to me: firstly, that *one can document one's life via the weblog*, and secondly, that it was the centrality of

the conversational mode that makes blogging become a more dialectical online activity rather than a static myriad of content produced for the web. These two concepts became essential for the second phase of my fieldwork.

More specifically, what makes online blogging interesting is its *gendering* process via online identity formation. For example, as DuoDuo informed me, many people use the weblog as an online diary that documents his or her relationship experiences. More particularly the weblog, as an emerging cultural repertoire, provides young men with an opportunity to talk about their experiences of 'breaking up' or falling in love with someone. This was also echoed by Martin, a 27 year-old-masters student in art, 'if you want to become a popular blogger, you have to write something about relationships'. This comment is clearly reflected by the culture of weblog. An example is 無名小站 (wu-min-xiao-chang), the Taiwanese equivalent of FaceBook, and one of the most popular blog websites among young Taiwanese people. There are fourteen categories that appear on Wu-min's homepage of which 'relationships' is the most popular topic. Only one out of the ten most viewed articles does not address the issue of relationships.

3.5.6. The dialectical interplay between my fieldwork experience and academic experience

Two further aspects contribute to my particular focus on blogging. At a practical level, due to its popularity, researchers are more likely to find interviewees whose weblogs are centred upon their relationship experiences. Indeed, despite the attempt to include different research participants from various categories of weblog (such as political, discussion of music/ film, or travel journals), almost all the interviewees, who agreed to take part in the research, had put their blogs under the category of 'relationship discussion'. At an analytical

level, the interest in blogging also echoed my shifting theoretical position. In other words, a late modernity framework not only helped me to make sense of the interplay between masculinities and consumption in contemporary Taiwanese society, but also of identity formation through blogging. This was particularly highlighted when I read Giddens's *Modernity and Self Identity* (1991). In his chapter on 'The Trajectory of the Self', Giddens talks about how the reflexive project of the self is developed via 'self therapy'. In other words, as symptomatic of late modernity, one often asks reflexively: 'what do I want for myself right now?' 'Is everything alright?' (ibid: 71). Moreover, the temporal dimension is important for Giddens to construct a reflexive identity of the self, in the sense that self realization can only be arrived at if one knows where s/he came from, and where s/he is going to. It is perhaps through writing one's autobiography that one can best carry out reflexive self-observations.

While reading Giddens's self identity in late modernity, I recalled the lesson learned from DuoDuo about blogging: *to blog is to document one's life* in which the *conversational* tone is important. It seems that the weblog as a cultural resource provides the possibility for bloggers to literally document their 'do-it-yourself' biography through online blogging. Derived from Giddens premise; I set out to ask; how do younger research participants construct their reflexive project of the self via blogging and online communication? And, then to explore the extent to which these young men and their gendering practice in late modernity via online blogging resonate with the 'disclosing intimacy' postulated by Giddens (1992).

As DuoDuo reminds us, to blog is not only to document one's life. It is also to read others' lives (diaries) and respond. Although I have to some extent rejected Nixon's position

on the 'new man' as the articulation of a new gendered hierarchy, his deployment of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur* is useful for me to explain the *conversational* tone between bloggers. As Nixon (1996) suggests, derived from Walter Benjamin, the display of deluxe goods and extortionate trifles in shops did not only establish a particular way of looking between the flâneur and these beautiful and expensive things. More importantly, it also invited the flâneur to look at himself, while catching sight of his reflection in mirrors or shop windows. It is precisely this identity formation through spectatorship that helps me make sense of how blogging/ flâneuring in the cyber arcade, enables male bloggers to see 'the self' in others' stories, and furthermore become story-tellers who narrate their own gendered stories via blogging.

3.5.7. Experience present perfect as my positionality

Thus far I have documented the trajectory of my research in which *experience present perfect* has been played out. It is *experience present perfect* that defines my understanding of what is meant by reflexivity in this research. It is suggested that the establishment of the dialectical relationship between my own cultural and academic experience enables me to understand the concept of reflexivity. However, the notion of reflexivity I refer to can neglect the *immediate* ground of reasoning provided by *experience present*. In other words, what I have emphasised is the *inclination* (i.e. a habitual way of thinking) rather the *impulsion* (e.g. sudden desire or choice) provided by *experience present perfect*. It is, however, my endeavour to *materialize* experience in order to avoid the abstraction that one speaks from nowhere without stabilizing/essentializing it, that leads me to postulate the necessary ground for *experience present perfect*. This can only be achieved through the consciousness that allows the dialectical interplay between one's cultural experience and academic experience. The emphasis on

dialectical interplay is important since it enables me to postulate a kind of a materialised experience that is never fully incorporated within the structure (Adkins, 2003, Bulter, 1999).

Rather than the kind of consciousness projected by feminist standpoint epistemology, the consciousness I postulate is closer to Stuart Hall's 'positions of enunciation' that 'implicate the positions from which we speak or write' (1990:222). In other words, alongside Scott (1991), I do not want to describe *experience present perfect* as an unchallenged foundation that reveals or locates 'true' and 'authentic' knowledge. Rather, I want to demonstrate how *experience present perfect* informs my take-up and production of positions, but does not fix me either in time or place. It is through *experience present perfect* that I hope to make the process of the research transparent, to articulate my position 'produced not by external ideas, values or material causes, but by one's personal subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meanings, affect) to the events of the world' (de Lauretis, 1984:159).

As described by Hall, the notion of reflexivity is the articulation of the researcher's identity; a continuing process of enunciation. As Rabinow (1977) reminds us, this reflexive process, as an interlude, is only momentarily broken here. This break indicates the limit of my knowledge and my cultural experience; it also indicates both the theoretical positions I am adopting, and the empirical data I was able to obtain at the time of writing. Reflexivity is likely to be continual, and not necessarily linear in the future depending upon the cultural and intellectual repertoire available for one's appropriation. What nevertheless has become a necessary ground for reflexivity is one's *experience present perfect*.

3.6. Situating analysis

3.6.1. The research process

Before the discussion of how ones can analyze culture, I want to provide some information on how my research process was taken place. This research is essentially encompassed by (a) two generational groups (younger and elder generations) and (b) two fieldwork experiences. In terms of (a) generational differentiation, it is more *biographical* than chronological. In other words, the cultural understanding of the (dis)continuation of gender practices cannot be simply *read off* by chronological differences i.e. age, although the distinction of age can provide a useful reference at first glance. More specifically, chronological differences, similar to the notion of 'life circle', tended to suggest a relatively fixed series of stages through which individuals move. What is often implied by this sort of analysis is that stages and processes of life are normatively central in a way that one is inevitably subsumed under the assumed dominant gendered practices when s/he reaches certain ages (Morgan, 1996). This conceptual deficiency can be understood by different classification of the age of adulthood such as age of consent or film age rating. However, if we understand generational differentiations as something *biographical*, we can further recognize the complex and dialectical interlink between changes in individuals and the wider movement of historical changes. It is nevertheless possible that individuals might tend to think in normative ways (e.g. when to get married to have children), and these understandings might still be influential. Yet, to conceptualize generational differentiation through shared biographies is to recognize gender practice *not* as a process 'through a structure but the negotiation of passage through an unpredictably changing social environment' (Harris,1987:27-28).

Taking the research participants from an earlier generation as an example, all of the elder participants are married and grew up in rural areas. Most of them have PhD degrees attained through scholarships. Although almost all elder research participants came from disadvantaged social background (except Shei, a 82-year-old retired primary school head teacher), all of them now belong to socially elite groups such as (associate/assistant) professor, retired head teacher or college principle (for the background information of the elder research participants see Appendix, category A:6-11). It is through this shared biographical route (i.e. born into disadvantaged social groups and growing up in rural areas) that we may understand why *weak tradition* still plays a significant role in shaping their understanding of certain gendered practices. For example, without their fathers' permission, few of them could continue their postgraduate studies (for example see the discussion of Tom in **section 4.2.**). Often, they had to work as a full time teacher, and studied their masters and PhD degree during the weekend. All of them were expected to financially support their family of origin when they started working. Nevertheless, it is also the trajectory of their professional lives (e.g. from humble background to becoming social elites, or the opportunity to lecture in both science and humanity department) that enables them to articulate a more reflexive gendered language that differentiate themselves from men from their fathers' generation (for example see the discussion of Scott in **section 4.3.3.2.**).

In contrast, most of the younger participants grew up in relatively advantaged social and economic backgrounds. Many of them have a masters degree and some of them are continuing to PhD level. Few of them grew up and lived in rural areas (mostly of them from Taipei, some of them from Taichung and Kaohsiung); none were married (although some were in stable relationship). Unlike the elder research participants, there were some self-

identified gay participants among the younger generation, and none of them need to obtain scholarship for their postgraduate studies (for the background information of the younger participants see category A: 1-5; 12-16 and B: 17-22 in Appendix). Therefore, while discussing generational differences in terms of what it means to be a Taiwanese young man, alongside the category of age, it is important to bear in mind how different social factors such as marital status, familial background, urban/rural areas, sexualities, the experiences of studying in overseas countries, and occupation also come into play.

As far as (b) my fieldwork experience is concerned, it is encompassed by two stages: (i) my data collection for consumption and (de)traditionalization, and (ii) my analysis of male identity formation and the gender configuration via online blogging. In the first stage of my fieldwork (i), there are 16 research participants, who I have obtained mainly through my gatekeepers (Tom for the elder research participants, and Alvin for the younger research participants). Gatekeepers offer me a relatively efficient access to find my interviewees (for other advantages see my discussion of ethics and cultural codes in **section 3.6.4.**). However, it is also through the gatekeepers where the invisible habitus operates so silently and violently that excludes me to obtain research participants from different social and economic groups (see **section 6.1.3.3.** for further discussion). In terms of the (ii) second stage of my fieldwork, there are 6 younger research participants (between age 25 to 30-year-old) in which only one (Alan, a 30-year-old PhD student in sociology) I have known through my own personal network. As I have mentioned earlier (in **section 3.5.6.**), I endeavored to include different participants from various categories of the weblog by sending out online inquiries to 85 individual bloggers via *wu-min-xiao-chang*. Nevertheless, all of the research participants (5 people in total) I had obtained via online contact locating their weblogs in the site of

‘relationship discussion’. I will discuss in more detail the cultural codes such as empathy for those research participants, who I did not know beforehand and agreed to participate voluntarily in my research in **section 3.6.4.** At this point, it is interesting to ask why all younger research participants in the second stage of my fieldwork are heterosexual; few self-identified gay men were willing to participate in my research, particularly when the identity of the researcher was concealed. Alongside Rutherford (1988) and Kimmel (1994), we may suggest that heteronormativity and its male order define who are legitimate to talk about their sexualities, how, and under what circumstances. In this case, it is a heterosexual man who is legitimized (not) to talk about their gender relations through blogging, the gendering practice that confirms its heterosexuality (for example see **section 5.3.1.**). For those non-heterosexual men, they simply exclude themselves from the institutionalized gendered practice i.e. my interviewing process in the first place, in order to avoid the surveillance of the assumed heteronormative gaze (also see Mort, 1988, Jackson, 1999).

3.6.2. The analysis of culture

I want to assert that my interpretation rests on the *particularity* that is culturally located in a specific ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1961). The *particularity* becomes evident if one looks at the similar biographical routes (or ‘habitus’ in Bordieu’s sense) shared by research participants. I am aware of the *particularity* of my research; this was not my original intention, but was ultimately restrained by my social networks. This condition was further particularized by the practicalities of obtaining participants. The limited criterion for sampling has led me to encounter the question of ‘generalizability’ of this research. During one of my PhD panel reviews, I was asked by one of the reviewers, whose specific research interests are ‘post-positivism’ and ‘critical realism’, how I can *prove* the generalization of my own

findings. In other words, whether the experiences of Taiwanese elder/younger men I have discussed are typical of Taiwanese men's experiences in general. A sense of positivist scepticism is raised here, and it seemingly could only be satisfied by scientific experiment and its objective of replicable findings.

However, could one study culture within a naturalist approach and generalize it's meanings? A social setting is impossible to *freeze*; one cannot collect cultural meanings as if they are rocks. Culture is ready to be interpreted, and is already interpreted. The so-called cultural facts produced by both the researcher/researched are only a partially satisfactory interpretation of one's social world due to the specific historical situations and social positions in which one is located (Rabinow, 1977). The positivist generalization can only be obtained when the cultural understandings and interpretations of the researcher/researched are excluded.

If this is the case, then how can culture be studied? Raymond Williams' (1961) analysis of culture provides a useful approach. To begin with, Williams defines culture in three general terms. Firstly, there is culture the *ideal*, in which 'culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values'. The role of cultural analysis, using this definition, is to discover and describe 'those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition' (ibid: 41). However Williams acknowledges; 'I find it very difficult ...to identify the process of human perfection', yet 'if we call the process, not human perfection, but human evolution, to mean a process of general growth of man as a kind, we are able to recognize areas of fact which other definitions might exclude'(ibid:42). Derived from this stance, Williams' first

definition of culture is useful for me to make sense of the role of my *academic experience* in general and more specifically, those (western) theories I have acquired. By this, I understand *theory* itself, as the cultural ideal, to be a generalization that represents 'ideal' accounts postulated by scholars in order to explain the social phenomena that is researched. It is through the acquisition of theories that I realize the exclusion of other possible explanations.

Secondly, Williams suggests, there is the 'documentary in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded' (ibid:41). Based on this definition, cultural analysis functions as 'the activity of criticism' - by discovering the best that has been thought and written, by interpreting and evaluating a particular work being studied, or by the critical assessment of historical documents in order to uncover the particular traditions and societies in which they appeared. In short, cultural analysis is to understand the signifying practices through which meaning is produced. Derived from the second definition, I intend to perceive my own fieldwork as a cultural documentary (not so much in the sense of ideal, but in the sense of *situated* cultural explanations) that functions as a critical response to deployed western theoretical frameworks. Throughout the analysis, I endeavour to record the cultural meanings and values kept alive by social inheritance and by the embodiment in particular groups of Taiwanese men that I have interviewed in this historical juncture of late modernity.

Thirdly, there is the *social definition* of culture, in which 'culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also institutions and ordinary behaviour' (ibid: 41). In other words, Williams (1958) argues that 'culture is ordinary' and is threaded through *all* social practices such as

politics, economics, family, organization, etc. The attempt here is to democratize and socialize the concept of culture as 'the *signifying system* through which necessarily... a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored' (Williams, 1981:13, original emphasis). More specifically, it is through communication and common meanings within a particular community that culture is learned (Williams, 1958). Rather than a reflection of the base (economic structure) in Marxist terms, cultural practice and cultural production are themselves a major constitution of social order. Cultural analysis, using this definition, provides 'the clarification of meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture' (1961:41-42). Through the *actual* experience in which a culture is lived, one can observe the social patterns that emerge from a particular community; patterns that are indissolubly bounded within the society as a whole. The ultimate goal here, in demystifying these social patterns by studying their modes of change, is to discover certain general laws or trends in order to understand social and cultural development of a society as a whole.

A basic anthropological axiom is that significance resides in the whole (Rabinow, 1975) and Williams's aim here is to bring an anthropological stance into culture. However, this is less to do with the exotic other, but rather the *ordinary* culture of one's own. The social definition of culture is useful for my research in the sense that it illustrates the social structures and cultural values of a specific society at a certain historical juncture, by critically exploring a particular group of people within such a society. Moreover, these social structures or cultural values are not externally isolated from everyday practice. Rather, they can only be understood through *a particular way of life* - the actual lived experiences of the interviewed young men that play an important role in shaping my cultural experience. By

listening to the research participants about their life experiences, I hope, not so much to quantify what counts as young men's experiences, but to qualitatively understand them. Firstly, by understanding how young men reflexively appropriate existing Taiwanese cultures and traditions as a meaningful framework for interpreting the world. And secondly, by asking how the cultural meanings and understandings of gender practices in late modernity can help us to make sense of the existing gender configuration and changing social conditions in contemporary Taiwanese society; a structure that is articulated via a distinctive whole way of life amongst a particular social group in a particular society,

So far, I have contextualized Williams's analysis of culture in my own research. It is important to note that Williams insists on unpacking culture from these three definitions *simultaneously*: 'There is a significant reference in each of the three main kinds of definition... it is the relations that shall claim our attention...To study the relations adequately we must study them actively' (1961:43-45). That is, to see these social activities as a particular and contemporary form of human energy, in which agency should not be compromised in a theory of culture that focuses predominantly on social totality. This particular stance echoes how *experience present perfect* is developed in this research, in which my *cultural* and *academic* experiences have dialectically enacted with each other.

Throughout the analysis, there is a continuing tension between theory and 'day-to-day-practice'; between cultural norms and personal choices. Although, as Rabinow (1975) reminds us, the particular direction of an inquiry follows certain guiding ideas, yet these guiding ideas, often theoretically informed, are neither ends in themselves nor sufficient explanations for our own analysis. Rather, like signposts, they are *heuristic* directions, rather

than holistic conclusions for interpreting specific material. Therefore, the deployment of one's theoretical framework needs to avoid suppressing difference as suggested in Sartre's critique of Marxist structuralists, whose 'aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it' (1963:48). In order to do so, one needs to seek that 'particularity' within a general context. More specifically, we need to recognize cultural meaning and coherence always exist in relative association with symbols to the particular historical and spatial conditions in which they are situated (Rabinow, 1975; Williams, 1958). This particular stance, as Stuart Hall (1980) suggests, informs significantly the methodological paradigm developed within cultural studies, which endeavours to synthesize the *experience past* (structuralism) and *experience present* (culturalism) in making political sense of culture and society.

In the context of my research, as I argue, the studies of young men and masculinities in contemporary Taiwanese society can be most insightful if one holds on to the dialectical interplay between (western) theories and (local Taiwanese) cultural practices; the (changing) collective cultural values and the individual choices at this historical juncture of late modernity. This productive tension needs to be continually demonstrated throughout the textual construction of my own fieldwork. Nevertheless, *text* is driven by the desire for openness and 'explosion', whereas *work* is completed by closure and institutional classification (Barthes, 1989). The completion of one ethnographic work is an inevitable process of selection and interpretation of particular lived experiences. I made interpretations and selections from research participants and my experiences within the research context which best illustrated the research inquiry: namely a cultural understanding of Taiwanese young men and masculinities in late modernity. Albeit their accounts may be just as partial as

my selections, what is accentuated by this process is my intended structure and analysis.

Both are *situated* by the 'structure of feeling' between the research participants and myself.

3.6.2. Structure of feeling

While constructing my own analysis, I realized that there was a common cultural ground and shared values between the researcher and the research participants. More specifically, this shared 'structure of feeling' enabled me to understand 'in and through another' (Probyn, 1993:20). By 'structure of feeling', in line with Williams (1961:48), I understand:

... a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some way passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour. We are usually most aware of this when we notice the contrasts between generations, who never talk "the same language", or when we read an account of our lives by someone from outside the community, or watch the small differences in style, or speech or behaviour, in someone who has learned our way yet was not bred in them...

One is right to suggest that the shared 'structure of feeling' implicates the positions from which I speak or write. This particular feeling towards structure became apparent for me when I listened to participants' stories about the *right* things to do in life. For example, in many elder participants, I can see similar cultural values to those of my father, who was a child from a small village with few material resources, a diligent man who achieved what he has as a result of being extremely hardworking, a filial son who takes care of the elderly, and a quiet but responsible father who tries to give his children the best, never asking anything for himself. For them (the elder participants, and my father), these are simply the right and meaningful things to do.

Similar to many younger research participants, our relatively advantaged social and economic backgrounds enable us to choose the lifestyles we want to lead. Few of us needed to work in order to support ourselves, and many of us can continue studying into our late 20s. However, no matter how individualized our lives become, choices for life are rarely easy to make if they are about the family. This situated 'structure of feeling' is precisely one of the pivots that constitutes my research. Alongside Williams (1979:138), my *cultural experience* is appropriated as the *inspiration* (rather than determination) of explanations: 'What I said in effect was that we know this to be so about our own lives - hence we can take it as a theoretical assumption...'. However, with the insistence on 'experience' in its weakest form (as Williams reminds us) there is a great difficulty *not* to marginalize/totalize the experience of 'others'. By weakest form, he refers to the immediate ground of reasoning and the most *authentic* truths provided in what he terms *experience present*. To avoid this, Williams has suggested the necessity of 'a renewed awareness of the indissolubility of the whole social-material processes' (ibid), and I have turned this into the understanding of *experience* in its *present perfect* sense.

'Experience' is indeed perceived by Williams as 'the terrain of the lived' that articulates structure with agency (Hall, 1980:66). It also provides a productive tension between the ontological and the epistemological. This can be further understood by Probyn's (1993) proposition of different registers of 'ontological' and 'epistemological' *experience*. In line with Williams, Probyn (1993:16) suggests

...at an ontological level, the concept of experience posits a separate realm of existence - it testified to the gendered, sexual and racial facticity of being in the social; it can be called an immediate experiential self. At an epistemological level, the self is revealed in its conditions of possibility; here

experience is recognized as more obviously discursive and can be used overtly to politicize the ontological - the experiential self and the politicization of experience – are necessary as the conditions of possibility for alternative speaking positions within cultural theory.

However, in actual practice, there is not always a clear indication of whether the ontological self is a cause or consequence of the epistemological self or vice versa. In constructing my own analysis, it was through the differentiation of ontological/epistemological experience, at least at an analytical level, that I was able to see how a different (cultural/theoretical) *self* came into play. In so doing, I hoped to understand my own culture, not from deductive operations, such as universal structures of mind or determinative laws of economy, but through how gender and culture are actively lived out by Taiwanese young men as *a particular way of life* in late modernity. Accordingly, such a distinction enables me to critically examine the appropriation of my own cultural experience and the experience of research participants, to understand how cultural and academic experience have changed and enact between each other, and to not only recognize, but also amplify subjective interpretations of the ‘structure of feeling’ shared by the researcher and the researched. In short, I am working against the ‘ontological egotism’ and ‘stationary others’, at the same time appropriating and synthesizing my theoretical and cultural trajectory in order to understand the self as a speaking position on the question as to ‘how it is that I am speaking’ (Probyn, 1993:80).

3.6.3. Interpretation of the data: authority, symbolic violence, and epistemological domination

3.6.3.1 Authority and symbolic violence

Suppose, for example, I see a vessel on the stocks, walk up and smash the bottle hung at the stem, proclaim ‘I name this ship the Mr Stalin’ and for good measure kick away the chocks: but the trouble is, I was not the person chosen to name it

(J.L. Austin, 1962:23)

In *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin singled out a class of 'performative utterances', such as 'I do' in the course of a marriage ceremony or 'I name this ship the Mr Stalin' uttered, while smashing a bottle against the stem of a vessel. For Austin, such utterances are not simple ways of reporting or describing a state of events, but ways of acting or participating in a ritual. In other words, rather than a strict sense of truth or falsehood, what is indicated by such utterances is a necessary sense of felicity or infelicity. Therefore, to be felicitous, such utterances must, among other things, be articulated by an *appropriate* person in accordance with some 'conventional procedures'.

Following Austin, Bourdieu (1991) further argues that the efficacy of performative utterances is inseparable from the existence of an institution that defines conditions such as time, space and agency in order for an utterance to be effective. By institution, Bourdieu understands in a more general and active sense (a sense conveyed better by the French term, *institution*, than by its English equivalent), where an institution is not necessarily an organization, but any relatively durable set of social relations which endows individuals with power, status, and resources. This sense of *endorsement* can be traced, for example, through the early use of institution synonymously understood as ordainment (see 'institution' in OED, *ibid.*1085). Therefore, not anyone can stand before a newly built ship and successfully name the vessel; it is a set of prerequisite social relations, an institution, which *authorizes* a particular individual with the power to make the utterance effective, and recognized as so by others.

Bourdieu's central contention of performative utterances, left unexamined by Austin and conceived simply as conventional means, is the nature of felicity as primarily *social* productions. In his editor's introduction to Bourdieu's (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*,

Thompson (1991) suggests Bourdieu's departure from Austin's speech-act theory occurs in relation to the former's scepticism towards the latter's oblivion of the social conditions of felicitous use. More specifically, when an authorized spokesperson speaks with authority, s/he does not create it, but simply expresses or manifests this authority. To think of performative utterances only in a linguistic sense is to 'forget that the authority which utterances have is an authority bestowed upon language by factors external to it.' What is implicated by conventions are 'a set of social relations, imbued with power and authority, embroiled in conflict and struggle' (Thompson, 1991:9). From this perspective, in the process of doing research, it is important to ask, who is legitimized and by what to make authoritative or accountable claims to whom in what circumstances? Accordingly, we also need to ask how certain types of knowledge are normalized, authorized and legitimated, and why certain groups are seen to be respectable, to be worthy objects or subjects of knowledge (Skeggs, 1997).

These questions are epistemological and related to how (legitimate) knowledge is produced. Traditionally, the distinction made between object and subject is necessary in order to construct an objective and authoritative knowledge. For example, during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, exotic others, whose consciousnesses were often denied, played an important role in anthropology. More specifically, the obtained knowledge often needs to be secured and authorized by distanciation with others (Geertz, 1988), although this process of knowing and designating others is always made through a reference to the self (see Cohen, 1994 and previous discussion of Malinowski). We can also see how research on oppressed groups, such as Black or white working-class women, are designated as objects of knowledge in order to effect a return to the self of the researcher, who produces the

knowledge (Game, 1991; Skeggs, 1997). In short, the hierarchy of knowledge is (re)produced and maintained by the differentiation of *stationary others* and a *moving scholarly self*.

The subject and object dichotomy in terms of the production of knowledge and how the hierarchy of knowledge has changed involves complicated philosophical debates in the western world. For example, the subject for Descartes – as the thinking self - is proposed as the first substantial area of knowledge, whereas all other things different from the active mind or thinking agent must be reduced to objects. However, it is not the subject (and his/her *subjective* interpretation, impression or feeling) but the object (as the *objective* fact and neutral finding) that provides the most reliable sources of knowledge for a positivist approach (Williams, 1976). Nevertheless, as Paul Willis (1980:91) reminds us, for qualitative research in general and cultural analysis in particular, '[the] "object" of our inquiry is in fact...a subject and has to be understood and presented in the same modes as the researcher's own subjectivity'. Moreover, the researcher always needs to be ready to 'be surprised', to contest thoroughly his/her own meanings or expectations, to document the tensions and contradictions between what is said, and is experienced or actually occurs.

One way of practicing this is to demonstrate it through one's own analysis, as I shall illustrate in the next two chapters. Another way is through what Willis calls the 'theoretical confession' (ibid: 93). This is not simply a process of 'self-indulgence' as Bourdieu (2003) once criticized - it is the actual practice of acknowledging and making contradictions and tensions visible, particularly those occurring during the process of carrying out research that are unknown to the reader. Examples of this are documented in the previous discussion of *experience present perfect*. The theoretical confession allows the authority of the researcher to be

challenged, altered, and delegated, and more importantly, the cultural understandings of research participants to be interpreted, appropriated, and heard. In order to do so, during my fieldwork, research participants were constantly asked: what do you mean by this? And ‘can you give me some examples?’ Many participants’ accounts are quoted at length in order to maintain and illustrate arguments from interviewees’ perspectives. It is participants’ cultural understandings and interpretations of their own lived experiences, offered as critiques and an explanatory framework, that constitute and simultaneously challenge my own understanding. Paradoxically, Willis’s theoretical confession seems to echo Bourdieu’s contention of language and its symbolic domination; both endeavour to problematize the authorized knowledge of the researcher/spokesperson. However, they are epistemologically different in the sense that Willis’s manoeuvre derives from the inclusion of different subjectivities of agency (experience present), whereas Bourdieu’s intension focuses on *social* conditions (experience past) that authorize such knowledge in the first place. Yet, both agree that scholarly authority needs to be questioned, particularly when it is unseen and normalized through the process of making/uttering.

However, to question the production of knowledge and its embodied authority is not a straightforward task. One needs to decipher how authority is constructed in the first place. In earlier discussion, it was suggested that knowledge as a subject-object monitoring relation plays an important role in shaping the authority of anthropologists. Such a subject-object dichotomy is further reinforced by anthropologists’ *authentic* experiencing of the natives’ lives, and their monological construction of an ethnographic *text*. (Also see Greetz, 1988; Bourdieu, 1991, and section 3.4. for further discussion.) In fact, etymologically, authority can be synonymously understood as (i) authentic or (ii) **author** (see ‘authenticity’ in OED, *ibid*:

134). In terms of the former (i), authority is derived from the quality of being 'genuine', 'firsthand', and therefore trustworthy and reliable. Authorized knowledge of this sort is obtained ontologically and articulated through the most vividly personal *experience present*, including thought as well as feeling. It offers not only truths but the most *authentic* kind of truths (Williams, 1976). The latter (ii) suggests authority originating from masters, leaders or *authors* (as its Latin root *auctor* suggest), who generate thoughts or opinions to influence the conduct and action of others. Authority of this sort can be articulated through advice, commands, or texts that represent respectable knowledge. What is underlined by this type of authority are the existing structural conditions (*experience past*), that authorize one's privileged position, enabling one to speak convincingly or authoritatively (Bourdieu, 1991). This can be understood by the earlier discussion of Malinowski's anthropological magic that is constituted by 'I-witnessing' experience (authenticity) and his epistemological privilege (western scientific approach).

Reflecting upon my own research based on the above discussion, it is appropriate to suggest that my own origins, cultural background, and the shared 'structure of feeling' and cultural ground between the research participants and myself – as an ontological privilege - offer me authentic experiences and the immediate grounds for reasoning and analysis. I have not only 'been there' but also 'grown up' in the culture I was studying. This helps me to construct my writerly identity, my cultural signature, and is utilized as a monopolised interpretative scheme for my research. However, there is a risk of assuming my ontological status must lead to the prerogative of my own cultural experience, while simultaneously eschewing other kinds of 'authentic' experiences. Or I will commit the charge of being an over-passionate impressionist that hears the music that does not exist, interprets the words

that are not spoken, and of course is culturally essentialist in assuming that only Taiwanese researchers are able to provide the most authentic truths. Rather, as I argued earlier, cultural facts are partial, already interpreted and always ready to be interpreted. They are temporal conclusions of a continuing cultural flow that is situated in particular historical and symbolic conditions. Accordingly, in order to make transparent the process of reaching such conclusions, one needs to critically engage with and examine the dialectical interplay between one's cultural experience and theoretical discipline that contributes to an understanding of the social world s/he dwells in.

My academic training and my theoretical knowledge have equipped me with professional authority, yet there is a risk of assuming that inequality of knowledge must necessarily entail a social/moral inequality of worth between the researcher and the researched. One should be cautious about authority and unevenly distributed knowledge, yet one should not assume that people who have authority must abuse it. By authority, we understand not only 'the power to enforce obedience' or to 'maintain moral or legal supremacy'. More importantly, we can also understand 'authority' as 'derived or delegated power' (see 'authority' in OED, *ibid*: 134). Although both meanings can suggest a hierarchal power relation, the former emphasizes domination, whereas the latter, particularly suggested by delegated power, endorses the process of *sharing responsibilities* and *power* based on *trust and consensus*. It is this sense of entrusting and mutual cooperation between the researcher and the researched that significantly informed my understanding of Taiwanese young men and their generational understanding of masculinities and gendered practices. It is also these research participants' understandings of their selves that enabled me to develop my cultural understanding of what it means to be a Taiwanese young man. Commenting on the

epistemological authority and the inequality of the knowledge between the knower and the known, Skeggs (2002:363) rightly concludes:

...I know some things about the women I studied that they don't know, just as they know things about me that I don't...Also by virtue of my training, experience, ethnographic labours and time, I have access to explanations and interpretations that do offer some epistemological authority, but this need not contradict the moral equality between us. It was the merging between my knowledge and the women's own knowledge that produced the explanations in my [research]. Most of us do empirical research to learn from others, not to exploit and use them. It is therefore important not to confuse positioning with morality or we become complicit in the reproduction of passive pathologies.

3.6.3.2 Epistemological domination

I have endeavoured to critically engage with what I understand as authority and symbolic violence. In the following section, I want to return to Boudieu's (1991:164) discussion of symbolic domination as 'the invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it'. In the context of my research, this symbolic power becomes concrete and apparent when it comes to the textual construction of my fieldwork. I have discussed so far the trajectory of my research encompassed by my changing theoretical and cultural positionality - my *experience present perfect* - in order to provide an insight into how the research participants and their lived experience constituted my speaking position - from where I speak and how it is that I am speaking.

However, in so doing, I do not want to suggest that I simply let the research participants speak for themselves, and that my role was simply reporting what they said. I therefore can eschew my responsibility and any possible symbolic violence I may commit. Due to my theoretical position, in general and feminist research and cultural studies in

particular, I endeavour to identify many contrasting and contradictory lived experiences that informed the continuing tension between structure and agency in late modernity. Yet, this is followed by possible explanations and implications, which are situated within my theoretical disciplines and cultural experiences, as my intention of mastery through knowledge and my will to provide authoritative reasons (Walkerdine, 1988). Accordingly, this led me at times to apply my framework directly onto research participants' experiences without listening to or hearing what they were saying.

Take the translation of my fieldwork as an example. All of my interviews were carried out in (Mandarin) Chinese. Although sometimes research participants would reply to my questions in simple English words or sentences such as 'exactly', 'ok', or 'you are right' (particularly for those who obtained degrees from abroad or those from the younger generation), almost all of the conversations needed to be translated from Chinese to English. While translating, if I could not find a suitable translation, I translated from (Chinese) words to (English) words and used my knowledge to find an English equivalent e.g. 'long term rice ticket' (長期飯票) as 'breadwinner' in order to make sense for English readers (see section 4.3.1.1.).

Translations of this sort are related to cultural differences, and less to do with conceptual conflicts. By conceptual conflicts I mean the conflicting interest between the researcher/researched in interpreting the *same* word for different meanings as the result of the researcher's analytical purpose. For example, the English word 'wife' can find its counterpart in Chinese as '妻子' (qi zi); it was also a shared word used by elder research participants to describe their spouses. Therefore, in the first draft of my data analysis (**Chapter 4**), both in

the elder participants' quotes and in my own analysis, I used terms such as husband and wife to describe the gendered relation of a married couples amongst men and women from an earlier generation. However, in the second draft, I have changed the term wife into *partner* in my own analysis, while maintaining the original usage (wife) in interviewees' accounts. The reason for doing this, as research participants reminded me, is that the term 'wife' cannot fully capture the gendered category lived out by their current partners. More specifically, unlike their mothers who mainly participated in unpaid labour and received relatively little education, most partners of elder research participants are educated full-time career women. Many of them, like their partners, also work as academics in universities or colleges. They contribute not only to the economy of the family but also to their children's education, responsibilities that usually were not available to married women from an earlier generation, in particular those from rural areas. In short, due to their particular biographical routes, the gendered relationships between elder research participants and their married partners are more cooperative in the sense that housework does not belong only to women (for example, see Tom's discussion of 'housewife' in section 4.3.2.3.).

However, unlike the younger research participants who often use the term '伴侶' (ban iv) - meaning 'partner' or 'companionship' in English - for their potential future partners, and perhaps marriages - few of the elder research participants refer to their married 'wife' as 'partners'. One of the explanations is the different kind of gendered reflexivity shared by these two generations. More specifically, gendered reflexivity for the younger generation is catalyzed by a process of 'individualization' in late modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), whereas for an earlier generation although gendered relations are more

cooperative, the distribution of housework seemingly remains orchestrated by ‘family myth’ (Hochschild, 1990) and a more traditional gendered code (see section 4.3.2.3.).

Although in my own analysis I use ‘partner’ to describe the spouses for both generations, I am aware that these two generations may conceive this term differently. More specifically, the gendered reflexivity (McNay 1999) I will discuss in the next chapter can be applicable to both the elder and younger generation when it comes to kin values. Yet, when it refers to gendered practices such as marriage, family and kin practices, it is the younger generation who are more likely to experience an uneasy self awareness than the elder. This indicates the difficulty of capturing a complex gendered relation in transition for these elder research participants. In particular, tradition in its weak form is still significant for them, yet paradoxically gendered reflexivity, as an indication of processes of detraditionalization, is also enacted. Accordingly, one may suggest that gendered reflexivity is the necessary creative energy and contemporary strategy for strong tradition and its continuation in late modernity. This particular gendered reflexivity not only identifies the local culture in late modernity but also the shared social and economic position of the researcher participants. This is an important stance and I shall return to this in more detail in the following chapter.

I also realize that I chose ‘partner’ rather than ‘wife’ in my own analysis as a result of it being congruent with my own analytical framework, but that it may not necessarily resonate with the research participants’ understandings. However, such realization – or in Rabinow’s words ‘the comprehension of the self by the detour of the comprehension of the other’ (1977:5) – is a privileged position of mobility and power, which is unavoidable as certain forms of symbolic violence are always deep-rooted in the structure of the situation (also see

Killick, 1995). Accordingly, for Bourdieu (2003), participant objectivation becomes necessary in order to intervene in this 'scholarly gaze', the symbolic domination of the researcher's utterances, whereas for Willis, one needs to return to a theoretical confession to make the unseen seen in order for the researcher's authority to be challenged. I am accountable for my theoretical constructions and, my choices of terms which inform what are more suitable and what are not. Without acknowledging this, or by opting out by claiming conceptual irrelevance, it is assumed that it does not matter and that *others* will take responsibility for it (Skeggs, 1997).

3.6.4. Ethics and cultural codes

As Weber (1949) suggests, all research - including that committed to objectivity and a scientific method - is influenced to some extent by the researcher's values. Only through these values do particular issues get identified as research questions and studied in specific ways. This particular stance captures my attempts in previous sections, where I have attempted to appropriate my life experience in my own intellectual work (Mills, 1959), to make sense of contemporary gendered experiences in Taiwan through a shared 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1961) between the researcher/researched. This is followed by my critical intervention about symbolic violence and authority in order to avoid distortion and misrepresentation, while simultaneously enunciating the position I am speaking from. Before concluding this chapter, I want to discuss further some important ethical concerns of my research, which I was aware of throughout the study.

Alongside the British Sociological Association's code of practice for carrying out research (2002)⁵, I consulted the codes and guidelines produced by the University of Birmingham's Code of Conduct for Research⁶ before undertaking the fieldwork. During the research process, I also addressed Hammersley and Atkinson's (1995) discussion of ethical issues, including those of informed consent, privacy, harm, and exploitation. The issue of exploitation has been discussed in the previous section 3.6.3., and I will discuss the concern of harm at the end of this section. In terms of informed consent and privacy, all the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms, and the research participants were informed thoroughly about the aims of my research. The researcher explained to the research participants the necessity of tape recording for accuracy of translation (from Chinese to English), and informed the research participants that they could terminate the interview or stop tape-recording at anytime if they wished. Few of the research participants objected to be being recorded throughout the interview.

Reflecting upon my own fieldwork experience, alongside (western) ethical guidelines for research, three important cultural codes also contribute significantly to my understanding of carrying out research: (i) *guanxi* (connections), (ii) empathy, (iii) and similarities. *Guanxi* (i) is defined as one's own social networks and connections that play a crucial role in achieving business success in Confucian societies (Yeung and Tung, 1996). This particular cultural feature enabled me to obtain relatively easy access to the elder research participants. More specifically, through Tom (the gatekeeper in my research for elder participants), who worked

⁵ British Sociological Association website for ethical issues webpage Archived at: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>, last accessed 15 May 2008

⁶ University of Birmingham Code of Conduct for Research Web page Achieved at, http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf, last accessed 17 March 2008

as a professor and the Dean of the Business School in a university, I was able to interview his colleagues, who were willing to participate in my research and generously gave me their time due to the *guanxi* existing between them and Tom, and therefore indirectly with me. Due to this particular relationship, and as reminded by Tom, I was aware of the cultural necessity to prepare small presents for elder research participants when I visited them. This particular motive is based on cultural conformity - as one should return the favour when help is given – functioning here as a social lubricant that reduces the distance and unfamiliarity between the researcher/researched. It is also through cultural conformity that the *guanxi* between elder research participants and myself could be further solidified. For instance, many of them were willing to provide me with follow-up interviews and gave me any assistance I needed. Without *guanxi*, the recruiting process would have been more time consuming and less predictable. This became apparent when I was trying to look for volunteers amongst younger research participants.

For a number of younger participants, who were not contacted through my personal network, (ii) empathy played an important role in encouraging their engagements. By empathy, I mean the shared experience between the researcher/researched that enables the research participants to empathize with the obstacles of carrying out research. For instance, I was wondering why Nine (a 30-year-old celebrated blog writer, whose writing has been collected and published books) was prepared to participate in my fieldwork. Nine, who trained as a sociologist and carried out fieldwork for his masters dissertation, told me that he knew how difficult it was to recruit interviewees. Moreover, due to his academic training, Nine was able to articulate his thoughts in a sociological way. He explained to me, I was not the first person who interviewed him. However, what made him more excited about our interview was that I,

as a researcher who was interested in cyber culture, might be more empathetic about what he was doing:

How people interpret the cultural phenomenon of blogging and the popularity of my writing, as the decline of traditional literature or a more contemporary way of cultural communication, is already predetermined by their positions. People decide which lens they want to use. This is why I hardly accept interviews from people, who are trained as conventional literature critics; can you imagine if they advocate my works, how could they pass their viva? (laughing)

Except some younger research participants, who I know through my network, this particular academic empathy was a main motive for those younger research participants to volunteer to take part in my study. At the end of our interview, Nine told me that my questions really forced him to think about the assumptions that informed his work. What he enjoyed most was that, unlike other researchers who come and make judgements about him, 'you just ask me some interesting questions and listen to me.'

The last cultural code that helped me conduct my research was the similar social position (iii) shared between the research participants and the researcher. This became apparent when I was discussing sensitive issues, such as (homo) sexuality with my informants. I came to know the self-identified gay research participants through one of my main younger informants. Although it was through *guanxi* that I was able to be in contact with them; what enabled us to get to know each other were the similar experiences we had encountered. For example, we talked about gay life in Taiwan compared to other societies. We also shared our feelings about the existing tension between our own sexualities and the expectations of our families. By claiming this, I do not want to suggest the knowledge I have obtained is a most 'authentic' kind of truth. Rather, I want to emphasize that the process of telling a life story

to a stranger/researcher can be a 'deeply problematic and ethical process in which researches are fully implicated' (Plummer, 2001:224). Nevertheless, it was similar social positions between the researcher/researched that enabled me to be sensitive about the potential harm or damage that might be caused by the process of interviewing. The interview processes with these young gay men were carried out with caution and empathy. By revealing our personal experiences, we were not judging each other. Instead, it was more like a journey of discovering that our assumed own isolations were not isolated as we first thought. To share our experiences did not necessarily solve any issues we were encountering; but it is always comforting to know that you are not alone.

In this discussion of cultural code, there is a need to highlight that for a qualitative researcher, following ethical codes is just the beginning of a responsible research project. More importantly, one needs to bear in mind the cultural codes that may come into play, that remind us of the responsibilities and the positionalities of being a researcher. Nevertheless, in identifying the significance of cultural codes, it is suggested that there are not potential limitations. Sometimes, it may also lead to recruiting a homogenized group of research participants. I shall discuss this more in detail in **Chapter 6**.

3.7. Conclusion

Throughout the research process, I have felt a continuing unease because I have had to deal with a paradoxical tension...I chose to do research which was central to my own experience. My fear of distorting the often similar experiences of the women whom I interviewed generated a constant sense of insecurity which in turn served to underline my power as interpreter...These feelings were intensified because at root my research was a advocacy research. I have a message I want to tell...

(Reay, 1996:62)

Feminist research has contributed significantly to our understanding of reflexivity and reflexive practice. In particular, it has attempted to address the power relations and inequalities operating through the process of doing research (Hardling, 1987; Wilson, 1978; Blair, 1995; Probyn, 1993; Phoenix, 1994). A key question raised by feminist research is the notion of representation: who can represent who and under what circumstances? For those who study *others*, the researcher may be concerned about not representing the otherness sufficiently; for researchers such as me, who study men 'like myself', we may worry about writing too much about the self. As Archer (2002) suggests, one useful way to move forward from this methodological dilemma for a researcher is to clearly locate his or herself subjective position, place his or her values and politics centrally within the work, and make explicit the reasoning and procedures used to carry out the research. In short, reflexivity lies in the positionality of the researcher (Hall, 1990; Skeggs, 1997; Willis, 1980).

Reflecting upon my research, I have attempted to provide situated knowledge that is constituted both my cultural and academic experiences. These two sometimes conflicting, yet analytically, explanatory and complementing frameworks enabled me to critically engage with changing gender relations in contemporary Taiwanese society. It is also suggested that the shared 'structure of feeling' between the researcher/researched, functioning as a creative energy, enabled me to postulate my theoretical position and my politics - to identify the location of tradition and local culture in a late modernity framework.

Nevertheless, Archer also (2002:111) reminds us as researchers we are involving in 'uncovering /recognising the difference your differences make.' Here, she highlights the usefulness of a comparative approach provided by the differences/similarities of gender and

race/ethnicity between the researcher and participants that enable feminist researchers to reveal the 'hidden' discourses of power. For researchers such as me, who study the 'familiar others', this is particularly salient. I needed to demonstrate not only how the local shared cultural repertoire enables me to critically engage with western theories that informed from where I speak and write. Also, perhaps more importantly, I also needed to highlight the *differences* between myself and those Taiwanese men I have interviewed; the differences that are more epistemological. Throughout the textual construction of my work, I have been constantly reminded of the tension between my own research purpose and the intensions of my research participants who shared their experiences with me. More specifically, as Reay's quotation indicates above, I felt uneasy about whether or not my own appropriation of the gendered experiences were simply 'stealing' the words out of men's mouths. I endeavoured to deal with this uneasiness by not hiding it but making it visible through my conceptualization of *experience present perfect*. More specifically, through *experience present perfect*, as the documentary of my research trajectory, I hope to tackle my own textual authority, symbolic violence, and epistemological domination through the transparency of the research process and the accountability of the researcher for the claims made in this thesis.

As a response to my own analytical framework, it is through *experiences present perfect* that I have attempted to address the necessity of maintaining the dialectical interplay between structure (*experience past*) and agency (*experience present*). This dialectical interplay can only be maintained if one perceives how a habitual experience is never fully incorporated within the materiality of the past, and leaves itself open for challenges, reinterpretations, or alterations when new forms of experience come into play. Through *experience present perfect*, it is also necessary to recognize the *particularity* and *partiality* of my research. The cultural

experiences provided by research participants are only partially satisfactory for reasons I have discussed earlier. These experiences also articulated as a way of life located within a particular social group in contemporary Taiwanese society. Yet, alongside Williams (1961), through this particular way of life, I hope to provide some pieces of a jigsaw. Through these partial pictures, I endeavour to map out how the changing gendered configuration is culturally lived out in contemporary Taiwanese society. I shall elaborate on this further in the following two chapters focusing upon my data analysis.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis I: From 'A Life for Others' to 'A Life of One's Own' – Taiwanese Young Men, Masculinities, and Consumption in Late Modernity

- 4.1. Introduction: consumption as an effect of late modernity
 - 4.2. 'A life for others': the 'norm-al biography' for men and its gendered norm
 - 4.3. A life of one's own: young men and a 'do it yourself' biography
 - 4.3.1. Changing concepts of marriage
 - 4.3.1.1. Marriage as pure-relationship
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 - 4.3.2. Changing concepts of family
 - 4.3.2.1. Alternative: family as a sense of 'self belonging'
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 - 4.3.3. Changing concepts of kinship
 - 4.3.3.1. Tension: tradition as cultural *formality* or cultural *conformity*
 - 4.3.3.2. Continuation: the reinterpretation/reinvention of kin practice in late modernity
 - 4.3.4. Changing concepts of consumption
 - 4.3.4.1. Consumption for young men as a particular way of life
 - 4.3.4.2. Cultural feminization of everyday life
 - 4.4. Late modernity vs. tradition: the 'right' choices for life
 - 4.4.1. The meaningful practice for life: tradition as selective memory
 - 4.4.2. The 'right' choice for life: tradition and its cultural norm
 - 4.5. Conclusion
-

4.1. Introduction: consumption as an effect of late modernity

Across contemporary western societies, there is a sociological trend of explaining late modernity and its changing social and cultural perspectives via the ascendant position of cultural industries. This, as Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) observe, is epitomised by the rise of information technologies and the practice of consumption. For example, scholars such as Lash and Urry (1994:111) suggest that '[without] the presence of information and communication structures, enabling a certain flow of information and accumulation of information-processing capacities, reflexive individualization (and modernization) is impossible'. In the next chapter, this feature of information technology will be discussed by young men in the context of their reflexive projects of the self via online blogging.

Alongside information technologies, another key dynamic for understanding contemporary identities and their cultural meanings is the shift from production (needs) to consumption (lifestyle choices). Through this theoretical trajectory, as outlined in my literature review, the cultural legacy of the imagery of the New Man has become pivotal among contemporary commentators (Mort, 1988, 1996; Nixon, 1996, 1997; Edwards, 1997). However, the question of whether men and masculinities are changing has been widely disputed. This theoretical uncertainty has emerged from diverse responses to an assumed crisis in contemporary masculinity and sexual politics. Despite different interpretations, what connects these different interpretations is a particular focus on male representations via fashion, marketing and advertising.

Locating myself within a late modernity framework, I define consumption as an effect of individualization within contemporary conditions. By individualization, I understand,

in line with Beck (1992:130), that '*[the] individual himself or herself becomes the reproduction unit for the social in the life world*' (original emphasis). Individuals are removed from a traditional context of dominance, support, and security to the centre of a 'do-it-yourself' biography (Beck, 1992; Heelas et al, 1996). It is suggested that this disembedding of tradition enables research participants to narrate their self-related biographies outside the traditional route that was conventionally followed by Taiwanese men of an earlier generation. In the age of late modernity, the autobiographies of Taiwanese young men have shifted from 'a life for others' (production) to 'a life of one's own' (consumption). This can be exemplified by their changing understanding and choices compared to an earlier generation in relation to marriage, family and kinship, with specific reference to consumption. I endeavour to document these changes in the first part of the analysis.

To postulate that these young participants are able to bricolage a self-related biography in late modernity is *not* to suggest that they disconnect their everyday practices from tradition. It is important to assert that while late modernity theorists attempt to capture how traditional social bonds are giving way to new social orders (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991); it is Confucianism and its filial piety that continues to shape the extent of life-choices that one can have, and is therefore able to make. So, in the second part of the analysis, I will explore how participants narrate their 'do-it-yourself' biography as a result of the interplay between tradition *and* late modernity in contemporary Taiwanese society.

4.2. 'A life for others': the 'norm-al biography' for men its gendered norm

To begin with, it is useful to illustrate what it means to be a Taiwanese man of an earlier generation from a younger generation perspective.

C29: Men from an earlier generation could hardly lead a life for themselves. The economy was very poor and the high labour demand of agriculture drove them away from thinking about themselves. They usually followed a conventional route; the one that is very like their fathers: To get married, to have their own children, work hard and support their family.

H31: For my father's generation, men were like Taiwanese Buffalos that worked very hard on farms in order to take care of their families. To be able to support the family was their main concern

Due to post-war conditions, and more specifically the development of agriculture, the economy in Taiwan⁷ did not encourage men who grew up in the 1950s and early 1960s to lead a life outside of a standardized route: to be a man was to work hard, to support the family, and to have a son that carried on the family name. Family and its related concepts such as kinship and breadwinner provided a rudimentary gendered experience that enabled men from an earlier generation to make sense of who they were. As Tom (a 52-year-old professor in Business) recalls:

T52: Both of my parents are farmers and very traditional. I remembered when I was 26 years old; about to be a part-time masters student while teaching in high school, my mother always told me that I should settle down in the village I came from. Many friends I grew up with already became fathers by that time, and I was the only person who went to university. I suspect if I didn't get the scholarship and my father's permission in the first place, I would never have the chance to leave the village, and would have been married with kids in my early twenties like most of my childhood friends. For men from my generation, particularly in the rural area, it was almost impossible not to follow in our fathers' footsteps, like all of my three elder brothers did: to become a famer, marry someone and have a few kids in their early twenties in order to have more people to work in the field.

⁷ Since the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) fled to Taiwan in 1949, following their defeat by the Communist forces, Taiwan was always fighting against poverty. In 1961 Taiwan's GNP (Gross National Product) was \$153 per capita and the average national income was \$143 per capita with average \$104 private final consumption per capita. See <http://www.stat.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs4/nis93/ni.pdf> for the detailed information.

Tom's account is not an isolated one; many older participants shared similar experiences. More specifically, most of the elder participants in this research are professionals, who obtained PhDs and worked in universities. They were born into socially and economically disadvantaged positions and came from rural areas. Higher education opportunities, professional occupations, and improved financial situations enabled them to lead a lifestyle different from their fathers or elder brothers, whose lives are still predominately based on agriculture. In addition, it seems that Tom's father's and brothers' biographies echo what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) theorize as the 'norm-al biography', in which individuals are forcefully bound by existing social norms, such as kinship, marriage and traditional gendered roles. It is important to note, however, that for Tom and many other elder research participants, their current social and economic positions appears to have little effect on their understanding of what it traditionally means to be a man. In particular, when it comes to men's responsibilities, few of them disagree with the cultural values pursued by their fathers: to be a man is to get married, to support his family, and to have a son that continues the family name, as outlined above. Although these elder research participants share similar cultural values with their fathers, what makes them different from their fathers is their more reflexive gendered language, as exemplified by their understandings of father-child relationships. I shall address this particular stance in a later discussion (see section 4.3.3.2.).

4.3. A life of one's own: young men and a 'do it yourself' biography

What does the 'norm-al biography' mean to the younger research participants I interviewed? The answer is far less straightforward, particularly in a society where fixed and predefined images of what a man should be are coming to an end, and abstract collective

categories such as life, death, marriage and parenthood etc. are becoming decidable and fragmented. Everything can be decided and must be decided (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1996). Accordingly, the 'norm-al biography' has gradually given way to a 'do-it-yourself' biography, where individuals become the authors of their biographies via their own actions. This is illustrated in Zack's (a 37-year-old art gallery manager) account:

Z37: I work and I have money. I can decide what I want to do with my life. I am responsible for myself only...it is also to do with my choice for the life I want to have. Unlike men from my father's generation, if they reach my age, they have to get married, work hard, and support their families. For my father, this is his responsibility... For me, my choice is about my own interest. My choice for life is not always available for men from an earlier generation.

Rather than inheriting traditional male roles (e.g. father, husband, or son), the younger research participants such as Zack find 'themselves in the position where they have to...construct their own way of life' (Heelas, 1996:2). Accordingly, through a gender lens, one may further ask: what is a sociological explanation for the interplay between the interviewees' 'do-it-yourself' biographies and their gendered positions in late modernity? In what follows, I shall discuss the emerging societal meanings via changing concepts of marriage, family, kinship, and consumption respectively.

4.3.1. Changing concepts of marriage

4.3.1.1. Marriage as pure relationship

For scholars, such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002:8-12), the changing social history of marriage provides the epitome of a 'do-it-yourself' biography in late modernity. In the western world of the 17th and 18th centuries, marriage was understood as a direct component of the social order, as religious obligation, and as materially anchored the forms of work and life. Romantic love and personal choices were rarely mentioned in the

manuscript of marriage. Today's marriage, however, becomes an almost exclusively individual journey in the sense that marriage itself is a risky personal undertaking for which no insurance is valid. More specifically, marriage is to do with personal choices that determine the union of two people; neither God nor government can prevent the separation of the couple, although the regulations of divorce can make it less straightforward for both parties. If this is the case, then how is marriage perceived by the young research participants in contemporary Taiwanese society?

C23: I think the concept of marriage is more varied now... Before, it was to do with matchmakers or parents' decisions, but now it is down to individuals. You can find someone you prefer. Parents have few opinions of the person you are dating. In the previous generation, for men to find a wife was to find someone you could have children with, perhaps, someone who is good for the family. For women, they wanted to find a 'long-term rice-ticket' (長期飯票) (the equivalent of breadwinner, in English). But now, reproduction is not enough. For me, I want to find someone, someone who understands me... someone I love; I can talk about my problems in life or to share wonderful things in life... I hope the other person will feel the same about me.

For Charles, (a 23-year-old undergraduate student from an elite university), marriage is less to do with external social bonds (i.e. economic need or reproduction), but is rather a personal decision that should be based on love. In other words, to be a husband is not to be a 'long-term rice-ticket' for someone, and to find a wife is not simply to find 'the mother of my children'. Instead, for Charles, the rudimentary experience of marriage should be based on self-fulfilment, in the sense that he wants to find someone who can provide a therapeutic role if he is upset, answer his questions when he is confused, or to understand the jokes he tells. Therefore, to marry is to choose a partner for his life. The applied criteria work mutually in the sense that the one who makes the choices is also subject to those made by the other. The concept of marriage therefore is built upon mutual-understanding. Young men as well as

young women address their emotional needs and establish intimacy through mutual 'self-disclosing' (Giddens, 1992).

However, the chosen partner for life is not necessarily a life-long partner. As Charles points out: 'in the previous generation, people could not get divorced easily because of the pressure from family and relatives...Now is very different, I don't have too many relatives and I am not close to them anyway. I only have a younger sister. She won't interfere too much with my life and she respects my choice'. In other words, the disintegration of tradition, loss of extended family, the intensified value of romantic love, and (re)marriage as personal choices have increased the accessibility for divorce. Marriage, in this context, seems to lose its traditional protections; this fragility suggests marriage has become a situation of pure personal commitment that one needs to maintain and foster:

C23: Even though divorce is an option, it is not a desirable one for me. For me, I hope I can still overcome the problem together with my future partner. ...You don't want to divorce not because you can't, but because you care for someone so much that you want to make it work.... The possibility of divorce makes me think that I should even try to pay more attention to take care of the relationship; especially I prefer to marry someone who is also like me, someone who has her own ideas and career. If you want to drive a Ferrari, you can't expect that it only cost the same as Ford (laughing)... This makes communication even more important...Even though people now are supposed to communicate better with each other, there are more people divorced than ever.

Marriage as commitment for Charles is indeed a paradoxical option. On the one hand, it relies on the commitment that two people promise to show willingness, to work hard, and give of their energy and time to maintain their marital relationship. However, since it is optional rather than obligatory; marriage itself becomes precarious in the sense that there is no external coercion to ensure the entrusted responsibilities are being carried out. From this perspective, it is negotiation and communication that have become the essential

characteristics of marriage for Charles - the characteristics are reflexive rather than obligatory. From this perspective, we can suggest that Charles's concept of marriage resonates with what Giddens's calls 'a pure relationship' (1992), where a social relation can be sustained by mutual satisfaction for each individual to stay within it. Mutual self-disclosing may increase the personal intimacy, yet it does not guarantee the continuation of the marriage, particularly when personal choice is more prioritized than mutual agreement.

4.3.1.2. Negotiation: women and their 'life of one's own'

The reflexive character of marriage also indicates that women's social positions are shifting in contemporary Taiwanese society, where participation in the workplace and better education now enable women to demand a life of one's own. This opportunity was not always available for women from an earlier generation. Alvin (a 28-year-old insurance sales manager) and Hou (a 31-year-old lecturer), who are aware of gendered discrimination against women; discuss both a range of constraints and resistances to this earlier institutionalized gender order:

A28: My mother was always a career woman, and she also insisted my sister keep her job after she became pregnant...my mother told my sister, based on her experience, that a married life is easier if women could be financially independent. Some of her (my mom's) friends are housewives, and sometimes if they want to give money to their own parents, their husbands can be quite reluctant...I think the financial independence of a wife allows them to have a bit of life for themselves... My brother-in-law actually shares housework with my sister. I think nowadays in society, it is necessary otherwise women may complain: 'why do I spend the whole day at work and have to do all the housework after work'?

H31: My father had a kidney problem in his early forties, so that my mother had to be responsible for the income of our family. In the morning, she had to run the grocery, cooked three meals for the whole family and took care of 4 kids... My grandmother was not particularly easy-going, and I think my mother suffered quite a lot of unfair treatment. Unlike my girlfriend, who knows what she wants and keeps reminding me how equal we are, my mother

never complained. She thought that was her fate. Perhaps that's easier for her if she didn't think it was a problem at all in the first place...

A similar account can be found in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) analysis of the impact of individualization on contemporary women's lives. For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, there is a generational change in women's lives from 'the life for others' to 'the life of one's own'. Education and women's participation in the work place are two major reasons for such a change since 'expanded opportunities in education, work and income – *has quite a different meaning for men and for women*' (ibid: 75, original emphasis). Until the late nineteenth century, there were very limited educational opportunities for girls. The availability of any development of skills set for women were designed to help them acquire suitable knowledge for marriage.

However in recent decades, major changes are reported in Taiwan. For example, the 6 year compulsory education policy (from year 6 to year 12) was implemented since 1945 and extended to 9 years (from year 6 to year 15) from 1968 (Laws and Regulations Database of The Republic of China⁸) . Falling birth rates, as a result of policies of fertility control during the 1960s and 1970s (Sun and Soong, 1979; Tsai, 2007), and the transformation of family size from extended to nuclear family have improved not only equality, but also the quality of women's education, and therefore provided women with increased knowledge and professional competencies for labour markets (Kuznets, 1979; Chang, 1991, Haung, 2002). The greater educational opportunities women have, the better the working opportunities available to them. The more (financially) independent women become, the more life choices they can have. Inclusion in the market as a female worker might bring less economic

⁸Laws and Regulations Database of The Republic of China website for compulsory education policy Achieved at <http://law.moj.gov.tw/LawClass/LawSingle.aspx?Pcode=II0070001&FLNO=2> , last accessed 8 August 2007

autonomy in comparison with men; yet, it offers a chance of freeing oneself from the social demands of the family (Ehrenreich and English, 1973). Marriage, therefore, is no longer the ultimate goal *ascribed* to (younger) women. If women do get married, they demand greater male involvement in housework. Men, on the other hand, have lost their patriarchal privilege of being sole breadwinners and may have to re-negotiate their gender role within the domestic context as a result (Connell, 1995).

4.3.1.3. Tension: (gay) men and their life of one's own

If marriage becomes a personal choice, then individuals can decide whether or not they want to be married. Statistics inform us that in western societies including America (Bumpass et. al, 1990) England, and Europe (Kiernan, 2004), there are sharp declines in rates of both first marriage and subsequent rates of remarriage. One explanation is that emerging social phenomena, such as cohabitation, unmarried parenthood, or same-sex relationships have gradually challenged the hitherto significant functions provided by (heterosexual) marriage and the family (Weeks, 1995, 2001). Another sociological explanation, as Giddens's suggests (1992), is the recognition and reorganization of other close forms of personal relationship other than marriage that *construct* rather than constrain one's self identity. From this perspective, one may suggest that the articulation of a 'do it yourself' biography- to make a life of one's own- is where tradition is fractured. This can be understood by Wong (a 29-year-old PhD student in art) and Young (a 37- lecturer in art), who perceives marriage as the end of self-autonomy.

W29: If I don't get married nor have any children, I only need to think about myself. I don't have to carry the economic burden like what a husband should do. I don't have to play a role that is responsible for others, for example, the education of my own kids. ... I do enjoy having someone's company, but if I married, I couldn't behave like myself and keep being

myself...why not just have relationships without getting married? You can have your cake and eat it....

Y37: My parents did expect me to get married at some point, but it was simply because they worried that my life would not be easy if no one would take care of me when I am old. But I told them, what is good for them is not necessarily good for me. Instead of what they think, it should be how I feel and how I think... Besides, nowadays even though you have sons, they won't necessarily take care of you when you are old. I can take care of myself, and I enjoy having my own space despite being married or not...

Marriage was a central obligation for men from an earlier generation, but not for Wong and Young. For Wong, marriage seems to function as a social apparatus of male norms that mould individual men into a standardized manhood (i.e. father and breadwinner). Therefore, to have autonomy, is not to have marriage. It seems that young men such as Wong do not conceive of marriage as the cornerstone of a relationship. The exploration of the self is less bounded by ascribed roles (e.g. father and husband), but rather *acquired* through knowledge (i.e. knowing more about the self). As far as Young is concerned, marriage symbolizes tradition, such as his parent's expectations. '養兒防老' (yang r fang lao), to take care of your sons so that they will take care of you when you are old, used to be an idiom amongst people from an earlier generation, but this is not the case for Young. He clearly rejects this traditional value, while embracing his choice. A strong sense of self reflexivity is emphasized here - Young can distance himself from traditional norms and values that are not applicable to his way of life. Instead, questions such as 'How shall I live?' or 'What kind of lifestyle do I want to choose?' have to be answered in day-to-day decisions about who to be, how to behave, and what kind of intimate relations one should choose (Giddens, 1991:72). Here, marriage as a matter of family commitment (to one's parents or to a future partner) has become a matter of *negotiation* rather than ascription, in the sense that the acceptance of diversity and individual choice are culturally prioritized (Finch and Mason, 1993).

Alongside generational changes, it is likely that these two research participants' sexuality (both of them are self identified gay men) also contributes to their rejection of a traditional concept of marriage. While responding to the researcher about his impression of marriage, Wong comments that: 'Who wants heterosexual marriage? It is simply a reproduction of patriarchy'. As a PhD student in art, who is interested in feminist and gay movements in Taiwan and Western societies, Wong is able to appropriate a (western) feminist challenge towards the ideology of the monolithic family and its legitimization of the subordination of women in the economy and public institutions (Thorne and Yalom, 1992). However, appropriation of feminist thinking on gender does not always inform his actions.

Power: Have you ever thought about 'coming out' to your parents and discussing the reason why you don't want to get married?

W29: Actually not ...my father is a very traditional person, although he is also very professional and educated. I simply told him that I knew that he had to sacrifice himself a lot for us [my sister and I], and perhaps he could do more things if he didn't get married. He kind of agreed with what I was saying. I think he knows society is different now. It is my mother who is keener on the idea of me getting married. But I simply tell her that I am still a student. It is very useful and convenient.

Within a family context, it is important that a personal decision of not getting married is informed by a consensus between the parents and the son. In other words, for Wong, at a *personal* level, his rationale for not marrying a woman is more to do with his sexuality; yet, at a *parental* level, the legitimate reason is either to maintain his own autonomy, or to cite the inappropriate stage of his life course. His father's acceptance of his explanation for not getting married also indicates changing societal conditions, to the extent that he (particularly as a result of a higher educational background) can understand that marriage is something optional rather than obligatory. Wong's mother, on the other hand, does show her wish for him to get married, although this more traditional expectation is postponed by a more urgent

social expectation towards her son at this particular moment of his life course: that is to complete his study, establish a career, and then have his own family. An important theme raised here is the silence of the discussion of same-sex desire within a family context. At this point, I want to suggest that 'choices' for life should not be perceived as voluntary actions of the individual. Some choices are more meaningful and others are simply not available in the first place. It is through the meaningful choices that one can trace how a strong sense of how tradition is lived out in daily life practice. I shall elaborate further on this point at the end of the chapter.

4.3.2. Changing concepts of family

4.3.2.1. Alternative: family as a sense of 'self belonging'

Another dimension of a 'do-it-yourself' biography lies in the changing concept of the family. For elder research participants, the concept of the family is encompassed by a husband, a wife and their children. But traditional definitions of the family are not always applicable to interviewees from a younger generation:

Z37: My friends and I tend to agree that we want the feeling of being home but not necessary to have a family and children. I already have my family, my parents and my siblings. If I want to enjoy the family company, I can go and stay with them (laughing), a bit irresponsible I know. When I don't want to be surrounded by others, or I should say if I want to be alone, I have my own space and it is also my family. The concept of family is not so concrete anymore, but the feeling is very important. The concept of family becomes broader and it is a feeling for a place that I belong to...This is how I define the word 'family', and if I don't have such belonging, I don't consider it is a family to me.

According to Zach (a 37-year-old manager in a national art museum), the concept of the family is defined by the self, rather than being a norm that defines everything else. A key change here is the search for a satisfactory relationship through personal affirmation. In

other words, family for this research participant is a sense of self belonging in which a partner and children (as a socially constructed familial constitution) is not necessary. However, what is necessary for Zach is that the definition of the family is *congruent with* rather than controlling of his project of the self. Family therefore becomes the outcome of one's *choice* rather than a biological creation.

Although Zach is (self-identified) heterosexual, his understanding of the family - as a 'sense of belonging' – seems to resonate with what the family means within contemporary non-heterosexual relationships. In particular, according to Weeks et al. (1998:88) 'the idea of a chosen family is a powerful signifier of... affirming a new sense of belonging, that becomes an essential part of asserting the validity of homosexual ways of life'. More specifically, for non-heterosexual relationships, the concept of the family is practically understood as developing from chosen friendships, rather than the kinship that one was born into. The former provides not only emotional and material support, but also the affirmation of (non-heterosexual) identity and belonging; whereas the latter may not always culturally approve of that self lived out by gay people. Therefore, one can see the need to expand an established concept of the family marked by a heterosexism, which fails to recognize alternative family formations.

A main goal for Weeks et al is to call for legal recognition of non-heterosexuals' rights within the context of the family (e.g. adoption, custody, health insurance and inheritance rights etc.). More importantly, alongside this political demand, we also see that the changing concept of the family signals changing gender relations in a wider social context. Consequently, to live an alternative lifestyle outside of a traditional route has become possible

for both homo/heterosexual men and women, with the construction of new spaces for everyday life (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 1995). By this, I mean a shift from the 'norm-al biography' to an elective biography; a 'do-it-yourself' biography in late modernity, where individuals are now the centre of their own life course and are able to choose a lifestyle that suits their own preference. Hence, traditional values become references rather than inevitable social forces that determine what the family and hence a man means culturally. This is further explained in Young's account:

Y37: I think different concepts towards 'family' will lead to different self-realization and completeness. For my father, to have a family is his responsibility and what the society expects him to do. His sense of manhood is fulfilled by the obligation. But for me, it is more to do with the individual self.... However, this is not saying that I am not a responsible person, quite the opposite, I am very responsible but in my own sense. Unlike my father is responsible for his family, I am very responsible for myself, I take good care of myself, and I pay less attention to what people expect me to do and more to what I want to do... perhaps; the traditional route for what a man should be is not something I will take...

In traditional Chinese societies, to establish one's own family and to a career is the main pathway to becoming a man. This can be understood by the Chinese idiom 成家立業 (chéng jiā lì yè) meaning an independent man, he must first establish his own family and career. However, unlike his father, for Young, to establish one's own family is not the only path to self-realization. This changing attitude towards the family enables him to further define what counts as responsibility, and what kind of responsibility he *wants to* rather than *has to* take. Furthermore, what is suggested both here and in the previous section is that the changing concept of marriage and the family for Young are not anymore a 'norm-al' biography that he inevitably has to follow. There is plenty of room for manoeuvre where individual choice can be initiated and negotiated. The rejection of tradition is the endorsement of one's self-

realization. If we compare Young's account with Zack's, despite their differences in sexuality, both Zack and Young share a similar understanding of what the family culturally means to them; that it is not centred by family obligations, but is congruent with their reflexive project of the self. These two research participants' understandings of the family are common amongst younger research participants. However, such understanding resonates less with the biographical route shared by men from their fathers' generation.

4.3.2.2. Combination: family and a 'do-it-yourself' biography

Both Zach's and Young's accounts provide a different interpretation of how the family is traditionally understood. Increasingly, the family is being deployed to denote something broader than relationships based on lineage, alliance, or marriage. However, the family in this sense is not axiomatically understood as a faded concept. As Thornton and Yong-Demarco (2001) remind us, marriage and family life still remain important as part of a cultural ethos for young people in the sense that many of them are still inclined towards marriage, and to bear or rear children. Such cultural rhetoric is also echoed by some younger research participants. Charles for example, (a 23-year-old undergraduate student from an elite university) expresses his interest in having his own family in the future:

C23: If you ask me, I would say that I am looking for a relationship now, a stable one. But it does not necessarily mean that I want to have a relationship in order to get married. It is still too early for me... perhaps in few years time, when I want to settle down, I would like to have a family with the woman I love and have some kids...I can see myself playing basketball with my children like my father did with us... How cool it is!

Paradoxically, this point of view is also shared by Zach, who earlier mentioned the need to understand the concept of the family in more individualistic terms:

Powe: Have you thought about getting married?

Z37: Don't take me wrong, when I said that family as a sense of belonging does not mean that I don't want to have my own family. What I mean is that unlike my father, I don't feel the pressure to have my own family simply because I have to. I think it is important to know the reason why you want to have your own family; you choose to have your family with someone you love...not for the sake of having your own family... If I have the opportunity and meet someone I love, I can't see why I shouldn't get married. But I will think more about having children. I see how difficult it was for my mother to take care of us [me and my brother] all by herself when my father was busy working when we were kids. But who knows, I may want to have children one day if I am married and we [my wife and I] are more financially stable...

What we learn from these two research participants is the continuity of family values. Yet the concept of the family is changing and is driven by more individualised motives. In other words, none of them reject the idea of establishing their own families but the idea, of having a family needs to follow the establishment of an intimate relationship. Charles, more than Zack, advocates the concept of having children since it is a 'cultural ideal' for him (Connell, 1995, 20005). However, Zack is less certain about having children indicating a possible tension between work and family life. The idea of having children is not completely ruled out. But this is not possible without first achieving financial stability. Once again, we can see how Zack, as part of a younger generation, organizes his life course differently from the cultural route suggested by tradition. From this perspective, family for Charles and Zack is not the fulfilment of a social norm, nor 'norm-al biography', but another way of constructing one's own biography that is encompassed by one's own life-choice.

Through the changing concept of the family, we can see a need to unpack, socially and culturally, the process of individualization. By socially, I refer to changing gender relations in general and the shift from a 'norm-al' biography to a 'do-it-yourself' biography in particular. In terms of its cultural dimension, I refer to how one's biography interacts with the particular and meaningful way of life the individual wants to live out. The cultural

dimension is where *strong* tradition comes into play. Accordingly, in Charles context, a family of one's own will resonate with his cultural ideal of the family. Moreover, tradition is also open to *interpretation* and *negotiation*, particularly when it is not a cultural norm but a sense of belonging that constructs one's 'do-it-yourself' biography. From this perspective, a family of one's own is where *weak* tradition is absent.

I am aware of how different cultural meanings are negotiated and articulated when interpretations of the family are carried out by different actors in different contexts. These accounts can be simultaneously coherent or contradictory with reference to the idea of the family portrayed by Taiwanese men from an earlier generation. Nevertheless, one can see how individualization as an *uneven* process is lived out by young men in late modernity. Through this process, we need to emphasize the interplay between structure and agency in general, and the existing gendered configuration and individuation in particular. This leads me to maintain that although a late modernity framework is useful to the extent that it opens up the conceptual possibility of accommodating young men's 'do-it-yourself' biographies outside of the traditional route. However, tradition does not disappear, particularly in its *strong* sense. It can reinvent itself through one's own biography (e.g. one's upbringing and childhood memories) and become a familiar cultural detour that leads one to an anticipated future.

4.3.2.3. Tension: gendered reflexivity and its uneasiness – housewife and fatherhood as examples

▪ Housewife

Changing definitions are not limited to the concept of the family. A family related concept such as that of 'housewife' can also be understood in different ways. This may have resulted from the changing structure of the economy and society (i.e. the rise of consumer

society), in which certain social roles that a wife would conventionally be expected to take up are gradually shifting. As Tom (a 52-year-old professor in Business) explains:

T52...the term housewife is problematic since in the present society, there is less housework than there used to be. The changes in the social structure allow us to consider family as one aspect of the society instead of being everything. The family and housework will therefore be socialized. What I mean by socialization is that the function of the family and housework can easily be replaced by the society. For example, cooking becomes less compulsory since there are many restaurants that can provide this function. In my family, since my two children are away studying, my wife and I buy our breakfast and lunch in university and bring our dinner back from the cafeteria.

Power: So what kind of interaction is there between you and your wife?

T52: Due to the 9 years of compulsory education in Taiwan, more and more women have entered the workplace. Many more women now go to universities or even work in higher education like my wife does.... However, the inherent values from previous generations still somehow expect men to earn more money than women, to take a bigger financial responsibility than women. Women, on the other hand, are also expected to participate in the decision-making for the family, for example, children's education or how to spend the savings. In my family, we work as a team, we share domestic work, and we help each other out. This is something different from my parents.

As Tom points out, the term 'housewife' is problematic and is not able to capture the diversity of the tasks that his partner is involved in. Being an educated and professional woman who also works in the university, Tom's partner shares a very different biographical route from that of his mother. This may again result from women's current social positions that initiate a new gender experience in the domestic context; partners are working as a *team* rather than one being subordinate to the other. This teamwork relationship is not uncommon for elder research participants who share similar social and gendered positions, such as Tom and his partner.

However, I asked more in detail how the domestic arrangements were carried out between him and his partner, Tom's account resonates with a traditional gendered division;

as a conventional Chinese saying suggests, ‘男主外 女主內’ (nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei), meaning that men are responsible for work outside the house (breadwinners), whereas women take care of the jobs in the house (homemakers):

Powei: Have you discussed who does what? For example, who does the laundry usually? And what kind of domestic work do you regularly participate in?

T52: We do what we are good at. For example, my wife usually does the laundry and ironing. She is also the person who does the cooking if we do cook since she cooks better. I am responsible for tasks such as cleaning the rubbish, garage, or gardening, things that need more strength to do. If there is anything we need to go out and get, it is usually my job as well. Basically, she is in charge within the house, and I am responsible outside of the house.

If we recall Mansfield and Collard's (1989) and Hochschild's (1990) discussion of domestic arrangements in **Chapter 2**, we can see how the gendered space in Tom's house is actively orchestrated by a 'family myth' (i.e. I-do-outside-the-house-she-does-inside-the-house where outside is garden and garage and the inside is cooking and laundry). The domestic chores just *naturally* fall into place. It has been suggested in western literature that men may have become more involved in housework and childcare (Schor, 1993; Gershuny et al., 1994) due in particular to the availability of technological innovations in the home (Cockburn and Ormrod, 1993; Smeds et al., 1994). Yet feminists are sceptical about the assumed breaking of the link between the exclusivity of women and housework (Brannen and Moss, 1991; Coward, 1992; Duncombe and Marsden, 1993; Silver, 1987). For example, expressing a similar view to Tom (a 52-year-old professor in Business), Juliet Schor has argued that 'housewifery is dying out' (1993:98), yet in the very different sense that fewer households nowadays can afford the labour of an adult being solely responsible for house-cleaning, cooking and mothering. The more women have to participate in the workplace, the fewer full-time housewives there can

be. The time women spend on domestic labour thus begins to shrink, as this can be compensated for by the invention of household technologies. Nonetheless, while men are still locked into work, women are locked into *both* work and primary responsibility for the home.

This can be further explained by Silva's (1999) historical analysis of the interplay between the innovation of home technologies and changing housework activities. For Silva, the traditional feminist assumed that men did *not* do housework (Silver, 1987), and therefore neglected the emergent transformation of heterosexual housework. By this, Silva means that one needs to first of all recognize how technologies (e.g. hoovers, cookers, washing machines) can lighten the burden of chores. It also needs to be acknowledged that the image of the cook or the gendered associations of laundry are now more fragmented. However, this recognition is only the beginning of a feminist analysis. One has to bear in mind that 'machines hardly make any difference in isolation from social context' (ibid: 64). We need to further consider that although domestic technology can change domestic practice and lighten the burden of activities; 'the development of newer cookers has also tended to re-emphasize dominant constructions of the gendered users of technology' (ibid.). This position reminds us of the need to critically engage with a deeper, and, perhaps, changing gendered structure that is as yet under-scrutinized. From this perspective, we can suggest, in terms of domestic arrangements at least, the relationship between Tom and his partner is marked by a more cooperative approach than his parents' generation, yet there is still a clear gendered code of division of labour.

For someone who comes from a younger generation, such as DuoDuo (a 28-year-old PhD candidate in IT management), such a cooperative practice can lead to a more *uneasy* individualized way of social behaviour that often requires negotiation:

D28: When women do more housework, it is not simply a matter of being unfair for women or being an advantage for men. Even though women are expected to do more housework, men are expected to earn more money as well. I would rather be a housewife than to have a hard job (laughing). Besides, there is less housework left for women to do. For example, people tend to dine out. In terms of washing, there are washing machines for clothes and dishes...Doing laundry can become awkward for a couple in the sense that whose turn is it to do laundry, how often should laundry take place, and how to do laundry...Perhaps at the end of the day, she will wash hers and he will wash his separately...The distribution of the housework is more sophisticated at the present time; they (men and women) become more understanding towards each other. If women want to convince men to do housework, they need to find a more persuasive and effective way; and of course, men always find a better way of avoiding it (laughing).

In his text, *Dirty linen: couples and their dirty laundry*, French sociologist, Claude Kaufmann (1998:55-57) suggests that the acquisition of a washing machine provides an important indicator that signifies the moment when two people become a couple in late modernity. In other words, the washing machine makes a joint domestic commitment that is routinely organized. This may imply a significant changing gender relationship in late modernity. Doing laundry was not such a problem for people in a pre-industrial society because it was a job for women. However, for DuoDuo, this pre-fixed gendered distribution of domestic work is now replaced by a process of discussion and negotiation. Therefore, unlike Tom and his partner, whose cooperative relationship in domestic chores can be guided by more traditional gendered rules, for DuoDuo, there are no clear rules to follow. If a couple wishes to resolve their domestic tensions, as this younger research participant suggests, they either have to do things separately or reach agreement via negotiation. From this perspective, the

gendered distribution of domestic labor for this interviewee is not a task pre-assigned by a gendered structure, but a continual dialogue between men and women (Mort, 1988).

At first glance, both Tom and DuoDuo find the term 'housewife' problematic. Yet one needs to further ask whether these two research participants share the same gendered reflexivity. Why can the distribution of domestic work be attributed without much difficulty by Tom and his partner in accordance with assigned gendered roles, whereas finds the contribution of chores problematic. One possible explanation lies in their understanding of *weak* tradition (for definition, see **Chapter 2**). More specifically, Tom's dissatisfaction with the term housewife most likely results from its incapacity to describe the tasks women are expected to do in contemporary societies. This is not to deny Tom's awareness of the different biographical routes shared by his mother and his partner. However, neither Tom nor his partner seems to challenge the take-it-for-granted family myth in terms of domestic arrangements, or the assumption that women are probably better at cooking, ironing, and laundry. By contrast, although DuoDuo acknowledges the existing gendered expectations towards men and women in contemporary Taiwanese society, he is reluctant to simply accept the traditional gendered division of housework and the gendered role assigned to him. Consequently, DuoDuo feels that there is a cultural tension between *what men are expected to do* and *what men want to do*:

Power: Do you think women still tend to do more child-caring when they have a job?

D28: They can have maternity leave up to 2 years... and men can only have three days off when their wives deliver the babies...It is not simply because men don't want to participate in the parenting....it is also an issue with the social norms. If a man tells his boss he is not going to work because he wants to take care of his baby, people can be easily confused by why he wants to do so. His colleagues may look down upon him and feel that he is not

ambitious at all. This is not a matter of his personal willingness or not, it has to do with the social norms as well.

If we examine the accounts provided by Tom and DuoDuo, they may further suggest that the 'obviousness' of domestic arrangements in day-to-day contexts (for Tom and his partner) is gendered by the cultural production of the embodied rituals of a traditional gendered habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Cooperative teamwork between them in terms of domestic chores is realized via a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, in the context of domestic arrangements, the question of who should do what for whom in what circumstances can be worked out, at a pre-reflexive level, via mutual understanding.

However, the 'uneasiness' for DuoDuo, according to McNay's analysis, is associated with an increasing feeling of 'the lack of fit between gendered habitus and field' (1999:107). More specifically, and unlike Giddens (1991, 1992), who highlights the significance of self-monitoring reflexivity and the disembedding of tradition, McNay argues what is also re-embedded is the 'entrenched dimensions of embodied experience' (ibid: 103). More specifically, men and women have entrenched and 'often unconscious investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity which cannot easily be reshaped and throw into doubt ideas of the transformation of intimacy' (ibid.). Experiences of this are exemplified in the gendered distribution of domestic arrangements between Tom and his partner, or in McNay's example, career women's emotional responsibilities for their children.

For McNay, processes of detraditionalization have opened up certain aspects of gender relations to renegotiation. However, as I have discussed earlier, the detraditionalization of gender does not always make women or men feel easy about the ideal of performing the life of one's own. Their anxiety can be intensified by a tension between

conventional gendered expectations and the desire for an ideal individualized biography (also see Jamieson, 1998). This stance is particularly relevant to explain the gendered reflexivity articulated by DuoDuo. In particular, detraditionalization has opened a gendered space for renegotiation in late modernity; nevertheless, it has not freed him from the burden of traditional responsibilities for men. There is a continuing tension between 'the life of one's own' and the traditional expectations towards a man that are actively articulated by this younger research participant and his cultural understanding of gender relations in late modernity.

We can suggest that the gendered reflexivity applied by DuoDuo enables him to create a framework of rules that indicates what is fair and what is not in a malleable social world. We also learn that the dialogue in which younger generations engage, working out practical arrangements of their domestic life can be uneasy, and needs to be continually (re)negotiated. Nevertheless, practical arrangements and abstract personal rules inevitably add to the institutionalized framework in which their relationship is constituted (Jamieson, 1999). Consequently, what is articulated by young men such as DuoDuo is an increasingly recognized and conflictual male role. It is precisely this tension between existing tradition and the processes of detraditionalization that constitute my understanding of gendered reflexivity in relation to traditional gendered practice in late modernity. In the following section, I want to further examine this gendered reflexivity by using fatherhood as an example.

- **Fatherhood**

Similar to DuoDuo's uneasy gendered experience in contemporary Taiwanese society, Chris (a 39-year-old director of a research institute in business management and a father with

three daughters), who endeavours to achieve a work-life balance, also encounters a tension between 'a life for others' and 'living one's own life'. Being someone who obtained his PhD in America, the *ideal* fatherhood for Chris is to be more than just a 'breadwinner':

C39: Like my father, I always think that a man has to take care of his family. However, what is slightly different between me and men from my father's generation is the care for the emotional needs of my wife and my children. When I studied in United States, I found Americans pay a lot of attention to arranging family leisure time because they only work five days a week...Our lecturers often shared with us their experiences in attending their children's matches or their experiences of travelling during the weekend. They did not hesitate to let us know straight away that they valued a lot their family life. This influenced me a lot. In an earlier generation, if a man told you, "I am sorry, I have to go home and take care of my children and spend time with my family", it was kind of feeling of being 'ashamed' (in English) for him. However, now I will tell my students straight away I have to finish the meeting earlier so that I can pick up my children. For me, I am simply telling the truth, and I don't understand why I need to be ashamed if I speak out the truth.

Power: Can you explain a bit more what you mean by emotional needs?

C39: When my wife saw our daughters sitting on my lap, she said to them they were very lucky since she (my wife) never had that kind of experience. For her, this is something surprising; for me, it is just a normal thing to do. I also spend time shopping with her, and often tell her I am grateful for what she does. I think men from an elder generation tend to think actions are more important than words. However, for me, I think actions are as important as words. You need to let the person you care know how much you care for them...sometimes, what you have done is not enough; you have to make your actions as loud as your words. Of course, this is also to do with the relationship I have with my wife. The one we have is very different from my parents. When I was a child, my mother was used to not having my father around since he was very busy working. For her, it is something of a matter of course since he had to work in order to support our family. But my wife will complain if I spend too much time working. This is why I think communication is very important.

At first glance, Chris's account may seem to reinforce the pro-feminist conception of men's domination over women via their control in both the public and private domains (Hearn, 1987). Although Chris is the sole breadwinner of his family, his role cannot be fully

captured by the language of patriarchy. More specifically, his gendered roles as – a director, an employee, a professor, a father and a husband – represent a continuing contestation and an internal contradiction for a socially progressive man to maintain a balance between personal responsibilities and public/work requirements.

This can be further explored by examining Cooper's (2000) research on fatherhood and masculinity in Silicon Valley. Through interviewing hi-tech workers, Cooper identifies what she refers to as a 'nerd masculinity' that has emerged in connection to work styles found within Silicon Valley. Nerd masculinity, as a masculine work ethic, requires one to be tough, to put work first, and to ensure you 'can get the job done no matter what' (Cooper, 2000:382). It celebrates brilliance in technological competency, rather than looks or masculine physicality. Moreover, this type of masculinity endorses gender egalitarianism rather than misogyny in the work place. For Cooper, it is interesting to see how these men - as hi-tech workers as well as fathers - transform their public claim of gender equality into private gender practice.

Most interviewees in Cooper's study, at some point, appear to prioritize work over family. Many of them have to rely on the women in their lives, namely their partners, to do much of the work involved in family life. However, those who are 'superdads', tend to sacrifice their own time in order to invest heavily in both career and family. They also demonstrate a strong emotional engagement with their families, including the ability to empathize with their partners' contributions to domestic life. This can be seen by their active participation in childrearing or chores and their acknowledgment of their partners' need and entitlement to personal time. In addition to demands at work, these men as

husbands also feel responsible for demands at home. Consequently, the balance between work and family life can only be achieved through exhaustion.

However, this is not to suggest that the gendered division of domestic life is disappearing. Indeed, some of Cooper's interviewees tend to divide the domestic division of labour along traditionally gendered lines. The majority try to resolve the contradiction between work demands and family responsibilities by leaving most of the family work to their partners. Simultaneously, these husbands do want to be involved in and are responsible for at least some of the family domestic work. Cooper's research demonstrates the tension between gendered ideology at work and the actual practices of parenting. It is suggested that institutionalized masculinity acts to control and influence the way these professional fathers think about, experience and manage their work and family lives. Yet, for some, there is space for manoeuvre, where the practice of fathering is a constant struggle to achieve a balance between work and family life.

If we return to Chris's account, we can see some similar patterns to those identified by Cooper in terms of 'superdad'. For example, a traditional gendered definition contributes significantly to this research participant's understanding of fatherhood when he talks about his responsibility for his family (Connell, 1995; 2005). This is a similarity between him and his father - to be a man is to be a breadwinner who supports his own family. However, what makes him different from men from an earlier generation is that he cares about not only the material but also the emotional needs of his family. This is illustrated by his interactions with his wife and daughters.

More specifically, for Chris, a definition of intimacy involves not only the action of the actual care (Jamison, 1998). They need also to be verbally communicated (Giddens, 1992). From this perspective, one can further suggest that this recognition of a need for communication between men and women signifies changing gendered relationships in late modernity, where men cannot take for granted what women do to support the family, which in turn cannot be valued in simple financial terms. Communication here can also be understood as negotiation to which both Chris and his partner need to actively participate in - working out how to do things together that are marked by a shared sense of fairness. Mutual acknowledgement is needed in order to recognize each other's contribution. Indeed, for Chris, acknowledgement is important since he realizes, like the superdads in Cooper's study, that without the help of his partner in his domestic life, he cannot fulfil his public role. If acknowledgement is not given, Chris's partner will not be silent but make her voice heard. Her role here is not simply that of a traditional housewife (the role taken by Chris's mother), but a gendered reminder that informs Chris that he should behave in terms of being not only a breadwinner but also an intimate partner.

However, this is only one side of the story, and one that strongly differentiates the life experience of the research participant from his father. Behind this *cultural ideal* of fatherhood, there are also contradictions and tensions between work and family life. For Chris,

Powei: Do you find it is difficult to maintain a balance between work and family life?

C39: The reason I choose to work in the university is because it gives you a lot of liberty. That is something very appealing to me. Except for teaching, you have a flexible timetable to organize your own research and activities. I can also spend more time with my family. Since I have become the director of the institute, I find it is very difficult to maintain what I was hoping for, although I am trying very hard... Working hard and being responsible for what you do is an important value that I have learnt from

my father. To be honest, it is one thing to tell your students you have to finish a meeting early in order to pick up your kids, it is another matter if you want to tell your boss you can't come in on Saturday for the meeting because of your family time. From this point of view, my wife is very understanding. She gave up her job to take care of our daughters. Because of her, I can do what I am doing now and am doing well enough to support the whole family. But trying to be a good husband and good father at the same time as a good employee is not an easy task at all.

From the previous discussion, we have learnt that Chris's experience in America has contributed significantly to his cultural ideal of fatherhood: to be a good father is to not be absent from his children's childhood. This is also the main reason he chooses to work in the university because of the flexible timetable it provides. However, Chris's escalated position in work also increases the tension between professional and family life (McNay, 1999). More specifically, his institutional trajectory further reinforces Chris's traditional understanding of men as breadwinners, while simultaneously holding him back from doing what he ideally wants to do in terms of fathering. Consequently, this continuing tension between work responsibilities and family commitments makes Chris seek help from his partner, and therefore confirms for him once again that actions are important and need to be heard through words and communication. From this perspective, we can see how gender identity for Chris is *not* simply assumed to be pre-assigned. Rather, it is a continuing process of reconstruction and negotiation between the self, others and changing social conditions.

So far, I have discussed gendered reflexivity in late modernity via the concepts of being a housewife and fatherhood. It is an *uneasy* self awareness that is actively lived out by younger research participants through their everyday gendered practices and processes of detraditionalization. What complicates these processes is the way in which how existing

cultural values of tradition are understood and interpreted. This can be exemplified in DuoDuo's resistance to traditional domestic arrangements and gendered roles. In Chris's example, we can see how *strong* tradition – as meaningful practice - reinvents itself through institutional identity, as well as demonstrating, its pressures in the practice of everyday life. Nevertheless, the discussion of gendered reflexivity, as an uneasy self-awareness, is mainly based on the younger generations. In what follows, I want to continue to unpack the processes of detraditionization by examining changing kin concepts and practices amongst both the elder and younger generation. In so doing, I want to further demonstrate how gendered reflexivity operates as a contemporary strategy for the existence of strong tradition by opening itself up to selection and reinterpretation.

4.3.3. Changing concepts of kinship

4.3.3.1. The tension: tradition as cultural formality or cultural conformity

- **Kinship as cultural formality**

For men of an earlier generation to have a son that carries the family name is essential, alongside marriage and family. However, this is not always the case for the younger research participants:

C39: For me, it is our choice if we [my wife and I] want to have children. And we don't think that to have a boy is obligatory and I think many of my friends will agree with me. What we are concerned with is the future of the children... Maybe my parents would be concerned if no one would worship them after they die. My father said to me that my grandfather passed him the ancestors' pai-wei (牌位)⁹ and it is his responsibility to pass it to the next generation. In Taiwan, you have to worship your ancestor to show gratitude. But as a Christian, I feel it is not the formality that counts. Although my parents-in-law sometimes feel sorry that their daughter cannot give my family a boy, my wife

⁹ Pai-wei, a spirit tablet, is a placard used for the seat of deity or ancestors. It is commonly a sight in which any form of ancestor veneration is practiced.

and I are happy with the decision we have made. Elder people have their belief of what a family should be like, but it is really down to us to decide what kind of life we want to have.

As Chris (a 39-year-old director of a business management institute), who is a father of three daughters, points out: filial piety does not need to be fulfilled solely through traditional practices. In other words, it is not necessary for Chris to have a son who can carry the *pai-wei*; the signifier for a legitimate heir and the continuation of a family. In Chris's family, people from an earlier generation seem to show unease about his decision. However, alongside the agreement with his partner, Chris's religion helps him to rationalize his decision and furthermore downplay the symbolic meaning of *pai-wei* as a *cultural formality*; hence his rejection of *weak* tradition.

This particular stance can be further explored if we look at the interactions between Tom and his sons, and the discussion between DuoDuo and his parents. As Tom indicated, he could not continue his postgraduate study without his father's permission. In other words, a weak traditional influence (to be a son is to be obedient to his father) still plays an important role in shaping his gendered understanding. However, when he comments upon the interaction between his partner and their younger son, his position shifts:

T52: Before we were about to send both of our sons to study in America, the relationship between my wife and my younger son was quite intense. He [my younger son] had a girl friend at that time, and he did not want to go to America without her. My wife wanted him to prepare for TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language]. He instead joined the cram school that prepares people to pass the entrance examinations of the masters degree in Taiwanese universities. We [my wife and I] work in the university and we know that if you want to work in the university in the future [in Taiwan], it will be much easier if you obtain your PhD in America. But my wife complained to me. She really did not know what he [our younger son] was thinking. No matter how hard we tried to explain the situation to him; he still wanted to choose his own way. This is something very different from the relationship we had with our parents. Our parents were much more

authoritarian and we hardly ever did things without their permission. But the younger generation now has its own way of thinking. What we think is good is not simply good enough for them. They often have a strong opinion as to what they want to do.

The younger generation referred to by Tom is the generation to which DuoDuo belongs. In other words, young men such as DuoDuo do not simply follow the traditional gendered role that was assumed by their fathers. Rather, there is space for manoeuvre where individual choice is often prioritized. This becomes apparent when DuoDuo talks about his interaction with his parents:

Powei: What kind of expectations do your parents have towards you and your brother?

D28: Not really...I am a rebellious child. For example, I don't like to visit relatives, and I think this is a common feeling that people in my generation usually have. But for my parents, it is something quite important...But I simply disobey their wishes.

Powei: So people from your generation do not have a strong bond with their relatives?

D28: Not only 'not strong'. Very weak.

DuoDuo's resistance to a *weak* tradition and its symbolic articulation (i.e. visiting relatives) is not an isolated experience amongst younger research participants. Previous discussions of the changing concept of marriage or family illustrate this particular stance. If we examine the accounts provided by Tom, DuoDuo and Chris, we can also see how a weak tradition is encountered in relation to its *limits* in everyday practice. More specifically, it seems that the elder generation will have been directly exposed to the pressures of a weak tradition. In this context, it could be women in traditional Chinese society, who were blamed for not being able to produce a male heir for her husband's family. Or, Chris's parents-in-law, who are concerned that Chris and their daughter do not want to have a son, and Tom's obedience

towards his father. By contrast, in Chris and DuoDuo's context, what is culturally lived out and interpreted by a younger generation are the limits of tradition as cultural formality.

- **Cultural conformity**

One can suggest that the absence of obligation on the part of the younger generation articulates the limits of tradition in its contemporary form. This leads us to understand tradition in its *weak* sense, where the individual's decision is prioritized in the 'do-it-yourself' biography, while simultaneously rejecting what are traditionally perceived as norms, the things that one ought to do in order to fulfil the ritual of the tradition. In other words, Chris's familial biography can be completed without having a son. His resistance towards tradition has been accelerated by his embracement of a new form of religion, Christianity.

However, to reject the practice of cultural formality is one thing. It is another matter to repudiate the fundamental cultural understanding that serves to make sense of a particular way of life, as *meaningful* practice, from generation to generation. More specifically, tradition in its strong form is always open to interpretation and embodies itself with contemporary strategies. If different interpretations of traditional values occur as a result of generational differences, conflict between family members needs to be negotiated where even *cultural conformity* is performed.

C39: I do understand the significance of pai-wei for my mother, and I don't want her to think that since I became a Christian, I have forgotten my cultural roots. My wife and I have spent time explaining this, and we try to spend more time with our parents whenever we can. I also tell my wife that we should pay for the food supplement for my parents-in-law every month...just a gesture to show our concern. I think when it comes to conflict (between Christianity and Taiwanese traditions), some compromises are

needed. We expect them (our parents) to accept our decision, but we also have to confirm with them that we don't forget where we come from.

Chris acknowledges his mother's disappointment since his rejection of receiving the *pai-wei* has its implications and consequences. In other words, as the symbol of filial piety, to turn down the *pai-wei* could be understood by the elder generation as the denial of tradition. And more importantly, the denial of the traditional Chinese parent-child relationship: to take care of the elder. In order to avoid his mother's misinterpretation, it is necessary for Chris to assure his mother by showing cultural conformity and spending more time with his parents. Moreover, this is not only a passive cultural act that one *ought to* fulfil. As I will discuss in the last section, to take care of the elderly is indeed a meaningful practice that the younger generation still agree to do.

A similar pattern can also found in DuoDuo's account. This young interviewee rejects a weak tradition. Paradoxically, he gives his mother a certain amount of his income every month even though his parents do not need his financial support. Instead of visiting his relatives, DuoDuo thinks that this is 'a more sensible thing to do'. Here, we can see how a *strong* sense of tradition is interpreted by and symbolically carried out by DuoDuo as a meaningful practice. It is interesting to see how Chris's account resonates with DuoDuo's, in the sense that both reject a *weak* tradition as *cultural formality*, whereas both embrace a *strong* tradition in terms of *cultural conformity* and meaningful practices. More specifically, a *strong* tradition continues to exist and reinvents itself not through family obligations or duties, but through a familiar cultural route that informs and confirms one's family *responsibilities*. It is important to note here that both research participants emphasize the necessity of how the individual defines what family responsibilities mean to them. In other words, rather than

subsuming their practices to tradition and its obligations, or simply following their parents' understanding of how to do things *properly*, it is the individual who decides what to do for whom, and in what circumstances (Finch, 1989).

4.3.3.2. Continuation: the reinterpretation/reinvention of kin practice in late modernity

A changing perception towards traditional practices does not occur only amongst the younger generation. The financially self-sufficient older research participants also have different understandings from that of earlier generation of kinship, particularly, when it comes to tradition and its ritual practices. For example, many of them were asked to support their family of origin as soon as they were financially independent. However, they were asked if they also expected their children to financially support them, the answer is the opposite:

T52: I think there is no comparison between my father and us since our (my wife and my) economic situation is much better than for my parents' generation. Being able to support our parents financially is the way to fulfil the filial piety... However, we had the opportunity to get a better education and therefore have better jobs now. So we won't expect our children to do so...

Due to an improved financial situation, Tom's expectation of filial piety has shifted from financial support to companionship.

T52: For us, we just want our children to spend more time with us. Both of my sons now study in America.... It was our (my wife and I) idea to encourage them to study abroad for their future career ...but it was quite difficult to accept the idea that they want to stay in America for good. The society is more individual-orientated now. My sons won't take our opinions as seriously as we did our parents. This is something we (my wife and I) need to adjust ourselves to. But I still think that tradition will continue to be passed down to the next generation, but it will be less significant than it used to be. My sons see how grateful I am to my parents, and they are very grateful to their grandparents as well...I tell them (my sons) I don't expect them to take care of us because we can take care of ourselves...I am really looking forward to the future when we are retired, they can live near to us if

they want to ...so that I and my wife can take care of their children when they need to work.

For Tom, ritual practice is challenged by a new global condition where traditional values of filial piety need to be reinterpreted in a contemporary vocabulary. More specifically, it is necessary for Tom and his partner to send their sons to study in America in order for their future career development. This is indeed a dilemma for Tom. On the one hand, by sending his sons to study in America, he is also able to fulfil his cultural understanding of fatherhood: to be a father is to support his own family. In addition, for Tom's sons to work in the university in the future like him again suggests how tradition is handed down to the next generation and ensures that this sons can continue to inherit their father's wishes, or do what their fathers do, as the Chinese idiom '克紹箕裘'¹⁰ (ke shao ji qiu) suggests. (Also see Archer and Francis's discussion of 'known' routes and 'safe' routes within a family context, 2007:134, 142). On the other hand, there is a risk that Tom's sons may want to stay abroad; a risk that Tom's father's generation might never have experienced. What is indicated by this risk is Tom's awareness of changing understandings towards kinship. More specifically, for Tom, whose life is heavily informed by tradition, to be a filial son is to follow what his father says. However, he realizes that he cannot expect the kin relationship between him and his sons to be like that between him and his own father. Consequently, to perceive filial piety as *companionship* seems to be a necessary adjustment for this elder research participant, in order fit into the changing social conditions in contemporary Taiwanese society.

¹⁰ 克紹箕裘(ke shao ji qiu) can be understood as cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense in which a blacksmith's son can learn how to melt the iron easily or the son of a chief can learn how to cook easily because they have been watching their fathers do such things since they were a child. In Chinese, this term is understood as the son who can continue to inherit father's job.

What we can learn from such a trend is a kind of gendered reflexivity similar to the one articulated by Chris's understanding towards fatherhood. Both of them advocate traditional values of fatherhood in their own terms. Yet, this also leads them to experience a kind of uneasy self-awareness; a gendered reflexivity that is rendered by the tension between existing tradition and its changing practices in contemporary Taiwanese society. Consequently, a strong tradition is maintained, although it necessitates contemporary strategies to carry out cultural practices that are congruent with changing gender relations in late modernity. In Chris's context, communication and negotiation with his partner become necessary, whereas the cultural understanding of kinship is reinterpreted by Tom in terms of a shift from financial support to companionship. Derived from this position, a new gendered space is likely to be created, when the traditional cultural 'field' (in Bourdieu's sense) is coterminous with the processes of detraditionalization. This hybridized habitus allows and even demands investment, negotiation, and creative appropriation to create meaningful gender identifications (Adams, 2006; McNay, 1999).

For Tom, traditional values of filial piety are more likely to be continually handed down to the next generation via a contemporary gendered language and new forms of kin practice. This can be further illustrated by Scott, who suggests that the disembedding of tradition and its ritual practices are simultaneously re-embedded through the invention of modern technology.

*S48:...*loosing tradition is a necessary historical process... tradition is now a mixed one, a kind of hybrid between old forms and the new conditions, particularly under the influence of globalization... Kinship is a good example...The young generation have to work far away from home or even in another country, and maybe a few times a year they can gather together with their family. The physical presence will become less than it used to be.

However, this loss can be compensated by modern technology like phones or the Internet... For example, my daughter now is in America, but we talk regularly through Skype and I don't feel that she is away far in America. The physical connection may become less frequent, but modern technology can provide another way of connecting family... you asked me if the filial piety has changed. I think it is the practice of filial piety that is different. The fundamental values are still maintained but the way of communication is changing.

Thus, under the influence of globalization, and although traditional values of kinship still exist, the practice is very different. Like Tom, Scott's daughter also studied abroad. However, her physical absence can be alleviated by the use of the Internet. The articulation of filial practices has transformed into something more remote. If we agree with Thompson (1996) that tradition is 're-fashioning' and 're-mooring' via the media, then we can understand how strong tradition is articulated via a contemporary strategy: the use of the internet. The realization of changing kin practices can be further understood by Scott's changing attitude towards the father-child relationships. However, for him, it is more to do with his changing institutional biography. An uneasy gendered reflexivity is triggered by a conflictual understanding of fatherhood;

S49: Like my father I work very hard, and I think it is my responsibility to take care of my family... However, I and my wife, pay a lot of attention to our children's education, and try our best to provide our children with a good environment to grow up with. This is something different from my father since it is something he could not give to us... Like my father, I am very strict my children ...I know we should ... respect their choices for life, but it is not easy to do... I struggle sometimes to just let them do what they want to do

Power: It sounds that you reflect a lot on yourself. What makes you think in this way?

S49: I had an opportunity to work in an Infant-and-Childcare department... I learned very different ways of treating students...In the engineering and management department, we seem to objectify our students, but in the education department they tend to treat everyone more like individuals. I have learned to be more patient, and encouraging towards my children. It is still difficult for me to learn how to show my affection towards my kids,

and to be less authoritarian.... This is somehow different from the way my father treated me.

For Scott, the dominant father image, the diligent work ethic, and the traditional family arrangements are values he shares with his father. It is through these continuing male norms that one can see how weak tradition is passed on. However, the different biographical routes between him and his father helps Scott articulate a more reflexive understanding in terms of fatherhood. For example, he realizes that parents need to respect children as individuals (an idea that is overlooked by Confucianism, in which the respect for the elder is prioritized, see Zhao, 2007), and to be more encouraging and affective. Such a sensibility was missing from his father. As far as Scott is concerned, it is the institutional experience gained from the department of education that provides him with the language to reflect upon his reticent father-child relationship.

In common with my previous discussion of DuoDuo's gendered understanding of doing laundry, or Chris's understanding of fatherhood, Scott's sense of uneasiness and conflicting feelings about his own fatherhood is resonant of McNay's (1999) discussion of gender reflexivity. An example here would be a career woman (living one's own life), who has become responsible for full time childrearing (being there for others). Hence, reflexivity is understood as an intensified gendered awareness that enables women's 'distanciation of the subject with constitutive structures' (McNay, 1998:111). From this perspective, McNay's account seems to capture Scott's reflexive understanding of being a different kind of father as a result of his academic trajectory from an engineering to an education department - his changing movement across the fields.

Reflecting upon Tom's and Scott's accounts, one can suggest that the rise of globalization has been lifting out social relations from local contexts of interaction into a global context (Giddens, 1990). Due to contemporary temporal-spatial compression and the interplay between the global and the local, in general, and the Western and Eastern, in particular, globalization and its cultural conditions can initiate a new gendered language for the research participants to make sense of who they are. More specifically, it is a gendered language that situates the elder research participants in late modernity and enables them to make sense of what kinship means to them.

However, a main purpose of this research is to sketch out the location of culture in late modernity via the trajectory of local tradition. The central contention is to argue that a strong tradition does not simply disembed itself evenly in late modernity. Rather, it continues to re-embed itself, and is actively and culturally lived out through contemporary forms. This can be understood by kin values and their generational continuation in current Taiwanese society. Through unpacking the processes of detraditionalization, we can furthermore trace how a weak tradition encounters its limits in everyday practice. Accordingly, one can suggest that individualization is occurring, mainly, among younger research participants, particularly in the context of family, marriage, and kinship. If this claim is correct, then one needs to further explain why gendered reflexivity amongst the younger research participants appears to occur also among elder research participants within the specific social context of kin relationship?

This question may be partially answered if we examine whether this gendered reflexivity has also occurred amongst elder research participants in other social domains. For

many elder research participants, their escalating social positions and academic backgrounds seem to enable them to articulate a more reflexive gendered understanding of fatherhood. However, it appears that such gendered reflexivity mainly takes place within a kin context, and has become visible when their children are directly involved. Such uneasy self-awareness has become less apparent when gendered interactions occur mainly amongst the elder generation themselves. This can be exemplified by the early discussion of Tom and his understanding of 'housewife' (see section 4.3.2.3.). Furthermore, while younger research participants perform a more individualized biographical route, elder research participants still articulate a more traditional understanding of their gendered roles as a father or a son. From this perspective, one may argue, in the context of kin practice, that for elder research participants, in late modernity *gendered reflexivity is a necessary creative strategy* in order to negotiate the tension between traditional male norms and changing male practices in the context of kin support (McNay, 2006). Through such a contemporary strategy, *a strong tradition has continued to reinvent itself* through the processes of detraditionalization.

Finally, scholars have suggested that the kind of gendered reflexivity I have been discussing might only apply to particular social groups (Adkins and Skeggs, 2004; Adams, 2006; Lash, 1994; Scott, 2002). More specifically, it is suggested that this form of gendered reflexivity as a creative energy in late modernity is the production of socially and economically *advantaged* groups, as illustrated in the social and economic location of my research participants. I am aware of this particularity of my research as the result of my theoretical position. This is further constrained by my own personal network that did not to obtain wider social and economic groups of research participants. More specifically, I have attempted to synthesize a late modernity framework with cultural studies in order to trace tradition and its

hegemonic position in contemporary Taiwanese society. In so doing, I have endeavoured to capture tensions within a continuation of local tradition as actively lived out via everyday gendered practice; tensions that exist between 'the life of one's own' and 'the life for others.' This enables me to provide a different gender lens, thus capturing the diverse and unevenly lived gendered practices via the processes of detraditionalization.

Throughout my analysis, I am aware that class analysis is less pronounced in my own research due to research participants and their homogenized socio-economic position. Nevertheless, I intend to overcome this limitation by providing a cultural materialist understanding of the social totality (Williams, 1961, 1977 and my discussion in section 3.6.1.). Indeed, alongside culture, social factors such as class can also help us to understand gendered reflexivity in late modernity (see example in Skeggs, 1997). In future research, it would be productive to explore the gendered reflexivity in a Taiwanese context amongst people from a less privileged social position. Through a comparative lens, we may be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how local tradition is enacted with changing gendered practice, via the processes of detraditionalization. This particular stance will be addressed further in **Chapter 6**. In the next section, I shall explore the issue about the shared socially and economically advantaged position amongst the younger research participants by looking at their changing concepts of consumption.

4.3.4. Changing concepts of consumption

4.3.4.1. Consumption for young men as a particular way of life

According to Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), institutions such as kinship, marriage, and family in industrial societies are disembedding, while new social regulations are re-embedding through consumption, the labour market, and the welfare state in late modernity.

In other words, individuals are moving from a traditional biography-for-others to a self-related-biography, in which the practice of consumption is one of the prominent features (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). It is important to acknowledge here, due to the emphasis on its institutional role, that the logic of consumption for Beck and Giddens seems to be operated inevitably (in a trickle-down logic) as 'standardized individualization' (Beck, 1992:130) or as 'commodification' of the project of the self (1991:196-198).

However, rather than standardization and commodification, the culture of consumption for the younger research participants lies in a fractured gendered norm generated through the processes of detraditionalization. This does not suggest that consumption has nothing to do with standardized or commodified experiences. Rather, it is suggested that the particular stance shared by Giddens and Beck, as with the Frankfurt School, emphasizes how the practice of consumption is driven by the static structure of (late) capitalism (Storey, 1999). In critiquing this stance, I argue that there is a need to understand how consumption, as a particular way of life, is actively appropriated, and culturally understood by those who practice it in everyday life (Featherstone, 1991).

In this research, I want to suggest that the deployment of a late modernity framework is useful in the sense that it initiates, at least at an analytical level, the possibility of gender reconfiguration that goes beyond earlier models of patriarchy. Accordingly, I want to understand consumption, as an affect of detraditionalization in late modernity, wherein younger research participants are able to have a life of one's own that does not necessarily resonate with a traditional gendered language. This helps me to explain why younger research participants perceive consumption rather than production as the cultural repertoire with

which to speak of the gendered self. Take Zack (a 37-year-old art gallery manager) illustrates this:

Z37: I think the sense of achievement for men in my father's generation is based on family and work...they have their responsibilities for families and their main concern was whether they could support their family or not; less attention was paid to themselves. For example, my father hardly buys any clothes for himself, it is usually my mother who would do the shopping for him. This is very different from my generation... I am always in charge of buying my own clothes even though I am married.

As Zack points out, for men from his father's generation, their lives are centred by 'work' and 'family' as two rudimentary concepts that define what a man is. The primary concern for men from an earlier generation is to fulfil the role of an adult male who is the provider for the family as discussed above. The practice of consumption appears to have rarely been taken into consideration for elder men, and was absent from their daily life practice. It was women, namely their wives, who were responsible for buying the clothes.

However, for Zack (who grew up in a generation of abundance) a culture of narcissism where consumption is not only a necessary part of his life, but also a particular *way* of life, differentiates him from his father. What we are witnessing here, as I shall argue below (see section 4.3.4.2.) is not a gendered language driven by marketing. Rather it is rendered by changing gender relations in contemporary Taiwanese society, where the breadwinner is no longer the only legitimate term for young men to make sense of who they are. The changing definition of manhood from *self-made* man (production) to *self-related* man (consumption) should not be seen in cultural isolation (Kimmel, 1996; 2003; Mort, 1988; 1996). Pervasive consumerism within a consumer society (Edwards, 1997), and the established interrelated cultural institutions, such as men's periodicals, marketing and advertisement (Nixon, 1996; 1997) all contribute significantly to producing a 'narcissistic maleness'.

4.3.4.2. Cultural feminization of everyday life

It is suggested that the arrival of late modernity seems to provide young men with a different 'structure of feeling' from that shared by men from an earlier generation (Williams, 1961). The younger generation seems to respond in very different ways to the society it is inheriting in terms, for example, of marriage, family, and kinship. What is implied by these changing social structures are more flexible male norms and the denaturalization of gender in contemporary Taiwanese society (Adkins, 2002). This is illustrated in Young's (a 37-year-old Art lecturer) account:

Y37: ...15 years ago, I found it was so difficult for men to wear long hair or wear ear rings. Nowadays, men with long hair and ear-rings are ubiquitous. What used to be bizarre is not considered as strange anymore... to some extent, the society nowadays is much more open-minded and has become more androgynous... for example, both men and women can work in offices, the differences between what men and women can do has become less significant. The gender binary seems to be disappearing ... Only women worked in department stores before, but if I go shopping in a department store, I can see so many men working there. But I think when I go back to my home town, a quite rural area, the gender binary can still be quite clear. But in an urbanized area, it is not so much so.

An important theme is suggested here: changing gender relationships via the feminization of the workplace. There is increasing evidence that indicates a loosening of the boundaries between what we traditionally understand as constituting women's work and men's work (Casey, 1995). While women are now moving into a wider range of jobs, men are increasingly working in the same jobs as women, and are moving into traditionally female occupations such as catering, cleaning, and shop work (Crompton, 1997). What is interesting about the previous account is that feminization does not only occur in the workplace. Through processes of detraditionalization, it continues to assert itself through a wide range of cultural practices, and allows men to be actively interested in appearance, image, and consumption,

which were, in an earlier period, closely assigned to an aesthetics of femininity. In short, many young research participants are witnessing what Adkins (2002) suggests is 'the feminization of culture' in everyday practices.

One of the distinctive features in this recent form of feminization is what Adkins refers to as the 'cultural feminization of work' where 'the performance of stylized presentations of self has emerged as a key source in certain sectors of the economy, particularly in new service occupations' (Adkins, *ibid*:63, also see Pringle,1998). More specifically, the gender binary is not only denaturalized. It appears that conventional gendered codes have been reworked, suggesting that the traditional gender binary needs to be rethought. This is illustrated in the following account from Zack

Z37: If you look at young men and young women, they are more and more like each other. At least this is the case where I work. Maybe it is different from working in the factory, but in the cultural industry, men often do what women do... including styling their hair, and using cosmetics. But this is also a necessary requirement of work which is very much about public relationships and impression management. Interestingly, it is not only about appearance, in the place I work (cultural industry), men are required to be attentive, thoughtful and explicit in terms of feelings and emotions like giving compliments... those kinds of characteristics used to be categorized as 'being a woman'.

As far as Zack is concerned, the men who he works with are not only required to embrace a narcissistic maleness as a new form of work ethic, but also to adopt 'feminine attributes' as their new gender dispositions. In particular, "men" may perform (and indeed be rewarded for performing) traditional acts of femininity - such as showing fear and confessing it - and "women" may perform (and also be rewarded for) traditional acts of masculinity... a reversal or substitution of positions defined by a traditional binary logic....' (Adkins, *ibid*: 69-70). A similar account can be found in McDowell's (1997) study of professional financial service

sector workers in the City of London. According to McDowell, since the 1990s, workplace performances are increasingly influenced by *feminine* characteristics, and in particular an emphasis on style and image at work. In new service sector occupations, 'the personal performance of workers, their ways of being and doing are part of the service that is sold' (ibid: 139). Therefore, one needs not only to work but also to *look* professional in the sense that occupational bodies and personal appearances have become an integral element of workplace success. Consequently, McDowell argues, it is now 'in men's interests to co-op femininity at work, or a version of it' (ibid: 208). A similar line of argument is put forward by Illouz (1997), in her historical analysis of a changing work ethos in American service industries. As Illouz suggests, male managers need to acquire what she terms 'emotional capital', to incorporate their personality with 'feminine attributes such as paying attention to emotions, controlling anger and listening sympathetically to others'(1997:39). This becomes particularly important when they are dealing with people. Nevertheless, as Zack and Young acknowledge, this cultural feminization of the workplace can be geographically different and institutionally specific. This particular gendered route for young men is different from workers in factories or young men in rural areas. This is an important observation to make in the context of the above text, which may be critiqued for over-generalizing the claims about gender relations within the workplace. I shall return to this issue at the end of this section.

As argued above, cultural feminization does not only exist in the workplace, it is also pervasive within young men's cultural practices of everyday life. Many younger research participants, particularly the urban flâneurs, are conscious of their images and personal style, and spend much time on their appearance (Mort, 1988). This stylized performance of the self is manifest in the articulation of a reflexive gendered relationship:

Power: Why do young men pay more attention to the way they look now?

M20: [Young] men's attitudes towards [young] women are different...we don't want to pay for everything...Many young women, for example, my class mates, are quite independent as well. They are not afraid of speaking out what they want and how they feel. If we don't want to pay for everything, we may as well need to follow the game, to make ourselves look nice...few of them [my female classmates] want a boyfriend who doesn't dress well, is not fashionable, and who does not smell good, particularly if he is not going to pay for everything.

As Mark (a 20-year-old university student) points out – with the cultural feminization of the workplace, gender expectations between young men and young women are changing in the sense that women are expected to be financially independent, a traditionally masculine domain, whereas men are expected (and indeed being rewarded) for embracing a stylized performance of the self, a traditionally feminine domain. In addition, for Mark, the embracement of a feminine aesthetic practice is a necessary strategy to deal with changing gender relations. For young men, who do not want to follow the tradition of paying for the date, it is important to reconstitute their new image of the self in accordance with young women's emerging expectations. Accordingly, for Mark, femininity as a form of cultural capital is beginning to have a broader currency in unexpected ways through the processes of detraditionalization (Lovell, 2000). By using this new form of cultural capital, Mark is able to bargain with the traditional male norm (i.e. men as the breadwinner) in terms of what he wants from a relationship.

This changing attitude towards feminine aesthetic practices is further amplified by marketing and advertising (Mort, 1988; Nixon, 1997). Moreover, as Alvin (the 28-year-old insurance sales manager) suggests, such gendered practices appear to be culturally embodied and ritualized in young men's everyday lives:

A28: Do young men take care of their looks? Of course, they love it very much. Isn't Men Q's (a male cosmetic product) advertisement slogan: 'the new attitude for men to chase girls: Don't worry about being 'Nian' (feminine), doing what women like to do makes you more popular amongst them?' This kind of advertising is not something you would see 20 years ago. The whole society seems to embrace androgyny. Men are practicing what women do and indeed enjoying doing it

Power: Would these kinds of ads not appear 20 years ago?

A28: I think at that time people wouldn't associate 'Nian' positively with men. Few people can recognize themselves in this sort of ad. Amongst the young generation, you often hear they call each other 'Nian' in a jokey way to describe one who loves to take care of himself, or doing what women like to do. It is not necessarily a derogatory term... But in the earlier generation, you wouldn't find an equivalent understanding. You can hear the term 'Nian Nian Chian' (sissy). But it has a very negative implication.

Power: Did Men from an earlier generation take care of their looks?

A28: I heard my aunt said when my father was young he spent a lot of time taking care of his looks as well. However, the same behaviour can be understood very differently... had he done what I am doing now, people might say that he [my father] didn't behave like a man. But now, taking care of your looks is almost a part of your daily life practice. You have so many products for men, a lot of magazines to teach you how to take care of yourself. But, in the elder generation, it could be quite strange for men to use facial creams, perfume or pluck their eyebrows. But now on the MRT (Taipei Metropolitan Rapid Transit System), you can easily see (male) high school students stylize their hair, using the window as their mirror... We (I and my friends) often discuss what kind of hair products is really good to use.

As Wittgenstein (1988:23) suggests: 'To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.' What we can learn from Alvin is how such a language originated from the younger generation and their particular way of life. It is interesting, as Alvin informs us, that the term 'nian' has reversed its derogatory emphasis, with a relatively positive contemporary connotation. Something that used to be strange has now become a common practice. More specifically, rather than simply the creation of marketing, this narcissistic maleness is lived out by young men in their everyday life practice. Therefore, for young men such as Alvin, the conversations about hair products may replace those about work and family.

We can further understand this popular cultural practice of feminine aesthetics, in Lash and Urry's (1994) analysis of English popular music. According to Lash and Urry, 'popular music' e.g. the Beatles, flourished in 1960s England because it was not only a type of music, but also a particular form of culture that described English young people and their way of life. "Thus "popular music" becomes "popular culture" [in the sense] that 'music' becomes "part of the teenage lifestyle" (132). From this position, we can suggest that 'feminine aesthetic practice' is a popular practice, where cosmetics advertisements speak to young men through their own gendered language rather than the traditional norm that defines what a young man should be (Mort, 1988). An implication of this is that traditional gender boundaries and their assigned gendered practices need to be rethought in order to capture the emerging cultural meaning of gendering practice amongst young men such as Alvin.

In addition, a rapid flow of signs and images have pervaded everyday life in contemporary society. The widespread availability of cultural images, together with lifestyle consumption provides the context of what we understand as consumer society (Baudrillard, 1983; Featherstone 1991). This can help to explain how male periodicals cosmetic products provide young men such as Alvin with a cultural repertoire to bricolage their particular way of life. Unlike Mark, Alvin enjoys taking care of his appearance. A similar account can be found in dandyism. As a modern man, a dandy tries to invert himself, having a 'heroic concern with the achievement of originality and superiority in dress, demeanour, personal habits, and even furnishings' (Featherstone *ibid*: 67). Consequently, the project of 'turning life into a work of art' is what he intends to achieve. The more choices that are available, the more decisions that one has to make in order to maintain a distinctive way of life. Often, what is accompanied by the pleasure of exploring one's taste is a necessary self contemplation:

A28: Men from the younger generation have different expectations towards life now. For example, both my father and I wear suits, my father cares more about practicality.... I pay more attention to the detail such as cutting, material, colour, tie and cuff-links in the sense that women do with their earrings or necklace etc.... Wearing a suit seems to mean formality for my father when he reaches a certain social status... But for me, wearing a suit is more about personality; you want to present yourself in a particular way, to show people your tastes. This is why I like to try different things on so that I know what I need to wear in a particular circumstance... I enjoy experiencing different things, things that can tell different sides of me. Sometimes, mixed and matched, you are able to create your own style. Although you can always be tempted by a nice suit, you have to ask yourself: does it look nice on me. Unlike my father, my collections are more various, because I think different tailoring can make you look different or feel different... If I want to visit elder clients, I would wear something more conventional that I think they may like. If I go out for a date, I will wear a "Paul Smith" (in English) suit jacket with skinny jeans, Mickey Mouse T-shirt and Converse on. If I am going to a meeting with mainly female colleagues, I will wear something like "Dior Homme" or "Prada" (in English), something feminine or softening rather than too overpowering. However, if I am going to a formal meeting, I will put on my power look: that is "Hugo Boss" (in English) of course!

From this previous account, we hear of a different generational understanding towards the concept of a suit. For men such as Alvin's father, a suit is a *symbol* of social status that represents conventionally, notions of formality and authority. It symbolizes success, professionalism, and social status. Unlike Edward's (1997) analysis of the New Man, who dresses for success and dresses to kill, for Alvin, to wear a suit is like a *signing* a signature, that informs others who he is. Under conventional rules, there is plenty of space for manoeuvre and personal thought. For this young interviewee, the self stylization of mixed-and-matched clothing is an enjoyment in the sense that he is able to explore different aspects of the self that can be revealed via his fashion experiments. This pleasure does not always come from buying a new suit, but in the experience of trying out a new thing. This is like the dandy's particular understanding of pleasure: that 'is *against* pleasure in the "fruit" and *for* pleasure in

the experience of tasting it, and celebrates an experiential-experimental openness to what is “new” or “exotic” (original emphasis, Lury, 1996:75).

Alongside self-exploration, what is also important for Alvin is a sensibility of taste. In other words, taste as the process of decision-making is based on available options. The process of cultivating taste is to open oneself up to an extended range of sensations. What is accomplished through the process of self-exploration is a better understanding of the self in terms of what is appropriate and appreciative for one to do. This can be also explained by Featherstone’s notion (1991) of a controlled de-control cultivated via an aesthetic stance. Accordingly to Featherstone, the central capacity for an artist’s sensibility lies in the reflexive shift between the full exploration and control of emotions in the process of producing a work of art. This technique enables the enjoyment of both the pleasure of immersion in objects and detachment from them. The artist therefore is able to vividly portray emotions beyond his or her own, while simultaneously producing the art work that is faithful to his/her own style. Thus, Alvin is excited about trying new things and enjoys exploring different kinds of fashion. However, this pleasure of the experiential-experiment needs to be congruent with what he thinks is suitable. The question is no longer ‘is this a nice suit to buy?’ but ‘does this look nice on me?’

What is further articulated by this younger research participant and his cultural awareness of the suit is a strategic gendered artifice. More specifically, he can decide what he wants to wear, for whom, and under what circumstance. Therefore, different suits become different gender signs for one to appropriate. Rather than its conventional form and its pre-assigned gendered meaning, wearing a suit becomes a communicative device that

informs others from where one is coming. The changing style of a suit for Alvin suggests a kind of self awareness that the image he created is part of the product being sold. The manipulation of fashion consumption indicates a gendered strategy that he can adopt for his own use (e.g. conventional suit as trustworthy, 'Dior Homme' or 'Prada' as non- threatening). Rather than an internal, fixed attribute, Alvin understands 'gender', like his understanding of a suit, as a self-conscious stratagem, a sign to be made and used relationally as an item. This younger research participant appears to perceive his gendered position as contextually multiple and complex (also see McDowell, 1997).

So far, I have discussed the implication of a changing gendered configuration from the perspective of the cultural feminization of the workplace and everyday practices. In so doing, I have attempted to explain why consumption and its close association with femininity is now not only practiced but also strategically adopted by the younger research participants in constituting their own gender identity. Approaching the end of this section, I now want to further examine the conditions for and implications of such a process. More specifically, in the age of late modernity what kind of gendered reflexivity is referred to by Adkins's cultural feminization? For McNay gendered reflexivity is defined as 'the transposition of the feminine habitus into different fields of action' (1999:113). This can only occur within the conflict and tension of social forces (e.g. tradition and individualization) operating within and across specific fields. So would McNay's analysis recognize the gendered reflexivity I have discussed in this section, as a kind of self-awareness that is more playful and strategic, and less concerned with conflicts and tensions?

Similar to Lash (1994) and Featherstone (1991), Adkins recognizes that ‘symbolic forms of destabilization invoke an opening up of social identities to produce a less fixed positioning of subjectivity’ in late modernity (Adkins, 2002:52). However, what is problematic about this premise, as McNay (1999:106) argues, is that ‘it elides a process of symbolic destabilization with processes of social and political transformation’. In other words, in late capitalist societies, there may have been a lessening of dominant images of femininity or masculinity. But their impact upon reflexive gender configuration is far from certain. A similar line of argument can be found in Edwards’ criticism of Mort, in terms of scholarly interpretation of new man imagery. While the former emphasizes social structures, the latter underlines the significance of cultural understanding (for a detailed discussion, see **Chapter 2**, section 2.3.1. and 2.3.3). Consequently, to base gender reflexivity upon an aesthetic stance is to assume an absolute submission of the subject (e.g. changing gender relations) to cultural objects (e.g. the changing imagery of the ‘new man’).

Before I discuss Adkins’s response to McNay’s argument, I want to highlight the former’s notion of gendered reflexivity. For Adkins, gendered reflexivity is ‘a self-conscious and strategic stance in relation to gender’; a reflexive artifice for one to rework one’s gendered position (Adkins, 2002:75). For Adkins, reflexivity is tied into the rearrangement of gender in late modernity, where gender has detached from social forms of determination and has been made mobile, fluid and indeterminate. Put another way, ‘for both men and women gender is increasingly taking the form of a self-conscious artifice which can be managed, strategically deployed and performed’ (Adkins, 2003:33). Reflexivity of this kind has been documented in this research in relation to younger research participants’ understandings of the cultural feminization of the workplace and everyday consumer-based life practices.

However, for McNay, this more calculated awareness cannot sustain itself as reflexivity since it assumes a voluntarist position.

Both McNay and Adkins perceive reflexivity as *not* something generalized or as a universal capacity of subjects; both endeavour to make visible the *uneven* process of gender identity transformation. Whereas McNay focuses on reflexivity as ‘an irregular manifestation dependent on a particular configuration of power relations’ (1999:109), Adkins argues, in contrast to McNay, that the aesthetic dimension can also involve an uneven manifestation of reflexivity. More specifically, although Adkins (2003) acknowledges the possibility of gendered artifice through the processes of denaturalization of gender, she maintains that the outcome is more ‘ambivalent’. By this she means the embracement of feminine (aesthetic) practices does not only mean undoing or declassifying gender. More importantly, what follows immediately are new forms of classification and a gendered hierarchy (also see Felsk, 1995; McDowell, 1998). Consequently, Adkins suggests that the processes of denaturalization of gender in late modernity is an uneven process which only allows some to appropriate the mobility but not all; to manipulate the gendered artifice via “being more or less female” and not “more or less male”(2002:76).

It is suggested that these two kinds of gendered reflexivity discussed by McNay and Adkins respectively appear to resonate with those amongst my research participants. More particularly, the possibility for elder research participants, who are able to reflexively perceive ‘kin practice’ specifically as ‘companionship’ rather than ‘material support’ relies mainly on their changing biographical routes from agricultural base to academia, and their self-sufficient economic status(see Lan, 2002 for similar example, and Lin for counter example, 2010). For

younger research participants who are able to appropriate the practice of a feminine aesthetic, as Zack and Young remind us, this can be geographically and institutionally specific.

In terms of the gendered artifice appropriated by the younger research participants, we also need to ask, alongside Edwards (1997), where do these young men come from? As Hennessy (1995:166) suggests, the idea of self-fashioned lifestyles promotes a 'de-centering of identity' or 'a way of thinking identity as malleable' in late capitalist societies. This has become particularly apparent amongst new urban middle classes of industrialized economies where identity has increasingly become a matter of consumer choices (Featherstone, 1991). Consequently, 'the stylization of life suggests that practices of consumption ... support more flexible subjectivities' (Hennessy, *ibid.*). What is interesting with regard to Hennessy's analysis of consumption in late capitalism is her recognition that certain subjects occupy increasingly mobile and flexible positions: 'the once-rigid links between sex, gender and sexual desire that the invisible heterosexual matrix so firmly secure in bourgeois culture have become more flexible as the gendered divisions of labour among the middle class' (*ibid.*: 169). Nevertheless, as far as Hennessy is concerned, as argued by Edwards (1997), this appears to become only possible in relation to 'capital's insidious and relentless expansion' (Hennessy, *ibid.*: 143). Therefore, for Hennessy, as well as Edwards, we are made by the culture of consumption in late capitalism, not the other way around. It is right to recognize particular social and economic positions that provide the conditions for particular forms of consumption; however, what the economic cannot do is to determine what such practices culturally mean. While acknowledging that only certain groups of young men can afford to have a wide range of designer suits such as Alvin does, one also needs to recognize that it is

Alvin, who actively makes sense of the gendered artifice of what a suit means to him, while wearing it strategically.

One cannot understand the transformation of identity formation from *either a social or a cultural stance*, but *both a social and a cultural stance* in late modernity (Adkins, 2002; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2007). More specifically, McNay's social explanation helps me to explain how the uneasy gendered reflexivity is a necessary creative strategy for the continuation of a strong tradition for both elder and younger research participants. Adkins's reflexivity as gendered artifice enables me to pinpoint the social and economic positions shared by younger research participants. To focus only upon the social processes of detraditionalization is to neglect the consumption-based cultural repertoire that constitutes young men's reflexive gendered selves – and a significant generational difference in gendered reflexivity would therefore be left unexplored in my research. This would also fail to acknowledge the shared biographical routes and socio- economic position amongst the younger research participants. Consequently, if researchers such as McNay only perceive gender transformation primarily in relation to the *social*, they may make invisible 'a key dimension of the unevenness of reflexivity with gender' that they themselves seek to make visible (Adkins, 2002:54).

4.4. Late modernity vs. tradition: the 'right' choices for life

4.4.1. A meaningful practice for life: tradition as selected memory

The traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its *contemporary* system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation... In the analysis of contemporary culture, the existing state of the selective tradition is of vital importance, for it is often true that some change in this tradition - establishing new lines with the past, breaking or re-drawing existing lines - is a radical kind of *contemporary* change.

(Williams, 1961:52-53)

In the previous sections, I have sketched out younger research participants' 'do-it-yourself' biography in late modernity via their changing choices around marriage, family, kinship, and consumption. This self-related biography has indicated a changing male norm from 'the life for others' to 'the life of one's own', where a weak tradition is losing its rigidity. However, due to Taiwan's social and cultural trajectory, tradition and its cultural values do not give way completely to consumption, labour markets, and welfare systems, as Beck (1992, 1994) and Giddens (1991) suggest. Rather, tradition has become something 'active' 'selective', and open to interpretation, as Williams (1961) has described. Inherited traditional values, therefore are not understood simply as obligations, but also reflexively interpreted as meaningful practices. This is made evident, for example, in my earlier discussion of tradition as cultural formality or cultural conformity, in relation to the context of Confucianism and its kinship values.

In the film *The Joy Luck Club* - a story about relations between Chinese-American daughters and their Chinese mothers - one of the protagonists tells her daughter that life is like a stairway; sometimes you could walk a few steps backwards, sometimes you could walk a few steps forwards, but no matter how differently one wants to live one's life, the stairs have only one way. By analogy, 'the stairs' refers here to the ritual route of tradition. In this film, the four Chinese-American daughters, who are highly educated and relatively successful, appear to have few things in common with their mothers, including the way they talk, the way they dress, and their attitudes towards work and lifestyle consumption.

However, no matter how 'Americanized' they are, what articulates their understanding of how a woman should or should not behave is their childhood memories of their mothers;

as symbols of tradition. One may claim that tradition seems to play an over-deterministic role in shaping these daughters' sense of womanhood. Nevertheless, certain memories can become less clear but do not disappear, particularly when they have been handed down through generations. Tradition here is more than a fixed set of cultural norms. It becomes an interpretative scheme that is lived out by individuals to make sense of their social world (Hall, 1996; Thompson, 1996).

For example, Peter (a 28-year-old teacher and self-identified urban gay *flâneur*), enjoys visiting the gym during the week. At the weekend, he likes to go to gay bars with his friends. When he talked about his views of sex and relationships, he shows disdain for what he terms as a 'traditionalist way of life', categorized by monogamy, stability and commitment. Throughout the interview, he describes to me the urban gay lifestyle in Taipei: the most popular places to eat, the trendiest places to go clubbing, where he has his hair cut, and what tanning lotion works most efficiently. It seems that for Peter, hedonism is practiced and asceticism is abandoned. I was curious about the lifestyle between him and his father. He assured me that there are few commonalities. However, despite his cultural practices of consumption and lifestyle choices, Peter speaks in a traditionalist tone when he talks about his understanding of filial piety:

Power: You mentioned earlier, you live by yourself now, but you still give your parents some money every month?

P28: I give my parents a certain amount of money every month, although they never asked me to do so, yet I think it is the *right* thing to do. I think it is a kind of tradition, you are not necessarily taught this but you just pick it up as time goes by...like childhood memory... Since I was a child, my father has always given money to my grandfather...I have never been told that is the way it should be, but I remember how things should be done when it is my turn... Sometimes you have questions, you don't necessarily always know the correct answer... but you often return to the way you are familiar with to do ...something you feel *right* doing (my own emphasis)...

In other words, for Peter to take care of elders financially is simply the 'right' thing to do. This resonates with DuoDuo's account that, on the one hand, rejects the *weak* tradition and the imposed symbolic meaning of cultural norms, and, on the other hand, endorses a strong tradition as a sensible practice and a meaningful thing to do. Tradition in the former context is understood as obligation, whereas it is interpreted as responsibility in the latter and enables reflexive agency to think about what to do, for whom, in which circumstance (Finch, 1988). From this perspective, tradition in its strong sense, has defended its internal claims to truth, via the recall of childhood and by its own ritual and symbolism. Rather than an obligation, for Peter, to support financially his parents-the ritual practice of tradition- is simply a *meaningful* practice.

However, the interpellation of tradition itself is not always successfully through the ritualization of the past. Rather, it is selectively interpreted by those who carry out such practices. This can be illustrated by Chris's experience. When it comes to kinship, this skilled professional and father of two girls did not consider that it is necessary to have a son to fulfill what is traditionally meant by a family. In fact, when it comes to the inheritance of the ancestor's *pai-wei*, Chris considers this ritual practice mainly as a cultural formality. However, when filial piety is less symbolic, and indeed resonates with him as a parent, Chris understands that it is his *responsibility* to take care of his mother and father.

C38: Like my father, it is my responsibility to take care of my parents when they are old since the influence of Confucianism's filial piety... when I studied in America, I met an old lady living alone and all her children lived in another state. She got cancer, and her children arranged for her to live in a nursing home. I felt so sorry for her. In our culture, we would like to stay with our parents if something like that happened to them. Actually, I already found a job in America, and perhaps, I would have a more comfortable life if I stayed in America. But if I stayed there, I may have lost my roots. Besides, the government does not provide too much help for the elders. My mother has always been a housewife, and my father is a

pensioner...he worked very hard to support the family and help me study in America... I would like to do more things for them and I think I made the *right choice* (my own emphasis).

By choice, we understand an *act* of choosing. In Chris's context, the 'right choice' can synonymously be understood as a preference. Tradition becomes something selective for Chris in the sense that *he* defines what filial piety means for *him* (Williams, 1961). Filial piety for him is less to do with ceremony; it means actual practice and care. The combination of an inadequate welfare system in Taiwan and gratitude towards his father contribute to Chris's understanding of what filial piety should be. On the one hand, tradition is considered as a part of his cultural *roots* and informs him where he came from. On the other hand, tradition is also understood as a cultural *route* - with familiar signposts indicating which way to take when he encounters key decisions at a crossroads in his life - and therefore leads him to where he wants to be. Rather than a dogma, however, the ritualization of the past can be reflexively interpreted, and the interpretation needs to situate with Chris's 'do-it-yourself' biography.

4.4.2. The 'right' choice for life: tradition and its cultural norm

In the previous discussion, I have discussed how a strong tradition has reinvented itself through gendered reflexivity and childhood memory as meaningful in late modernity. In so doing, taking care of the elderly can be interpreted by the younger generation as a 'right' choice for life. However, tradition is not always about an easy engagement with the past. It can sometimes be conflictual but cohesive, particularly for those who are often excluded from tradition; such as, gay men:

W29: ...There are some conflicts between who I want to be and the expectations of men I have grown up with. My father's opinion towards what men should be can sometimes appear in my mind. Also when I go

home, I can't behave exactly the way when I am living by myself. I tend to be softer, yet my father is very manly. He likes to read *Water Margin* (a Chinese classic novel talking about integrity, morality and solidarity between men). I have to hide the characteristic of being androgynous. My father doesn't like men to cry at all. I *choose* not to let my father know I am gay, it's *better* in that way (my own emphasis)...I won't let my father know that I am narcissistic, and I won't be such a gossip in front of my father. Some clothes and accessories, I will never wear at home, and I don't do piercing or dye my hair since my father dislikes it very much.

As the earlier discussion indicates, marriage is perceived by Wong (a self identified gay man) as a social apparatus which moulds men into expected gendered roles. In late modernity, the disembedding of tradition loosens up the standardized biography in general and heterosexual 'normality' in particular (Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al., 2002). This then enables the participant to lead a life of his own in which the gender binary has given way to androgyny. However, 'the life of one's own' can only be lived out when one is *alone*. The absence of the self is the presence of tradition and its hegemonic domination (Connell, 1995; 2005). In other words, the embracing of gender flexibility for Wong is sometimes interrupted by his father's values, and cannot be enacted in front of his father; as *the* symbol of tradition that defines what a man should be. In particular, the disembedding of traditional social relations is re-embedded, not by the welfare state, labour markets, or consumption, but by the financial power of the family:

W29: It is very difficult to show my true colours to my family, particular my father... I respect him, and he worked very hard to support my study, and to enable the lifestyle I have....I have a very comfortable lifestyle, I spent a lot of, a lot of money buying CDs, going out to eat with my friends and buy things that I like. However, I earn few things that I bought and most of my spending is supported by my father...Sometimes I feel guilty since I know I cannot become what he [my father] expects me to be although I know he feels that it is his responsibility to support me...perhaps, it is easier if I am always financially independent...

What does a 'do-it-yourself' biography mean for those who are financially supported by their family of origin? An understanding can be reached if one looks at the role played by

tradition. For Wong, tradition plays a double-binding role. On the one hand, in common with many older research participants, Wong's father feels that it is his responsibility to support his son, although is already 29-year-old. Due to financial support from his family, Wong is able to live a life of his own, and to afford the lifestyle he wants. Yet for Wong, traditional values such as marriage and family are losing their authority to a 'do-it-yourself' biography in late modernity; while other traditional values such as father-son relationships are paradoxically re-embedding themselves via the financial bond and its cultural norm (i.e. financial support means family expectations). This may help to explain why for Wong it is a 'right choice' to conceal his gay lifestyle from his father.

While theorists, such as Beck (1992), and Giddens (1991) capture the possible societal transformation in late modernity, it is worth asking where is the location of local tradition to be found in such a framework. For Anglo-American gay movements and identity politics, the concept of 'coming-out' seems to play an important role. The politics of 'coming-out' can explain the extent to which an individual can live out a 'do-it-yourself' biography that situates preferred sexualities and sexual practices. However, in the previous example, Wong explained the difficulty for him to 'come out' to his family, as the result of filial piety and its double-bind. This leads one to ponder: 'Can it be that in Taiwan only orphans can "come out"?' As one gay activist scholar points out, 'It is often said that families are happy, that families are places that provide warmth, but it seems that actually [to gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer persons] only orphans can "come out", because the politics of the family is too terrible' (Ni 1997:201 cited in Liu and Ding, 2005:31). (Western) identity politics seems to be coterminous with its cultural challenges in contemporary Taiwanese society. For Wong, and many Taiwanese gay people, the reluctance to come out to their family demonstrates the

tension between late modernity and the significant role played by local tradition. This tension is also documented in my earlier discussion of family, marriage and kinship. In addition, the tension lived out by Wong occurs when individualization encounters a local Taiwanese cultural pressure in late modernity. More specifically, the choice to 'have the life of one's own' is simply not available for gay people, such as Wong. Such cultural pressure can be further understood by a *cultural* understanding of homophobia in contemporary Taiwanese society:

Power: Why do you think that for gay people in Taiwan it is difficult to come out to their families?

Ying30: (Gay) people are still scared of coming out to their family, particularly those from my generation (30 something) unless we have no choice. We feel that the consequence of coming-out to our families is usually bad. The relationship we have with our families can be easily jeopardized. I am the only son and my parents worked so that they can send me abroad for studying. They of course realize that I am different from others, but there is some kind of mutual-understanding ... we don't talk about it. They still love me as a son, they still hope one day I could get married so that my life is easier. Often I feel I am cheating people who love me, but I think it is also very selfish to simply force your beloved ones to accept who you are, particularly when they never expect anything from me but having a comfortable life for myself. Perhaps, keeping things in this way (not coming-out) makes their lives easier for everyone....

Power: What do you mean when you said that the concept 'gay lifestyle' is not applicable for you?

W28: Gay lifestyle? What does that mean? Now it is very easy to talk about that one should be true to yourself and decide the life of your own. How about the life of your parents? And if I come out, where should I come out from? And who would I become if I came out of the closet? I think, if I come out, I would 'be out' of my family like a son who betrayed them. My parents would never understand, or at least willing to pretend they don't know, what does gay mean, and why I want to be gay. I think, all they would do is be very worried for me. Taiwan's still homophobic in the sense that *we* simply just don't talk about it...

According to Ying and Wesley (a 28-year-old post-graduate student in history), not only the concept, but also the practice of “coming out” is problematic. The usefulness of identity politics in a western context includes, firstly, forcing the dominant social norm to recognize the existence of marginalized categories, and, secondly, challenging, the existing hierarchy. Although the process can be aggressive and hostile, often accompanied with violence, the political dissidence can implement dialogue with those in power, and demand social change. However, for Ying and Wesley, dialogue with their families about their homosexual identity can hardly begin. Rather, what seems to be experienced is a kind of silent tolerance from the family in which the subject of homosexuality becomes something unspeakable and invisible:

W28: I was brave enough to bring my mother to see ‘Brokeback Mountain’, because I was hoping it could be a good chance to tell her something about myself. After the film, I asked her if she liked the film, and she only replied “the scenery was really beautiful in the film”. In order to thank me for taking her to see the film, she took me for dinner. We had a pleasant evening, but I never had a chance, or perhaps, I was not brave enough to find one, to talk to her about my thing.

The argument here is not to suggest that homophobia does not exist in Chinese societies, as some scholars suggest (Chou, 1997). It is, however, to address the significant role played by national culture to make sense of what (the western concept of) ‘homophobia’ means in Chinese societies. As Liu and Ding argue (2005:33-36), the homophobia experienced in the family by many gay people in Taiwan is less to do with direct hostile violence. Rather it is the finely deployed force’ of ‘tolerance and reticence’ that originates from traditional Chinese poetics-aesthetics. However, it is precisely the family’s ‘benevolence and tolerance’ (ibid:42) - the sacrificing and understanding parents, who hope their homosexual children go back to a ‘normal’ life for their own good - that nonetheless becomes a kind of force that can produce a dilemma for a filial gay son. The kindness and tolerance from their parents provides the

family and its apparatus with the most righteous power to maintain its harmony. This tolerant and reticent homophobia for these interviewees is not something visible, but the shadow of something unspeakable that follows the individual who attempts to transgress the moral rules. The invisible homosexuality is where the traditional values (i.e. kinship and filial piety) are played out. Consequently, in my research, it is necessary to maintain that the uneven processes of detraditionalization are amplified by the tension between cultural locality and individualization in contemporary Taiwanese society. To have the life of one's own, can be sometimes *a bit* life of one's own only. For young gay research participants, this part of an ideal individualized biography can hardly be played out in front of family politics.

4.5. Conclusion

We focus on local communities because it is here that new economic conditions have their most marked effect, religious movements find their adherents, raw materials are extracted, and political leaders find their followers. Basic social and cultural changes may be initiated elsewhere, but it is on the local scene that change is integrated and interpreted if it is to have social importance. Therefore an analysis of social change must move from worldwide shift through a series of mediations to national, regional, and even individual changes, and then back again into broader integrations. If we are to understand social change, we must attempt this accordion like expansion and contraction both vertically in terms of time and horizontally in terms of space.

(Rabinow, 1975:4)

In this chapter I have endeavored to provide a systematic analysis that demonstrates the generational (dis)continuities in terms of gendered understandings and their practices. On the one hand, through the generational discontinuities such as the changing concepts of marriage and family, or the changing practices of kinship or consumption, we are able to document how the processes of detraditionalization are occurring. On the other hand, the continuation of certain gendered practices enables us to identify the existing local tradition.

I have attempted to demonstrate the cultural understanding of Taiwanese young men through their gendered reflexivity, an uneasy self awareness that is in search of developing a life of one's own, while simultaneously being held back by existing local cultural values. I have argued the processes of detraditionalization are unevenly lived out in two senses (i) firstly, and, generationally, it is the younger generation who may experience such processes beyond the context of kinship (ii) and secondly, and, culturally, a life of one's own is not always available for those younger research participants who are self-identified gay men. I have further argued the necessity to consider in this research gendered reflexivity as defined by Adkins and McNay. In so doing, I am able to trace the position of the local culture via McNay's gender reflexivity – as a contemporary strategy for a strong Taiwanese tradition. By gendered artifice postulated by Adkins, I am able to not only to recognize the processes of denaturalization of gender, where younger researchers can strategically appropriate gender signs via their fashion consumption. Moreover, it also enables me to recognize the possible uneven embodiment of such gender mobility.

While unpacking the processes of detraditionalization and reconstructing the sense of a strong Taiwanese tradition, I have been constantly reminded of the particularity of the gendered practices carried out by the research participants. More specifically, it is their shared biographical routes and their social and economic advantaged position amongst these two generations that enable them to articulate their gender practices in a particular way (e.g. kinship as companionship or consumption as gender artifice). Despite their differences, what is articulated by research participants' gender practices is the cultural influence of a strong local tradition in contemporary Taiwanese society. From this perspective, it is important to

maintain that a late modernity framework is most useful for my research when the trajectory of the local tradition is identified.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis II:

Blogging Masculinities: Taiwanese Young Men, Identity Formation, and Online Flâneuring

- 5.1. Introduction: the weblog and blogging
 - 5.2. Blog documents your life: young men and 'do-it-yourself' biography via online blogging
 - 5.2.1. Temporal conversations with the self
 - 5.2.2. Conversations with the invented self
 - 5.2.3. Conversations with the rational self
 - 5.3. Cyber flâneuring in the gendered blog world
 - 5.3.1. The gendered blog world
 - 5.3.2. Encountering male bloggers
 - 5.3.3. Encountering female bloggers
 - 5.4. Conclusion
-

5.1. Introduction: the weblog and blogging

To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. Wittgenstein (1988:23)

W29: The Internet will flourish the development of a new language...the younger generation who grow up with the Internet will have a different way of communication.

Z37:...they (men as from the young generation) can easily chat with you about everything... When we [people now in their late 30s] are in the office, if we want to talk about something, it is something needed to be discussed. But they (younger men) can chat about everything, like mobile phone, movies or girls...Chatting is so important for the younger generation. For example, they can chat on MSN, Skype, or blogging...They chat about everything ...everything that is trivial and meaningless. For me, it is strange.

In the previous chapter, I endeavoured to understand consumption and changing masculinities as effect of late modernity. Here I want to focus on Taiwanese young men, identity formation, and masculinities via online blogging. Although these two chapters represent very different domains, what connects them are the domains of late modernity and a 'do-it-yourself' biography. In particular, Giddens's concepts of 'trajectory of the self' (1991) and 'disclosing intimacy' (1992) provide useful insights to understand how the research participants construct their male identities in late modernity through online blogging.

The weblog is commonly understood in journalism (including by the *Economist*) as 'a personal online journal'.¹¹ There are two intriguing but contradictory meanings suggested by this definition. First, the term (i) 'journal', as in 'journal book', could be understood as a 'daily record of events or occurrences kept by any one for his [or her] own use' (see 'journal' in

¹¹ *Economist* online archive, Achieved from http://www.economist.com/surveys/displaystory.cfm?story_id=6794172, last accessed 6 July 2008

OED *ibid*: 1138). From this perspective, the word 'journal' is synonymously used with 'diary', in which the primary purpose is to record one's daily life.

For many of the younger research participants¹², the weblog is designated as their online diary. In other words, with regularly updated personal information, arranged in chronological order, and orchestrated by particular themes or personal style, the weblog can function as one's online archive that 'documents one's life' (see Blood, 2002; Miura and Yamashita, 2004). Accordingly, it is reasonable to suggest that the weblog is one's world in miniature - particularly for those who actively participate in blogging (Serfaty, 2004). Evolving technology and standardized formats such as hyperlink, uploading or permalink¹³ mean that the making of a self documentary of one's autobiography is easy for bloggers. Derived from the first definition of journal as 'personal diary', I will now focus on how younger research participants document their 'trajectory of the self' and 'disclosing intimacy' through their monologues and online blogging.

In terms of the second definition, (ii) one could also understand 'journal' as 'a daily newspaper or other publication; hence, by extension, [any] periodical publication' (see 'journal' in OED, *ibid*). In other words, rather than for self-use, the 'journal' here is understood as a 'publication' for the purpose of public viewing. It is this particular definition

¹² This data is collected from my second period of fieldwork. There are now 5 research participants in this group between the age 24 and 31-year-old. All of them are university graduates. One of them is currently doing his doctorate research. Two of the participants are studying for their masters degree. The other two are not students, one of them is sales man and the other one is doing military service.

¹³ According to Hourihan (2002), 'The permalink (the link to the permanent location of the post in the blog's archive) plays a critical role in how authors participate in distributed conversations across weblogs. The permalink allows for precise references, creating a way for authors to link to the specific piece of information to which they're responding'. For original article, see <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub /a/ avascript/2002/06/13/megnut.html>

that brings wider social and interactive relations into blogging (Nardi et al., 2004). It is similar to a personal webpage that allows 'individuals to become producers of media content, with the possibility of access to a mass audience that they normally would be unable to reach' (Burnett and Marshall 2003: 68). Thus, the internet can turn one's online diary into a publication. Consequently, it may be suggested that what is embodied by the blog-world is the gendered world in miniature, where the possibility of a mass audience places bloggers under public gaze.

In addition, as Blood (2002:1) suggests, '[a] weblog is a coffeehouse conversation in text, with references as required'. In other words, alongside documenting one's own life, blogging is also a continuing process of communication between the self and others. For instance, many of the younger research participants do not only tell their own stories, but also read the life stories of others through blogging. What is made possible here is direct interaction between bloggers and the conversations between them. Derived from the second definition of journal as 'publication', with an intention to communicate with others, I will therefore focus on how younger research participants construct their male identity formation through online blogging /flâneuring.

In this chapter, the first part of the analysis focuses on a 'do-it-yourself' biography via online blogging. It is suggested that the weblog provides these research participants with a cultural repertoire to hold reflexive conversations with the self from at least three aspects - (i) temporal conversations with the self, (ii) conversations with the 'invented self', and (iii) the self that is rationally narrated through blogging. Moreover, blogging is not only a reflexive

project of the self, but also a *gendering* practice in which young men are emboldened, for example, to talk about their relationship experiences.

The second part of this chapter will emphasize two themes: firstly, the gendered structure of the blog-world and, secondly, male identity formation through online blogging /flâneuring. What connects these two themes are conversations with (invisible) others through online blogging. To blog is not only to write one's life story, but to present it to a virtual audience. The central contention in this chapter is that through the weblog, as an emerging cultural repertoire, younger research participants can live out their gendered identities in more provisional and reflexive ways. By provisional I mean that rather than via the traditional gendered vocabulary provided by work, kinship or family, younger research participants can disclose/discuss their relationship experiences through online blogging. By contrast, a gendering process/gendered practice seems to be absent for men from an earlier generation.

However, alongside different male identities, also articulates blogging the gendered structure of the virtual blog-world. It is suggested that a late modernity framework can be fruitfully explored, at least at an experiential level, if one can tease out the productive tension between the existing gendered structure and individual gendering practices. Accordingly, through the interplay between structure and agency, it is necessary to understand the reflexive project of the self within late modernity is *unevenly* lived out by individuals in cultural practices of online blogging. In what follows, I want to discuss first of all, how young men construct their *reflexive projects of the self* through online blogging and conversation with the self.

5.2. Young men and a 'do-it-yourself' biography via online blogging

5.2.1. Temporal conversations with the self

For many younger participants, their first experience of blogging was to talk about their relationships. For example, Wai-wen (a 25-year-old insurance sales person) blogging was triggered by the experience of ending his relationship with his girl friend. When this research participant was asked to give the reason why he started blogging. He advised that it provides a therapeutic practice for smoothing his 'breaking up' experience:

W25: At that time I just broke up with my ex (girlfriend)...I didn't really want to talk to others, but I needed to clear my head a bit....Many of my friends were using blog at that time, and Shane [another research participant] introduced it to me....Blogging is just like writing a diary; however, it can be done online. I don't have the hobby of writing a diary, but I do use a computer very often...Blogging is to have conversations with the self, the self in the past or the self in the future.... Through blogging, I can really see how I have changed in four years time... if I read again what I wrote about my relationship four years ago, I come to a realization that how silly or immature I was at that time. This is not always a pleasant process of reading what you wrote before, but it helps me understand better myself through my past.

For Wai-wen, to blog is to have conversations with the self; the self that is temporally located in both the past and an anticipated future. It is through blogging that these different selves become coterminous. Rather than any prerequisite rule to follow, blogging has become a reflexive project for this research participant that he is responsible for (Giddens, 1991). Through blogging he is able to actively make sense of who he is rather than simply be defined by a ascribed gendered role. This active sense becomes apparent for Wai-wen when he is able to reinterpret the past, and then appropriate it as a cultural material to bricolage the self in an anticipated future. Identity is therefore a continuing process of making and remaking by the self in which the process of becoming is documented by an emerging cultural repertoire: the weblog. However, the process of reconstructing the past is not always emotionally easy, in

the sense that the weblog as a cultural field has brought different gendered selves to come into play simultaneously (McNay, 1999). Yet it is this uneasy self awareness that provides young men, like Wai-wen, a reflexive understanding of the self.

Another interesting point is how emerging information and communication technology, such as the weblog is appropriated by Taiwanese young men, such as Wai-wen to distribute a picture of their inside world. In fact, modern technology has provided a different way of communication for the younger generation in Taiwan. For example, in Taiwan, approximately 60% of young people between the ages of 19-23 considered that mobile phones played a more important role than the Earth¹⁴. In addition, according to the Taiwan Network Information Centre in 2004 approximately 90% of young people between the ages of 12- 25 participated in online activities.¹⁵ The internet seems to provide the younger generation in Taiwan not only with a different social network from the earlier generation, but also fosters a new form of generational culture based on online communication (Chen, Y.-L., 2003). Youtube and Facebook are two good examples. This is also echoed by Wai-wen, who does not have the hobby of writing a diary, yet has begun to document his life via online blogging, due to the important role played by the Internet in his everyday life. In addition, shared web usage amongst the young generation that makes the weblog a popular cultural resource for this young research participant to bricolage his life via online blogging,

To blog is not only to reconstruct the reflexive project of the self, it is also a gendering process in which blogging emboldens one to articulate one's thoughts as well as

¹⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.libertytimes.com.tw/2003/new/jun/4/life/information-2.htm> last accessed 16 Aug 2007

¹⁵Taiwan Network Information Centre, online archive achieved from www.twNIC.nct.rw/download/200307/200307p.ppt last accessed 16 Aug 2007

feelings about what a relationship means to him/her. This gendering process can be understood by Henry (a 25-year-old graduate, who is currently doing military service) and his trilogy of 'relationship and love'. Although Henry has only been blogging his personal experiences, he also explains that there are diverse forms of blogging. As he suggests, voyeurism plays an important role in the cyber world, particularly, for a blogger such as him, who describes himself as an 'exhibitionist'. In other words, like an actor, who always needs approval from the audience, the weblog provides Henry with an immediate stage for performing in the cyber world, where he knows that there is always a very large audience waiting out there. Unlike some bloggers who enjoy writing about music, politics, or food, for this research participant his relationship experiences are the favourite topic for his monologue:

H25: When I started blogging, I wrote an article about love and relationships, it is called 'The courage for love'. Later on I wrote the second and third one: 'The lightest weight that one cannot abandon', and 'Shall we be happy together?' These three articles are very popular amongst other bloggers because they all address the same theme: love and relationships...When I wrote the first article, I was hanging out with a girl and about to ask her to be with me. Basically, I think in contemporary society, a relationship usually needs an urge to begin with... In the contemporary society, everything becomes less certain....The more one thinks about it, the more difficulties he may encounter to cultivate a relationship. Relationships eventually come down to the two people who both want to be together... For me, what is useful about blogging is that through the weblog, I could understand how I felt at a particular moment and how my feelings change as time goes by...Of course, to write a blog for me is to share my story with others, but a more important factor for me is that, through blogging, it records how I grew up in a relationship...even though I often write things that are trivial, but because of these details, I can easily remember exactly what happened, when it happened and how I felt and reacted...

Henry's reflexive understandings clearly echo gender relationships proposed by late modernity theorists (Beck, 1991, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991). A relationship becomes an individual choice in which commitment is not anchored in external

conditions of social or economic life but through personal decisions. By choice, we understand the act of choosing between different possibilities - what is underlined by this process is the power or right for one to choose. However, unlike Giddens's reflexive agency that is able to trust in and reflect upon the self and can make a sensible choice; for Henry, the process of choosing is more ambivalent in the sense that the more one contemplates, the more risks may come out from self evaluation, and the less likely it will be that one can have a relationship. Therefore, for Henry, mutual commitment becomes essential in a relationship (Giddens, 1992), where it is initiated by personal wishes and courage rather than obligation.

For Henry, in common with Wai-wen, the weblog gives him not only the opportunity to reflect upon his past experiences, but also the chance to document his trajectories. The changing concept of relationship is accompanied by how he makes sense of the past. A relationship becomes reflexive in the sense that the individual constantly examines it by asking him or herself: is everything all right? (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, it is the weblog that provides this research participant with a cultural artifice to carry out his self-examination. In summary, both Wai-wen and Henry have documented the trajectory of the self through the weblog. Through blogging, one can see how different but continuing selves are being played out. The cultural practice of blogging therefore becomes a reflexive gender practice, where Henry as well as Wai-wen are self-consciously, reflexively working on sustaining a sense of who they are, and are self-consciously considering what kind of personal relationships they want (Giddens, 1991, 1992).

5.2.2. Conversations with the invented self

To blog is to have conversations with the self, and for bloggers, such as Shane (a 25-year-old postgraduate student), these conversations occur between the existing self and the

self that is 'invented' in the blog-world. In other words, the reflexive project of the self is less to do with time span than with one's own psyche. We can understand this from the title of Shane's weblog: 'The (none) existent conversations', where the conversations are taking place between what he calls 'the real and the imaginary'. More specifically, blogging for Shane is to have conversations with either himself or the role he has created through blogging. What differentiates blogging from other kinds of dialogical modes for this research participant is its underlying process of continuing articulation. In other words, for Shane, the cultural practice of blogging is constituted by serious attempts to make sense of thoughts and feelings that may not be easily realized for him in the first place.

S25: By these conversations, I feel I can express my feelings and opinions more clearly...To blog is to have conversations with someone, perhaps the one who is deeply dwelling inside me at that particular moment. It provides a clearer picture of who I am through these conversations between me and myself or the invented role; perhaps the psychological part of me, who always exists but can only easily be heard by the conversations through blogging.

Blogging for Shane is not only to have conversations with the self; it is also a pathway to his inner personal territory, where he can gain greater insight into personal feelings and meanings. A reflexive self-awareness is suggested here, which heightens the possibility of reaching new levels of knowing and understanding connected with the self. This particular way of knowing is deeper than pre-given and common-sense cultural descriptions. This is a knowing which is 'discovered' or 'created' through blogging and intensive interaction with the self. Moreover, for Shane, blogging requires constant attempts to articulate his thoughts. In other words, to blog is to write down what one thinks, to reflect upon one's own thoughts. For him, one way of doing this is to have a conversation with an imagined *self*. This is where the gendering process begins:

S25: For me, to write down something in the blog is to think carefully and once again and again what I try to say....like I am having conversations with the self in the blog world This person is not necessarily male or female. It depends on the circumstances I have encountered. For example, when I have some troubles in a relationship, this person who I have a conversation with is usually a female one. The role she plays can be a listener or someone who can provide me with a female perspective. However, if the conversation is more about men's complaints, it will usually turn into men's talk.

Power: What kind of men's talk? Can you give me some examples?

S25: You can often find, through blogging, women complaining that men don't treat them fairly: they (men) like to play around, and spend more time on sports than with their girl friends.... However, women hardly realize that the expectation and stress men receive from the society hardly changes.

It seems that for this participant, the invented self is not necessarily male. It can be a female who encourages Shane to talk about his relationship problems, whereas the male counterpart encourages him to talk about his uneasy self-realization (McNay, 1999) from a young man's social position with regard to women in contemporary Taiwanese society. Reflexively contextualizing the situations he encounters and tactically assigning gender roles to the person with whom he has conversations highlights blogging as a gendering process for Shane. What is interesting, however, is that blogging seems to be a gendered practice in the sense that he feels more comfortable expressing his frustration in front of a (imaginary) female listener. In other words, if we interpret Shane's account based on Kimmel's (1994) discussion on 'masculinity' and 'homophobia', it may suggest that although being a man means 'not being like a woman', paradoxically, men's vulnerability (i.e. relationship problems) can only be comfortably revealed in front of those who do not threaten the masculine position. This particular stance echoes what Radway suggests (1987) that, men rely on women rather than each other for nurturing emotional literacy. Nevertheless, this is

not always the case. As I shall demonstrate in a later section, it is conversations with other male bloggers that provides Shane with a reflexive gendered language to make sense of his own relationship experience.

5.2.3. Conversations with the rational self

Blogging can sometimes be deliberately limited to a particular narration that avoids abundant personal information. Different narrations through blogging often emerge from bloggers and their understandings of what blogs mean to them (Blood, 2002). As the following account by Alan (a 30-year-old PhD student) indicates: A blog is conceived as an online database that documents his thoughts. However, it is mainly his academic thoughts that are documented.

A30: When I used blog, I did try to define what it meant to me...I thought since I was already a PhD student at that time, so I expected my blog to function as an archive that documented my ways of thinking. Therefore, a rational and analytical tone is important in my blog. Accordingly, I deliberately avoided writing anything about my personal life. What I wrote in my blog are things that I considered worth writing. To blog is to document my thoughts, this is why I call my blog "Pensieve" (English). Pensieve is not actually a word. It came from Harry Potter. You know when Dumbledore wanted to see something that happened in the past he would pull out his thought and put it into Pensieve to show Harry what happened to him before. For me, my blog is like my Pensieve, where it can transform an idea in my mind into something enduring and be stored in the cyber world.

As this 30-year-old Sociologist pointed out, to blog is to establish a personal archive, in which he is able to not only to document his thoughts but also to show them to others. For Alan, to blog is to have conversations with the self; and these conversations are rather formal and serious. Unlike Henry, Shane or Wai-wen, the weblog for Alan functions as a comprehensive CV (and the weblog provides him with a more efficient access to reach a mass audience). His 'Pensieve' blog not only stores his thoughts and achievements, but also

his identity as an academic, who speaks analytically and rationally in a rather masculine tone.

His focus on the weblog as a personal showcase consciously reminds Alan what to write, and to whom he is writing for – for example, those people who he met in conferences:

A30: ...For many people, perhaps blogs seem to be a private domain; for me, I clearly define it as something public. Therefore, my blog for me is like the background of my stage. The stage is important since it is apparent to the audience what the show is going to be even when the protagonist hasn't appeared on stage yet. Nowadays, I know many people are like me, and will add the link of their personal weblogs at the end of their mail. If I attend a conference, people want to know more about me, they can Google and find my blog that will provide them with a better understanding of me. In principle, my blog doesn't involve personal things because I know my blog is a place open to everyone, in particular those who just met me and want to know more about me. I notice the number of visitors to my blogs has increased after I attended a conference.

From this perspective, the weblog is not a personal domain for Alan, in the sense that blogging is characterised by him as a social activity, or more accurately, the promotion of his professional profile. This particular orientation therefore articulates Alan's blogging with his institutional identity that constitutes the representation of a *rational* self in the cyber world. The *non-anonymous* self-disclosure for Alan through blogging further contributes to the outcome of not giving highly personal details or sharing private emotions (Qian and Scott, 2007). Alan's impersonal and professional narration through blogging further informs us of the gendered structure of the weblog. This is an important feature of blogging and I return to this point in the following section.

The weblog and its possible accessibility to a mass audience allow bloggers such as Alan to perceive weblogs as personal showcases in which professional issues are the only subject of discussion. Accordingly, blogging for Alan is a process of selection in two senses: to filter his thoughts in order to present a profile to other readers, and the selection of the

readers who can appreciate Alan's contemplative thoughts. As Bourdieu reminds us, 'taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (1984:6). It is a traditionally masculine taste that constructs Alan's particular way of blogging: to be professional is not to be personal and emotional. Therefore, what is reflected in Alan's weblog is not only his public persona but also his social position in the gendered blog-world.

5.3. Cyber flâneuring in the gendered blog world

5.3.1. The gendered blog- world

The blog-world is the gendered world in miniature. On the one hand, weblog provides a cultural resource for young men to talk about their *failure* in relationships; an experience that men are not often willing to acknowledge. On the other hand, the accessibility of mass audiences through the weblog to hear about personal relationships presents these young men's lives to the public gaze, and therefore makes blogging a gendered practice. This dilemma is illustrated below. Like Wai-wen, Shane started blogging when his relationship with his girlfriend ended. The weblog provided Shane a more appropriate medium of communication with his ex-girl friend at that time, since it was a common medium they both shared. As far as he is concerned, unlike calling someone up by phone, the weblog provides a more personal space between people, where one does not feel the need to answer or feel obliged to reply immediately. As Shane suggests, 'my ex knows that I was blogging our relationship, if she wanted to know how I felt about her, she could just read my blog.' Even though the weblog provides him with a cultural terrain to cultivate his thoughts and feelings, Shane, unlike Henry, does not express his feelings directly in front of others through blogging.

S25: It depends. Everyone can read my blog therefore when I write my blog, I don't usually write in an explicit tone.... Unlike women who can easily discuss their relationships, men still have certain concerns. You don't want others to read your

blog and find that you are too emotional. I want to talk about my feelings, but I don't want everyone to think I am too emotional. It would be kind of embarrassing.

These accounts suggest that blogging is a gendering process in which young men can discuss their relationship experiences, and speak for themselves, as both gendered and emotional beings. Yet conversely, for Shane, blogging is also a gendered practice in the sense that as a man, he does not feel comfortable appearing vulnerable in a public/virtual world (Kimmel, 1994).

S25: Now everyone says that men should talk about their feelings...but it is still not easy for men to talk about the problems they had with their girl friends or something that happened in their family through blogging. They don't like to give too much detail, to sound too emotional... one may say: 'my friend has to work for the whole day. He is already shattered, but his girl friend still asks him to carry her bag while they were shopping in the department store...Why doesn't she ever come across to be considerate and put herself in his shoes', You know this type of comment, almost sounds like he (the blogger) is complaining to his friend.

Powe: Any ideas why people don't want to talk much about their own families?

S25: I think to talk about my own family is too personal...You can change your girl friend before she becomes your wife, but you can't change your own family. When you talk about your problem with girl friend, it is still a matter between you and someone outside of your family. But if I talk about my own family, it is between me and an extended part of me. There is an old saying; 'don't let something embarrassing in the family go outside the front door' ['don't wash your dirty laundry in public'- my translation]. I suppose, family is the place here I cannot hide myself...to talk about my own family world makes me feel so naked and exposed that I would not feel comfortable doing it...

What is articulated here is how the gendering practice of blogging is consistently censored by the hidden rules of the male order. In line with Rutherford (1988:22), I understand male order as an attempt 'to ensure its absence and to evade becoming the object of discourse.

Heterosexual masculinity shifts its problems and anxieties, defining them as belonging to others. Our identity represents its own problems in the image of the compliant female... [Male order] is its attempt to pass itself off as natural and universal, free of problems'. The hesitation to show one's direct thoughts and emotions and the exclusion of the most inner self is how the male order operates.

We can further understand this male order with reference to Kimmel's description of 'masculinity as the flight from the feminine' (1994:126). The notion of masculinity - or anti-femininity as Kimmel suggests - is constituted by *fear*, *shame* and *silence*. Derived from Freud's Oedipus complex, by *fear*, Kimmel refers to, the *surrender* to and the *terror* of the potential punishment, or 'castration' in Freudian terms, due to the failure of identifying himself with his father, who is a heterosexual man. The fear is not only a temporary phenomenon. It is constantly present and forces one to prove one's manhood by not being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men.

Shame suggests that a man needs to reject any association with 'the mother', since she can easily remind him of his childhood dependency. He also needs not only to *prevent* himself from association with the mother, but also to devalue any femininity symbolically represented by the mother or other female figures, since being associated with the feminine is to reveal that he is not manly or tough enough. Therefore, to be a man is to hide one's fears, emotions, or any kind of behaviour that can easily emasculate one's manhood. His fear is the fear of humiliation. He is ashamed to be afraid. This leads to *silence* among men. For example, few men are willing to openly support or discuss how women, racial and ethnic minorities, or even particular groups of men (e.g. effeminate or gay men) are treated unfairly by men. The

silence can lead to violence if one attempts to uncover why men keep quiet about their own domination, since such questioning can result in one being labelled as a sexual dissident (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Consequently, this prevalent silence also keeps other people (including men themselves) believing that men actually approve of this androcentrism.

Returning to Shane's account, we can see how 'fear', 'shame', and 'silence' come into play in his gendered practice of blogging. In terms of 'fear', he is willing to blog his personal life only to the extent that it is about the legitimate gender relationship between 'him' and 'his girl friend'; a gendering practice that confirms his *heterosexuality*. However, through blogging, what he remains silent about is his family life. As far as Shane concerned, to discuss his family life would make him 'naked' and 'uneasy', like a man being reminded of his vulnerable boyhood. In terms of 'shame', Shane expresses the possible 'embarrassment' that would be caused if he is to blog explicitly about his 'personal problems' i.e. the relationship problems between him and his girl friend. For Shane, it is still women who are culturally authorized to discuss their personal problems in public. Men, on the other hand, should not want to associate themselves with 'being too emotional'. Both the gender codes of 'fear' and 'shame' lead Shane to decide what (not) to talk about through blogging. Accordingly, through Shane's silence, these gender codes are operationalized.

However, the male order of a weblog can be 'subverted from within', in de Certeau's sense (1984) by those who use it. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau talks about how the domination of the economic order 'insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisible...through its way of using products' (xii-xiii). What is often deployed by such an order is the institutional 'strategy', aiming at maximum efficiency and homogenized audiences.

However, de Certeau rejects the nature of the consumer as 'either passive or docile' (xxi). Instead, he prefers the term 'user' in order to describe how the 'weak' consumer (in comparison to *strong* commercial institutions) actively and *tactically* appropriates the laws of institutionalized consumption in order to subvert its own domination. The cultural practice of consumption in everyday life is therefore perceived by de Certeau as *victories of the weak* over the strong through 'clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, "hunter's cunning" manoeuvres' (xix).

To draw an analogy between the dominant economic order and the male order, the practice of consumption and blogging, can also be seen as the possibility for one to tactically avoid the surveillance of gendered codes in the blog-world. One way of achieving this is to encode one's own writing:

S25: I like to use metaphors. I like to use certain words that can symbolize particular meanings. I remembered at that time I used leaf or the faded flower to stand for a relationship. The relationship between people is like the growth of trees or flowers. When we seed a relationship, we often expect it to produce fruit. The most beautiful and anticipating moment for a plant is that when it is in full bloom. However, as long as this moment arrives, we begin to worry that the flower may inevitably begin to be fading away. Fading away is not always a bad thing since it is necessary for the preparation of the next blooming. I also drew an analogy between a window and 'The heart of mine'. I wanted to open my heart (for a relationship) as easily as I opened a window in order to see what the world was like on the other side of the window. However, I was not brave enough to fully open the window. I could only make a chink to have a peak or let those people who I was familiar with have a look into the inside of my world.

Power: Where do you get these ideas from?

S25: These concepts are everywhere if you ever pay attention to read others' blogs.

One may argue that Shane's metaphors for relationships, like 'the script for love', have *already* been written and are being 'continually recycled' through communicative mediums such as the media or advertisements in contemporary societies. This research participant may simply be socialized into a gendered script, rather than actively challenging the normalization of romantic love (Brunt, 1988). However, the gendered script of love is also appropriated by Shane as a tactical move to avoid the surveillance of the male order. That is, he turns the narration of his past love into metaphorical descriptions of a faded flower - a love script provided by the gendered structure in the blog-world. From this perspective, not every blogger who reads Shane's blog can straightforwardly decipher the fact that his blogging is the reflection of his 'breaking up' experience. Only those who know his personal life can decode Shane's metaphors and associate his writing directly with this particular 'breaking up' experience. By doing this, Shane, can speak personally but does not sound *too* personal. He escapes the censure of the male gaze without avoiding it. In the gendered blog-world, bloggers such as Shane are poachers and always ready to score.

To suggest that young men are emboldened to blog a gendered language for themselves is one thing. To assume that all young men will articulate such a language in the same way is quite another. Some may speak quietly, and others may even become silent. Take Wai-wen as an example. This participant perceived himself as a reserved and traditional person. However, the uploading function of the weblog for music and pictures provides him with respite from the scrutiny of the male gaze:

W25: The last two articles I put on blogs are not really articles. One is the copy of a paragraph from a Buddhist text. My father had just passed away, and I didn't give too much detail of the background as to why I used this text, since I didn't want many people to know about my private life.

However, as long as I read it, I know exactly what I was trying to say to myself at that particular moment. Another one is a piece of music I uploaded the lyrics attached. It is called "Yearning is not a sickness but incurable." Basically, it tried to say that one should live in the moment. When I uploaded it, I was kind of feeling that I didn't cherish what I had at that time. As long as I looked back, I realized that I should do more.

Powei: Who is the song for?

W25: For my ex-girlfriend and me.

For bloggers such as Wai-wen, blogging enables him to articulate feelings for his late-father and ex-girlfriend in a language that he speaks publicly but can only be understood personally. Indeed, the pathway to Wai-wen's inner world may only become accessible to those he writes about. Unlike Shane who is capable of writing poems in order to express how he feels, bloggers such as Wai-wen have directly appropriated the technological innovations provided by the weblog. Nonetheless, both Shane and Wai-wen have tactically subverted the gendered structure of the weblog in their own different ways. Yet, bloggers such as Alan clearly understand the weblog to be a public domain that operates in a masculine order. To remain silent about his personal life is the best policy.

A30: I still want to defend my private domain. If I want to let people come into my private territory, they need to have my permission first. I don't want to invite everyone to come into my private territory, particularly through blogging. Pictures like my wedding or news like my wife and I just had a daughter won't be put on my weblog. Another important thing is that my real name is provided in my blog, and for many people who share their privacy in their blogs don't usually reveal their real name. This is quite an important factor. If I blog, I expose myself completely under the public eye. My thoughts and articles need to be enduring and good enough for scrutiny...you could say the exposed "I" through blogging is the one who is never naked and always dresses in a suit.

For Alan, to blog is to document his life, a life that is centred on his public persona rather than his private behaviour. The etiquette of Alan's profession (as an academic) extends into the social world of the weblog. What is mirrored by Alan's blog is his own image; one that is

'always dressed in a suit'. Therefore, rephrasing Tim Edward's words (1997:134), one can suggest that, for bloggers such as Alan, the weblog is like a mirror, and bloggers are indeed in the mirror; a mirror that the world around them is holding up to scrutinize their appearances, in that they simply blog for success and blog to kill. When men are silent about their personal feelings or emotion, this is how the male rule is operationalized.

In this section, I have discussed how younger research participants construct their gendered identities through blogging, while simultaneously revealing self-knowledge, establishing contested territories and clarifying boundaries (Plummer, 1995). I have argued that blogging is not only a gendering process i.e. disclosing intimacy, but also a gendered practice i.e. what (not) to blog. This enables us to trace how the gendered configuration of the blog-world is actively lived out by Taiwanese young men and their cultural practices of blogging. To blog is not only to document one's life. It is also to tell others life stories of one's own. In many cases, the gendered language and associated meanings articulated by these younger research participants through online blogging demonstrates the impact of the dominant discourse of a gendered hierarchy in the weblog world that informs them which stories can or can't be told at certain times. Such language also reveals the influence of dominant gendered norms of 'proper' male identities and practices (Holland, et al, 1998).

To suggest that the blog-world is gendered is not to assume that the gendered configuration is culturally lived out symmetrically through blogging. The above analysis has recognized research participants' diverse, fragmented and contradictory lives in and around the blog world. In other words, my attention has focused on men's gendered identities and their ambiguous, discontinuous, multiple characters within asymmetrical relations with the

weblog, in accordance to what blogging means to them. Consequently, different recognitions are important in capturing and examining the shifting nature of (asymmetrical) gender configurations through blogging that resonates with gendered relations in the wider social world. This suggests that the significance of recognizing gendered practices can simultaneously change in character and yet remain broadly the same in structure (Connell, 1995; Collinson and Hearn, 2005). This leads me to maintain that a late modernity framework is useful to the extent that it captures young men and their reflexive way of knowing the *self*; from traditional gendered roles to 'self-disclosing' intimacy via blogging in contemporary Taiwanese society. Nevertheless, the gendered practice of blogging and 'self-disclosing' is an *uneven* process and needs to be contextualized in relation to individual young men and their cultural understanding of the weblog. Acknowledging this is an uneven process, and highlighting how it is articulated by tactical resistances, consensuses, and complicities, enables us to provide a more comprehensive picture of the interplay between reflexive gender configuration and information and communication structures in late modernity.

5.3.1. Encountering male bloggers

So far, blogging as a gendering process has been primarily explored through the interplay between the self-narration of bloggers and the gendered structure of the weblog. The remaining part of the discussion will concentrate on blogging as a gendering process, resulting from the interaction between bloggers. To blog is not simply to write a 'do-it-yourself-biography'; it is also to read others' biographies. While cyber flâneuring/blogging, conversations between bloggers can often occur (Blood, 2002; Nardi et al., 2004, also DuoDuo's example in section 3.5.5.). Interestingly, blogging seems to share many

characteristics with the 'flâneuring' described by Walter Benjamin. The infrastructure of the weblog is thus a place for seeing and being. '[Strolling] could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades' (Benjamin, 1973:36). In other words, without the weblog, one cannot simply sit in front of the computer and stroll around others' blogs in the cyber world. Benjamin describes *arcades* as: 'a rather recent invention of industrial luxury [that]...are glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways...Both sides of these passageways which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature'(ibid: 36-37). One can describe bloggers as the *proprietors* of fashionable boutiques, which are stocked with their by eclectic personal tastes (through diaries, music, articles, and photos. The most advanced modern technologies to show serves as the boutique window. The weblog is one's world in miniature.

To blog is to flâneur in the weblog world. For Benjamin, flâneuring 'permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations' (1973, 55). For Shane, to listen to other men's stories of relationships ending with their girlfriends provides him with 'a way out' of his failed relationship. More specifically, from Shane's earlier account, we have learned that the ending of his relationship acted as a catalyst for him to blog. In the initial stage, to blog was not only to disclose the self but also to provide him with a therapeutic way of looking at the 'self' in the past by reading others' blogs.

Power: What do you mean by 'finding a way out' in terms of blogging?

S25: ... on the one hand, when I wrote down how I felt, it's like I can tell someone how I feel and let the upsetting feeling come out. On the other hand, when people read about what I wrote, they usually left quite encouraging messages... I also visit others' blogs when I do blogging. I remember at that time I particularly read people's blogs who shared similar experiences or those who just broke up with someone. Talking to myself and to others about my past relationship was like finding a sluice gate for

relieving the flood of my emotion. I tried to leave a message for those bloggers who I could empathize with. If they replied to me, I would try to write down some ideas based on our conversations. These ideas often became the material of my writing when I started blogging.

Power: Can you give me some examples?

S25: I remembered at that time I met a guy who is older than me. He also broke up with his girl friend because of a long distance relationship and many complicated issues....it was quite comforting to talk to him and learn experiences from someone who you can feel empathetic with...After talking to him, I wrote a poem about a long distance relationship on my blog. The poem is about when we are having a long distance relationship; we can sometimes wait for something that may not happen. We sometimes can be easily paranoid because of the absence of the other person and the presence of the long distance between each other....This sense of paranoia is like someone is so carefully protecting the candlelight from being blown out by the wind that even the zephyr can wake him up with a startle... However, sometimes it is not only the physical distance between two people but also the distance between their minds that make people suffer paranoia. This is what happened between me and my ex at the end of our relationship. This makes me think that falling in love is an easy thing, because you suddenly drop down in it. But to maintain a relationship can never be an easy task, particularly when you are both mentally and physically distant from each other...

Through flâneuring in the cyber world, one can recognise his/her own experiences in others' stories, like Benjamin's flâneur, who captured his own images in reflected shop windows. For Benjamin, the display of deluxe goods in shops not only established a spectatorship between the flâneur and these beautiful and expensive things, it also invited the flâneur to look at himself through catching sight of his reflection in mirrors or shops (Nixon, 1997). For Shane, to blog is to actively seek out the stories that resonate with him; stories that can help him make sense of the past and an anticipated future. Male identity, from this perspective, is not something one is born with or that one simply inherits. Rather, it involves an active process of seeking, enacting, and becoming (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1992; Plummer, 1995).

Moreover, for Shane, to blog is also to find a 'sluice gate for the flood of emotion'; it is conversations with other bloggers that opens such a gate for him. Indeed, as Henry suggests, 'to blog is not only to write about what you think. For many people, often you write down your problems and hope that people who read your blog will give you some kind of advice, or at least to confirm what you think is right.' This particular cultural characteristic of the weblog seems to echo a number of commentators who have suggested that late modern society is witnessing a 'transformation of intimacy' in which previous discourses of emotion are becoming increasingly public and disclosing (Giddens, 1992; Plummer, 1995; Weeks, 1995). Unlike the flâneur catching his own images simply by looking, through blogging, Shane is enticed to sketch out his gendered 'self' by not only reading male bloggers' experiences, but also talking to them. The conversations with other male bloggers also provide Shane with a new cultural repertoire for his own writing. Therefore, through blogging, this research participant becomes not only a flâneur who simply observes others' stories, but also a storyteller, who reflexively innovates and shares with other bloggers what a relationship means to him. Hence, blogging is more than a gendering process, where he can see his gendered reflection of self in other's writing. It is also a reflexive practice, where Shane is able to reflect his gender relationship by rearticulating his own story that is inspired or shared by other male bloggers. From this perspective, we must acknowledge that the activity of 'blogging' – as a continuing process of selection, interpretation, and appropriation – is a cultural endeavour and complex practice of making meaning (Storey, 1996).

In Rosaldo's anthropological understanding of self and feeling, it is suggested that 'feelings are not substances to be discovered in blood, but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell. They are structured by our forms of understanding'

(1984:143). Jackson's sociological exploration of emotions (1999) further explains that our feelings, such as, falling in love, or being in a relationship, are gendered phenomena that are socially constructed. However, one is not simply socialized into a pre-existing and structured social-cultural understanding of what love or relationship means, s/he actively engages in appropriating and making sense of these social meanings, and articulates them through his or her biography (Haug et al, 1987). For instance, Shane consciously participates in interpreting a sense of what his feelings are, of what being in love or 'breaking up' means. He does this by participating in a set of meanings or shared life stories; constructed, interpreted, disseminated, and deployed throughout the culture he belongs to, and through interactions with others male bloggers.

Contrary to common assumption that the narratives of love and romance are more available to women than to men within our culture, which therefore makes men rely on women to nurture their emotional literacy (Cancian, 1900; Radway, 1987; Jackson, 1997). Shane does not find himself emotionally illiterate. The weblog, as a new cultural resource, provides him with a rich cultural repertoire for the bricolage of his emotional landscape. In addition, it is suggested that the very act of 'romance reading' provides women with an opportunity to reflect upon their own relationships: identification with *ideal* heterosexual relationships in romantic novels reminds one of the distinction between romantic *fantasies* and the demands of family and domestic duties in *everyday practices* (Radway, 1987). For Shane, the very act of gender reflection lies not only in reading others' stories but also the actual practices of writing/blogging his romances. Through blogging, this research participant is encouraged to develop a competence in his emotional life by locating himself within discourses of love and heterosexual relationships through conversations with another male

cyber flâneur. It is the availability of the weblog - as an emerging information and communication structure- that makes this social process of constructing narratives of the gendered self reflexive and accessible to this interviewee (Lash and Urry, 1994).

5.3.2. Encountering female bloggers

To blog is to flâneur in a cyber world where there are not only male flâneurs. Encounters with female bloggers provide another dimension of blogging as a gendered practice. This may be understood in relation to Benjamin's comment on Baudelaire's sonnet, "To a passer-by", where the male narrator's desire was aroused by the frisson of a passing woman (Nixon, 1996). Influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, some feminists argue that the ways of looking suggested by Benjamin's flâneur are implicated in a set of gendered power relations of looking (Pollack, 1988; Wolff, 1985). Wolff (1990:58) suggests that the possibility of 'unmolested' strolling and observation firstly written by Baudelaire and then analysed by Walter Benjamin were 'entirely the experience of men.' This leads one to argue that women, for example in England during the closing years of the 19th century, were excluded from public space and city life, particularly those middle-class women, who were mainly consigned to the home (Wolff, 1990).

However, according to Robert Thorne (1980), this was also the period when (both working and privileged class) women were emerging into the public spaces of the city (also see Wilson, 1992). Those who conceived that 'the ideology of women's place in the domestic realm permeated the whole of society' (Wolff, 1985:37), would not disagree that '[the] gaze of the flâneur articulates and produces a masculine sexuality which in the modern sexual economy enjoys the freedom to look, appraise and possess' (Griselda Pollack 1988:79). Although women of the streets never inhabited the streets on the same terms as men, the

feminist position shared by Wolff or Pollack tends to overemphasize the passivity and victimization of women, and therefore underestimates the ability of groups of women, who were directly involved in the 'pleasures of just looking' associated with the practices of consumption (Wilson 1992, also see Green, 1990).

How are gender relations between male and female cyber flâneurs presented in my own research? Unlike in feminist critiques of the flâneur's misogynist gaze, what appears to be constituted by encounters with female bloggers is a more reflexive understanding of gender relations. For example, for Martin, a 27-year-old masters student in Art, the weblog provides not only male bloggers, but also female bloggers with a gendered space to construct their reflexive project of the self:

M27: The web is an open space for everyone...you can also see that women create their own space and establish their own territory in the weblog. Through blogging, they try to gather together with those who share similar values...to express what they don't like about men and how they are expected to be treated... They [female bloggers] also like to pamper themselves. You can see female bloggers discuss where are the nice Japanese or Italian restaurants, where can one go for a Spa, and how to travel abroad by yourself. These kinds of discussion are very different from women from my mother's generation.

Powei: How do you feel after reading weblogs like this?

M27: I remember I wrote an article about the relationship between young men and women nowadays. Basically, I think women should have the right to do what they want to do. I also agree that to some extent, women do not receive exactly the same benefits as men do, in terms of salary for example...yet women to some extent have much more advantage than men.... for example, it is very easy for women to accuse men of being chauvinistic and you know sometimes when I do blogging with other female bloggers, and if we don't share the similar point of view, they can easily make such comments to me and kind of end all of the conversation. When men are dating, they are still expected to pay for the bill. I think men are changing in the sense we are willing to learn how to have conversations with women. However, what can I say when I am accused of being chauvinistic because of my gender? There is not a female counterpart for such a term, right?!

Through Martin's account, we can see his suggestion of an interesting but paradoxical picture of gender dynamics in contemporary Taiwanese society. On the one hand, female bloggers seem to resonate with what Walter's (1998:2) suggestion that contemporary young women 'are beginning to move somewhere without markers or signposts...they are making up their lives as they go along. No one before them has lived the lives they lead. They are combining traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine work and clothes and attitudes'. More specifically, women from a younger generation, similar to the younger male participants, are gradually freed from the inherited ascriptions of institutional demands and are moving toward the process of individualization (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Improved financial autonomy further encourages women to lead the life of one's own, to develop a close relationship with the self, or in Giddens's (1991) words: the 'reflexive project of the self'. Rather than concepts like motherhood or housewife, it is consumption and lifestyle choices that appear to be central to their discussion. However, 'the more people are individualized, the more they produce de-individualizing consequences for others' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxiv). Consequently, more dialogical and negotiable gendered relations between men and women are required in order to reach a consensus around gender differences.

On the other hand, alongside Walter's idea of empowered young women, accounts of female victimhood are culturally available to be appropriated by female bloggers. By this I mean that the language of patriarchy is articulated by women as a political justification, while encountering potential androcentric comment. This appropriation is likely to have emerged from the feminist movement in Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, in which

second wave feminism plays a significant role (Chang, 2006). However, for Martin, such feminist rhetoric can easily close down conversations between men and women. The breakdown of conversation implies, firstly and generationally, Martin's disconnection with male domination portrayed by female bloggers, and, secondly and politically, an unavailable gendered language for men to articulate their own narratives when it comes to sexual politics and women's accusations of sexism. Unlike the relatively mature stage of feminism in Taiwan that energizes political and public engagement with women's lives, the lack of academic discussion and political discourse of men's experience can be explained by the still early development of Taiwanese research on men and masculinities. Not until 2000, was there a gender academic forum that was centred on men's lives and their cultural experiences (Bi, 2003). Martin's frustration can be further understood by Rutherford's comment on the ambivalence of second wave feminism and its central contention of patriarchy: 'As men and women we seemed to be talking different languages. There had been little connection between us and I felt no wiser about how I should respond to a sexual politics that was extremely critical of me, but also offered me a sense of myself and something that I wanted' (1988:22).

For Martin, cyber flâneuring is indeed a gendered experience, not so much in the sense that women are objectified by men's gaze, but in that men can sometimes be caught between claims for a more equal gendered society and women's ongoing enactment of an 'old fashioned' style with men. However, I would argue, in contrast to some of my research participants, who perceive women as the ultimate winners of contemporary Taiwanese society, I want to suggest that there are signs indicating the changing practices of being and becoming men lived out by the younger research participants. These signs resonate with and

dynamically help to constitute our understanding of flexible and changeable gender relations, a shifting emotional landscape, and the complex transformations of gender configurations in late modernity (Giddens, 1992; Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2006).

5.4. Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter is to tease out, at an experiential level, how male identities, (changing) gender relations, and the gender configuration in late modernity are lived out by young men and their cultural practices of online blogging. To blog, is to document one's life, or to construct, in Giddens's words (1992), one's 'reflexive project of the self', where the process of 'self-disclosing' plays an important role in constituting the young research participants' understanding of the 'gendered' self. However, to blog is not only to document one's life. To blog is also to communicate with others. The potential accessibility to a mass online audience to disclose intimacy makes blogging a gendered practice. By gendered practice, I mean an awareness of how the male order and its gendered gaze informs male bloggers what (not) to say, for whom, and how, under what circumstances. It is through processes of resistance, negotiation, compromise, and consensus that one can sketch out the gendered structure of the blog-world.

Through my analysis of online blogging, it is suggested that for most of the younger research participants (except Alan), the weblog provides them with a cultural repertoire that emboldens them to discuss their inner thinking and feelings about past relationships in a reflexive way. From this perspective, gendered practices amongst the younger research participants are changing, in the sense that disclosing intimacy may provide useful cultural material to bricolage their reflexive gender identity. However, to suggest that gendered practices are changing is one thing. It is another matter to suggest that gendered

configuration in contemporary Taiwanese society has also changed. Feminists have convincingly reminded us that transitions may well occur mainly at the level of the individual rather than society (Jamison, 1998; Skelton, 2005), and the processes of transformation may take place unevenly (McNay, 1999), and the outcomes may be ambivalent (Adkins, 2002). This is also echoed by my earlier discussion of the gendered structure of the blog world. Therefore, what is suggested here is that rather than simply assuming a changing gender configuration is occurring, it is far more important to tease out how the existing complex gendered structure is culturally understood and lived out by young Taiwanese men and women.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

- 6.1. What has this thesis explained?
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6.1. What has this thesis explained?

6.1.1. The substantive issues

My research is about the lived gendered experience of a particular social group of young men in contemporary Taiwanese society. I have attempted to provide critical explorations and explanations of how gender relations are enacted by Taiwanese tradition and the emerging processes of detraditionalization. In so doing, I wished to demonstrate a generational understanding of the current gendered configuration and gendered practices that are *lived out* amongst these research participants. It is suggested that through processes of detraditionalization, younger research participants are able to bricolage their 'do-it-yourself' biographies via consumption and online blogging. However, a local strong tradition does not disappear. As I have argued, it reinvents itself through contemporary gendered strategies. This has been explored through an *uneasy* gendered reflexivity - wrenched by the entrenched shared cultural expectations alongside the wish to have a life of one's own (McNay, 1999). Rather than obligation, strong tradition is actively interpreted by research participants as meaningful practice. Throughout my discussion of consumption, there is a second kind of gendered reflexivity, rendered by cultural feminization (Adkins, 2002), that enables the younger research participants to practice a feminine aesthetic. Reflexivity of this sort becomes apparent if one examines younger research participants' understandings of consumption as a *gendered artifice*. Through this the uneasy gendered reflexivity I was able to trace the local tradition within a late modernity framework. Through reflexivity as gendered artifice, I could further identify the shared social economic position of the younger research participants.

I have further discussed in detail how younger research participants bricolage their 'reflexive project of the self' through online blogging. In so doing, I have endeavoured to demonstrate, from an experiential perspective, how the weblog as an emerging cultural resource enables younger research participants to articulate a more reflexive gendered language via 'disclosing intimacy'. However, due to the weblog and its accessibility to a potential mass audience, these young men's lives were subjected to the close scrutiny of the public gaze. From this perspective, it is argued that blogging is not only a gendering process, but also a gendered practice, where one actively negotiates, resists, or simply complies with the male order (Rutherford, 1989) in the gendered blog world. This leads one to understand the gendered practice of blogging and its potential for disclosing intimacy as an uneven process that needs to be contextually addressed.

6.1.2. My analytical synthesis

Theoretically, this thesis set out to explore the theoretical and conceptual tensions that become apparent by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to contemporary gender relations encompassing feminism, studies on masculinities, a late modernity framework, and cultural studies. It is argued that a late modernity framework becomes most insightful for this research if the productive tension and the dialectical interplay between structure and agency can be maintained. For example, through the processes of detraditionalization, I have synthesized a late modernity framework with cultural studies, where the notion of gender reflexivity (McNay, 1999) is deployed to explore the continuation of Taiwanese tradition. In other words, through gendered reflexivity, tradition has invited reflexive agency to come into play. Accordingly, as Williams (1977:112) argues, tradition, in its strong sense, 'has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified', whereas weak tradition is

simultaneously 'resisted, limited, altered, challenged'. In so doing, the thesis contributes to the under-theorized notion of the re-making of tradition within the processes of detraditionalization (Delanty, 2005).

In addition, rather than understanding consumption and masculinities via textual analysis – as the major analytical stance previously posited Taiwanese researchers, it is maintained that there is a need to understand consumption as a particular gendered way of life that is *culturally lived out* by younger research participants. In so doing, one is able to unpack both socially and culturally why in this particular historical juncture of late modernity, younger research participants are able to realize a self-related biography through consumption rather than traditional gendered roles. Accordingly, it is important to locate consumption within a wider social context, such as changing gendered practices of marriage, family, and kinship that document the actual processes of detraditionalization. In so doing, one can avoid a tendency in textual analysis to 'elide a process of symbolic destabilization with processes of social and political transformation' (McNay, 1999:106). Therefore, a more complex picture of the existing gendered configuration in contemporary Taiwan can be provided by understanding how research participants actively interpret, appropriate, and make sense of existing gendered structures.

A similar line of analysis is extended to my exploration of masculinities and male identity formation through blogging. In particular, derived from Giddens (1991,1992) , I have attempted to perceive blogging - the documentary of one's life – as an emerging cultural practice that emboldens the research participants to narrate a more reflexive gendered language through conversations with self and (invisible) others. However, this is only the

beginning of the analysis. I further employed pro-feminist approaches (e.g. Kimmel, 1994) and a feminist reading to make sense of the diverse gendered practices suggested by the younger research participants. More specifically, while some can disclose their (failed) relationship experiences without much hesitation, others may have to speak it tactically, quietly, or even be silent when it comes to personal matters. Giddens is right to indicate a kind of reflexivity revealed by self-disclosing. It is suggested that the changes may occur at an individual level through the younger research participants' reflexive gendered practice of blogging. However, the transformation of intimacy is far from complete and less straightforward than that postulated by Giddens (1992). This becomes apparent if one examines the gendered blog-world (see Jamieson, 1998).

6.1.3. The methodological reflection of my position: if I were not who I am

6.1.3.1. Reflexivity in context

In **Chapter 1**, I briefly sketched out the trajectory of my analytical framework. In particular, I have pointed out the significance of my fieldwork experience that constitutes and enacts my interpretative scheme. What I have learned the most from research participants is how a researcher can appropriate *ordinary* culture in order to not only critically and creatively engage his/her own analytical position, but also reflect upon one's own culture. In short, through the detour of *familiar others*, I have explored what it means to be a cultural self.

In **Chapter 3**, I discussed how to make sense of experience methodologically. The theorization of experience was important for me in two senses: it informed me how knowledge originated from at least two sources: *experience past* with its structural influence, and *experience present* with its agentic understanding. The former reminded me to examine the materialised/institutionalized knowledge that may unconsciously shape my particular way of

knowing; whereas the latter highlighted the necessity *not to* exclude other sorts of ‘authentic’ experience if one wished to appropriate his/her own personal experience as the immediate ground of reasoning. Accordingly, I posited to understand experience in its *present perfect* sense. In so doing, it enabled me to maintain the dialectical interplay between structure and agency by addressing a kind of self reflexivity that is never fully incorporated with entrenched knowledge (Adkins, 2003). From this perspective, reflexivity of this sort was a self awareness that become apparent when different fields of knowledge became coterminous with each other (McNay, 1999). This can be understood in terms of how my cultural and academic experience enact *within* and *between* each other. It was through *experience present perfect* that constituted my position of enunciation (Hall, 1990). This was further followed by my critical evaluation of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. As an ‘insider’, it was suggested that a shared ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1961) between my research participants and I provided a shared ontological ground of understanding gendered relations via our particular way of life. I further challenged my *author-ity* by demonstrating what I understood as symbolic violence and epistemological domination. In so doing, I wished to make my research transparent and responsible.

6.1.3.2. Taking sides: ‘whose side are we on’ or ‘which side do I not include’

For researchers who study the culture of others, or groups of minorities, the question of ‘taking sides’ may appear as important (see Mac an Ghaill, 1988 for example). Some suggest that not taking sides is to assume a naive scientific objectivity that can be maintained by distancing between the researcher/researched. The broader question here is that of power relations and the need for the researcher to make explicit his/her values (Devine and Heath, 1999). For example, Greetz (1974:28) reminds us, for an ethnographer,

‘what happens to *verstehen* [interpretation or understanding] when *empfinden* [empathy] disappears?’

However, for one who studies his/her own culture, the methodological issue is less to do with ‘whose side are we on’, but ‘which side do I not include’. Although a main concern of my research is to identify the location of local tradition in a late modernity framework, I am constantly aware of the particular social and economic position shared by the researcher and the researched. In other words, occupying a relatively advantaged social and economic position, the reflexivity I have discussed is a privileged production of social mobility. My *experience present perfect* would not be constituted in its current form if I did not have the opportunity to acquire my academic experience in England. For elder research participants, kinship is unlikely to be reinterpreted as ‘companionship’ – to expect their children to spend more time with them rather than actual financial support - if they were not financially secure themselves. In short, if I were not who I am, and if I was located in a socially and economically *disadvantaged* position, would then reflexivity and the understanding of the self, mean different things to me?

However, as argued earlier, although the articulation of gendered reflexivity may be different, these differences do not signal a sign of a disappearing local tradition. I am lucky to have a colleague from China who is currently studying gender relations amongst Chinese male migrant workers. Through our discussions, I have learned that for male peasant migration, their understandings of kinship have transformed from ‘companionship’ to ‘actual material support’ due to their changing socio-economic circumstances from agriculture to industrialized activities (Lin, 2010). In fact, the main reason for the male peasant migrates to the city is to provide improved financial conditions for families back home. Therefore,

although kin practices may be different, what culturally articulates these two different social and economic groups of men, both sides of the Taiwan Strait, is the continuation of a strong Confucian tradition and its kin value (also see Lan, 2002).

We can also find this kind of strong tradition in Archer and Francis's (2006) study of the interplay between what they term 'family capital' and higher academic achievement among British Chinese pupils. In particular, despite the conventional view of different social mobilities assigned to different socio-economic groups, the distinctive cultural discourse of 'Chinese valuing of education' (ibid: 43) seems to be found across different social classes. This may be partly shaped by the historical establishment of the imperial examination system for official recruitment and the state endorsed ideology of Confucian scholars since the Han dynasty (206BC-220 AD) (see Song, 2004). This suggests that a strong local tradition does not occupy only a dominant economic, political or cultural position. It has transformed itself into a complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces, helping to shape the whole social process in the fabric of everyday life, and becoming a particular way of life (Williams, 1977).

6.1.3.3. The limits of my research: class (in) sensibility?

However, what differentiates my research from Archer and Francis's is their insight into 'social class' within the context of Chinese culture and tradition. In other words, while my own analysis can only draw upon the continuation of a strong tradition derived from a particular group, the wider inclusion of different social and economic groups are presented in Archer and Francis's study. This leads me to ask myself: why do my research participants have a shared socio-economic background? Do people from a relatively social and economic advantaged group recognize their own privilege? Was I insensitive to the issue of class in my

study? It is suggested that people from an advantaged social and economic position do recognize their privileges. For example, as Tom (a 52-year-old professor in business) clearly indicates, changing economic conditions for him and his partner allow them to have a privileged and alternative interpreted experience of kin practice. For younger research participants such as Alvin (a 28-year-old insurance sales manager, in talking of his appreciation of different styles of suits, he has also made clear to me that some of his friends can join the gym or buy designer brands with little hesitation due to their financial support from the family, yet he also knows that others can only do similar things if they have extra money. These accounts seem to suggest that the research participants are aware of their privileged position by 'differentiating oneself from others in the field' (Devine et al., 2005:14).

Reflecting upon my own analytical position, one greatly informed by earlier structural analysis of masculinities (e.g. Hearn, Brittan, and Connell), feminist research (e.g. Adkins and Skeggs), and cultural studies (e.g. Williams or Hall), I understand how class analysis can generate a criticality for one's own research and political standpoint. At the same time, I have also learned the limits of economic determination if it is appropriated as the *last stance* of one's own analysis (Hall, 1996). I am also aware of the conceptual difficulties and limits of deploying a western understanding of class consciousness without locating it within a specific historical and cultural context, as discussed in Chapter 1 (also see Savage, 2000). However, and perhaps most importantly, I have come to the realization that the research participants presented in my study in terms of their homogenized social and economic position can be taken as evidence of the overarching power of 'habitus', that is operated through one's social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977). My habitus and familiar experiences, functioning as a creative energy that enabled me to develop a cultural sensibility of exploring

gender relations in late modernity. It further fostered my analytical position to seek to identify the cultural trajectory of local tradition through the processes of detraditionalization. Paradoxically, it was also my own habitus that unconsciously constrained me in obtaining a more diverse range of participants for my research. Here, the concept 'class' operates in a silent but violent way. In response, I suggest the direction for future research: to culturally make sense of what respectability means to Taiwanese (young) men.

6.2. Future research: from responsibility to respectability

In **Chapter 2** (see section 2.4.3.2.), I discussed how the term 'responsibility' connotes a meaning of 'respectability'. In particular, 'being responsible' suggests the virtue of trustworthiness, where respect/reputation can be earned and publicly acknowledged if one fulfils his/her own role. In this thesis, I have developed a framework that explores how one should understand family responsibility, in order to perceive kin practice as more than just moral obligation or personal duty; it always needs to be contextualized by asking who should do what for whom in which circumstances (Finch and Mason, 1993). In so doing, we can explore the continuation of a local strong tradition that invents itself as meaningful practice by allowing reflexive agency to come into play.

In future research, it is worth further exploring, what 'respectability' means culturally in Taiwanese contexts; for example, within marriage, kinship, or family? Who can become or have the access to become a respectable son, husband/partner, or father? How do you become a respectable Taiwanese (young) man? The purpose behind asking these questions is to pinpoint the distinctive gendered practices that differentiate themselves from other kinds of social practices; practices that are morally appraised and culturally aspired to (Skeggs, 1997). By asking such questions, one may understand, for example, family

responsibilities as more than just proper things to do. We can further explore how they could be done 'properly'. By doing things 'properly', one needs to rely on the right knowledge and certain cultural resources that may not be always accessible to everyone. In particular, the economic resource as affording is of key significance (Skeggs, 2004). This can be understood, for example, by the fact that only certain people in Taiwan can hire carers to take care of the elderly in order to fulfil their filial piety. Amongst them, Taiwanese carers may be more preferable than foreign carers due to the language and culture shared with the 'cared for' person (despite migrant labour often being more affordable than domestic help). Accordingly, money is a primary means to being a respectable son/daughter if s/he cannot personally participate in taking care of the elderly. Consequently, we may further identify the distinctive gendered practice of particular social groups that are entitled to respectability. In short, cultural understandings of respectable gendered practices can contribute to our understanding of social inequalities lived out through cultural values premised on moralities exclusive to certain social groups (Skeggs, 2005).

Appendix: The Sample

Category		Name	Age	Sex(uality)	Marital status	Occupation
A	1	Mark/M20	20	Heterosexual	Single	University student
	2	Charles/C23	23	Heterosexual	Single	University student
	3	Zack/Z37	37	Heterosexual	Single	Art gallery manager
	4	Hou/H31	31	Heterosexual	Single	University lecture
	5	Chris/C39	39	Heterosexual	Married	Director of a research institute
	6	Shu	49	Heterosexual	Married	Associated professor
	7	Scott/S49	48	Heterosexual	Married	Associated professor
	8	Tom/T52	52	Heterosexual	Married	Professor in Business
	9	Li	53	Heterosexual	Married	Associated professor
	10	Chuo	66	Heterosexual	Married	Retired principle of an occupational college
	11	Shei	82	Heterosexual	Married	A retired primary school head teacher
	12	Alvin/A28	28	Self- identified gay man	Single	Insurance sale manager
	13	DuoDuo/D28	28	Self-identified gay man	Single	PhD candidate in IT management
	14	Wesley/W28	28	Self-identified gay man	Single	PhD student in history
	15	Wong/W29	29	Self –identified gay man	Single	PhD student in art
	16	Young/Y37	37	Self-identified gay man	Single	Lecturer in art
B	17	Wai-wen/W25	25	Heterosexual	Single	Insurance sale person
	18	Henry /H25	25	Heterosexual	In a long-term relationship	An university graduate who is doing military service
	19	Shane/S25	25	Heterosexual	Single	Master student in geography
	20	Martin/M27	27	Heterosexual	Single	Master student in art
	21	Alan/A30	30	Heterosexual	Married	PhD student in sociology
	22	Nine/N30	30	Heterosexual	In a long-term relationship	Popular blog writer

- All names here are pseudonyms. Category ‘A’ refers to research participants from my first fieldwork (conducted during July and August, 2007), where I had collected the data for my analysis of (de)traditionalization and consumption presented in **Chapter 4**. Category ‘B’ refers to research participants from my second fieldwork (conducted during December, 2008), where I had collected the data for my analysis of blogging and masculinities presented in **Chapter 5**.
- The initial of is used to indicate people whose quotes are directly presented in this thesis (e.g. ‘M20’ stands for Mark, who is 20-year-old , see category A, No1).

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