

**PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT OF  
POST-SEPARATION DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES:  
A COOPERATIVE GROUNDED INQUIRY WITH ABUSED  
WOMEN AND THEIR TEENAGE SONS/DAUGHTERS IN  
HONG KONG**

By

Sui-Ting, Kong

A thesis submitted in accordance with the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of York

Department of Social Policy and Social Work

November

2014

## **Abstract**

This research involves formerly abused women and their teenage children equally with the practitioner-researcher in post-separation domestic violence service design and delivery. It examines how does a co-participative relationship among social work practitioner-researcher, women survivors and their teenage sons/daughters form, and how a co-participative relationship serves post-separation domestic violence service development, delivery and evaluation. Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI) is invented in this research to offer an alternative methodology to Service User and Carer Participation (SUCP), in addition to the current consumerist and emancipatory models. As a result, a theory is generated to explain the formation and displaying of a 'family-like community of practice' among inquiry members; meanwhile, the 'family-like community of practice' sets the context for the co-construction of local theories and practices that mitigate women and their teenage children's post-separation problems and enhance their competence in problem solving. This thesis meticulously articulates the experiences of co-constructing local knowledges with formerly abused women and their teenage children, and to contends that practices for facilitating 'identity (re)construction' and 'partnership making' are of paramount importance in their post-separation lives. Findings of this research pose challenges on the conventional crisis-oriented domestic violence services and the Cartesian model of self that underlies the mainstream understanding of post-separation needs and services. Drawing on the relational approach and Schatzki's theorization of social practices, the thesis critiques individualization of domestic violence (as acts performed by individuals) and the corresponding services. In the last chapter, building a community of practice is proposed as a possible way of reconciling the women-focused domestic violence services and child protection system.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Author's Declartion</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Domestic violence in Hong Kong, the related services and legal framework.....	2
1.2 Women's movement in Hong Kong .....	7
1.3 The quest for professional accountability.....	11
1.4 Cooperation is a timely response.....	13
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b> .....	<b>17</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	17
2.2 User participation in practice: In the field of domestic violence services, the challenges and opportunities .....	19
2.2.1 The challenges faced by abused women's participation in domestic violence service .....	19
2.2.2 Participation and marginalization of abused women in domestic violence services in Hong Kong .....	22
2.3 Intimate partner violence as a social practice of coercive control: A stronger need for participation and the development of 'relational autonomy' .....	26
2.3.1 The construction of victim, survivor and the '-'	28
2.3.2 <i>Mothering in the post-separation live of abused women and the reimagining of mothering and family care</i> .....	32
2.3.3 The turn to 'relational model of self' and its implications for understanding protection rights and participation of 'children' .....	35
2.4 Children's rights, participation and the dilemmas in children protection .....	37
2.5 The gap between domestic violence services and child protection work .....	41
2.5.1 Who could be and who should be responsible for protection of children in intimate partner violence cases? .....	43
2.6 Conclusion .....	45
<b>Chapter 3 'Cooperative Grounded Inquiry' with Formerly Abused Women and their Teenage 'Children' in Hong Kong: Methodological Innovation, Implementation and Implications</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>3.2 What is Social Work Research?</b> .....	<b>48</b>
3.2.1 Is this study social work research?.....	50
3.2.2 Forms of theoretical knowledge produced by social work research .....	53

3.2.3	Role(s) of the researcher .....	54
3.2.4	Degree of participation of service users .....	56
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Cooperative Grounded Inquiry: Merging of Co-operative Inquiry and Grounded Theory Methodology and implementation .....</b>	<b>58</b>
3.3.1	Cooperative Inquiry in the participatory paradigm.....	59
3.3.2	Grounded Theory Methodology for social work practice research .....	63
3.3.3	My blend: Cooperative Grounded Inquiry and Implementation .....	68
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Institutional ethics review: the limitation of Hobbesian model and the urge for expanding the ethical lens .....</b>	<b>92</b>
3.4.1	Ethical hurdles to participatory action research with formerly abused women in the framework of traditional research ethics committees (RECs) .....	94
3.4.2	Ethics underpinning this CGI .....	98
3.4.3	Expansion of ethical lens.....	101
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Understanding the ‘practice’ of CGI through the relational lens: ‘Partnership making’, ‘(trans)forming identities’, and ‘displaying a family-like community of practice’ .....</b>	<b>103</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	103
4.2	The practice of CGI with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters and its implication for understanding participation .....	106
4.3	Making partnership.....	109
4.3.1	The concept of ‘making or breaking partnership with women participants’ .....	109
4.4	(Trans)forming identities.....	126
4.4.1	The practitioner-researcher.....	126
4.4.2	Women participants in relation to their experiences of abuse and the pre-established relationships.....	130
4.4.3	Sons/daughters of women participants.....	132
4.5	Displaying a family-like community of practice .....	132
4.5.1	A community of practice: social identities, meaning making, interactions and learning .....	135
4.5.2	Displaying Yat-Ga-Yan (‘we are a family’) and the interplays of other practices.....	137
4.6	The three layers of participation and challenges against participation.....	142
4.6.1	1 <sup>st</sup> layer: Social participation in a community of practice.....	143
4.6.2	2 <sup>nd</sup> layer: Epistemological participation .....	145
4.6.3	3 <sup>rd</sup> layer: Political participation .....	147
4.7	Conclusion .....	149
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Re-constructing identity with Formerly Abused Women: ‘Locating Victim-Chungsangje’ and ‘Care and Service Rendering’— Linking Propositional Knowing, Practical Knowing, Experiential Knowing and Presentational Knowing.....</b>	<b>151</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	151

5.2	From ‘Locating Victim –Chungsangje’ to ‘Service and Care Rendering’ .....	152
5.2.1	‘Care and Service Rendering’ Relevant to Victim-Chungsangje Identities.....	153
5.2.2	‘Locating victim-chungsangje’ .....	157
5.3	Conclusion .....	207
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>From ‘Being Cared’ To ‘Equal Partners’: Transforming ‘Your Problem’ to ‘Our Problem’ and ‘Your Responsibility’ to ‘Our Responsibility’ Through Making Partnership With ‘Children’ .....</b>	<b>209</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	209
6.1.1	Children’s rights: the ‘Cartesian model of self’ or the ‘relational model of self’? .....	211
6.2	The grounded theory of ‘Making or Breaking Partnership’: transforming ‘your problem’ to ‘our problem’ and ‘your responsibility’ to ‘our responsibility’ .....	213
6.2.1	Making or breaking partnership with teenage participants .....	215
6.3	The Three Forms of Partnerships and Transformation of Problems .....	245
6.3.1	‘Opinion Giving’ for Transforming Needs of Women to Needs of Women and Their Sons/Daughters .....	247
6.3.2	‘Partaking in Actions’ for Transforming Your Mission to Our Mission.....	249
6.3.3	‘Collaborating’ in Transforming Mothering to Mutual Care Project.....	252
6.3.4	Transforming Your problems to our problems, your responsibility to our responsibility.....	261
6.4	Conclusion: <i>A new focus on mutuality and partnership making in protection services</i> .....	263
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>266</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	266
7.2	Cooperative Grounded Inquiry in the quest of social work professional accountability .....	267
7.2.1	Effectiveness .....	268
7.2.2	Ethics.....	274
7.3	Implications for post-separation domestic violence services.....	281
7.3.1	Abiding construction of identities as a way to locate problems and solutions: Departing victimhood and venturing into the ‘-’ between victim and survivor.....	282
7.3.2	Encouraging participation and developing personhood through acknowledging disagreement and constructing creative linguistic stocks in saying and doing things... ..	285
7.3.3	Protection services: A new focus on mutuality and partnership making.....	288
7.4	Translation in this CGI .....	300
7.5	Conclusion .....	306
<b>Reference</b>	.....	<b>312</b>
<b>Appendix 3.1</b>	<b>Inquiry timeline, tasks and facts .....</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>Appendix 3.2</b>	<b>Consent to take part in introductory session .....</b>	<b>339</b>
<b>Appendix 3.3</b>	<b>Consent form to take part in the research .....</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>Appendix 3.4</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> round ethics review: Reviewers comments and my responses .....</b>	<b>341</b>

<b>Appendix 3.5</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> round ethics review submission: Reviewers' comments .....</b>	<b>351</b>
<b>Appendix 4.1</b>	<b>Information Sheet (Translated Version).....</b>	<b>353</b>
<b>Appendix 4.2</b>	<b>An excerpt of the introductory session with YT .....</b>	<b>357</b>
<b>Appendix 4.3</b>	<b>The practitioner-researcher's photo log .....</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Appendix 4.4</b>	<b>The power differential pre-established between the 'role model'/mother-head and the other women participants in the inquiry group.....</b>	<b>360</b>
<b>Appendix 4.5</b>	<b>The practising of mutual accountability, equality and care practices .....</b>	<b>361</b>
<b>Appendix 5.1</b>	<b>Field note on 'making our dreams with play-doh' .....</b>	<b>365</b>
<b>Appendix 5.2</b>	<b>Coding of women participants' stories of strengths .....</b>	<b>370</b>
<b>Appendix 5.3</b>	<b>Transcription on the monopoly of limited successful experiences .....</b>	<b>371</b>
<b>Appendix 5.4</b>	<b>The Locations of Members in the Victim-Chunsengjia Classification.....</b>	<b>374</b>
<b>Appendix 6.1</b>	<b>Our Analysis on Mothering Experiences (Translated from Chinese).....</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>Appendix 6.2</b>	<b>The Mother's Day Event Planning (Translated from Chinese) .....</b>	<b>379</b>

## List of Figures

Fig. 1.1 An analysis of the principles of the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence (revised 2011) in Hong Kong .....	5
Fig. 3.1 Reflection-action-reflection cycle .....	60
Fig. 3.2 Dialogical relationship between the ideal and the practice of Cooperative Grounded Inquiry .....	69
Fig. 3.3. Modified reflection-action-reflection cycle.....	75
Fig. 3.4 Participants were simulating the moves in the dancing session in a group meeting .....	69
Fig. 3.5 Timeline for reviewing the inquiry process in the termination stage .....	83
Fig. 5.1 Mind map on service planning for formerly abused women composed in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> session of the inquiry .....	162
Fig. 5.2 Members doing pressure point massage, dancing and exercises in the country park during the inquiry meeting (masks added to protect privacy) .....	169
Fig. 5.3 Different faces of 'victims' .....	178
Fig. 5.4 Different faces of 'chungsangje' .....	179
Fig. 6.1 Pictures showing how the need for food was catered in the group and how the family-like 'dining together' experiences were reproduced in the inquiring group meetings. ....	2244
Fig. 6.2 Mind-map prepared by Yuen .....	226
Fig. 6.3 Poem/proses written by Yuen.....	2299
Fig. 6.4 Picture of Siu (the leftmost) and the family she took care of in the Mother's Day Event (masks added to protect privacy) .....	2511
Fig. 6.5 Picture showing how Yuen and YY collaborated in reviewing what we had learnt in the past 5 months (masks added to protect privacy) .....	257
Fig. 6.6 Picture showing how Yuen and YY collaborated in facilitating us to share views and experiences in a parenting session (masks added to protect privacy) .....	257

## List of Diagrams

Diagram 4.1 The concept of 'making or breaking partnership with women participants' .....	109
Diagram 4.2 The concept of 'relational calculation' .....	113
Diagram 4.3 The concept of 'pragmatic rationality' (at the beginning phase) .....	116
Diagram 5.1 Diagram showing the process of 'creating victim-chungsangje classification'.....	159
Diagram 5.2 The concept of 'victim' .....	159
Diagram 5.3 The concept of 'chungsangje' .....	173
Diagram 5.4 The concept of 'chungsangje-becoming' .....	187
Diagram 6.1 The grounded theory of 'making or breaking partnership' .....	213
Diagram 6.2 The concept of 'making or breaking partnership with teenage participants' .....	217
Diagram 6.3 The concept of 'sustaining partnership calling and response': A summary of the 'partnership-making' and 'partnership breaking' strategies discovered in this inquiry .....	245
Diagram 6.4 The relationship between 'forms of partnership' to 'redefining problems and responsibility' .....	258
Diagram 6.5 A hierarchical typology of parent-son/daughter practices .....	258

## List of Tables

Table 5.1 The change of care rendering with the change of victim-chungsangje location .....	156
Table 5.2 The change of service rendering with the change of victim-chungsangje location.....	157
Table 5.3 Categories of services devised by women participants in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> session of the inquiry .....	163



## Acknowledgements

My life and my work would not be the same without the women and the teenage participants, who went through with me many moments of love and resentment, excitement and frustration, determination and ambivalence, and aspiration and disappointment, in this inquiry. Their commitment in promoting the welfare of abused women and their children is the only thing that could make this inquiry possible. I am very grateful to have become their 'sister', and received lots of love when I was stressed out in writing my PhD. I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Carol-Ann Hooper, who carefully examined with me each step of involving user participants, and made this participatory research genuine and rigorous. Nonetheless, her enthusiasm for methodological innovation and scrupulousness in formulating arguments have demonstrated to me treasurable qualities to acquire as a researcher.

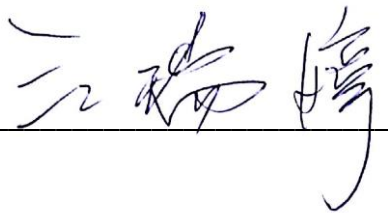
I would also like to take this opportunity to deliver my gratitude to the Forthright Caucus which helped in promotion and recruitment of participants. Furthermore, I also owe my deepest thanks to the chairperson of the ethics review committee for the support in advancing ethical decision-making in the context. I would like to express my appreciation to Prof. Chan Yuk-Chung and Dr. Ho Kwok-Leung of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, for their constant input and critical comments regarding child protection work and user participation respectively.

A special thanks to my family who provided unlimited emotional support whenever I needed, and talking to my parents was always the cure to my PhD panic. I always want to thank my brother, Man-Kit, who has been taking care of my parents and made my PhD worry-free. His love to me is priceless. I also owe lots of thanks to my aunt, Lin-Ho, who financially supported me to take on this academic challenge overseas. I would also like to deliver my heartfelt gratitude to Eric Hoddy for his company, support and editorial input in my conference/journal papers. He always gave me confidence when I felt unsure about myself. My gratitude is also extended to James Britton who helped me proof read my thesis.

Finally, I am also grateful to have met a lot of good friends in York. Thanks to Vera, Stella, Lena, Leyla, Katie and Jessica for making my PhD life more colourful than just 'black and white'.

### Author's declaration

I, Sui-Ting Kong, declare that this thesis is the product of my own work, which has not, whether in the same or a different form, been presented to this or any other university in support of an application for any degree other than that of which I am now a candidate.

Signed 

Date 10 March 2015

## Chapter 1

---

### Introduction

---

#### Introduction

*'I had no money when I left him (the abuser)...he seized all the money I had earned from selling umbrellas...I needed to take care of my children. They were still young. I needed food. Every day I waited at the entrance of the market...waited and waited...until all the stalls were closed. I kneeled down and picked up the vegetable leaves left on the floor, washed them and fed my children' said SC, extracted from an interview conducted in my Masters degree in 2008.*

The submissive image of Chinese women was engrained in me, by witnessing close women relatives of mine sacrificing their youthfulness and personal achievement on unamendable conjugal relationships. 'Why don't you divorce?' was always my response to women relatives' decision to stay in unfulfilling and even abusive relationships. During my MPhil study, my understanding about Chinese abused women was revised when I had the chance to volunteer in a survivors' group, and interview formerly abused women and engage in their post-separation lives. I tasted the hardship of rebuilding the home when I got totally sweaty carrying heavy furniture, collected from the Salvation Army, upstairs in Hong Kong's over-35-degree hot summer. The hectic life of single mothers was deeply felt when the regular opening of home visits and interviews became jumping in the midway of meal preparation and offering help in the kitchen. Bargaining for reduced meat and vegetables presented to me the struggles experienced by formerly abused women in obtaining the necessities of life for both themselves and children within small budgets. Painkillers and anti-depressants were usually the only 'support' formerly abused women could ever receive from the government. I came across many survival stories, like the one quoted above, which have transformed my understanding about the post-separation lives of abused women.

The question of 'why don't you divorce/leave?' appears even more victim-blaming when abused women's stay-leave decisions and their post-separation lives are better

understood. The question is problematic because it presupposes that separation is the end of their pains and their disastrous life, and the beginning of happiness and freedom. From this perspective, leaving is always preferable to staying. If intimate partner violence cases were linked to child protection needs, the staying of abused women would be literally labelled as cases of 'irresponsible mothers' or 'failed carers'. Women who stay are also naturally perceived as either exercising their absolute autonomous choice for worse or being too weak to choose for better. These narratives contribute to the 'insufficient mother' discourse on formerly abused women (Scourfield, 2001; Douglas & Walsh, 2010).

On reflection, the simplistic equalization of separation and freedom/autonomy/problem-free environment reflects an unsophisticated examination of women's experiences of abuse, situated in the context of intimacy and the broader relationships women have with their families and society. It is widely evident in the literature that many abused women suffer escalated violence and severer financial hardship after separating from the abusive partner (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Humphreys, 2000; Ben-Ari, Winstok, & Eisikovits, 2003). The long-term isolation of abused women in the abusive relationship strongly increases abused women's fear of re-engaging with the society after separation (Ho & Kong, 2010). Furthermore, women who conform to female social stereotypes (i.e. marrying a man, giving birth to children and securing an intact family) could experience an intolerable identity crisis in separation. Failing in re-orientating the conjugal relationship with the abusers could drive women back to the abusive relationship (Kong, 2010). Hence, the post-separation lives of abused women are far from problem-free. Instead, a wealth of evidence has shown the likeliness for escalated violence, increased financial hardship, and intensified social and psychological disruptions after leaving the abusers.

### **1.1 Domestic violence in Hong Kong, the related services and legal framework**

Tin Shui Wai tragedy which happened in 2004 exposed the bloody and brutal nature of domestic violence to the public, and it therefore marks one of the milestones in the development of domestic violence services in Hong Kong. In this tragedy, the perpetrator killed the twin daughters and his wife with a sharp knife. He then stabbed himself before calling to the Police and died subsequently. Inquiries and studies of domestic violence in

the following years continued to catch the attention of the public as the prevalence and the detrimental effects of the problem have already set off the alarm bell of the society.

Intimate partner violence (previously named as spousal battering) is defined in the *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence* (revised 2011) as ‘in using violence or the threat of violence, physical or psychological harm is inflicted with the effect of establishing control by one individual over another’ in an intimate partner relationship (p.2). It involves physical violence, sexual violence and psychological abuse. Although the term ‘coercive control’ appears twice in the *Guidelines*, ‘control’ is never well defined and its restraining effects on the abused through micromanagement of ones’ lives are not even mentioned. Neither are there substantial changes made to the handling procedures to eliminate coercive control in intimate partner violence. It is unlike the latest official definition of domestic violence in the UK, where coercive control is properly included while control is clearly defined as acts that make a person subordinate and ‘depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour’ (Home Office, 2013). *A Guide for Local Area* is also produced by the Home Office in the UK to inform how local authorities could extend their services to meet the change in the official definition of domestic violence.

In 2005, the first and the only one domestic violence prevalence study commissioned by the Social Welfare Department in HKSAR was released<sup>1</sup>. It shows that more than 1 in 7 spouses have been battered by their intimate partners at some point in their lives; while more than 1 in 5 households have spouses who have been battered by their partners. Incidents of both spousal abuse and child abuse/maltreatment, including physical, psychological and sexual abuse and child neglect, were collected and analysed to offer an estimate of the annual and lifetime prevalence of different types of domestic violence. About 1 in 10 of the interviewed spouses had either committed or experienced physical assaults in their intimate relationship at least once in their lifetime, among which about 4% had led to physical injuries. Over 50% of the interviewed spouses had committed or experienced psychological aggressions in the spousal relationship at least once in their lifetime; meanwhile around 6% of the interviewed spouses had either committed or experienced sexual coercion. Different from the Central Information System of

---

<sup>1</sup> In this study, Chan (2005) interviewed 5049 adults and 2062 children to understand the nature and resolutions of family conflicts in Hong Kong families through the use of Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2) and Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2PC).

Spouse/Cohabitant Battering and Sexual Violence Cases (the Central Information System), physical violence is the majority form of abuse conducted by the perpetrator since 2004, ranging from 60.5% to 87.8%. Meanwhile, psychological abuse is the second most reported form of violence (5.9%-36.7%) and then followed by sexual abuse (0.1%-0.7%). The under-reporting of psychological abuse could be attributable to the people's perception of such form of abuse as less serious as physical abuse, and hence being less likely to seek help from formal services or the Police. In addition, the Central Information System reveals a greater proportion of female victims in intimate partner violence, which consistently account for more than 80% of total number of cases. Although the same tendency is also confirmed in the domestic violence prevalence study carried out by Chan (2005), the gender asymmetry revealed by the report is very small compared to the Central Information System.

The tendency to reveal gender symmetry in Chan's study is anticipated and is methodologically determined. The measurement tool employed in Chan's study, in measuring the prevalence of intimate partner violence, is developed on the 'family violence' model which upholds the belief that men and women are equally likely to initiate violence. The tool, CTS2, employed in Chan's study therefore defines intimate partner violence as 'acts' of violence and disregards the context, sequence, nature and consequence of the violent acts (Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Therefore, the number of 'violent acts' committed by men and women are compared without addressing the differences in the nature and consequence of those acts. Women's self-defence and retaliation are also counted as evidence for women being equally likely to be violent partners in intimate relationships (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Johnson, 2006). In this sense, gender asymmetry would be shown by this act-based measurement when battered women do not normally defend themselves with violent/abusive acts in a violent relationship.

The evidence from the prevalence study, in addition to a number of shocking tragedies happened in Tin Shui Wai in 2004 and 2007 (Alma, George, Rendall, Yuk-chung, Gladys L.T., & Sung, 2008), reinforces the strong focus on risk management, the development of identification and assessment tools and studies of risk factors. Despite the legal and service improvements in the last 10 years, the post-separation needs of the abused partners are eclipsed in this imbalanced focus on risks, which are usually perceived as

synonymous to staying. This increased attention to crisis intervention is also reflected in the framework for domestic violence services in Hong Kong.

The procedural guidelines for all intimate partner violence related services clearly state that the service will terminate when ‘violence subsides’. Although the three-pronged service framework, as explicated in policy documents and the *Guideline*, includes supportive and prevention measures, crisis intervention is still the heart of the framework. In fig. 1.2, general principles suggested in the *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence (revised 2011)* are categorized according to their purposes.

General Principles	Purpose(s)
<b>Spousal Abuse</b>	
Safety of victims first	Risk reduction
Continuous assessment of risks	Risk reduction
Direct communication with victims about observed wounds	Involvement of victims in assessment and action planning
Reduce chances for repeating the traumatic experience	Avoid re-victimization
Confidentiality	Protection of privacy
Report of integrated family services/FCPSU if risks prevail	Risk reduction
<b>Child Abuse</b>	
Safety of victims first	Risk reduction
Continuous assessment of risks	Risk reduction
Direct communication with victims and their non-abusive carers	Involvement of victims and their carers in assessment and action planning
Reduce chances for repeating the traumatic experience	Avoid re-victimization
Report to the integrated family services/FCPSUs if risks prevail	Risk reduction

**Fig. 1.1 An analysis of the principles of the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence (revised 2011) in Hong Kong**

From fig. 1.1, we could see that the *Guidelines* for facilitating multi-disciplinary collaboration are largely set around crisis intervention, by targeting risk reduction and avoidance of re-victimization. Involvement of victims in assessment and action planning is restricted to ‘direct communication’.

The responsible social services, Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and Family and Child Protective Units (FCPSUs), work according to the same central framework as suggested in the Guidelines for handling cases of intimate partner violence. Severe cases of domestic violence are usually referred to FCPSUs which are specialized in domestic

violence services, whereas relatively minor cases of domestic violence are handled by IFSCs which provide multiple services for various family needs. Under the service framework, social workers in the two responsible services are the case manager for multidisciplinary collaboration, including the Health Services, the Police, legal services, shelter, housing and other welfare. The case manager approach is also a response to lack of coordination of services revealed in the Tin Shui Wai tragedy, aiming at providing seamless collaboration among multiple services. By acknowledging women's need for support in the leaving process, Victim Support Programme was launched in June 2010 in order to provide emotional support and escort to judicial proceedings involved in the process of leaving, such as divorce, custody and application for injunction order. This new service could be seen as a breakthrough from the narrow focus on staying, however, a comprehensive understanding of leaving as a prolonged process and the multi-faceted post-separation needs of abused women are not yet well considered.

Concern over the adequacy of protection to victims of spousal abuse further led to the revision of the 1986 Domestic Violence Ordinance (Cap 189) in 2008 and 2009. The earlier revision allows more simplified application procedures and an extended period for the injunction order for victims of domestic violence; while the latest revision includes homosexual intimate partners in the scope of service and legal protection, although they are not allowed to get married in Hong Kong<sup>2</sup>. The *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases* (2004) was then revised in 2011, giving rise to the *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence* (2011) to catch up with the legal changes that give rise to the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationship Violence Ordinance (Cap 189)(revised 2009). Since 2011, the term 'intimate partner violence' has been used rather than 'spousal abuse' for indicating the legal and service sensitivity to the changing characteristics of intimacy in Hong Kong. However, 'psychological abuse' is not specifically defined in legal terms, within the Ordinance, as the Labour and Welfare Bureau finds the flexibility given by the term 'molestation' will be able to cover

---

<sup>2</sup> Ho (2012) meticulously delineated the legal protection of victims of domestic violence in Hong Kong, and it is summarized as below: The Domestic Violence Ordinance (Cap 189) was first introduced in 1986, while its first amendment was in 2008. The legal protection was not extended to homosexual couples in Hong Kong in the first revision as the Labour and Welfare Bureau (changed from Health, Welfare and Food Bureau on 1 July 2007) does not recognize same-sex marriage under the Marriage Ordinance (Cap 181). Moreover, the Bureau justified this decision by saying that homosexual couples are enjoying the same legal protection within the criminal legislative framework as abusers in intimate partner violence are prosecuted under the Crime Ordinance (Cap 200). However, the Equal Opportunity Commission declared that the differentiation of heterosexual and homosexual couples in the context of domestic violence was unnecessary. This declaration became the pressure for the Bureau to put forth another revision in 2009.



psychological abuse and any other threats imposed on the victims (Ho, 2012). This decision is said to be made upon the successful experience of the UK.

Post-separation hardship of abused women is further aggravated by the current child-centred domestic violence services that attribute children's undesirable outcomes to abused women's failures to protect and nurture. As I contend, this inclination to children is rooted in the 'becoming/being' distinction between children and adults. The former are seen as insufficient to exercise their autonomy to the fullest, they should be 'protected' and 'cared for' by adult carers who are synonymous to 'mature' atomized persons who can make independent rational choices. Failure to achieve desirable outcomes for children is hence the mothers' fault. Next to this, individualism that frames women and children as separate individuals also leads to perceiving their best interest as exclusively independent of each other. In case children's desirable outcomes are not fully attained within the filial relationship, abused women would be easily blamed for maximizing their own outcomes at the expense of their children's. I attest that the individualistic approach in domestic violence services is moulded by the particular shape of Hong Kong's women's movement, and is exacerbated by the increasingly managerial service culture. Before developing this argument in the literature review, I would like to first delineate how the individual approach in domestic violence services is reinforced and left unchallenged by the women's movement in Hong Kong; meanwhile, the rising demands for social work accountability turn out to have strengthened the managerial culture. Problems invoked by idealization of separation and the child-centred individualistic domestic violence services are a reflection of insufficient cooperation between domestic violence social workers and users. Cooperation is hence considered as a timely response to improving the well-being of formerly abused women, and achieving professional accountability in domestic violence services. This research drew on Grounded Theory Methodology and Cooperative Inquiry to explore a special method of cooperation between practitioner-researcher and domestic violence service users for embracing the abovementioned challenges.

## **1.2 Women's movement in Hong Kong**

The shape of the women's movement in Hong Kong cannot be immediately understood from the experiences of the UK or the US. It was shaped by the particular political and

social contexts where Hong Kong women's movement took place. One of the most important and foundational initiatives was the establishment of the Council for Women in 1947 by the wife of the governor. The working committee of the council was composed of middle class women of white and Chinese ethnicity who were educated overseas. The Council aimed at advocating equality for women in the society, in particular, with concern for rapes committed against women after wartime and women's health and victimization. These concerns led to the set-up of the first women's centre and the first women's refuge (華南研究資料中心, 2000; The Harmony House, 2006). The establishment of both the women's centre and the Harmony House marked a milestone in the history of women services, particularly in the field of domestic violence.

The general orientation of the Council for Women deliberately disassociated itself from the collective ideological struggles that underpinned 'Western' version of feminism (Cheung, 1989). The 'bra burning image', polarization of men and women, the emphasis on women's individuality, liberation from family burdens and confrontational strategies against male domination were all eliminated from the agenda in the early local women's movement. It was argued that 'grassroots women' were not ready for radical approaches in asserting their rights, self-worth, and equality. The adapted version of feminism in the Hong Kong Chinese context even legitimised abandoning the radical/ideological struggles against male domination with the prevalent acceptance of patriarchy. By contrast, the 'Western' experiences showed that submissiveness and subordination to male/male domination were the root cause of women's victimization, which demanded collective ideological struggles in order to remediate (Willis, 1984).

In contradiction with the espoused rejection of individualism, I concur that the adapted version of feminism which was adopted in Hong Kong in fact aggravated the individualistic approach in addressing gender inequality. By reviewing the articles written by the chairperson of the Council for Women, the documents of the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), website of the Hong Kong Association of University Women, 20 years review of the Harmony House (the first women shelter in Hong Kong) and articles relevant to Hong Kong women's movements, three factors are identified to have attributed to the local twists and the huge service provider-user divide. The factors are namely 'pragmatic integration of the West in the East', 'taking care of the grassroots', and 'accommodation to the academic and cultural turns'.

The pragmatic integration of the West in the Hong Kong Eastern culture was argued in Cheung's article in which she said 'in terms of organizational structure, feminist ideology prescribes egalitarian decision-making processes and non-hierarchical structures. These values and practices need to be modified and adapted to the Hong Kong community' (p.105). She cited local surveys and experiences of the councils' staff as evidence for women's rejection of individualism and the liberation agenda advocated in the West. In order to avoid criticisms of western imperialism, elitism and being an irrelevant western import, the women's centre in Hong Kong established by the Council for Women took up 'a more pragmatic rather than a fundamentalist stand on feminism'. It took on a community approach in promoting women's equality by generally shifting the focus to development of personal competence, access to resources, and basic health promotion. I contend, rather than rejecting individualism, the consequence of shifting from collective social action to personal competence development reinforced the individual approach in driving 'advocacy' for gender equality and in providing services for unequally treated women.

As previously mentioned, the women's services and movement in Hong Kong were initiated by middle-class women (white expatriates or women who were educated overseas), and liberation/emancipation/ideological struggles were not felt important and were not prioritized in the advocacy for women's equal rights. Even though the Council for Women successfully advocated for the abolition of the legally sanctioned polygamous marriage system, the development of inheritance rights of women, and maternal benefits, Cheung (1989) openly admitted that the rejection of the 'polarization' of men and women strongly influenced the approach in combating domestic violence in Hong Kong. Even though EMERGE (a feminism informed batterer intervention programme which relies on Cognitive Behavioural Intervention) is currently part of Harmony House's services, collective ideological struggles/actions are still off the service map. The Harmony House, as the first shelter funded by the Council of Women, carries on the remedial-based, crisis intervention orientation of the Council in offering refuge and support to abused women (華南研究資料中心, 2000). The framework remains prominent in Hong Kong's domestic violence services.

The charitable and benevolent notion of 'taking care of the grassroots' prevailing in the early stage of women's movement ironically strengthened elitism and increased the

power differential between the service providing end (middle-class educated women) and the service receiving end (women from the grassroots). The espoused avoidance of elitism was not realized. This also led to the split in opinions of the service providing end and 'grass-roots' women users, on how to eliminate violence against women. In 1990, a stronger taste of bottom-up women advocacy in the field of domestic violence services was first noticed, at the emergence of the first grass-root women-led survivors group in Hong Kong. That was Kwan Fook (The Harmony House, 2006). Kwan Fook was founded by a group of women refugees in the Harmony House. It worked as a monitoring body, which made cases to accentuate the weaknesses and flaws of social policies, policing, and social work practices in relation to domestic violence. Some of its outstanding achievements include its active role in revealing the lack of coordination among professional bodies in handling cases of battered spouses in the Tin Shui Wai tragedy 2004<sup>3</sup>, and persistent participation in advocating the revision of the population policy that barred new immigrants from receiving social assistance in their first 7 years of residence (Peace Women Across The Globe). Kwan Fook also participated in many research projects carried out by local universities, and their participation in research works resembled so much of the previous emancipatory research, as discussed by Beresford (2005).

Dunn (2004) claimed that the success of feminist movement in the West needed flexible alliance with other local resistances and women groups. Kwan Fook, since its establishment, has always actively allied with other organizations in promoting social equality and improvements of domestic violence services. However, the lack of synergy among local women groups, in supporting participation of abused women, is speculated to have attributed to the scarcity of survivor-run service in Hong Kong. In the 1990s, Kwan Fook could have allied with an advocacy based women's group, the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), for stronger collaboration and synergy. However, the AAF experienced a cultural turn in mid and late 1990s. During that period of time, most of its effort was on 'gender education and other kinds of educational activities organized for high school students, university students, social workers, and teachers' (AWID Women's Rights, 2008). The enthusiasm for publishing literatures about women's experiences and gender related research predominantly led the organizational orientation of AAF in the 2000s. Meanwhile, Yin Ngai Society, another influential

---

<sup>3</sup> It happened in April 2004. In which, the father killed the twin daughters and his wife before fatally injuring himself.

grassroots women group, did not share the same objectives for women advocacy, rendering a lack of synergy among local women's groups in promoting participation of abused women in policy making and social service delivery. Even though there were prominent grass-roots women organizations at the time, the Hong Kong Women's Christian Council and the Hong Kong Women Workers Association, their major focus was on promoting equality of women within the Christian faith or at work (Tsang, 1995). Until now, Kwan Fook is still the only grassroots women-led domestic violence survivor group in Hong Kong; meanwhile, it prioritizes immediate support for women who have just left their abusive relationships (they are called *New Sisters*) over confronting patriarchy and women's subordination that cause and sustain intimate partner violence against them. Throughout the years, Kwan Fook has rarely initiated studies on domestic violence and its relationship with patriarchy in Hong Kong.

Abused women's insufficient participation and their invisibility in the Hong Kong domestic violence services mirror the 'modest' or 'underachievement' of the women's movement in Hong Kong. Both the lack of coherent gendered ideology in the women's movement and the dearth of synergy for supporting survivor-led services inhibit the intimate partner violence movement from thriving in Hong Kong. Although gender perspective was more advocated in the 1980s and 1990s, it was more in the form of literatures, arts, and research studies, which primarily address the issue of income inequality, women's labour, and sexuality. The scarcity of survivor-run services inevitably limits the flexibility of Kwan Fook in making useful alliances in combating intimate partner violence. Abused women who fail in seeking help from formal services could only resort to Kwan Fook which has been restrained to comply with the dominant 'crisis-based' and 'victim-first' orientation within limited resources. The lack of participation of abused women in Hong Kong is also evident given the absence of abused women or their representatives in domestic violence policy making in Hong Kong (The Civic Party, 2006).

### **1.3 The quest for professional accountability**

Professional competence of social workers dealing with domestic violence cases was brought into question by failing to protect both the mother and the young children in the Tin Shui Wai Tragedy. The repeated reporting and calls for help, both recorded and unrecorded, of the victim, Kam Shuk Ying, revealed the lack of adherence to the

guidelines by professionals (Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, 2004). The unfolding of the case also disclosed patriarchal values embedded in the Police, as well as the discriminatory attitudes of human professionals towards new immigrants (Hong Kong Christian Service, 2004; Wu, 2004). Since then, domestic violence social work has been subjected to stricter monitoring for ensuring their compliance to the procedural guidelines. Kwan Fook is also a dedicated monitoring body, which has been working with cases that the formal services fail to protect, to make a case for accentuating the problems and loopholes of formal services. Kwan Fook effortlessly holds domestic violence social workers accountable for protection failures.

The ineffectiveness of domestic violence services is no longer tolerable in the increasing demand for professional accountability. Lacking multi-disciplinary coordination is seen as particularly fatal after the Tin Shui Wai Tragedy. Although multi-disciplinary coordination had been recognized by the HKSAR government as crucial for tackling domestic violence, the tragedy revealed that the police and social workers did not actually coordinate according to the guidelines<sup>4</sup>. Failures in adhering to the guidelines and in coordination were found to lead to failures in protecting victims in the Tin Shui Wai Tragedy. The brutality of the tragedy shocked the public, and led to the revision of the *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases* in May of the same year (Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, 2004). In the *Report of Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai (2004)*, a lot more suggestions were made to improve local-central and inter-disciplinary coordination, in order to better protect battered spouses and children. To enhance service coordination, the *Report* also recognised the effort for transforming existing social services into Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSC) as crucial for protection and handling complex cases. Child Protective Units were also transformed into Family and Child Protective Units (FCPSUs) - specialized units for handling serious domestic violence cases within the social service system.

In addition to the questionable competence of protection services, domestic violence social workers are, with no exception, facing challenges caused by the growing managerial culture in social services. Managerial culture in social services became

---

<sup>4</sup> The *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases* was first published in 1996 by the Working Group on Battered Spouses, to guide the Police, social workers and other human professionals in combating domestic violence. It was first revised after the Tin Shui Wai Tragedy, and was revised again in 2009 to coordinate with the latest change in the Domestic Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189) for including homosexual partners in the scope of protection. The title of the guidelines was changed to mirror the legal amendment, giving rise to the *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases (revised 2009)*.

prominent in Hong Kong after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997. Hong Kong's economy was badly affected by the crisis, and the annual growth of local revenue was reduced to a point that the recurrent expansion of social welfare expenditure caused concern (Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR, 2000). The public's rising demand for quality social services and effective use of public funds led to social welfare reform in 2001. A new mode of subvention, named as 'Lump Sum Grant Subvention System' (LSGSS), was introduced by the Social Welfare Department. It was claimed to increase flexibility and autonomy for NGOs to deliver and re-engineer their services to accommodate the changing social needs (Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee, 2008). Needless to say, alongside this new funding scheme, many more control and monitoring measures were introduced to ensure the outcome of the services. LSGSS was also featured by Funding and Service Agreements (FSAs)<sup>5</sup> and Service Quality Standards (SQSs)<sup>6</sup>, which were managerial measures added onto the existing Service Performance Monitoring System for ensuring service outcomes. These new measures shifted the focus on input control to output control (p. 3). In the review of LSGSS published in 2008, the focus on output control was stiffened by the emphasis on reviewing accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness in the use of public funds under LSGSS.

#### **1.4 Cooperation is a timely response**

The individualistic approach, service provider-user divide, and lack of participation of abused women are what characterize domestic violence services in Hong Kong nowadays, and this has marginalized the needs of abused women. Abused women's needs are narrowly defined by policy makers and service providers alone, and are restricted by a focus on 'crisis intervention'. Supporting services are primarily materialistic and relief-based (i.e. housing, financial assistance, limited childcare and family services<sup>7</sup>). Abused women are presumed to be isolated and all-capable individuals who could naturally restore their 'normal' lives if their individual survival needs are met. Restrained by these understandings, domestic violence services in Hong Kong fail to acknowledge abused

---

<sup>5</sup> It stipulates the workload that the subvented service units must fulfil in order to obtain funding from the government. Statistics about their workload have to be well kept in order to enable official auditing.

<sup>6</sup> It sets out how the subvented service units would be assessed in respect of service information provision, service management, service users, and service users' rights. 16 criteria of assessment are detailed in the official documents: [http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/assmt16\\_e/guide.pdf](http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/assmt16_e/guide.pdf) (retrieved on 25 June 2014)

<sup>7</sup> According to the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Cases of Intimate Partner Violence (2008), family services would stop when violence subsides.

women's social, psychological and parental needs in the post-separation stage. It echoes with the virtual absence of post-separation services for abused women in Hong Kong.

Cooperation is argued to be a timely response to alleviate the ineffectiveness of Hong Kong domestic violence services. The tremendous effort in improving multi-disciplinary coordination and integrating domestic violence services is recognized to have enhanced service quality and outputs. However, ironically, effort in building social work practitioners-users cooperation is still unseen in Hong Kong domestic violence services. I concur this particular form of cooperation is helpful in minimizing elitism and the practitioner-user divide that hinder collaborative knowledge building. On the one hand it generates useful knowledge for re-engineering services that meet the changing needs of abused women and their children, while on the other hand it brings about synergy for the abused women's movement and participation.

This research is an effort to develop cooperation and equal participation in the field of domestic violence service. In Chapter 2, I review literatures on SUCP in the field of domestic violence services and the challenges and opportunities facing it in the UK context. After that, I will present Hong Kong's local experiences of women's participation in domestic violence services in order to highlight the peculiar problems SUCP may encounter in Hong Kong. The particular shape of women's participation in Hong Kong reinforces marginalization of abused women in the rise of managerialism in social services. In order to relocate abused women back to the centre of not just social work knowledge production and service delivery, but also of society, the concepts of 'self' and 'autonomy' are re-introduced from the relational lens. It helps us to see the close-knitted relationship between the welfare of abused women and their sons/daughters, and the importance of 'children' participation in a collaborative social work practice research endeavour.

To translate the good intention into practice, this thesis offers a social work practice-research model for collaborating with formerly abused women and their teenage sons/daughters in Hong Kong, in exploring problems, devising solutions and working together to solve their post-separation needs. This methodological innovation, Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI), is elucidated in relation to social work research in Chapter 3. It provides a framework for democratizing social work knowledge building,



and to develop propositional knowledge<sup>8</sup> that is grounded in the personal as well as collective experiences of all participants in the inquiry group. This form of propositional knowledge is found to be more accessible for both practitioner-researcher and participant-researchers. Hence, it is also easier to translate into practices that could be carried out, sustained and improved by members of the group. In Chapter 4, culturally and historically-specific practices of sisterhood and familialism are articulated and found to have influenced the formation of co-participative relationships in this inquiry. Formerly abused women are banked on the identity of ‘sister’, which is underpinned by family making practices, to develop we-ness and display a community of practice. Meanwhile, ‘(trans)forming identities’ and ‘partnership making’ are argued to be mutually constitutive processes that give this particular inquiry community a shape, ‘a family-like community of practice’. A model of three layers of participation is also constructed in Chapter 3 that could serve as an alternative framework for understanding participatory practices other than ‘degree of participation’ or ‘forms of user participation’.

In Chapter 5, the process of ‘(trans)forming identities’ is illustrated with the locally built theory of **“locating victim-chungsangje<sup>9</sup>”** and **“care and service rendering”**. In this chapter, formerly abused women’s needs for departing victimhood and entering survivorhood (‘chungsangje’) are elaborated. These needs were expressed through continuous construction of identities and adjustment in care and service rendering within the group. Apart from this, I further explore the problematic nature of victim-survivor dichotomy, and suggest practitioner-researchers make better use of their historically disenthralled position to infrastructure room for differences/disagreements/unintelligibility in the process of sense making and identity construction.

In Chapter 6, the focus will be on ‘partnership making’ with teenage participants who are children of women participants in this inquiry. The power difference embedded in the mother-child relationship is unveiled in this chapter, to cast light on teenage sons and daughters’ demand for equal partnership in delivering daily care and handling family

---

<sup>8</sup> Heron (1996) uses conceptual knowing interchangeably with ‘propositional knowing’ which means the knowledge making process that is conducted through conceptualization and linking of concepts.

<sup>9</sup> This translation is chosen to highlight that formerly abused women are ‘reborn’ to live a life with strength, dignity, and beauty. This choice is made between ‘Chung Sang Je’ and ‘Heng Chuen Jia’(倖存者); where the latter means people left alive after disaster. ‘Heng Chuen Jia’ is not chosen because it was said to render their effort in making a new life a consequence of luck.

problems. Another locally built theory, **“from “being cared” to “equal partners”**”, will be presented to demonstrate how the pursuit of equal partnership between abused mothers and their teenage sons and daughters could alter the ownership of family problems and the distribution of responsibility. This theory illuminates the potential for collaboration between abused mothers and their teenage sons/daughters in providing care in the post-separation period. Instead of seeing teenage sons/daughters (under 15) as essentially dependent and immature care receivers, they are more able and happy to contribute for the betterment of both themselves and their mothers. Partnering with teenage children in service design and delivery can unleash more synergy in family support and filial intimacy rebuilding.

Chapter 7 discusses how this Cooperative Grounded Inquiry brings a new light to abused women’s participation in domestic violence services, and to alleviate the problems of the currently child-centred or victim-centred frameworks (Hanson & Patel, 2013). Riding on the challenges and opportunities presented in Service User and Carer Participation (SUCP), Cooperative Grounded Inquiry shows its potential to bridge the service provider-user gap and unleash more synergy in achieving social work professional accountability, in the pursuit of which, I further suggest that re-considering ‘effectiveness’ and ‘ethics’ is necessary. Implications for post-separation domestic violence services are also delineated in the latter half of Chapter 7. Opening space for identity construction, constructing partnership, and transforming child/women care plans into collaborative care projects are contended to be helpful in breaking the victim-survivor dichotomy, remediating marginalization of abused women, and transforming mother-son/daughter relationship in post-separation care.

---

### Literature Review

---

#### 2.1 Introduction

This research follows the logic of 'emergence' entailed in Grounded Theory Methodology so as to maximize the potential for originality and generation of local theories (propositional knowing). It prioritizes examining the local concerns of participants over finding theoretical gap in extant literature, and generation of local knowledge with participants over applying external theoretical concepts in explaining participants' lived realities. In this regard, the first round of the literature review carried out before field work is primarily on 'social work research', 'user and carer participation', methodology and its application in working with abused women; while the literature review of the 'substantive field' (intimate partner violence and post-separation live) is 'delayed' and majorly carried out alongside the generation of local theories to ensure its relevance and fitness to the data (Dunne, 2011). The degree of relevance of literature is judged by how it can enrich an understanding of the locally constructed knowledge in this Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI). Choice of substantive areas for the literature review is made according to the substantive concerns (core categories) constructed in this inquiry, i.e. 'achieving changes together on equal footing', 'reconstructing victim-chungsangje identities' and 'building partnership with teenage sons/daughters'.

The selection of literature is thus judged on its relevance, practicality and workability in relation to the locally articulated experiences/identified problems. It differs from the conventional literature review which usually serves as a process for the identification of the theoretical/research gap in the substantive area prior to the fieldwork. In this regard, the literature review undertaken alongside the fieldwork in this research could be seen as a strategy to draw the academy closer into the participants' everyday lives and cultures, through translating academic knowledge into practical solutions. Alternately, the conventional literature review is to bring participants into the academy by utilising practical and experiential knowledge of participants to address the theoretical/research

gaps<sup>10</sup>. Although the logic of 'emergence' preserved the room for generating practical relevance of academic literature and research to local problems, it is inadequate in guaranteeing the research could address the latest presented theoretical/research gaps in the intimate partner violence study. This problem became more visible in the writing up process because the practitioner-researcher had to fulfil the demands of the academic field where achieving research credibility through demonstrating a contribution to new knowledge of the substantive field is prioritised over local practical relevance. Due to the field differences and the logic of emergence, the onus rests on the practitioner-researcher in drawing out the academic contribution from the possibly mixed and not necessarily coherent findings and literatures in the writing up stage. Participation of women and their teenage sons/daughters became very limited in the literature review throughout the inquiry.

Although employing a literature review to inform the arrival and development of theories in advance of data collection was deliberately avoided, this thesis is also aware of the fact that no experienced researcher will be a 'theoretical virgin' of a substantive field. Reflexivity is hence the major tool for making the pre-learnt concepts and knowledge visible in the production of local knowledge. Although the literature review was largely carried out after fieldwork in actual practice, it is presented in front of findings in this thesis, so as to contextualize and help identify the need for further research in the area of social work practice research with formerly abused women and their teenage sons/daughter in domestic violence service design and delivery in Hong Kong.

This literature review will first cover the challenges and opportunities faced by Service User and Carer Participation (SUCP) in domestic violence services, followed by deliberation on participation of abused women in Hong Kong's domestic violence services. I will also try to show how the unique trajectory of the abused women's movement has fortified the domination of a victim-survivor dichotomy, the pertinence of which may restrict our understanding of abused women's diverse lived experiences, and mar women's development of personhood. It also renders the needs for post-separation

---

<sup>10</sup> Shaw and Holland (2014) raised an example about how children were trained with research skills by university researchers for doing research with their children peers. It is to illustrate how participants are brought into academy through research training. By drawing on the distinction of 'taking academy closer to participants' and 'taking participants to academy', doing conventional literature review in this participatory action research could be seen as the latter, through training women and teenage participants with theoretical and research literacy, so as to fill out the theoretical/research gaps.

domestic violence services invisible. Due to the participation of teenage sons/daughters in this inquiry, this chapter will also cover literature on 'children's rights and participation' and how domestic violence services address the care and protection needs of both women and their children in the post-separation stage.

## **2.2 User participation in practice: In the field of domestic violence services, the challenges and opportunities**

There are two major driving forces identified in the literature that have led to profound advances in participation of abused women in domestic violence services (Beresford, 2000; Beresford, 2005). They are: the feminist movement in the 1970s, and the user involvement movement in domestic violence services in the last three decades. The former aroused the public interest in gender politics by explicating how patriarchy affects the life of men and women and confines women's participation within male dominance. The latter represents the rise of awareness of consumers' rights as social service users; the results have led to thriving survivors' forums in the domestic violence services. The two initiatives are translated into two directions of women survivor participation - the democratic model and consumerist model - in today's user participation movement in policy and service making in the UK. These two trends of user participation in domestic violence services are also notable in Hong Kong. The consumerist model is commonly practised in women shelters, which regularly collect users' opinions for service evaluations, whereas democratic model is identifiable in local women advocacy that has contributed to revealing the truths of the Tin Shui Wai tragedy that marked a milestone for the development of governmental responses to domestic violence. However, neither model of user involvement is ideal because the consumerist model is irrelevant to the ceasing of professional hegemony, and could plausibly confine users in the service receiving end; whereas self-advocacy fails to provide a platform for social workers and abused women to collaborate, which is crucial for the integration of diverse situated knowledge and improvement of domestic violence services.

### ***2.2.1 The challenges faced by abused women's participation in domestic violence service***

Service user and carer participation (SUCP) has been criticized by Carey (2009) for continuing the professional hegemony, and serving the interests of the government and the social care market. The effects of consumerism and tokenism, in fact, have been

worrying scholars since the 1990s (Croft and Beresford, 1996), and continue to cause concern in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hague, Mullender and Aris, 2003; Hague and Mullender, 2006; Hague, 2006; Beresford, 2006; Carey, 2009). The current SUCP looks like a resurrection of the 'outdated male-tailored garment' (Davies, 1998, cited in Carey, 2009, p 180), which ostensibly encourages participation of different forms of knowledge making but continuously marginalizes feminine forms of participation. According to Reason (2004), the ideal form of participation should be a searching process for critical, but all-flourishing, participatory relationships with all forms of creatures in the world. Conversely, modernity and the expanding managerial culture in social services tend to sustain 'male' linear mind-based rationality and suppress the more 'feminine' and all-flourishing element of participation. The overemphasis on cost-effectiveness in today's SUCP is inherently contradictory to the principle of survivors' participation, which 'cannot be done on the cheap' (Hague & Mullender, 2006, p. 579). Without reflecting on the philosophy, assumptions, and theoretical frameworks held in practising women survivor participation, 'dialogues' and 'participation' between social work practitioners and women survivors could be just rhetoric, and risks sustaining patriarchy and oppression against non-linear knowledge making.

The rooting of SUCP in consumerism is problematic because this confines women survivors to the role of consumers who have no power to decide and design their own services. Under the consumerist framework, women survivors participate for the purposes of evaluating service effectiveness and to comment on service responsiveness and cost-effectiveness (Hague, Mullender and Aris, 2003). Whether survivors' opinions are respected, heard, and adopted in future service provision is not guaranteed, but is largely determined by members of the social service agencies. Among good examples of user forums, success is dependent on the acceptability of women's ideas 'by' social service agencies. The more survivors' ideas were adopted, the more likely survivors found the forums useful and felt themselves to have real participation in policy/service making (Hague, 2006; Hague and Mullender, 2006). Therefore, Hague and Mullender (2006) commented that, in many cases, this form of collaboration between social work practitioners and women survivors was set to fail due to the tokenistic approach of social service agencies; although Beresford was still optimistic for the value of the consumerist model if it was carefully practised to challenge tokenism (Beresford, 2002).

Contradictorily, tokenistic attitudes and manners in consulting the survivors' forum are fairly unanimously agreed to be destructive to survivors' participation (Beresford, 2000; Hague, Mullender and Aris, 2003; Hague and Mullender, 2006; Hague, 2006). Tokenistic 'participation' is a disguise that treats women as a means to justify the work done by the practitioners. Women usually find this form of participation unreal because they realize their inability to take control over the services concerning their life chances. Real participation has to be achieved through challenging any intention that reinforces top-down and disempowering practices (Reason, 1994); moreover, bottom-up knowledge and decision making systems co-constructed with participants are crucial in achieving more participatory practitioner-abused women collaboration in social work practice research. Chapter 3 details how CGI facilitated the construction of local knowledge with formerly abused women and their teenage children. It helped build up competence and practices to meet their post-separation needs.

Rather than being a panacea for tackling marginalization of abused women in domestic violence services, empirical studies show that survivor-run services are not necessarily participatory. The biggest challenge to participation faced by survivor-run services is to 'keep doing something different from the mainstreamed managerial culture of service provision and undemocratic leadership' (Hague, Mullender and Aris, 2003). Particularly for services stably funded and successfully mainstreamed, the strengthening managerial culture in social services and social policies is found to haunt survivors' participation as well as the practitioner-abused women collaboration. Hague and Mullender found that even in shelter services, which are recognized as the most satisfying services in terms of survivor participation, women survivors are far less permitted to participate in service management than in the past. Nonetheless, the idealization of survivor-run services possibly comes from ignorance of the power dynamics and differentials embedded in sisterhood. Sisterhood does not denote equality but consists of imbalanced relationships like mother-daughter and old-young (one aged about 80 and the majority were in their thirties or forties); also the experienced-inexperienced, the resourceful-deprived, and the known-unknown were displayed in this inquiry (see Appendix 4.4). Phillips (1991) also noted that 'friendship' accompanied with sisterhood may take differences and disagreements underground.

Compared to increasing managerialism in stably funded survivor-led services, Hong Kong domestic violence services suffer more from the dearth of survivor-led services and the lack of synergy in abused women movements. As I argue in Chapter 1, the demotivation seen in abused women's participation in Hong Kong is partially attributable to historical reasons, such as the absence of ideological consensus and the culture/research turn of the prominent women's group in the 1990s; meanwhile, polarization of social work practitioners and abused women enrooted in the traditional 'democratic model' of user participation further strips off the possibility of practitioner-user cooperation by positioning users in a monitoring role to formal social services. The polarization per se accentuates alienation and hierarchical practices. It would be more helpful to create a community of practice that draws together stakeholders, i.e. social workers and survivors, for solving problems that concern them in the field of domestic violence. The collaborations in this research shed light on the importance of developing a Community of Practice (CoP) with different stakeholders, so that we could regain synergy in revealing and solving problems that concern participants' life chances (see Chapter 4).

### ***2.2.2 Participation and marginalization of abused women in domestic violence services in Hong Kong***

Unmistakably, the Council for Women, which funded the first women refuge, played a crucial role in the wider women's movement and the starting up of domestic violence services in Hong Kong. Its emphasis on individual empowerment and retreat from ideological confrontations was later criticized for neglecting the structural pressure faced by most women in their daily lives (Tsang, 1995). It also carried a tendency to reinforce the 'victim' image of abused women, by ignoring the issue of male power but highlighting the misery of abused women and their needs for 'help'. Particularly in the 1970s, when the second generation of Chinese migrants had grown and became active in promoting women's liberation, the Council's perceived rejection of promoting individuality and its strong adherence to family were no longer unequivocally agreed.

Since the 1980s, more women were educated and being active in women's associations for promoting gender equality and confronting patriarchy. Their dissensions towards the obsolete community or individual empowerment approach in dealing with oppression against women and domestic violence came to the surface. The dissensions probably



contributed to the flourishing of gender studies, while some shared an interest in how Chinese patriarchy caused intimate partner violence against women. The concept of 'face'<sup>11</sup>, Confucian culture, and the concern with women's virtues (婦德) were proposed by Yeun-Tsang and Sung-Chan (2005) and Tang (1999) as strongly associated with women's submissiveness and the shaping women's experience of domestic violence. Rising attention was paid to the possible marginalization of abused women in domestic violence service reforms and housing arrangements (Chan & Lam, 2005; Chan & Chan, 2003).

Without radical feminism's challenges to male domination embedded in daily life in Hong Kong, gender inequality in family and intimate partner violence cases are not sufficiently visible to the public. Ellen Willis discussed radical feminism's contribution in mapping sexual politics in the public agenda (1984). The unchallenged gender inequality in Hong Kong is reflected in abused women's help seeking process in which the welfare of abused women is perceived as secondary when child abuse co-occurs (Chan & Lam, 2005). Despite their victimization at home, they are required to be strong enough to protect children from all the harms and risks. In these cases, women who conform to the traditional domestic and submissive women image would find themselves incongruent in personhood that consists of a strong and self-led image. Hence, abused women are suffering from a double-bind situation formulated by the contradictory demands, one from the traditional Chinese culture and the other from the child-focused domestic violence services. To leave, women have to break away from certain valuable cultural links with their female identity; to stay, women are subject to vigorous criticisms from peer survivors and child protective workers. This double-bind situation has become a unique form of victimization experienced by abused women in our local context.

Furthermore, domestic violence services in Hong Kong are insensitive and unprepared for challenging patriarchy and marginalization of abused women in our society. The governmental preventive measures against domestic violence principally focus on encouraging 'family solidarity', 'family and individual resilience', 'joint parental responsibilities of divorced parents', and help seeking of victims, next to advertising the

---

<sup>11</sup>Face (面子): The public image particularly refers to proper public images according to traditional Chinese virtues, of the individual, couples, and the whole family.

available legal and social services for handling domestic violence (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2013). The three-pronged approach (i.e. preventive, supportive, and specialized services), despite the inconsistency revealed in different governmental documents, locates crisis intervention and combats of crime in the centre of domestic violence policy in Hong Kong (Lee, 2009; Legislative Council Secretariat, 2013). Once abused women are housed either in private rental housing or public housing, cases would be terminated because 'spouse battering elements have subsided'. In this regard, abused women who have left the matrimonial home and petitioned divorce are the most unattended in Hong Kong domestic violence services. The Harmony House was aware of the needs of formerly abused women, and then started developing 'after shelter services' and survivor volunteer groups to care for the emotional and adaptation needs of women who have left the shelter. Disappointingly, the good intention was not effectively translated into practice due to austerity (Harmony House, 2007). For social work follow-up services provided by the case manager, they are usually administrative and mostly concerned with welfare application. Long term recovery services for abused women and their children are virtually absent in Hong Kong. The underdeveloped follow-up services in Hong Kong could be understood as the absence of abused women's voices in the domestic violence services which are unable to listen to the outcry of women survivors who are struggling with their life outside the abusive relationship. Lived experiences of abused women, their knowledge about their needs and capabilities to evaluate the suitability of services are apparently ignored or exploited by top-down public service design.

Distinctive hardship and social isolation were also identified in abused women who were single mothers, new arrivals, and homosexuals in Hong Kong (Ho & Kong, 2010 ). Weiss and Berger (2008) pointed out that immigration experience could be potentially stressful and even traumatic due to multiple losses of familiarity with 'physical and cultural environment, economic and social status and resources, language and identity, as well as a sense of community' (p.93). With a rise of cross-border marriage and an increasing number of non-resident partners of Hong Kong permanent residents migrating to Hong Kong on the grounds of family reunion, the marginalization of new arrival abused women deserves more concern. The Harmony House announced a figure of women new arrivals accounting for 80% of total domestic violence cases in the shelter (Wenweipo, 2007). However, the accumulating tension between China and Hong Kong has bred stronger

negative labels on new immigrants, for example, 'locusts', for criticizing their dependence on social welfare (Ho & Kong, 2010). It was found in Ho and Kong's research that abusers were enabled to continue their subordination, control, and manipulation after separation by utilizing the negative labels attached to new arrivals.

Instead of transcending this particular victimhood constructed around abused women, Hong Kong domestic violence policy reproduces it by putting all its weight on crisis intervention while seeing leaving as cessation of traumas and the need for help. The framework for domestic violence services in Hong Kong reflects Nissim-Sabat's (2009) conceptualization of individualistic victimhoods, V-1, V-2 and V-3<sup>12</sup>. The emphasis on crisis intervention succeeds the concept of V-3, which assumes that victims of domestic violence are entrapped by the victim mentality and victimizing environment, i.e. psychological entrapment, learnt helplessness, Stockholm syndrome, and structural oppression, that render them no choice to live otherwise (Bograd, 1988; Hydén, 1999; Hydén, 2005). The termination of support and assistance after leaving suggests that help should NOT be rendered to 'survivors' because they are able to choose otherwise and be responsible for their own lives (Nye, 1978; Johnson, 1992; Herbert et al., 1991). This service approach presumes the restoration of self-sufficiency and individualism, which allow women to make rational choices in their own rights after separation. This survivor concept is synonymous to V-2, which assumes that victims have the choice to be something else even though they are coerced in their lives, and those who choose to be victimized are also those to blame (Nissim-Sabat, 2009). Unsurprisingly, formerly abused women, eager to depart from victimhood, would find the reproduction of victimhood daunting because it restrains their construction of alternative identities in relation to their experiences of being abused, and refrained them from organizing their lives and practices in a non-victim way. Moreover, the victimhood constructed around abused women in the modern capitalist society yields the victim and survivor identities, both of which rest on the pursuit of self-sufficient individualism, whereas failure to maintain such would be sanctioned with blame and self-doubts.

---

<sup>12</sup> V-1 refers to victims of 'natural disasters' that could happen to anyone; V-2 refers to victims subjected to 'self-imposed suffering' by either inherited or socially inherited 'deficiencies' or 'victim mentality'; and V3 is a victimhood constructed as the victim-blaming tendency in V-2, claiming that victimization of abused women originates from the victimizers but not women's deficiencies/mentality. Hence, intimate partner violence could happen to anyone.

At a time when accountability has become unprecedentedly important in today's social work practice (Fischer, 1978), along with the pursuit of effectiveness, domestic violence social work has to properly address this multi-layer marginalization of abused women in Hong Kong, such as their underrepresentation in women activism, the lack of survivor run services, the prevalence of victimhood discourse, and the negative social labelling, in order to achieve a fuller version of accountability.

### **2.3 Intimate partner violence as a social practice of coercive control: A stronger need for participation and the development of 'relational autonomy'**

The relational approach affords us an anchorage in understanding the concept of 'autonomy', while precluding self-sufficient individualism. It informs us that participation and coercion-free construction of identities are the foundation for democratic knowledge making because pure knowledge is not intrinsically privileged. However, it is extraordinarily difficult for these two social practices to be prompted and sustained in social relationships that are regulated by coercive control, such as intimate partner violence. Coercive control learnt within intimate partner violence could be reproduced in other social arenas where abused women are situated, such as a survivors' group or a CGI group. In this regard, Stark's scholarship on coercive control could shed light on the nature of this oppression against and its potential effects on participation and the development of autonomy.

Stark (2007) recognized that intimate partner violence could not be fully comprehended as discrete physical violent incidents but was a pattern of coercion and control enmeshed in the everyday life of abused women. His coercive control model poses criticisms to the traditional 'violence model' for relying on the calculation of incidental injuries in conceiving the degree of devastation caused on abused women (Stark, 2013). The discrete incidental perspective that prevails in the current legal system, social policy, and social work practices is incapable of seeing the 'cumulative influence' of 'patterned' coercion and control on women in an abusive controlling relationship. The latest revision, in March 2013, on the official definition of domestic violence in the UK, to include 'any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, (and) coercive...behaviors', reflects a pioneering initiative to properly address the problem of coercive control in intimate partner violence (Home Office, 2013).

*'These data suggest that abuse is typically a chronic rather than an acute problem, that the pattern is the appropriate target for assessment and intervention, not a discrete episode; and that the related harms are cumulative rather than incident-specific' (Stark, 2013, pp. 19-20)*

Stark's scholarship not only highlights the limitations of an incident-based framework, but also strongly implies the importance of 'personhood' development in resisting coercive control. He suggested that restoration of 'autonomy' and 'independence' was equally important as safety in domestic violence social work intervention (Stark, 2013; 2007). He particularly pointed out that control was the most likely ignored dimension in intimate partner violence (composed of coercion and control); while he quoted David Adams, a founder of one of the first perpetrator programs in the USA, in defining control as acts 'that cause the victim to do something she does not want to do, prevents her from doing something she wants to do, or causes her to be afraid... regardless of whether assault is involved' (p.22). Hence, eradicating coercive controlling strategies/technologies, namely isolation, deprivation, exploitation and regulation, has paramount importance (Banks, 2014; Stark, 2013). These strategies/technologies were found to create women's dependence on their male partners, so that they would be entrapped within the control perpetrated by the abusers. Thereby, rebuilding 'autonomy' is not just an ethical pursuit, but also a safety strategy that promotes discovery and utilization of strengths and available social and tangible resources to solve problems.

However, as previously discussed, the unexamined concept of 'autonomy' or 'independence' can be victim-blaming if it fails to acknowledge the relational nature of human beings and to recognize that autonomy requires a relationship context to nurture and sustain. This is particularly detrimental to abused women who fail in managing independent living and accomplishing flawless protective mothering after separation. In this regard, we have to take the value of Stark's scholarship on board with meticulous care in the aid of the relational lens.

By considering intimate partner violence as a social practice of coercive control, our attention is broadened to examine how coercion and control are reproduced in daily practices that disable and marginalize women in constructing their personhood, including identities, preferences, understandings, and ways of saying and doing things. Without scrutinizing the perpetuation of coercive control in different social arenas, we may lose

sight of acknowledging the continual damage on women's personhood within and outside the abusive relationship. Ordinary daily life could contain coercive controlling practices employed in the abusive relationship for securing and expanding a privileged position, in which a regime of domination in personal life through a course of self-interested behaviour is established (Stark, 2013, p. 21). Failing to see coercive control as a social practice which could be easily reproduced in daily life, e.g. parenting, sisterhooding and domestic violence social work practices, we may unconsciously collude with the abusers in repressing women's development of personhood and autonomy, violating both the ethics of care and justice.

The multi-layered marginalization of formerly abused women in Hong Kong renders the (re)construction of personhood and its implications multi-faceted. Building personhood may involve (re)construction of 'identities' which allows formerly abused women to recognize not only their beauty, strengths, capabilities and hopes, but also their diverse ways of relating to their ex-partners, their children and the larger society in helpful ways. As the relational approach suggests, formation of identity is also formation of relations with the 'outside world'; through which we make sense of realities and coordinate our actions. Schatzki (1996) pointed out that social practices are sites for identity construction and actualization of their 'selves'. This further supports focus shift to social practices as a site for research and social change.

### ***2.3.1 The construction of victim, survivor and the '-'***

The emergence of 'victimhood' in domestic violence literature can be traced back to the 1970s when feminist advocates extended their effort in dragging domestic violence against women 'out of closets of shame and silence' (Davis, 2008). The collusion of patriarchy and violence is highlighted in feminist and pro-feminist literature to illustrate how women were made more vulnerable when violence against them happens in marriage or intimate partner relationship. The basic connotation of the feminist approach in understanding intimate partner violence against women is that violence enables men to exert and sustain their control over women. These controls are supported by the larger culture of patriarchy and its cultural derivatives, such as the carer role assumed of women, public tolerance to wife beating, and the lack of gender sensitivity in policing procedures. Stanko (1985) extensively unveiled women's

subordination to men by showing how women were treated as property of men in marriage, in which men could have the right to love, not to love, to control, and to direct women's living. In the feminist discourse, women are the primary victims in the course of domestic violence, and usually suffer more from its consequences due to the patriarchal culture. This latter is termed as 'intimate terrorism'<sup>13</sup> (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000) by which women are framed as passive actors who do nothing to cause the violence against them, but are continuously subject to different forms of control, threat, and battering in daily life (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999; Leisenring, 2006). As long as the 'battered women movement' started out from public tolerance and silence, the women it aided were 'beaten women, whether at home or on the run, need much and can give little' (Tierney, 1982, p. 212). Experiences of abused women in the early years of the movement supported the construction of victimhood in that women had low personal agency to resist the violence against them, and needed external investment for remediating the problem. This particular form of 'blameless' and 'innocent' victim identity served as the 'politicized collective identities' for mobilizing public resources and brokering public sympathy and help for the emerging social problem of 'wife battering' (Dunn, 2004; Tierney, 1982).

The victim identity was soon realized, after its emergence in mid-1970s and 1980s, to be problematic due to its simplicity in describing the complexity of abused women's experiences and its negative connotation. Dunn (2004) analysed the victimizing stories told by battered women and the media, and discovered that four types of victims, namely 'precipitating victims', 'ideal victims', 'stigmatized victims', and 'heroic victims', were constructed in the unfolding of women's experiences. Different victim claims by abused women themselves were also discussed in Leisenring's (2006) work, consisting of the 'pure victim' claims, victim empowerment framework, the responsibility claims, and victim-survivor claims. The traditional weak and blameless 'ideal victim/pure victim' identity is failing to sustain its monopoly in the discourse of domestic violence and has not been left uncontested. The 'ideal victim/pure victim' identity employed by the battered women movement in mid 1970s was challenged by the increasing findings on its harms for the post-separation recovery and self-efficacy. Donovan & Hester (2010) found

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Intimate terrorism' is distinguished from 'common couple violence', 'violent resistance' and 'mutual violent control' for women having no part in the cause of the violence.

it jarred with the self-perception of the abused partners, in both heterosexual and homosexual intimate relationships; while, believing oneself as victim was also perceived as contributing to victim mentality by abused women (Leisenring, 2006). Muehlenhard & Kimes (1999) reported numerous findings that showed women who had experienced intimate partner violence refused to identify themselves as victims of abuse, or label their experiences as abuse, because of its damage to their self-image. Dunn (2004) further argued that 'victimhood', to be justified in the western culture which emphasized autonomy and agency, inevitably connoted a power differential between the sympathizers and the sympathizees (p.239).

Interestingly, I would see the construction of victimhood as the constitutive element of survivorhood in the domestic violence discourse. Survivorhood was developed in resistance to the stigmatizing victim identity constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. Survivorhood captures the strengths, power, choice, rationality, and virtues of abused women, as an arena in opposition to victimhood (Dunn, 2005). It could be seen from the burgeoning literature documenting women's rejection, hatred, and refusal to employ 'victim' to describe their experiences of living with/through intimate partner violence (Leisenring, 2006; Donovan & Hester, 2010; Brosi & Rolling, 2010), and the increasing emphasis on women's resistance, their ability to cope, and their choices in the victimizing experiences of abuse (Hydén, 1999; Herbert, Silver, & Ellard, 1991; Davis, 2002; Johnson, 1992). The recognition of strengths and resistances is also considered as a sign of moving away from victimhood and the start of post-abuse recovery (Brosi & Rolling, 2010). With the construction of survivorhood, the lens seeing intimate partner violence against women has changed from focusing on 'staying, leaving, and returning' to 'resisting, coping, and surviving' (Leisenring, 2006). Studies began to examine how abused women utilize rationality to make choices, how they protect themselves and children in domestic violence, how to promote involvement of abused women as equal partners in devising protection plans for themselves and children (Humphreys, 2000). In the traditional victim perspective, fragile, helpless, and hopeless victims have no place in service provision until their strengths and capabilities are recognized and made explicit through the construction of survivorhood. With the increasing awareness of the strengths and capabilities of abused women, their positional knowledge has gained more and more appreciation and recognition in policy and service design (Mullender & Hague, 2005; Beresford, 2000),



giving rise to the emergence of survivor-run domestic violence services (e.g. Women's Aids, UK) and domestic violence service user participation forums.

However, the marginalization of the victim discourse by the construction of survivorhood is risking itself being stigmatizing. Victimhood is realized to have both restraining and enabling effect to the women's construction of self. Although, on the one hand it restrains women from articulating their experiences and personhood differently from being blamelessly weak and powerless, on the other hand, it enables women to explicate their needs and garner sympathy and assistance (Leisenring, 2006, p. 307). This enabling and restraining dual property of victimhood constructed in domestic violence has created a paradox in the development of survivorhood and survivor-based practice because marginalization of victimhood at the same time marginalizes abused women who express their needs through victim identities. Therefore, the survivor-constructs on one side facilitate the explication and manifestation of strengths and power, whereas on the other side it may obscure the expression of the needs for help and the wish for care and comfort. When survivorhood is assumed to capture all the experiences of abused women, it becomes as problematic as the construction of victimhood. Abused women who still find themselves suffering from the history of abuse years after separation would then be considered as 'lingering' in the old days, and personally not willing to leave the victimization. The construction of survivorhood as an opposing force against victimhood also fails to capture the complexity and multiplicity of women's experiences of abuse, but, on the contrary, risks stigmatization (Leisenring, 2006, p. 312). The tension in identity-construction mediated through the dominating victim/survivor discourse was therefore seen as at the frontier of domestic violence debates.

The leaving experiences of formerly abused women further highlight the problematic nature of the victim or survivor dichotomy. Leaving is no longer considered as a clear cut process of separation marked by moving out or divorce, but a back and forth, spiralling in and out process that requires many loops of staying-leaving-returning to achieve (Kirkwood, 1993). In cases of 'successful leaving', each loop of staying-leaving-returning is carried out on the basis of the strengths gained in the previous loops. Therefore, leaving is a continuous process of intertwined exhibition of choices and entrapment, and coping and subordinating. Even for abused women, who 'successfully' leave the abusive relationships, they still have to suffer extensively in the help seeking process, such as the

bureaucratic welfare systems and insensitive police responses (Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003; Mama, 1996). The disinterest of helpers and difficulty in meeting their financial, housing and emotional needs are also factors that contribute to women's feelings of re-victimization, giving up in fleeing, and returning to the relationship (Wuest & Merritt-Gray, 1999, p. 112). Despite the fact that abused women stay alive after being punched, slapped, terrorized with weapons, stalked and humiliated in public, the history of all the 'traumas' could remain influential to their lives and the quality of living after separation. This realization is more evident in psychological studies which frame formerly abused women's continuous suffering from their abusive histories as post-traumatic stress disorder, and in literature about posttraumatic growth (Joseph & Linley, 2008).

With the increasing awareness of the ambiguous nature of abused women's staying-leaving-returning experiences, more domestic violence studies try to refer to abused women with a '-' or '/' connecting 'victim' and 'survivor'. 'Victim-survivor' or 'victim/survivor' is now seen more often in the literature as a linguistic response to the failing of traditional dichotomy and an acknowledgement of the complexity of abused women's lived experiences. However, the hyphen space employed in the existing literature is limited to addressing the uncertainty or the hybridity of abused women's experiences, while it still fails to describe substantively what is in the hyphen space. Even though the mixed experiences of victimization and surviving have been well recorded, I contend that the hyphen space has not yet been sufficiently articulated and travelled into. This renders a lot of relevant and important questions left unanswered: How could the hyphen space allow alternative identity constructions to take place? How may these alternative constructions influence women's social practices? How could these alternatives help abused women to live a more preferable life after leaving the abusive partners? Ventures towards the construction of alternatives to the hyphen space were explored in this research.

### **2.3.2 Mothering in the post-separation live of abused women and the reimagining of mothering and family care**

Abused women experience additional difficulties in becoming competent mothers in the context of intimate partner violence. The physical and psychological impacts of violence on them, on the one hand, remain after separation (Radford & Hester, 2006); meanwhile, abused women are, on the other hand, subject to stricter monitoring on childcare (Krane

& Davies, 2007). The expectations on mothers and an ideal motherhood could contribute to a special form of vulnerability of abused women in the post-separation stage (Eriksson, 2014). Furthermore, coercion and control can be extended to the post-separation stage through custody and parenting (Hayes, 2012; Jaffe et al., 2008). Radford and Hester (2006) discovered that undermining mother-child relationship<sup>14</sup> by the abusers has strong effect on women's confidence in their mothering. Eriksson also noticed that children can be drawn into coercive or controlling practices against their mothers as direct abusers or supporters of the perpetrators. To shed light on abused women's construction of personhood in the post-separation stage, understanding how women are threatened, controlled and micromanaged through motherhood and mothering practices is essential. As emphasized by Schatzki (1996), one's identity is constructed within a particular social practice one engages in, abused women's construction of identity are then more likely to be restrained by a particular motherhood under the influence of the extended coercive control by the abusers, and the normative expectations by the domestic violence services in the post-separation stage. In this regard, constructing preferable alternative personhood appears to be even harder if the current restrictive mothering practices are not challenged.

The child protection services are found to leave no room for abused women to feel ambivalent towards their mothering 'responsibilities' (Featherstone, 1997). Mothering experiences are framed by domestic violence services and child protection services as either 'restraining' or 'fulfilling', so that the ambivalence experienced by abused women in mothering finds nowhere to be expressed in formal services. Women who are forced to get pregnant may experience more ambivalent feelings towards their children as they may remind them of the abusers (Radford & Hester, 2006). The mothering ambivalence is not simply psychological, but also related to the conflicting discourses around mothering and different domestic violence services (Ericksson, 2008; Hester, 2013). The mothering ambivalence is hence on the one hand rooted in the conflicting protective and developmental discourses of childhood, reproduced by the child protection services and

---

<sup>14</sup> The undermining strategies carried out by male abusive partners, as suggested by Radford and Hester (2006), include 'humiliation/petty rituals', 'emotional abuse and mothering blaming', 'using institutions', 'isolation from family, friends and social support', 'threats to harm or abduct child/to commit suicide'. 'economic abuse/limiting income and child support', 'control over domestic labour and child care', 'abuse of child as abuse of mother', 'disrupting attachments' and 'control of fertility and reproduction'.

child custody; meanwhile on the other hand stiffened by the different demands in domestic violence services.

Age, gender and kinship were found to be the major pillars intersecting with each other to shape motherhood of abused women. They give rise to an ultimate responsibility on mothers to protect children, mothers/mothering as the centre of parenthood and an ascribed status of parent for fathers who abuse their partners (Eriksson, 2008). Abused women are hence having more responsibility but sharing relatively fewer rights over parenting after separation, particularly in the increasing popularity of co-parenting. This specific construction of motherhood allows extension of control over women by blaming mothers without recognizing the risks 'fathering' could bring to both abused women and their children post separation. Nonetheless, the construction of motherhood is also found to create contradictions with the construction of victimhood. Eriksson (2014) discussed the incompatibility of the identities of 'competent mother' and 'ideal victim' as constructed in the legal and service frameworks. Radford and Hester (2006) also contended that 'over-emphasis on women's behaviour as victims has limited thinking about mothering through domestic violence and encouraged the view that what women need most is treatment' (p.19). The incompatibility further creates a predicament for abused mothers as they may risk losing their legal and tangible protection when they display sufficient skills and strengths in protecting their children in mothering. As argued, competent mothers are subjected to higher expectations to make rational choices for themselves and their children, whilst being independent in surviving violence and its aftermaths. Within this restrictive construction of mothering/motherhood, competent mothers' vulnerability to continuous coercive control and their difficulties in recovering from the traumas are largely invisible. Acknowledgement of abused women's mothering ambivalence and continuous threats of abuse, in the post-separation stage, can easily trigger the alarm bell of the child protection services, questioning the adequacy of women as mothers.

As discussed in the introduction, framing children as 'becoming' and adults as 'being' dichotomizes abused women and their children (under 18) in post-separation protection and care. Eriksson (2008) found this dichotomization peculiarly prominent in abused women's post-separation parenting as it might have reflected the normative stance about the responsibility of parents for children. This framework for understanding family care

brushes off the chance for 'children' to participate in caring practices, while more and more studies recognize 'children' are social actors who can strategize themselves in complex social encounters, such as legal investigation by family law social workers in the post-separation stage of intimate partner violence (Eriksson, 2012). Therefore, supporting construction of personhood of abused mothers requires also supporting the construction of personhood of their 'children'. By which, we may have to challenge the 'being/becoming' dichotomy by looking at how competence and autonomy are actually constructed and promoted in relations with others. Post-separation mothering or family care practices could be *reimagined* only when the division of adult/child and its attached dichotomy of 'being/becoming' are re-examined. The alternative mothering or family care practices that capture the ambivalence in mothering and the competence of 'children' will then serve as the new site for identity construction and development of personhood for both abused women and their 'children' to resist continuation of coercive control.

### ***2.3.3 The turn to 'relational model of self' and its implications for understanding protection rights and participation of 'children'***

Turning to the 'relational model of self' in understanding 'rights' and 'responsibility' demands a revision of the taken-for-granted individualistic rights-based approach that underpins domestic violence and child protection services. The 'relational model of self' reminds us that 'self' or 'personhood' is a social construction created and shaped within particular interlinking historical, cultural and social loci. The nexus of relationships one is embedded in makes 'self-consciousness', meaning making, problem construction, solution formulation, and related practices possible. Seeing the rights for protection as social constructs, both 'rights' and 'responsibility' which take on the essentialist dictum would have to be re-examined for alternatives that promote interconnectedness instead of antagonistic relationships.

The relational approach transformed 'responsibility' by changing the question of 'who has to be responsible?', as raised by rights opponents (Melton, 2008), to that of 'how did we together create a situation in which an intolerable act has resulted?' (Gergen, 2001). To translate this approach in promoting protection rights, it becomes the responsibility of everyone to reflect on how we have created/sustained/ignored the vulnerability of abused women and their 'children', and how we further marginalize children's

participation by constructing the 'adult/children' distinction. For doing so, we are also advocating a community of practice that favours building connectedness, exchanges, and cooperation (as alternative to separation, alienation and antagonism produced by essentialism) between 'women victims/survivors', their children and 'non-victims/survivors' in the larger society. In a CGI group, this ethos could be translated into our obligation to open up communicative space for dialogues with different stakeholders, in this case, the practitioner-researcher, women participation-researchers, and teenage participant-researchers, to collaboratively construct understandings and solutions that address mutual concerns (Wicks & Reason, 2009). 'Children's rights' are brought into action through engaging teenage participants in problem solving as equal partners, and by making a community willing to allow both 'adults' and 'children' to make claims and participate in shifting the rules of the game. Such a community is where competence could be developed and recognized, and where 'autonomy' could be collaboratively enabled.

Increasing concern over partnering with 'children' mirrors the wider recognition of the relational dimension of 'children participation' (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006). 'Children' as an identity performs as the medium for organizing daily care practices that confine 'children' at the 'care receiving end' and 'adults' at the 'care providing end'. Therefore, partnership offers room for (re-)organizing daily care practices through more equal identities in the family context or in a community of practice. Hence, making sense of things in partnership with whom we call 'children' is not optional in the relational discourse, it reflects the participatory ethos carried on by the CGI.

Even though support for building partnership with children is strong, several problems and tensions about involving children in research, service development, and delivery still persist. Hooper and Gunn (2012) realized that participation does not necessarily and only cause benefits, but sometimes harms. The tokenistic model of children's participation, as in women survivors' participation, could discount the validity of children's knowledge in making change. In this regard, more and more literatures turn to accentuate the importance of 'relationship' in which the participation takes place. Hooper and Gunn (2012) employed the theory of recognition by Honneth to explicate how to maximize the possibility of empowerment instead of further exploitation to looked-after children through the participatory approach. The emerging terminology of 'partnership' in the

literature (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006) poses challenges against the conventional theorization of children participation in terms of 'level' or 'degree' of participation, which more or less presumes a hierarchy that the higher the level/degree of participation the better. The transformation from participation to partnership suggests to us that the quality of 'working together' is qualified by the relationship formed among participants, instead of the 'form/degree' of participation. In this regard, the next question will be 'how to improve the quality of children participation by improving the quality of the relationship formed among different participants?' This question concerns everyone who wants to acknowledge the rights, responsibilities, and the ability of children in all aspects of life that are currently dominated by adults. This is particularly critical for those who work in areas of child protection, including looked-after children, children who witness intimate partner violence, and maltreated children, because we all want to 'minimise(d) the risk of further disruption in already overly disrupted young lives' (Hooper & Gunn, 2012, p. 14).

#### **2.4 Children's rights, participation and the dilemmas in children protection**

Partnering with children is restricted by the social construction of childhood as 'becoming', incompetent, immature, and insufficient to accomplish tasks in the adult world. This understanding of childhood ignores the possibility that children are social actors who are competent and able to participate in social life and tasks related to them. With the growing support from research, children are found to be much more competent in decision making, understanding complex problems, devising elegant research design, and taking actions to make changes (McLeod, 2008; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Children are no longer 'looked down' and 'talked down' to by adults as the 'making of', but active social actors whose capacity of exercising self-determination is formally recognized (McLeod, 2008). The 'protection' agenda of the welfare state is therefore subject to criticisms from the academic, rights movement and user movement for being 'over-protective' and even 'exploitative'.

Alderson (2000) discovered how 'childhood' had been constructed in a particular society and at particular time. Children as 'becoming' versus adults as 'being' was, with more consensus, constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for religious reasons. Infants were born with 'original sins' so that in becoming adults, there should be a process of purification

through 'education, discipline, and control' (Kellett, Robinson, & Burr, 2004, p. 28). Children as 'becoming' adults have been continuously reshaped by the changes of cultures in the society at different periods of time, giving rise to conceptualizations such as 'blank slate', 'evil' and 'angelic innocents'. Modern conceptualization of childhood then carries on the image of childhood as 'becoming adults' and 'economically worthless' but 'emotionally priceless' (p.29). Two Chinese idioms, 'people at birth are good in nature (人之初, 性本善)' and 'people at birth are evil in nature (人之初, 性本惡)', show similar angelic-evil bipolar understanding of childhood as the early stage of the human being.

The psychological strand also provides alternatives in understanding childhood to seeing 'children' as problems to be managed. Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) contrasted 'behaviourism' and 'constructivism' that they set out the context for understanding how children were constructed as persons 'to be managed' and persons to 'develop'. The behaviourist view supports that people could make use of psychological conditioning to stop 'undesirable' behaviours and promote 'desirable' behaviours of children, so as to make them fit into the routine of adults. The desirability of behaviours is not measured against the preference of the child, but the adult world. This view of childhood development is arguably not directed to 'the best interest of children', but the best interest of adults; rendering learning as a social control instrument to shape children in a way not deviating too much from the norm. By contrast, Piaget as the representative of the constructivist paradigm promotes research methods that encourage 'children to talk freely, thus allowing their thinking to unfold and reveal itself to an attentive researcher' (p.23). This approach of understanding childhood rejects the environmentalist notion that 'children develop more mature ways of thinking by virtue of direct instruction and knowledge transmission' (p.22). Instead, children's understanding of the social reality is constructed by their actions on the environment, so as to allow them to discover some rules, properties, and logic about how things work. In this regard, children are continuous learners, and will be throughout their lifespan. They are not to be managed, but facilitated to develop their own understanding through interacting with world objects. Riding on the constructivist view of developmental psychology, children are increasingly perceived as able learners and even participants in complex learning process, e.g. surviving within complex family relationships.



Therefore, children who are consistently treated as a 'problem population', 'property' or 'the standard consumer durables furnish a household' (Freeman, 1992, p. 54) would be seen as more vulnerable for having their voices and benefits ignored. The individualistic model of rights emphasizes that human dignity and respect are equally shared properties of humanity. Any population that is not given rights in a society are more likely to be victimized (Freeman, 1992). Rights have become the *sine qua non* of a moral society, and gained their legitimacy in the advancement of capitalism in many industrialized countries. The instrumental, means-ends, and consequentialist rationalities fundamental to capitalism affect our way of justifying social distribution of resources, thereby 'rights' are often the rules of thumb for maximizing welfare which is essential for 'protection'. Freeman (1992) also argued that, without the coinage of rights, children's interests could be easily 'put aside in the sweep of consequentialist thinking'.

This argument does not only find its relevance in the UK but also in Hong Kong, where we have recognized the expanding marketization of social services in the past decade after the implementation of lump sum grant (Leung, 2002). Marketization of welfare drives children's rights movement to merge with the growing emphasis on users' rights, which have evolved to be the ultimate parameter to justify the merits of services, and to ensure accountability (Beresford, 2000). White (2002) even termed children participation as 'the touchstone of rights-aware development legitimacy' (p.1101). Thereby, children's rights, as shaped in these specific academic, socio-economic and ideological developments, favour the spreading emphasis on 'children participation'.

Riding on the expanding evidence on the capacities of children, the rights-based approach has convincingly raised our suspicion of 'age' as a category by questioning the correspondence between age and acquirement in 'personhood', i.e. competence and autonomy. It has also carved a territory for children's participation in research and given rise to what we call 'childhood studies', and in the children's movement that focuses on 'children's participation in decision-making' and protecting children's rights for developing 'personhood, integrity and autonomy' (Freeman, 1998, pp. 434-435). Despite the achievement in promoting equal respect and concern for children, 'personhood', in terms of 'competence' and 'autonomy', is conventionally built around an individualistic model of self (Cartesian model of self), which I argue to have caught 'participation' and 'protection', and 'rights' and 'obligation' in antagonistic relationships.

Thereby, the conventional justifications for children's participation places the responsibility on children to demonstrate their 'competence' in relational contexts where their capabilities are not recognized, and their participation is usually denied. Children are not even granted the right to make mistakes (Roche, 1999; Freeman, 1992). The relational lens helps us to rethink the concept of competence as performances which are understood, valued and seen as useful in a community, for example, typing speed is a competence in a secretariat setting and cycling a competence at races, but not vice versa. The concept of 'competence' generated in UNCRC and largely employed in current rights-based childhood studies obviously fails to involve children and their significant relationships in making sense of the term. Exclusion of 'children' and their significant others in making sense of 'competence' is equivalent to turning a blind eye to the concerns and problems lived by them, and to the 'competence' they need to solve those concerns and problems. Roche's argument is insightful to extend this view. He argued that our adult practices (as had persistently excluded children) had ignored the lived issues of 'children' and therefore rendered 'adult practices', e.g. voting for 'shorter hours and more money', majorly non-participatory to 'children'. 'Adult practices' lose links and relevance to the lives of 'children' and lose sight of children's concerns. Roche (1999) further contended, even though it was evident that children were informally taking up serious responsibilities in physical and emotional care at home, they were not recognized by formal social service agencies as carers and were not paid to care. This clearly illustrates to us how children's capabilities, routinely demonstrated in their lived experiences with others, are brushed off from the view of adults' perspective.

I argue that a relational lens does not lead to a universal form of 'children's participation' neither does it enable a concrete line to be drawn between 'competent' and 'incompetent' children for participation, as 'age' markers and 'Harter's perceived competence scale for children' do. However, it offers us a perspective to re-examine our construction of 'childhood', 'children's rights', and 'children participation' which artificially position people under 18 as 'children' and seize their entitlement in exercising autonomy and developing competence in making difficult choices. Being vigilant to these constructions can help us recognize our 'constitutive outside' (Mouffe, 2000) in creating 'adulthood' and possibilities for more inclusive and helpful identity and partnership constructions.

## 2.5 The gap between domestic violence services and child protection work

Lapierre (2008) discovered that the majority of literature, concerning the situation of children living with domestic violence, had focused on children witnessing marital violence and relegated women to the periphery. In this body of scholarship, women are usually framed as the means for protecting children, but not treated in their own right. Once mothers and 'mothering' are conceived of as an uncontested means for fulfilling the needs of children, the blame for failures in meeting developmental needs, or dealing with children's maladapted and violent behaviours, are placed with the mothers. However, formerly abused women's lives are never less disrupted than their children's (Krane & Davies, 2007). At the point of leaving, many of them have been trying for years to survive violence, death-threats, humiliations, poverty, and also the suffocating expectations for child protection. The problems suffered by abused women eventually arouse concern because their problems would doubtlessly affect the quality of their mothering and hence children's welfare. This comes to the argument formulated by Humphreys (2000) that we should protect children by supporting women. She contended that domestic violence services should be responsible for supporting women who are the main characters in the child care and protection agenda. Although it at least shows some concern over the benefit of women, women are just instrumentally employed for child protection, whereas fulfilment of women's needs that does not concern child protection can hardly stand on their own (Featherstone, 1999). Particularly, when children who witness intimate partner violence are immediately seen as equivalent to children who have suffered direct emotional abuse, e.g. the UK's definition of emotional abuse included in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (Department for Education, the HM Government, 2013), abused women could become even more vulnerable under the current child protection framework.

Hester's (2013) discussion on the 'three planet model' permits us to see how social and legal systems complicate the leaving process of abused women. The three planets, domestic violence services, child protection services, and post-separation child contact, hold on to entirely different historical, theoretical, and ideological underpinnings, and send contradictory messages to abused women about what is 'proper' to do (Hanson & Patel, 2013; Hester, 2013). 'Domestic violence services' emphasize the rights and autonomy of abused women, whereas 'child protection services' and 'post-separation

child contact' emphasize women's role as 'mothers'. In Hong Kong, the focus on women's rights was further blurred by the transformation of former Child Protective Services Units (CPSUs) into Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) to cover services for victims of intimate partner violence (Chan & Lam, 2005). The children centred domestic violence services, over-emphasizing the mother role of women, may easily collude with coercive control exercised by the abusers, in extending the micromanagement of women's lives according to the gender role. Child protection services could sanction abused women for failing to protect their children in the post-separation stage (e.g. returning and failing to safeguard children against the threats committed by the abusers). It may involve removing their children from their care, or application for a new custodial arrangement. The child contact system is found to predominantly assume the carers, mostly abused women who suffer from long-term and seemingly omnipotent threats from the abusers, to be able to overcome their fear to collaborate with the violent partners in post-separation childcare (Hester, 2013). Abused women's benefits are always at the margin in the gender insensitive child protection/contact systems; meanwhile, it is not uncommon for abused women to reject temporary relief from their childcare duties in the stressful post-separation period because they would perceive children and mothering as the essential parts in the formation of their '(inter)subjectivity'. Featherstone (1999) further argued that abused women's tie to the mother role in child protection services is the state's strategy to remediate the dissolution of women's traditional mother identity in the modern society. Reflexivity and identity plurality that remark modern society have given rise to women's rejection of motherhood or their alternative ways to identify oneself as a mother. The emergence of untraditional mother identities does not only affect how women feel about themselves, but also their way to relate to their families, society, children and men. Therefore, it is said by Featherstone that the state was concerned to 'fix motherhood in a way which stresses the importance of a very restricted model of mothering for children's welfare and indeed the cohesion of the wider social order' (Featherstone, 1999, p. 45). In this regard, the tie between a restricted form of motherhood and child protection services has a strong political agenda for social stability. Instead of serving the welfare of abused women and children, I contend that child protection services have polarized the interests of women and children, and restricted themselves to work within the mother-child relationship without acknowledging the wider context of relationships in promoting the welfare of both.

'Supporting' women as a way to protect children is in good intention, but also easier said than done. Next to resolving the inherent systematic conflicts between services as suggested by Hester, I propose that narrowing the gaps between women-centred and children-centred services requires building communities of practice for users and practitioners (abused women, children, and practitioners from both domestic violence services and child protection system). This Cooperative Grounded Inquiry is an approach (see Chapter 3 and 4) aimed at nurturing a community of practice that meets the needs of both abused mothers and their children in the post-separation stage.

### ***2.5.1 Who could be and who should be responsible for protection of children in intimate partner violence cases?***

The responsibility of abused women in protecting children is a major source of conflicts between domestic violence services and child protection services. In policies and services where abused women are constructed as autonomous individuals, women are presumed to have full knowledge about their situations, their partners, risks, dangers, resources, and opportunities. This understanding is supported by the discourse on normal development, primarily influenced by developmental psychology, that positions adulthood and childhood at the two ends of the growth spectrum. When adulthood is perceived as the ultimate achievement of growth, children are always seen as 'becoming', incompetent, immature, and insufficient to accomplish tasks in the adult world. Child protection services and the child contact system also afford adult abused women greater rights to exercise their 'choice' and therefore abused women are assumed to be able to make the most rational and beneficial choice among all options available (Wilson, 1998). By contrast, children are constructed as 'adult-becoming' so that they are contrarily seen the subjects to be managed; when translated in the protection agenda, children are the targets to be protected. Seeing abused women as rational choice making individuals is rife with the risks of magnifying the influence of coercive control on women's choices and parenting, while it also neglects the relational dimension of how their personal identities are constructed in relation to different 'others'.

This construction of adulthood supports the assumption that abused women are 'responsible for ensuring the safety of her children and, when she failed to do so, we have tended to hold her accountable for the actions of her violent partner' (Wilson, 1998, p.

289). The rational, individualistic model of self restrains social workers to see abused women who return to the abusive relationship as choosing the bad men over their children (Scourfield, 2001). Under this framework, any parental failure is always the mothers' fault, such as not choosing to engage their partners/relatives to share their parental duty or failing to look after themselves well enough to look after children (Scourfield, 2001). On the other hand, seeing children as 'becoming' suppresses the possibility that children are social actors who can contribute to the care of themselves and others. Despite growing support from research showing that children are much more competent in decision making, understanding complex problems, devising elegant research design, and taking actions to make changes than previously thought (McLeod, 2008; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000), children under the age of 16 are persistently located only in the protection/care-receiving end by Hong Kong legislation (The Hong Kong SAR Government, 2013) while a similar position of children is evident in the UK domestic violence services as well (Hester, 2013).

Wilson (1998) observed heightened tension between women protection and child protection services in cases where abused women insisted to carry on their mothering duties while the services' assessment finds them inappropriate or incompetent,. These cases place mothers' rights and children's welfare on the two sides of a scale. In such light, social workers' construction of women and mothering could have a prominent influence on the resulting assessment, intervention/service provision and, more importantly, assumed responsibility for child protection on women. Scourfield (2001) found that child protection social workers carried out strong scrutiny on 'home conditions' and bodily condition of children, which magnified monitoring on women who were actually more willing to contribute themselves to the well-being of children. The image of the 'nurturing mother' was also discussed by Scourfield, and it led to an unevenly harsh response to the parental failure of mothers rather than fathers. Moreover, it encourages the absence of abusers in making changes and improving the lives of both women and children. Sometimes, turning a blind eye to the impact of violence and control on abused women and their mothering may render women's behaviours unintelligible and even unacceptable. It would be more dangerous if social workers perceived these women as irrational, insufficient mothers, or choosing not to prioritize children's benefits. These assessments of abused women and their mothering would easily trigger the protection system to remove children from their mothers and

cause a devastating emotional impact on the women themselves (Scourfield, 2001; Douglas & Walsh, 2010).

In contrast with abused women, abusers are usually rendered invisible in domestic violence services and child protection because of their withdrawal from parenting, being less accessible/ available for the services and the general lack of parental expectation on the violent men. Compounded with the overarching expectation that mothers are the best carers and also women's formation of subjectivity through mothering, the gender division of labour in households is very likely to be reproduced. Leung (2011) conducted research in Hong Kong and recognized that 'being unable to confront the abusers' was the second most cited problem by abused women who received/were receiving domestic violence services at the moment of interview. The family approach, which dominates the analytical framework of social workers in the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the Family and Child Protective Service Units (FCPSUs), is also a reason for the gender insensitivity and the extension of gender inequality in Hong Kong's domestic violence services (Leung, 2011). Victim blaming, sympathizing with the abusers and emphasizing family unity emerged to be the result of this approach in dominant domestic violence services in Hong Kong. The threat of the family approach to further marginalise abused women was also stipulated by Chan & Lam (2005) when the Child Protective Units were restructured to include women protection under the overarching concept of family protection, giving rise to nowadays FCPSUs. The lack of gender sensitivity, insufficient awareness on the impact of intimate partner violence on child protection, and the invisibility of abusers in child protection services, all attribute to unconstructive domestic violence services and social work responses for abused mothers and their children (Douglas & Walsh, 2010).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Alongside overcoming the systematic conflicts among the 'three planet model', a lot more attempts have been proposed in the literatures for easing the tensions between domestic violence services and the child protection system. Apparently, more encompassing, gender sensitive and coercion-free protection for both abused women and the children in need/at risk is required. Some have suggested more 'children's participation' in decision-making about their own welfare as a response to the challenges

posed by the adult-child divide (McLeod, 2008; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Meanwhile, training and educating social workers about the impact of intimate partner violence on child protection was contended to be useful for bridging the protection gap (Hester, 2013; Beeman, Hagemester, & Edleson, 1999). Gender inequality sustained by social workers' construction of mothers, mothering, women, men, and children in domestic violence social work culture comes to light for being the barriers to exonerate abused women from oppression (Scourfield, 2001). More importantly, the invisibility of men in the services is commonly agreed as the major cause of placing blame on women. Hence, the removal and re-education of men are contended to have critical importance to transcend the women-child protection dilemma (Scourfield, 2001; Douglas & Walsh, 2010).

All attempts to redress the problematic overweight of responsibility on women for child protection reflect an urge for asserting the lastingly repressed personhood, marginalized benefit, and undermined effort of abused women in domestic violence related services. It is unhelpful to see the theoretical incompatibility between advocating battered women and child protection as essentially practically incompatible. Instead, we should see it as something to be transcended by collaborative possibilities (Beeman, Hagemester, & Edleson, 1999). Social policy and service makers, social workers, abusers, women, and children are all found to have their part in promoting the betterment of 'victims' of intimate partner violence and child neglect/abuse. Reducing protection issues to consequences of 'family dysfunction', insufficient mothers and the unchangeable violent fathers is far from satisfactory. Instead, collaboration as a general framework for problem solving is widely recommended, for example, collaboration between child protection service and women advocates (Beeman, Hagemester, & Edleson, 1999).

Informed by the literature, participatory SUCP in domestic violence services requires an approach that enables the flourishing of situated knowledge in both the practitioners and the users. This approach should also be vigilant to the long-term coercive control experience, compounded with all the other paternal family practices, which may repress women's formation of personhood and shape their understanding and practices of 'parenting' and 'childcare'. In the next chapter, the methodology for realizing a 'third way' of SUCP will be delineated.



---

### **‘Cooperative Grounded Inquiry’ with Formerly Abused Women and their Teenage ‘Children’ in Hong Kong: Methodological Innovation, Implementation and Implications**

---

#### **3.1 Introduction**

It is notable that there is an ethical, epistemological and practical urge for recognizing formerly abused women’s central role in developing domestic violence services and related knowledge. For achieving social work professional accountability, methodological innovations that facilitate participation of different stakeholders in domestic violence services are necessary. Instead of dichotomizing or polarizing domestic violence service providers and users, this research rigorously merges Cooperative Inquiry (CI) and Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), giving rise to my innovation of Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI), to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How does a co-participative relationship among social work practitioners, women survivors, and their teenage sons/daughters form?
- 2) How does a co-participative relationship serve post-separation domestic violence services/practices development, operation, and evaluation?

By undertaking this CGI, ‘three layers of participation’ are conceptualized to answer the first question (chapter 4); meanwhile, the local theories constructed with women and teenage participants (chapter 5 and chapter 6) could offer some thoughts on the second question, and illuminate on the service needs of formerly abused women and their teenage sons and daughters. Further discussion about findings is not the focus in this chapter. Rather, I would like to focus on the methodological innovations that I developed for researching these two questions and the analysis of the process of ethical review to suggest how an institutional ethics review could be more prepared for achieving ethics locally.

To begin with, I will map out the current understandings about social work research within which I locate this research. After that, I will try to elucidate the fit of Cooperative Inquiry, developed mainly by Peter Reason and John Heron, for studying the ‘participation

of abused women and their sons/daughters amidst social work practice'. Following this, I will justify the combined use of Cooperative Inquiry and Grounded Theory Methodology in this particular participatory endeavour. The methodological fitness of CGI to social work practice research will be discussed extensively with reference to the specificities of domestic violence services. Moreover, I will also elaborate how CGI was actually implemented. Finally, dilemmas facing participatory research endeavours will be further delineated, in order to develop working principles/strategies to respond to these dilemmas where possible.

### **3.2 What is Social Work Research?**

The impetus to define social work research has been found to arise from the rising emphasis on professionalism, which challenges social work as a 'discipline' that is lacking in local and characteristic knowledge and specific ways of knowing, that would allow it to become a distinctive discipline (Feldman, 2010). To respond to the criticisms, some scholars attempted to argue for a distinctive territory for social work research (Dominelli, 2005). Dominelli (2005: 224) argued for more focus on generating 'practice related' pure knowledge of social work, against the current evaluative focus, to 'produce a substantive foundation for the theoretical and methodological innovations that social work needs'. On the other hand, Shaw and Norton (2007) believe that social work research has to embrace both forms of knowledge - 'pure' and 'applied' - in a non-conflicting fashion in order to maintain sufficient flexibility in knowledge making. This flexibility is argued to be crucial for social work research as it has to fit the features of the profession for being dynamic, contextualized, and characterized by involvement of multiple stakeholders (Shaw et al., 2010).

Defining social work research appears to be, if not impossible, troublesome, and sometimes undesirable. A clear and specific definition of social work is argued to risk being too restrictive for multiplicity; whereas an all-inclusive definition is criticized as 'giving hostages to fortune' (Shaw et al., 2010). In this regard, maintaining some level of generality in defining social work research is considered necessary, so that it could be specifically defined by the local contexts to fit the purpose (Shaw et al., 2010; Shaw & Norton, 2007; Dominelli, 2005). To locate this research within the social work research enterprise, it must be able to exhibit 'social work elements', or 'qualities of social work' (Shaw & Norton, 2007), in the research design. Moreover, research design may have to

take social work professional code of ethics into account so as to guarantee the research is 'accountable for the users' (Dominelli, 2005; Brown, 2005). As Kirk and Parton (2010) asserted, social work research has to be coherent with features of social work as a profession. Qualities of social work research and ethical concerns are hence being more fully explored and carefully responded to throughout this chapter.

Shaw and Norton (2007: 8) developed 4 non-exclusive links, between social work research methods and purposes, which characterized social work research in relation to the social work profession:

1. Methods for providing evidence of effectiveness and improving social work intervention
2. Methods for enhancing theory and knowledge about problems, policies, and practice
3. Methods for highlighting and advancing the quality of lived experience, practical wisdom, and personal and organizational learning
4. Methods for facilitating social inclusion, social change, and justice

The linking is a helpful starting point to understand social work research in two ways. First of all, these links assist us in identifying the existing strands of social work research in the field. Secondly, it frames social work research as not only a means for producing pure, but also applied, knowledge for achieving certain highly treasured professional values, for instance social inclusion and justice. Failing to recognize social work as a discipline that requires both pure and applied knowledge to advance is argued to inhibit academic-practitioner-user collaboration in producing useful knowledge for social work development (Shaw et al., 2010).

Referring to the abovementioned linking, the first link is exemplified by the development of social work evaluative research (Shaw, 1999) and evidence based practice which emphasizes critical appraisal of research evidence to inform effective practices (Fortune, 2010), while the second link is reflected in the theory/knowledge generating disciplines, for instance, theme analysis on the problem of violence against women by Dobash and Dobash (1992), and study of the survivor user movement by Hague, Mullender and Aris (2003). The third link could be seen in experience-based social work research disciplines such as practitioner research (Brown H. , 2005; Venny-Tiernan, Goldband, Rackham, &

Reilly, 1994) and user-led research (Oliver, 2004), and the fourth link is largely observed in action research discipline which advocates social inclusion and making changes through research (Venny-Tiernan, Goldband, Rackham, & Reilly, 1994; Kwok & Ku, 2011).

It is important to note that these links of social work research and practice are not mutually exclusive; some research may exhibit two or more links listed by Shaw and Norton (2007). For example, Venny-Tiernan et al. (1994) employed co-operative inquiry to promote learning among staff of the Youth Service in South London and targeted actions that created alternative routes for qualifications for youth workers. It reflects both the third and the fourth linking in terms of organizational learning and social inclusion. Allegiance to any of the four is necessary and sufficient for the claim to be a social work research.

### **3.2.1 *Is this study social work research?***

The research questions raised at the beginning of this chapter reveal the allegiance of this research study to all the four links between social work practice and research. The first question expresses an ultimate concern with generating knowledge about how equal partnership between social work practitioners and women survivors could be achieved in the practice-research situation (the 2<sup>nd</sup> linking); while the 'co-' endeavour is obviously an attempt for social inclusion (the 4<sup>th</sup> linking). Meanwhile, the second question examines the value of 'co-participative relationship' (values examination is argued to be evaluative in nature (Shaw, 1999; Banks & Barnes, 2005)) to services/practices development, operation, and evaluation (the 1<sup>st</sup> linking). As far as suggested by co-operative inquiry, all the research participants have to engage in experiential learning cycles both as individuals and as a group, thereby this research is purported to pursue personal and group learning in the research process (the 3<sup>rd</sup> linking).

The linking between social work practice and research is perceived as important in the field because of the standing demand for demonstrating service effectiveness and professional accountability (Evans, 2011; Fischer, 1978). The perennial examination of this linking has led to development of 'practice research', social work research innovations and the burgeoning of related literature (Evans, 2011; Shaw & Phillips, 2011). A special issue on 'practice research' is also opened, in *Social Work & Society* (2011, volume 9, issue 1), to expand the thinking about how the two enterprises relate

meaningfully with each other after the Salisbury Statement <sup>15</sup>(Evans, 2011). The focus on 'practice' is the major shared component between this CGI and social work practice research enterprise. Uggerhøj (2011) employed Flyvbjerg's 'science of the concrete' to support a practice turn in social work research, contending that research activities should be able to generate 'pragmatic, variable, context-dependent and praxis-oriented' knowledge (p.46). This definition of practice research definitely offer a point of departure from the cook-book approach of evidence based practice (Smith, 2004) i.e. that which sees evidence based practice as a noun (which means a cook-book application of EBP procedures, and is used to contrast 'evidence based practice as a verb' which instead encourages evidence seeking in the process of practice) (Fortune, 2010). The emphasis on practical rationality as equally significant as logics and rules resembles the basic premise of 'human flourishing' in the participatory paradigm that underpins this CGI.

Generating knowledge 'scientifically' from the practice of social work, therefore, has become the focal point of discussion in practice research. This concern is also shared by many preceding scholars, such as Gadamer, Habermas, Arendt and Rorty, who revive the discussion on *praxis* as central to knowledge making (Bernstein, 2011). Science as 'technē' as propagated in natural sciences' particular objectivist traditions is gradually found to be restrictive to the appreciation of practical rationality and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). Practice research in social work and another stream of EBP as a verb can be considered as joining a similar venture. If there is a science in practice (praxis), technocrats are no longer the only experts who can produce 'valid' knowledge and 'truth'. This rationalizes the re-examination of the 'researcher-researched' division rooted in the academic research tradition, and development of a more bottom-up and applied-oriented approach in knowledge building (Uggerhøj, 2011).

Uggerhøj (2011) further discussed two mainstream approaches (approach A and B) to social work practice research. Approach A focuses on 'the framework, goals and outcomes' (p.49) of the practitioner-researcher collaboration process, while approach B attends to research, evaluation and investigation carried out by practitioners. He termed approach A as 'practice research' (which somewhat confusingly overlaps with the bigger

---

<sup>15</sup> A group of social work scholars, from the UK, Italy, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the USA, Canada, Israel and Hong Kong, formed part of the Salisbury Forum Group that provided the foundation of the Salisbury Statement. It provides an understanding about the landscape of social work practice research and to set the basis for carrying social work practice research forward by thinking about how professional practice is researched better to improve practice. Details of the Statement could be seen at <http://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/2/12>

umbrella concept of 'practice research') and approach B as 'practitioner research'. Uggerhøj argued as well the role of researcher in the two approaches also affects the mode of problem solving. The former relies on the mutual commitment in solving local problems, whereas the latter is dependent on the translation of research principles, designs and information to inform practice. This categorization allows Uggerhøj to reflect on the importance of maintaining contradistinctions and confluence between practice and research, and between different interests of stakeholders. He also claimed that 'a researcher could or should never become a practitioner, or vice versa'. This remark highlights the complexity of the role of a 'practitioner-researcher', who could also be a full-time researcher with practice experience ( in case of this research, see 3.2.3) that a reversed direction of influence from practice to research is likely, that the different fields s/he engages in may not reconcile with each other to even the field distinctiveness. The field distinctiveness also presents to us the demand for unceasing translation of 'findings' into 'solutions'. In this regard, the co-existence of different interests, the polyphony of understandings of 'reality' and the tension caused by the field distinctiveness of 'research' and 'practice' underscore the main challenges in social work practice research<sup>16</sup>.

The acknowledgement of the existence of differences in the field of practice research is responded to by the calling for more attention to 'participation', 'partnership' and 'dialogues'. Fook, Johannessen and Psoinos (2011) were aware of the inevitability of collaboration in practice research, and argued for more evidence in understanding how the processes and dynamics of partnership building actually enhance services. Unequivocally, these processes and dynamics involve efforts in mutual understanding as suggested by Fisher (2011). Thereby, cultivating practice literacy in researchers is equally important as cultivating research literacy in practitioners. It again points to the revival of practical rationality, as well as creating equal footing for the different forms of knowledge making. The proposal submitted by Fisher enables us to pay a vigilant eye to the usage of the term 'practice research', so as to avoid shifting 'a dialogue and respect for diverse viewpoints' of practice and research to 'making practice mirror research' (Witkin, 2011).

---

<sup>16</sup> Uggerhøj (2011) perceives different interests and voices as the condition for change and development through 'the conflict of opposing forces', as in contrast with the Hegelian process of 'arriving at the truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis'. By the latter he thinks it will abolish contradictions. I argue later (4.6.3) by drawing on Mouffe's scholarship on political participation that synthesis is not abolishment of contradictions but reestablishment of the boundary of the 'we-ness' and the constitutive outside.

In face of these remarkable challenges confronted by social work practice research nowadays, this CGI runs in parallel with the practice-research approach similar to the above discussed, by looking at the different forms of knowing, dual-research/researched role of inquiry participants and equal partnership in knowledge production supported by Heron's reflection-action-reflection cycle. This inquiry also involves practitioner-researcher who is a full-time researcher with some practice experience. Therefore, this CGI is also an attempt to develop a form of 'practitioner research' that promotes two-way confluence between practice and research (instead of translation of research principles into practice as understood by Uggerhøj) and hence joining Fisher's proposal in cultivating practice literacy in researchers.

After all, no simple definition of 'practice research' could be given, instead more challenges are presented to highlight the forces that give social work practice research a shape. With no doubt, this study contains qualities/elements of social work research in terms of linking social work research to practice; meanwhile, it shows shared concerns with social work practice research, in reviving the practical rationality and encouraging different forms of knowing in problem solving. This new practical engagement in social work research has opened up discussion on the form of theoretical knowledge a research should produce, the role of researcher it ascribes, and the degree of user participation it entails. In the following, by examining these strands of discussions, I would like to locate this research study, more clearly, within the social work research enterprise.

### ***3.2.2 Forms of theoretical knowledge produced by social work research***

Disregarding the degree of abstraction, research knowledge could be divided into 'theory for practice', 'theory of practice', and 'theory from practice' (Coulshed & Orme, 2006). This categorization is built on the different theory-practice relationships and it offers different vantage points for research design. 'Theory for practice' is an umbrella concept under which researchers believe that extant theories are entirely functional to guide social work practice, so that the purpose of research is to study how to apply the theories in different contexts, and how to modify it when necessary. Research of this type often starts with generating hypotheses and hypothetical models from existing social theories, and is then followed by an examination of its application in a particular social work context; for instance, evaluating cognitive behavioural treatment of schizophrenia (Bradshaw, 2003). Alternatively, 'theory of practice' means the development of theory

about the practice and is characterized by a concern over 'how to do social work'. Task-centred practice is an approach developed to inform how social work could work to resolve problems in a practical setting (Coulshed & Orme, 2006: 14). However, both 'theory for practice' and 'theory of practice' are criticized to be of little use if they are not translated into strategies that help solve local practical problems (England, 1986 quoted in Coulshed & Orme, 2006: 15). As advocated in this view, practitioners are encouraged to generate theoretical knowledge from their practice experience and practical wisdom through some codification. This form of theory celebrates contextual knowledge and allows everyone's perspective to flourish, as it is more able to capture the perspectives of users and carers in the development of theory (p.15). A theory generated from practice data is called a 'theory from practice'.

Generating theoretical knowledge in social work is never so timely because social work is at the height of a professional identity crisis, in which the urge for tailored ontology, epistemology, methodology, and practice related theories is so strong. Numerous scholars have engaged in a rescue, attempting to save the professional status of social work (Brown, 2005; Coulshed & Orme, 2006; Dominelli, 2005; Feldman, 2010; Shaw, 2010). This research is going to join this effort by generating a theory about the formation of a participative relationship *from practice*.

### **3.2.3 Role(s) of the researcher**

In social work research, the social work practitioner is very often involved (Banks & Barnes, 2005). They could be the 'researcher, commissioner, consultee, research user or a combination of these' (p.238). Likewise, in this research, the researcher is in the same while the practitioner who takes part in facilitating participation while researching and evaluating the participation with participants. This form of research is named as practitioner research, which could be carried out by a full-time practitioner who loves researching in his/her own setting, or by a full-time researcher with practice experience (Banks & Barnes, 2005; Fuller & Petch, 1995).

One of the most cited challenges encountered by practitioner-researchers is how to critically examine what s/he has done as a practitioner, so that the role of researcher could be properly performed. This question arises from the assumption that a researcher has to be distant from the subject of study in order to produce non-biased knowledge



that could then be generalized across contexts. This conventional, positivistic, view sees practitioner research as biased and its findings as non-generalizable. However, this criticism is in fact built on an incomplete view on the nature of knowledge and is unhelpful to capture insider knowledge within practice.

The conventional positivistic paradigm holds objectivity, neutrality and rationality as the golden rules for quality research (Bell, 2012). From this view, data and knowledge are out there for the researcher to discover. Thereby, researchers have to maintain a distance from the research subjects in order to avoid contamination of data. However, the view is criticized for undermining the fact that knowledge in human practice is situated. It means that all people are embodied subjects with situated knowledge of the society. People own, interpret, reflect and re-organize their experiences to give an account of reality.

Social work research has to be able to include situated knowledges in social work practice, in order to understand real life complexity. For such a purpose, we have to first acknowledge that both social work practitioners and abused women are situated knowers. They own, interpret, reflect and re-organize their experiences as social service providing end and receiving end respectively (Beresford, 2000). Both service providers' and users' knowledge and interpretation of reality are indispensable, whereas a detached and objective scientific researcher could easily dismiss situated knowledge and even label situated knowledge as a contaminated and biased interpretation of reality. In other words, researchers are competent to 'smell the real' only when they come close to practice which is 'about people, relationships, and organizations and social systems such as teams and networks made up of people and relationship' (Cooper, 2009, p. 432).

Once coming near to practice, despite how near the researcher is, changes of oneself are inevitable. Further on, changes of oneself are a lot more meaningful than just the inevitable consequences of practice-near research. It is argued by Cooper (2009) that research is in fact a cluster of interpretive activities which are partially dependent on the interpretive frameworks held by the researchers. Being near to practice renders the boundary-of-self fluid and uncertain, thereby, researchers would have greater flexibility for re-examination and reinterpretation of one's interpretive frameworks. Changes of one's interpretive frameworks could allow the emergence of new knowledge which is necessary for any learning.

*'Practice-near research will be passionate research about passions, in which the boundaries of the researcher's self are likely to become fluid and uncertain. Consequently, we need methodologies that can help us with the intensity and epistemological uncertainties that arise from such research encounters.'* (p.432)

In this research, I took on the role as a practitioner-researcher, due to the scarcity of suitable practice settings to build a 'researcher-practitioner-abused women' collaboration for studying 'participative relationship' in Hong Kong; the dual-roles allowed for a better understanding of the stress, tensions, and challenges encountered by practitioners and researchers. This understanding has pedagogical significance for training social work practitioner-researchers, in the hands of whom the future of social work lies (Dominelli, 2005).

#### **3.2.4 Degree of participation of service users**

Involving service users in social work practice research is not a monolithic concept, but a range of possibilities. Banks and Barnes (2005) suggested four categories of social work research according to the different degrees of participation of the users. They are namely applied research, action research, participatory research, and emancipatory research. The term 'degree' employed to denote the differences in participation does not imply any mathematical measurement; however, a progressive increase of participation could be seen in the categorization. Cooperative Inquiry is located in the larger umbrella of participatory research which encourages the flourishing of different ways of knowing.

In conventional applied research, participants may be involved as well, but as subjects of the study/consultees. This form of user participation allows service users no control over either the research or the research product. They are like passive subjects for investigation. Survivors' forums in domestic violence services are in this category. Alternatively, in action research, users are allowed and enabled to participate more actively. Action research involves service users as partners to solve problems together with the researcher. Therefore, service users could have more control over what and how the problem should be solved. Although service users have power to determine the action process, they are not involved in the research process by which their actions are interpreted. Participatory research represents a further opening up to the research process by involving service users as research partners/co-researchers. Service users in

participatory research not only have decision-making power in problem identification and problem solving, but also in data collection, analysis, and presentation. This implies a partnership between the practitioner/researcher and service users in both action and research. The most radical form of user participation in research is emancipatory research, which is initiated, carried out, and evaluated by service users. Proponents of emancipatory research advocate that only the insiders could speak for the insiders. A typical example of emancipatory research is disability research carried out by Mike Oliver.

The co-operative and participative relationship envisaged in participatory research is very similar to the 'social worker-service user relationship' in social work practice. Social workers could not simply leave people on their own to solve problems (as in emancipatory research) neither could they impose their own understanding on users' situations during the course of problem solving (as in action research). Instead, social workers are demanded to work with service users as partners, to work out solutions to problems that best fit to the users' situations. Participatory research is most open to participation of service users; meanwhile, it does not exhaust the possibility of co-operation between the service providing end and the service receiving end. Amongst these, participatory research shows the best fit for social work practice.

Apparently, social work research is a large enterprise that consists of different ways of doing research but a shared focus on advancing practice. At the beginning of this chapter, I have shown how this research exhibits linking with practice, and is mapped where it should be located within social work research enterprise. This research aims at building a theory from practice to address the dearth of theory on participation of abused women in domestic violence services (Hague, Mullender, & Aris, 2003). Theory from practice is said more readily to be translated into practical strategies (Coulshed & Orme, 2006) when compared to theory for practice and theory of practice. Furthermore, the lack of participatory post-separation domestic violence services in Hong Kong steers this practice research to participatory practitioner-research. The combination of roles of practitioner and researcher also reflects the combination of situated knowledge. In sum, participatory research is found to be the most suitable research approach that, on the one hand, fits the social work practice ecology, and on the other hand provides principles for practitioner-researchers and participant-researchers to solve problems and produce practical knowledge on egalitarian footing.

### **3.3 Cooperative Grounded Inquiry: Merging of Co-operative Inquiry and Grounded Theory Methodology and implementation**

I have created Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI) by merging Cooperative Inquiry and techniques of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), with extra caution on involving participants equally in designing and deciding data collection and analysis methods. By carefully addressing the theoretical incompatibility between these two methodologies, constant comparative analysis of GTM could become helpful in achieving the rigours of participatory research by producing 'propositional' knowledge grounded in 'presentational' and 'experiential' knowing while consummating different forms of knowing by translating them into actions for making better changes (Heron & Reason, 1997). In practice, constant comparative analysis in GTM offered promising techniques for attending to the differences and making invisible lived experiences linguistically visible (generating 'propositional knowledge' from experiential and presentational data); while it demonstrated its potentials in releasing participants' creativity in linguistic constructions, facilitating the identification of common problems, and enhancing collaboration in problem solving. The importation of constant comparative analysis in Cooperative Inquiry, however, should not fall foul of compulsiveness to research rigours at the expense of the flourishing of other forms of knowing (Heron & Reason, 2001). In this regard, participants' design and decisions in data collection, data analysis/interpretation, and usage of analysis were considered as equally valuable as what had been explicated in the research proposal in advance. Diversity in data collection and analysis methods was deliberately maintained.

In the following, I will first outline the features and changes of Cooperative Inquiry and GTM separately, so as to set the background for discussing how CGI may help advancing social work practice research. To avoid being criticized for haphazardly conflating methodologies, the compatibility and incompatibility of Cooperative Inquiry and GTM will be addressed in order to justify the development of Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI). Secondly, I will proceed to delineate how this methodological innovation was implemented in a way to fully achieve 'co-participation' in the inquiry, by looking into its capacity for building relationship and collaboration in different layers of participation. I will further elucidate how far CGI could handle the dilemmas of participation as identified

in the existing literature. Lastly, the ethics review procedures undergone by this research will be analyzed to explicate the challenges this methodological innovation may pose to an institutional ethics review board.

### **3.3.1 Cooperative Inquiry in the participatory paradigm**

Cooperative Inquiry was first developed by Heron in 1968-69 by giving the action research agenda a phenomenological turn. Heron began his development of Cooperative Inquiry with the focus on the reciprocal relationship between at least two human agents. He rejected the subject/object distinction that had been taken for granted at the time in experimental psychology and continued to argue that researchers could fully explore the relation between him/herself with another only by fully engaging in it (Heron, 1996).

Heron later collaborated with Peter Reason and John Rowan in 1978 to contribute to the development of the participatory paradigm by authoring two chapters in the groundbreaking work, *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research*, edited by Reason and Rowan (1981). He also developed the concept of 'extended epistemology' (see Fig. 3.1) that demarcated its version of action research from others with a focus on human flourishing, collaboration and practical knowing. The importance of extended epistemology is to challenge the domination/privilege of propositional knowing (abstract/conceptual knowing) by acknowledging the validity of other forms of knowing that are prevalent and significant in human problem solving. They are namely 'practical knowing', 'experiential knowing', and 'presentational knowing', which represent 'knowing how', 'the doing of knowing how in context' and 'articulation of experiences with non-propositional means', respectively. Heron's conceptualization of extended epistemology is not exclusive, but it opens up the discussion about different ways of knowing that are critical for human flourishing. The participatory element was further developed, as Heron (1996) acknowledged, by Reason's creative input of participative knowing that gave rise to an umbrella concept of 'participative inquiry'/Participatory Action Research (PAR), denoting the equal partnership of research participants in the inquiring process.

Heron also elucidated in *Cooperative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition* (1996) the distinctiveness of Cooperative Inquiry among all other participative approaches and

the overlap with them. The demarcation of Cooperative Inquiry rests on ‘extended epistemology’ developed by Heron in the 80s. He proposed the reflection-action-reflection cycle that viewed ‘the full range of human sensibilities as an instrument of research’ (1996:7), whereas action research and participatory action research (PAR) are contended to disregard ‘theory-building and the generative power of theory’. Among all participatory approaches, appreciative inquiry is closer to cooperative inquiry because of its shared concern on the flourishing of different ways of knowing. Despite the variations between approaches, all participative approaches share similar purposes of generating changes to solve problems and facilitating equal participation of participants in the inquiry process.

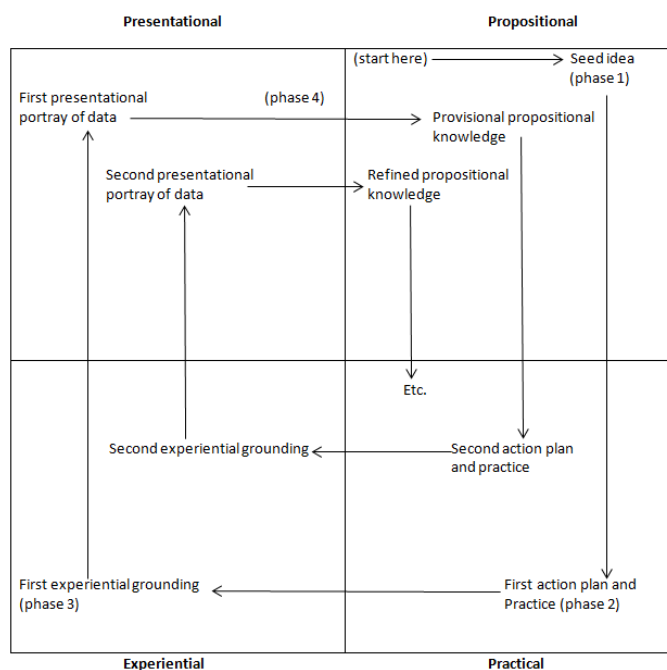


Fig. 3.1 reflection—action—reflection cycle

Source: *Participation in Human Inquiry* (Reason, 1994:45)

### 3.3.1.1 The participatory paradigm: ontological assumptions, purposes of investigation and implications for methodology

The phenomenological root of Cooperative Inquiry peculiarly challenges the disassociation of knowledge production and the knower, while it supports that participation is ontologically inevitable and epistemologically significant for human flourishing. Husserlian phenomenology, which informs the development of Cooperative

Inquiry, views the 'objective world' in terms of 'the theory of intentionality'. It refers to acts of reaching out to the 'outside' for the simultaneous construction of one's inside (consciousness). According to Smith and Smith (2006), the acts of consciousness include experiences of perception, judgment, fantasy, desire, emotion, and volition - technically not a bodily action but a mental occurrence. Husserl's focus on formation of consciousness renders the existence of the 'objects' problematic to the study of intentionality. It could be revealed in Husserl's presumption of the very existence of a prior 'self' who performed the acts of consciousness. He therefore favoured constructing formal concepts and logics that captured the essences of 'reality' (Smith & Smith, 2006). The 'Cartesian model of self' upheld by Husserl received criticisms from Heidegger by restating that the being of a being/beings was the fundamental ontological concern instead of human consciousness. Departing from 'mind' to integrated existence of beings is also departing from the attitudinal focus to arrive at the practical existential concerns. These existential concerns unveil themselves in *A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm* (Heron & Reason, 1997), despite a strong leaning to Husserl's phenomenology. The attention to the relational nature of self-formation, knowledge making and human actions are also easily identified in their works. Instead of adhering strictly to the Cartesian model of self, as Husserl did, Heron and Reason constantly contemplated the importance of 'critical inter-subjectivity'. They saw it as an element that could 'enhance critical subjectivity'. The largely 'subjective' experiential knowing about the 'objective world' (I-It) was perceived to be transformed into knowing through the relationships (I-Thou) in the human world, and to be consummated by presentational knowing and propositional knowing which were mediated by language that works only at the presence of 'others' in social practices (Schatzki, 1996).

I will say that the extended epistemology suggested in Cooperative Inquiry intrinsically builds in relationality due to its focus on language and social practices, as well as the interrelation between these two social domains. Gergen and Gergen (2004) echoed that any utterance required a response to make it meaningful, while Derrida (1988) argued appealingly on how his presence on the stage was perceived as giving a speech by the floor directing their attention to him. As accorded with Richard Roty (Reason, 2003), people describe and re-describe things constantly in order to solve the problems arising

from their lived communities. Therefore, participation is, per se, a necessity in human sense making, problem solving, and human flourishing.

Given the linking between sense making and human practices made explicit by the relational turn, problem solving becomes the primary purpose of Cooperative Inquiry and all other participatory research methodologies. Research is seen and valued as sense making activities that solve problems which concern members of a community. Participatory research differs from conventional applied research which aims at studying the phenomenon from a detached standing to avoid effecting any change over it. The participatory paradigm criticizes the search for detached and objective knowledge for its complicity in constituting 'objects' of study and 'the interested nature of knowledge making' (Reason & Bradbury, 2001:6). Alternatively, participatory research invites initiatives that change the phenomenon/problem under study for *'better' and 'fairer' outcomes*. This echoes the outcry for professional accountability in social work that social workers are obligated to produce changes to meet the practical and ethical challenges. As well as to eradicate oppression, exploitation and tokenism in the managerial culture currently prevailing in domestic violence social services, user participation in determining 'fairer' and 'better' outcomes is central to achieving professional accountability.

Informed by the participatory paradigm and the extended epistemology of Cooperative Inquiry, methods employed in the inquiry have to be able to reflect the spirits of equality and human flourishing; meanwhile, its action orientation further urges us to seek for methods that promote learning and problem solving. Its phenomenological tradition and relational turn create further demand for methods/methodologies that reveal and articulate bodily experiences and relationships among people. Methods/methodologies thence should be able to encourage diversity and differences alongside solidarity building, such as collective understandings, common identities, and a sense of community, in order to respect the distinctiveness of participants. Regarding these methodological challenges, GTM seems to offer flexible techniques/research tools for collecting multiple types of data, and for rigorously analyzing data with the creative use of linguistic constructs and local meanings. Nonetheless, it facilitates the performance of the reflection-action-reflection cycles, and potentially enhances the celebration of different forms of knowing.



### **3.3.2 Grounded Theory Methodology for social work practice research**

Gilgun wrote an article, *Hand Into Glove: Grounded Theory, Deductive Qualitative Analysis and Social Work Research* (1994), about the fit of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) in doing social work research. Grounded theory is known for its flexibility in the use of quantitative and qualitative data for theory generation. It advocates creativity in making sense of data in a way that fits, works, and is relevant to participants in the field. As argued by Gilgun, GTM enabled theoretical capturing of the multi-dimensional world of practice whilst concepts and theoretical links were supported by concrete 'natural data'. She delineated parallels between social work practice and grounded theory methodology, such as starting from where the client was and context-rich analysis, and continued to argue that grounded theory methodology was like a well-made glove for the hand of social work to slip in.

However, this 'hand into glove' connotation is challenged by Padgett (1998) by highlighting the differences between social work practice and 'qualitative research' in terms of 'paradigm assignment', 'goals', 'education and training', 'disciplinary influences', 'client-respondent-clinician relationship' and 'criteria for success' (p.375). From my view, the challenges fall foul of errors in many aspects. The argument of Padgett conceives 'qualitative research' as a monolithic concept which renders no difference among 'qualitative research' methodologies in respect of the abovementioned domains. More importantly, grounded theory methodology is not and should not be regarded as a 'qualitative research methodology' as it is suggested repeatedly in Glaser's work (Glaser and Strass, 1967; Glaser, 1978) that GTM could be employed for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Despite this, I agree that the 'disciplinary influence' remarked in her work accurately locates the incompatibility of GTM and practice (the same for Cooperative Inquiry). This discussion will be returned to after the introduction of GTM (the Glaserian version).

#### **3.3.2.1 Grounded Theory Methodology as a research package**

GTM is invented for theory building from data. Glaser and Strauss first developed this methodology in 1967 in their publication of *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. GTM is designed to counterbalance the overwhelming dedication to theory verification in the

time being. GTM employs constant comparative analysis as the means for conceptualization and theory development. The coding process is crucial for theory building and it consists of three rounds of coding, i.e. open coding, categorizing, and theoretical coding. Data collected from participant observation, interviews, pictures etc. are broken down into codes and conceptualized by comparing their conceptual characteristics. Concepts are further categorized according to their emergent links with each other and eventually integrated into a core concept that explains most of the emergent concepts and theoretical links. To facilitate theory building, researchers are recommended to do memoing after each round of data collection-analysis, so as to document possible theoretical links among concepts, and guide further data collection-analysis. This sampling method is called 'theoretical sampling'.

It has been repeatedly emphasized by Glaser that GTM has to be used as a package because each component is tailored for systematic theory building from data. Holding the principles and techniques loosely will cause damage to the credibility of the grounded theory that is generated (Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992). This marks the point of departure from the other GTM variants, such as Straussian GTM (Strauss and Corbin, 1992) and the Constructivist Grounded Theory proposed by Kathy Charmaz (2006). Strauss and Corbin favoured the 6 Cs model (causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, co-variances, and conditions) in theorization whilst Charmaz brought GTM on a new plane of constructivism. All these twists are perceived as unacceptable for Glaser as commitment to any particular theoretical model/paradigm that could restrain the emancipation of the researcher's theoretical sensitivity and hence loyalty to the emergence of theory.

The commitment to the packaged use of GTM is the prerequisite of the rigours of grounded theory research and the credibility of the product theory. These 'rigours' constitute the GTM 'disciplinary influence' which seems incompatible with social work practice research/participatory research because the involvement of stakeholders/participants/co-researchers could invite criticisms and even threats against such a commitment. In the following, the strained relationship between GTM disciplinary rigours and participative endeavours is further elaborated— the commitment to GTM rigours limits participation of service users in research design and interpretation of data, whereas the lack of rigours in theorizing participative practice is at the expense of

generating 'propositional knowledge' in a way readily translatable into action plans. In the following, the compatibility and incompatibility in the merging will be explored at first, so as to further suggest that my blend of these two research methodologies is better for facilitating and making sense of the participation of formerly abused women and their teenage children in this social work practice research.

### 3.3.2.2 The merging of Cooperative Inquiry and GTM: Problem of incompatibility

The combination of GTM and action oriented research is attempted at times to strengthen its link to practice/actions (Baskerville & Pries-Heje, 1999; Simmons & Gregory, 2003). It is observed that methodologies within action/participatory research enterprise do not offer readily applicable tools for data collection, interpretation, and theorization. Even though 'propositional knowledge' is suggested by Heron as a prerequisite to action plans then actions, there is no analytical tool provided in Heron's cooperative inquiry for such a purpose.

GTM is therefore identified as useful and fit for the purpose of theorizing in practice that involves other stakeholders. Baskerville and Pries-Heje (1999) argued that 'grounded formal theory is more trustworthy for consultations because both laymen and sociologists can readily see how its predictions and explanations fit the realities of the situation. This is strategically important [because] a layman will not accept a theoretical explanation unless he can readily see how it explains his situation and gives him a sound basis for corrections and future predictions' (p.7). Simmons and Gregory (2003) echoed this view and noted that GTM manages to inform actions that address organizational and social problems. This merging of GTM and action-oriented research is designed primarily within the framework of GTM, in order to develop the customary explanatory theory into operational theory. The extension of traditional explanatory grounded theory to action theory that both study actions and promote changes is called 'grounded action'. Grounded action, as a GTM variant, looks even more promising for realizing the merging of GTM with participatory research endeavours. However, unless participation of participants/users/stakeholders is carefully weaved into grounded action, the spirits of Cooperative Inquiry could not be safeguarded.

Simmons and Gregory touched on the issue of participation of other participants/users/stakeholders in their work and argued that how participation should

and could take place had to be decided within the context (2003). This stance looks remote from participatory research, which advocates the full participation of participants/users/stakeholders in research and actions as the ultimate measure of quality. However, after decades of development, insistence on a particular form of participation in participatory research is found to be contradictorily non-participative, and hence leads to the paradox of participation (Arieli, Victor, & Kamil, 2009). Arieli, Friedman and Kamil (2009) theorized such a paradox and contended that the paradox must be placed back in a practical context for relevant understanding and workable solutions through dialogues. Up to this point, the gap in designing how participation should and could take place in grounded action and participatory research appears less ineradicable. Full participation is therefore a regulatory concept that helps participants identify practices, attitudes, values, and ideologies that promote or hamper participation. In what way, to what degree, and for how long each participant participates in the inquiry are decided collectively by participants according to the specific context of practice.

The incompatibility therefore sits majorly in the compliance to the GTM methodological package, which creates a dilemma for the merging of GTM and Cooperative Inquiry. Cooperative Inquiry requires research decisions to be made with participants, while GTM requires a commitment to the packaged use of the methods prescribed. A complete harmonious merging could be expected only when the commitment to the packaged use of GTM/grounded action is deliberated, discussed, agreed, and exercised among all of the participants in the inquiry group. Otherwise, such a commitment could be damaging to the formation of participative cooperative relationship, and exclusive of participants who are unwilling or unable to perform such a commitment to GTM. In this situation, GTM/grounded action is no longer helpful in facilitating the translation of participants' experiential knowledge and presentational knowledge into propositional form, neither could it contribute to the continuation of the reflection-action-reflection cycles. In some circumstances, this dilemma will be heightened. For example, when theorization of participation does not interest participants, theoretical concerns do not support problem solving in practical terms, and the technicality of GTM curbs the participation of participants.

The abovementioned dilemma underlines the analysis of the actual practice of this CGI (chapter 4). Compared to 'reconstructing identities' (chapter 5) and 'making partnership

with teenage sons/daughters' (chapter 6), participants were less interested in conceptualizing the actual practice of CGI because they did not see the immediate relevance of that understanding to the problems they were encountering at the moment of the inquiry. Moreover, such an analysis required taking the knowledge generated in chapter 5 and 6 to a higher level of abstraction, so as to develop an understanding about how these knowledges were generated. Such an increased distance between the concepts generated in chapter 4 and the participants' lived experiences probably contributed to the reduced interest in participation. My interest in understanding the process of co-production of knowledge was therefore not entirely shared by women and teenage participants in this inquiry, whilst this mismatch of inquiry interest is helpful to point out where the incompatibility of the GTM and CI becomes more visible.

This experience resembles the tension between inquiry interests and practice interests in social work practice research as discussed by Uggerhøj (2011). This renders the 'voice' of participant researchers in the analysis presented in chapter 4 less prominent when compared to other finding chapters. However, instead of considering the tension as necessarily unhelpful, Uggerhøj (2011) perceived it as essential for genuine collaboration because it allows differences to take place in knowledge making and to enable 'practice' and 'research' to challenge each other. As long as participants 'didn't mind' having the practitioner-researcher to do the analysis of the process, I carried on the analysis of the process of participation alongside the other analysis elaborated in chapter 5 and 6. Analysis of the interrelatedness of 'partnership making', '(trans)forming identities' and 'displaying a family-like community of practice' was later found to be helpful for participants to tease out strategies and skills that we had employed in maintaining this action-inquiry community. They were particularly important for participants in the termination stage when women participants decided to carry on running the group. Other than this, the analysis on the power differentials embedded in the shared histories of women participants was helpful for locating the potential benefit of the practitioner-researcher (me) 'not sharing the same history with other women participants' (see 4.4.1). Therefore, maintaining diverse practice and inquiry interests is considered critical in keeping this CGI genuinely participatory.

### ***3.3.3 My blend: Cooperative Grounded Inquiry and Implementation***

I propose that the merging of Cooperative Inquiry and GTM could enhance research with formerly abused women amidst social work practices, as long as it enables the formation of participative social worker-users relationship and participation of each party in practice-research design, implementation, revision, and evaluation. The need for grounded action is to remediate the lack of tools for generating propositional knowledge that is grounded in participants' expressions, actions, experiences, and reflections of these; whilst it also offers assistance for building propositional knowledge in a way ready for informing action plans and actions. However, the packaged use of grounded action, in the same way as the participation ideal ascribed in Cooperative Inquiry, must be continuously deliberated, discussed and challenged whenever necessary for the promotion of authentic participation by each participant in the decision making and action taking of the inquiry process.

The ideal of CGI is to achieve the flourishing of extended epistemology and utilization of methodological techniques to support practical knowing informed by action-ready propositional knowledge and grounded in all forms of data collected from presentational and experiential knowing. This methodological invention is a member of PAR, hence, it inevitably encounters the paradox of participation as other participatory methodologies do. This paradox, as I contend, is inevitable and necessary to make practice-research 'more' participatory. The paradox allows the participatory ideals to work as sensitizing concepts to challenge non-participative practices, attitudes, values, and ideologies embedded in the practice context; in reverse, the participants in the practice context have to be enabled to argue otherwise equally. This dialogical relationship between participatory methodological ideals and practice contributes to leveraging participatory practice research into 'becoming participatory'. The dialogical relationship is presented as below (Fig.3.3):

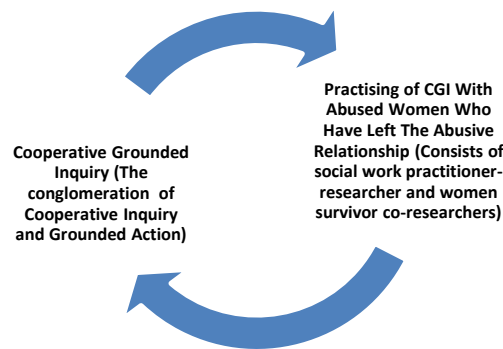


Fig. 3.2 Dialogical relationship between the ideal and the practice of Cooperative Grounded Inquiry

This CGI has engineered room for the above dialogical relationship to take place and yielded a re-examination of the western individualistic model of participation. The evolving of local concerns for relations and care posed an urge for positioning the participatory ideal on the relational plane (see Chapter 4, *the participatory practices from the West: demand for mutual accountability, equality and ethical evaluation*). In the following, I will continue to discuss the design of this CGI and how it operated at different stages and in different aspects. For easier reference, Appendix 3.1 also outlines the timeline and facts about this CGI.

### 3.3.3.1 Gaining entry, recruitment and consent: Process, approaches and techniques

The original target participants in this CGI were the initiating social work practitioner-researcher and abused women who had left an abusive relationship (institutionally defined as divorced or living in separate households with the abusive partners). They represent the providing end and the receiving end of domestic violence services respectively. In this inquiry, my personal network<sup>17</sup> with a local survivors' group was chosen to be the site for recruitment because some active members in the survivors' group expressed a strong interest in developing services for formerly abused women. This fitted the basic recruitment principle for participatory research, 'drawing the common souls'. Formerly abused women who were interested in the project were encouraged to contact the practitioner-researcher by phone/email for arranging an

<sup>17</sup> The practitioner-researcher participated in a local survivors' group for around 2 years (2008-2010) as a volunteer and continued to have connections with key members of the survivors' group. The need for services after separation was identified among abused women in daily exchanges, hence, suggesting a great chance to recruit formerly abused women who care about developing post-separation domestic violence services in Hong Kong.

individual introductory session. 6 out of 7 formerly abused women eventually joined the group after the introductory sessions. One potential participant turned down the invitation because the goals of the group did not match her expectations. The recruitment stage also engaged the former chairperson, NF (she is also a participant in this research and the mother-head figure for the women participants), in identifying abused women who had left the abusive relationship, and distributing invitations to participate.

Before the **introductory session**, target participants' consent to participate in the introductory session (see Appendix 3.2) was first obtained. Women were also informed about their rights to withdraw from the introductory session at any point without any consequence caused to the services they were receiving. In the introductory sessions, CGI was introduced as *an option* for further inquiry. In due course, the basic principles, assumed roles of participants, commitment needed from participants, expected trajectory of the research process, and the research outcomes of this CGI were elaborated. Participating women were encouraged to voice their questions and opinions on the proposed methodology or whenever doubts arose about any aspect of the research. The introductory sessions were audio taped as agreed by the potential participants for informing the next introductory session and for further inquiry. In the initial recruitment, 5 women participants revealed their interest in partaking in the introductory sessions, while 2 more women participants took part in the introductory sessions 2 months after the establishment of the inquiry group. 6 formerly abused women, except the practitioner-researcher, eventually joined the group after the introductory sessions. One potential participant turned down the invitation because of a mismatch with her expectations. Consents for participation (see Appendix 3.3) in this CGI were obtained from the 6 women participants before their participation in the inquiry group.

In this regard, introductory sessions were also opportunities for the initiating practitioner-researcher to build relationships with target participants and develop the research with participants in a way that addressed their concerns. Through the introductory sessions, we learnt that attention to the immediate interactions and local understandings of the research could enhance the initiating practitioner-researcher's reflexivity and sensitivity in knowledge production. In this CGI, each introductory session was analysed through



constant comparative analysis immediately after the session. It helped identify social practices and understandings that stood in the way to achieve/make sense of the participatory ideal, while informing the practitioner-researcher on how to address them in the next introductory session with potential women participants (see Chapter 4, *making partnership*). The analysis of the introductory sessions was also shared in the inquiry group for facilitating discussion on the egalitarian footing among participants, and the merged role of participant and researcher.

Teenage participants were formally recruited in April 2013 once the ethics review approval for 'children's participation' was obtained from the University of York. The need for involving sons and daughters of formerly abused women first emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> inquiry session (see Chapter 6) as women participants saw their happiness as strongly enmeshed with the happiness and achievement of their 'children'. Being guided by the participatory ideals, we decided to improve the problematic one-off consent giving mechanism and involved potential teenage participants in designing a mechanism to consistently ensure their coercion-free participation in the inquiry. Therefore, before engaging children formally in the discussion about the consent giving mechanism, we agreed on the following points: (1) children's participation in the group had to be entirely voluntary. If children did not want to attend group meeting, parent participants should not attempt to force them either verbally, by punishment or by reward. (2) Parent participants should be ready to listen to children's view on their experiences, including how they went through the violence and related experiences. Parents had to be aware that children's views could be unexpected and in contrary to their views/lived experiences. Therefore, parents were told that they should not act in a way to cause harm, threat, or discomfort to children for any of the views they expressed. (3) Children were equal partners with whom women participants had to collaborate with full respect and recognition of their views and knowledge. On the basis of these agreements, we proceeded to invite Yuen and Dai, who had shown an interest in this inquiry, to design the consent giving mechanism. Teenage participants, with the facilitation of women participants, arrived at a consent mechanism that monitored the potential abuse of authority by their mothers (see Chapter 6, p. 173-174). Thereafter, teenage participants, Yuen, Dai, Siu and Bui, participated variably in the inquiry sessions, depending on their own time schedule, interests and relationships with their mothers at the time.

By the end of this inquiry, 7 women participants (Me, HL, NF, PF, YY, KW and YT) and 4 teenage participants (Yuen, Dai, Bui and SY) were officially involved. 2 women out of 7 were born and educated in Hong Kong, while the others were all born and educated in mainland China. Women participants were aged from late twenties to mid sixties at the moment of the inquiry. Meanwhile, teenage participants were all born in mainland China and educated in Hong Kong since their late primary or early secondary education. Teenage participants were aged 11-18 at the moment of the inquiry (details please refer to Appendix 3.1).

### 3.3.3.2 The implementation of CGI: Group approach, Reflection-action-reflection cycles, and other principles/techniques for enhancing participation and extended epistemology

Diversity, dynamicity and complexity of practice have been widely acknowledged in social work literatures, suggesting that social work practice research has to be able to embrace these characteristics, whilst providing scientific rigours in bringing about 'better'/ 'preferable' changes to problems. As argued earlier, CGI on one hand promotes attention to contextuality and on the other hand provides framework and techniques to translate data into evidence for further actions. Nevertheless, CGI renders the construction processes of different forms of knowledge the main sites for inquiry and change.

CGI challenges the domination of mind-based rationality that subordinates other forms of knowing that are equally valuable for human flourishing. Therefore, it is also a democratizing process for achieving equality locally, alongside the knowledge building (Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005). In this regard, participation of participants forms the basis for evaluating what is valuable, preferable, and better for the stakeholders, in order to resist the dominant managerial capitalistic culture. In practising this CGI, women participants agreed that efficiency was never prioritized at the expense of sufficient exploration of each participant's ideas and experiences. At times in this inquiry, we dropped plans that did not sufficiently include differences in views and the diverse relevant experiences, for example, facebook page set-up, community education strategies and collaboration with political parties. Through both literature review and practising of this CGI, a number of principles and techniques were also generated for facilitating participation and recognizing different forms of knowing.

### 3.3.3.2.1 Group approach

For the practice of participatory research, group context is suggested as appropriate for building human connections and the collective interpretation of realities on which to devise collective action plans. It is suggested by Heron and Reason (2001), from their experience, that group sizes ranging from 6 to 12 people work best. It is supposed to provide a sufficient variety of experiences to stimulate a richer understanding of the problem, without depriving participants' of time for the expression of views. The total number of participants in this inquiry was 11 (the initiating practitioner-researcher, 6 women participant-researchers, and 4 teenage participant-researchers), which lay within the optimal range of participants in an inquiry group. We had at least one whole-day meeting nearly every week for 5 months (From late January to June 2013, see Appendix 3.1), in addition to 2 press interviews, 5 support and service sessions, and 3 extra sessions for drafting statements on domestic violence services and children's rights in Hong Kong. The group approach was found to be suitable for working with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters in this CGI because it offered network and rapports for participants to share resources, information, and even distress in the course of problem solving. Wicks and Reason (2009) also suggested that adherence to the developmental stages of a group provided the optimal conditions for 'opening up communicative space' in participatory research

Although the group approach offers a socio-relational condition for realizing and enhancing participation, Habermas' communicative space is not sufficient for realizing communicative rationality and a fuller version of human sense making (Ho, Ma, Chuah, & Lee, 2010). Ho et al. (2010) borrowed Bourdieu's concept of field to explain that actions, interactions and language expressions were shaped by the governing rules of the field. Therefore, any action performed by practitioner-researchers is endorsed by the rules embedded in the field s/he engages in, and it reproduces the governing rules in return. Gergen (2003) also contended that the primacy of rational deliberation, and the claim that it is the ultimate validity, requires re-examination and justification. Therefore, simple equalization of communicative space to the participative relationship would create a predicament for CGI. A field and stakeholders in the field of participatory research may have already determined the rules of the game about what participation should be and how it could be conducted, which is contradictory to participatory principles (Arieli,

Victor, & Kamil, 2009). Echoed in Ho et al.'s (2010) work, power, domination and oppressive practices have to be constantly challenged in order to attain a participative relationship among participants in problem solving and sense making (Park, 2001; Carey, 2009).

### 3.3.3.2.2 Data collection and analysis: modified reflection—action—reflection cycle

Based on Heron's reflection-action-reflection cycle, Fig.3.4 shows how the techniques borrowed from GTM or developed in the practising of CGI help to complete the cycle and enable the flourishing of different forms of knowing. According to GTM, everything is data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 2004), despite its types and nature. Its tradition encourages researchers to keep field notes for recording different forms of data, including conversational, observational, experiential and interactive data. Compounded with the phenomenological roots in Cooperative Inquiry, participant-researchers in this inquiry were situated as both researchers and actors who, on one hand, utilized all forms of data (verbal, textual, observational, and interactional) to develop propositional knowledge that informed their actions, while, on the other hand, produced experiences, data and knowledge in action to solve the emerging problems.

In this regard, each participant was encouraged to keep a personal log to document his/her own learning experiences, observations, reflections, feelings, desires, and visions. These personal logs include photos of the inquiry meetings where participants found they were able to capture their feelings, experiences, and thoughts. Drawings, documents, videos, and audio recordings were produced in this inquiry for maximizing inclusivity of different forms of data that revealed different forms of knowing<sup>18</sup>. In addition to the constant comparative analysis that was consistently employed and prompted by the practitioner-researcher, intuitive hunches and experience-based interpretation of data were employed by women participants, and also formed part of the data analysis when it gained support from further evidence in the inquiry. Different methods of data

---

<sup>18</sup> Data produced in this inquiry: (1) Document 1: Children participation in research (bilingual), (2) Document 2: Parenting Habits of Abused Women and Better Ways Out (Chinese). (3) Document 3: The concept of 'survivors' and 'surviving' (Chinese), (4) Document 4: 'How to deal with the press?' (Chinese), (5) Audio tape recording in most of the sessions, (6) Personal logs from each of the participating members, (7) Observational notes and self-reflective notes by the practitioner-researcher, (8) Photos of the meetings (e.g. seating, tools and skills employed, methods of documentation etc.), and (9) videos of trainings sessions on emotional support and parent-son/daughter practices

interpretation would not be immediately discarded, but made explicit as alternative interpretations for further comparison and support from evidence.

Although restrictions for data collection and analysis acquired from GTM will be relaxed (from the traditional view which assumes the superiority of a particular form of data collection and analysis), it doesn't imply the abandonment of research rigour. The rigour of CGI, like other participatory research, relies on the conscientious abiding achievement of participation and democratization of knowledge making (Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005). Reflection-action-reflection cycles, specially designed for these pursuits, were enhanced by some tools from GTM and certain locally developed participatory principles. In the following, I will discuss what tools/participatory principles were employed and how they help us realize human flourishing:

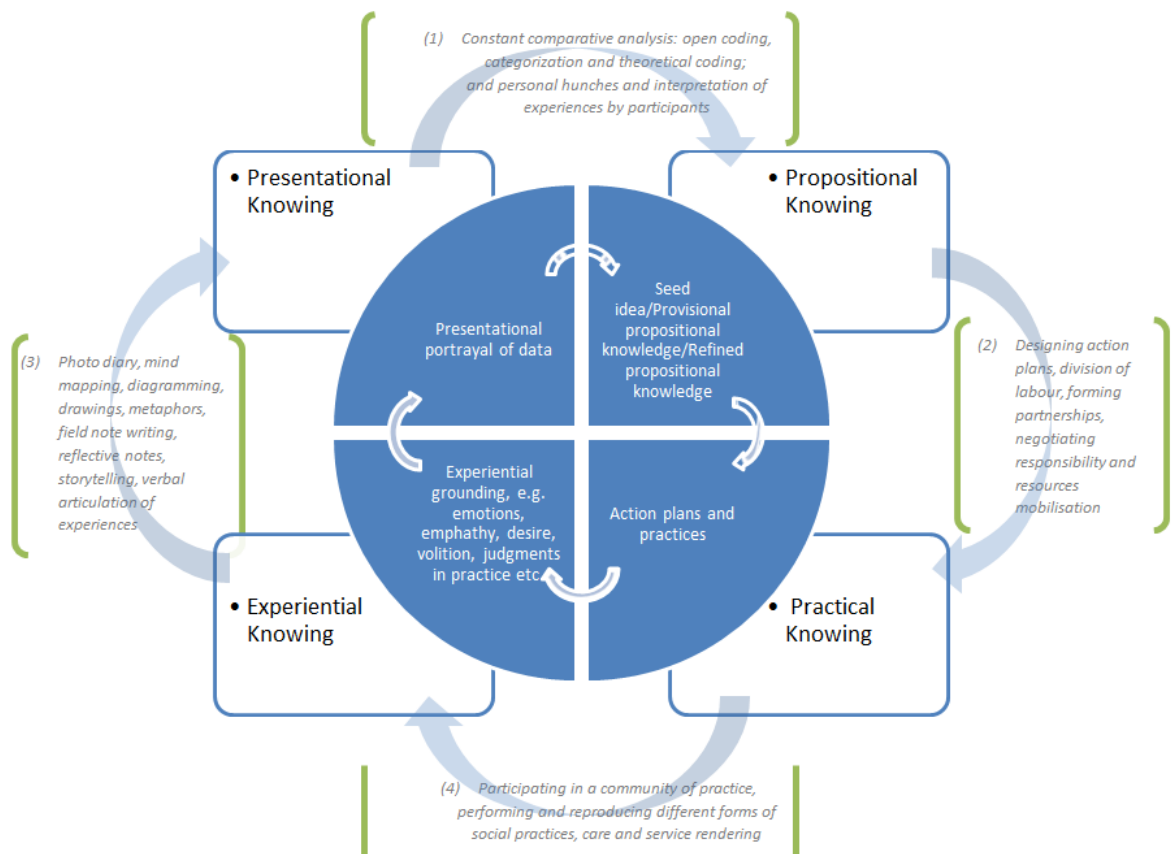


Fig. 3.3 modified reflection—action—reflection cycle

*Propositional knowing* is composed of acts of writing, talking and using symbols to construct relationships among concepts/abstracted understandings. Mediated by language, which could be verbal, textual or symbolic, propositional knowledge was

produced by co-researchers in the CGI. We identified problems and solutions through making sense of presentations, tacit expressions, and the experiences of ourselves and others, within and outside of the inquiry group. The evaluation and reflection sessions scheduled in the inquiry meetings were the main sites for collective propositional knowing. Grounded Action earns its role in developing propositional knowledge that was action ready. The application of *constant comparative analysis, conceptualization, theorization, and memoing* was to service the development of better intervention, solutions, and also operational theories<sup>19</sup>, instead of generating highly abstract explanatory theories (formal theories). For instance, by comparing victim and survivor images drawn by us/our narratives on the current relationships with the abusers, we were able to conceptualize our perceived qualities and emotionality of victims and survivors, and theorize the way we organize our frontline service and care rendering with reference to those characteristics (Chapter 5). Through pondering back in time for the strategies and experiences that had worked in helping us depart from victimhood, care and services were generated, practised and modified to meet the needs of abused women who were variably located within the ‘victim-chungsangje’ classification. By constantly comparing textual, verbal, audio-visual and pictorial data, women participants, teenage participants, and I continuously constructed propositional knowledge to explain problems and suggest solutions.

The construction and re-construction of the ‘victim-chungsangje’ classification reflected the modifiability of local theories generated by GTM; meanwhile, variations in experiential and presentational knowing enriched the inclusivity of emerging concepts and yielded new concepts in making the differences available for exploration and discussion. New concepts also led to changes in attitudes, care, and service rendering to members of the community. Another example of operational theory development could refer to Chapter 6, on different mother-son/daughter practices developed through varying mother-son/daughter partnerships. Our openness to new data, as encouraged by prioritization and appreciation of differences, allowed us to modify our understandings of the situation with the input of ‘new data’ collected by participants in the inquiry group. Inequality and power play engrained in the history of participants’ interactions were

---

<sup>19</sup> This is a theory developed from operational data that capture in the context about what works and what doesn’t. This is more than customary grounded theory studies, which most likely produce explanatory theories for the problem under investigation.

found to obstruct the emergence of new data/differences, and therefore those interactions were responded deliberately by the practitioner-researcher to reserve the room for alternative narratives and ways of doing things (see Chapter 4).

*Practical knowing* is about how to execute the action plans and act to solve contingent problems that arise from practice. It is a process of know how. The knowledge gained from working out solutions is practical knowledge. Formation of partnership, negotiation of responsibility, division of labour, and distribution of resources were found to be part of practical knowing (see chapter 5 and 6). These elements were identified as crucial to success in serving the needs of formerly abused women and increasing the synergy between abused mothers and sons/daughters in solving daily problems in the post separation period. However, practical knowing may not be necessarily speakable, while it enables the actors to solve problems (doing) without knowing (propositionally). Nick Crossley (2007) called these as body techniques and proposed that the study of body techniques could help us understand how human practices were embodied and how the body is 'used' in a particularly socio-cultural context.

“‘Body techniques’, by contrast... effectively translates ‘embodiment’ into a researchable format. By way of a focus on body techniques we can explore the embodiment of the doing of a wide range of practices and processes that are of interest to us’ (P.87).

‘Body techniques’ have three aspects, socio-cultural, biological and mindful, which are intertwined with each other to constitute human practices. Due to the presence of socio-cultural dimension, body techniques could be passed on from experts to novices through networks. In training sessions, participants with practical competence were urged to be reflexive in order to make the embodied knowing explicit. For example, qi-gong, pressure point massage, emotional support, care taking of victims of abuse, collaborating with sons and daughters, writing personal logs and comparing data. All this ‘know-how’ articulated from participants’ past experiences required body techniques to accomplish them. Crossley (2007, p. 88) contended that ‘the teaching and learning process tends to throw the principle embodied in a body technique into relief’. These expositions of embodied knowledge could be linguistic/propositional, aesthetical, and kinaesthetic (presentational).

Transmission and reproduction of body techniques (as gained in past successful experiences) were crucial in facilitating experiential knowing in solving new coming problems. At the same time, passing on body techniques itself requires cycles of reflection-action-reflection to succeed. The embodied knowledge could be passed on to others by body simulations of one's body techniques, for example, dancing (see fig. 3.4). The unconscious and unspeakable embodied knowledge was, by reflection, deliberated and explicated to produce presentational knowledge/ propositional knowledge, in order to communicate it to the other participants. This was a process by which both the teaching and learning participants became more reflexive about what they had done and how it had been done. Exposition of embodied knowledge allowed the other participants to practise with reference to the explicated principles. The practising of the body techniques also offered insights into understanding our own embodiment, which might facilitate or hinder the acquisition of new body techniques. It therefore led to more new experiences for reflection and explication. It could be said, the study of body techniques keeps the cycle of action and reflection rolling at both the personal and interpersonal level; hence, the flourishing of all forms of knowing.



**Fig. 3.4 Participants were simulating the moves in the dancing session in a group meeting (masks added to protect privacy)**

Study of body techniques was conducted in various training sessions in this CGI. To tackle the body fragility, we started our inquiry meetings with 1 hour physical exercises, including qi-gong, dancing and stretching; to provide proper support for women victims of abuse, we devoted training sessions on 'how to talk to "new sisters"' (abused women who had just left). Furthermore, to develop helpful and friendly relationships with the media, we spent time learning how to write a 'press release' and respond to harsh questions and online criticisms. Lastly, to restore intimacy with sons and daughters, we carried out parenting sessions for learning 'how to respond to hostility'. These training



sessions involved a lot of body simulation, observation of bodily responses, examination of body techniques and pre-dispositions and conceptualization of these techniques on site or afterwards. Co-researchers were at this time also the co-subjects because their performance in the situation will be studied at later stages (Reason, 1994).

*Experiential knowing* is a stage when participants fully immerse themselves into the experience of problem solving. It says the moments of 'just doing it'. The particular context/problem would require the participants to adjust the practising of the solutions, grounded in propositional knowing and practical knowing, accordingly. Such an experience would lead to new ideas and insights about the problem and solution in the due course of problem solving. The translation of 'what worked' (for themselves and others) into 'what works for themselves' occurs in experiential knowing and could direct participants to new domains of inquiry and concerns. The original action plans will be held lightly and sometimes participants may 'lose the awareness that they are part of an inquiry group' because of being so enthralled in the role of co-subjects (Reason, 1994:43). This form of knowing through doing is experiential knowing.

The practising of the mother's day event, organized by inquiry group participants for other abused women, demonstrated how immersion in experiential knowing could bring about new insights into problems and solutions. The mother's day event was designed to help abused women to relax and have some fun on the day, and hopefully to build mother-child intimacy. Women and teenage participants therefore transferred their successful experiences in enhancing happiness and facilitating mother-child collaboration to the programme design, i.e. BBQ, hiking, aromatic massage and interactive games (see Appendix 6.2). In the actual practice of the event, 'new sisters' preferred sharing their sorrows with group members to hiking or having a BBQ, whereas children of these women participants enjoyed 'chunking things on others' more than preparing Mother's Day cards. In response to all the contingencies, we (members of the group) immersed ourselves in solving problems that arose in practice, so as to increase the chance of meeting the targets set in the action plans. Simultaneously, we were sometimes carried away by contingencies while at times we decided to put the emerging needs of the participating families first. For example, we cancelled the aromatic massage in order to allow more time for 'one-on-one sharing' between our group members and the participating abused women.

By reflecting on the experiential knowing undergone in the inquiry, the unconscious ways of acting, speaking and responding were taken to the surface of consciousness. Reflection could be seen as directing attention and carrying out perceiving acts towards those unconscious experiences. By doing so, inquiry group members constructed consciousness about themselves in relation to those experiential encounters with the 'perceived objects', i.e. events, performances and people encountered in the inquiry. In the same way as the learning of body techniques, expositions of experiential knowing could be expressed in non-propositional ways<sup>20</sup>. Storytelling, photo taking, drawing, diagramming, poem writing, mind mapping, using metaphors, and dancing were acts carried out by participants in the inquiry, for creating ones consciousness about the unspeakable embodied experiences obtained in problem solving. By engaging in these activities, group participants performed presentational knowing.

*Presentational knowing* allows the unspeakable knowledge (most likely experiential and sometimes practical) a chance to be articulated. The knowledge produced in the course of expressing the unspeakable experiential knowledge with non-propositional means, e.g. music, poems, and pictures, is presentational knowledge. Further articulation of presentational knowledge may assist the development of propositional knowledge which is grounded in the practical and experiential knowing of participants (also the propositional knowing from the previous cycle). Visual images (photos and videos) or imageries (metaphors and poetry) were found to be the most stimulating tools for presenting ideas, feelings and embodied experiences for both women and teenage participants in the group, while I found diagramming the most useful tool for visualizing the links among different conceptualized experiential fragments, and the mind-mapping helpful for sorting out dimensions of experienced problems. The discovery of useful presentational tools was facilitated by the spirit of GTM for attending to various occurrences in making sense of what worked and what didn't for the various issues. Increased incorporation of visual tools was supported by women's increased level of involvement under the stimulation of colours and photo images in the first inquiry meeting. More details about how these tools were employed to generate presentational data can be seen in Chapter 5 and 6.

---

<sup>20</sup> Propositional knowing should be narrowly defined as the linking of linguistic/symbolic concepts to give an articulation on how 'things' work. Therefore, expositions of experiential knowing could be linguistic or symbolic, but not propositional.

Articulation of these presentational data could help us translate the presentations of embodied experiences into linguistic tokens (concepts) and even propositional knowledge. This translation was usually two-fold. The first layer was carried out by comparing presentational data, drawing out conceptual similarities/differences, and categorizing the lived experiences in one's terms (in-vivo codes) in the group. This layer involved creative use of linguistic stocks available in our culture in capturing the conceptual properties of different data. The second layer was to find out the links among the different linguistic tokens in a way that identified, described, explained, and redressed problems in the context. Propositional knowing was conducted by producing sufficient linguistic tokens that capture the diverse presentational and experiential knowledge, whilst linking them together in a way that fit the lived experiences of participants in the group. This resembled theoretical coding of GTM, but differed in a way that it did not necessarily arrive at only one core category at a time. In this inquiry, multiple core categories, i.e. '3 layers of participation', 'locating victim-chungsangje' and 'partnership making with sons/daughters', were maintained in parallel with each other to indicate the diverse foci of the inquiry that we were simultaneously working on.

#### 3.3.3.2.3 Data collection and analysis on the forming of participative relationship

The formation of participative relationship and the value of it were examined continuously alongside with the problem solving practices (the reflection-action-reflection cycles). The parallel study into the inquiry process, with particular attention to the forming of participative relationships, helps participants to realize the dynamics within the group, which may promote or hinder democratization. Documentation of regular group dynamics and relationships generated a database for the analysis of formation of participative/non-participative relationships. As this inquiry focus could not show its immediacy, compared to the burning needs for identity reconstruction and reconciling with sons/daughters, women participants were not eager to be involved in making sense of it. However, the impact of sisterhooding, family making and the prominent mother-head figure gradually played out in the ongoing inquiry (Chapter 4). Being interrupted in giving one's view, chastised for not revealing one's history of abuse, and being co-opted in the power figure's point of view increased participants sensitivity to the problematic nature of the dynamics and power differentials embedded in the group. Even though women participants were not interested in systematically collecting

data on the non-participative relationships, they did reproduce and participate in them. Women participants refused to carry out proper reflection-action-reflection cycles for inquiring into the forming of (non)participative relationships because they felt uncomfortable in bringing the conflicts to the surface of the 'sisterhood'. Instead, women participants expressed their experienced oppression, authoritarian mothering (by the mother-head figure), and monopolisation of surviving stories outside the group or in the absence of the authority figure. They reflected on how these practices were sustained and reproduced when they talked in private with me (the practitioner-researcher) about their concerns and sufferings.

Although women participants refused to bring out the relationship conflicts and power dynamics in the collective sense making, it didn't mean that they gave up on addressing the non-participative practices properly. Two participants directly suggested to me that they observed more respect and less authoritarian practices from the mother-head figures in my presence. The interactions between the mother-head and I were then compared to those between the mother-head and other women participants, and strands of power differentials entrenched in women participants' pre-existing history with each other were discovered. My lack of shared history with the mother-head figure accidentally opened up the space free of historical unbalanced powers, and also crafted a relationship that required equal partnership making in order to support it. My being in the group was conceptualized as 'historically disenthralled but socially connected being' which was found to be able to put the historically embedded power relationships into relief. I was primarily responsible for studying the forming of (non)participative relationships, including collecting data, compiling analysis, and taking evidence-informed actions to create room for 'social participation', 'epistemological participation' and 'political participation' (see both Chapter 4 and 7). I continuously produced field notes, coded data and wrote memos on plausible stories in making sense of the dynamics and relationships among members (including myself), so as to provide a close examination on the emergence of participative and non-participative relational practices. Analysis of these data has yielded Chapter 4 in this thesis.

#### 3.3.3.2.4 Planned termination: review and redress

Time allowance for this research was communicated clearly with the potential participants at the recruitment stage, so that they could be prepared for the termination

of the inquiry. As far as participatory research requires strong commitment and personal investment, termination should be able to deal with the tangible and emotional impacts entailed by it. In this regard, termination has to be scheduled with participants in this type of inquiry, so as to ensure that the following goals are addressed properly:

- Preparing participants emotionally for the separation
- Helping participants to wrap up the experience undergone in the inquiring process
- Agreeing on how this inquiry group should end/continue, and in what form
- Preparing participants to continue on the unfinished personal and group business initiated in the inquiry (i.e. providing direct support, building necessary networks, referring to relevant social services and skill training)



Fig. 3.5 Timeline for reviewing the inquiry processes in the termination stage

Hence, in this CGI, termination was planned ahead to allow enough time for participants to reveal their concerns, worries and plans after separating with the practitioner-researcher. The termination period in this research had two phases, reviewing and redressing. Reviewing the inquiry process worked well to help participants wrap up their experiences and move on with what they had learnt in the past 6 months. Redressing the worries with participants shed light on the possible solutions within the limited available resources. The reviewing phase of termination in late May and early June was largely conducted with women participants because it clashed with teenage participants' final examinations. Teenage participants were not able to attend meetings held in late May and early June; however, they were invited to write to us and express their views and concerns. Yuen revealed his concerns over parenting of mothers in the group and his concerns led to another reflection-action-reflection cycle in redressing problems in family care (details refer to Chapter 6).

The reviewing phase was aided by a timeline that displayed all the actions taken and plans implemented in this inquiry (see fig. 3.5). In these two sessions, women

participants were invited to review their experiences in undergoing different cycles of inquiry. Since pictorial presentation was found to be a useful medium for expression and further articulation of experiences, a stock of photos taken during the inquiry process was made ready to help participants capture the moments of concern (see figure 3.6). The formation of group identity was the moment that women reflected the most on because it helped consolidate sisterhood, intimacy, and support among members who had experienced isolation, the unfamiliarity of living separately, and the uncertainties in undergoing divorce and custodial procedures. By reflecting on the terms 'Chungsangje the Pearl's Project', 'sisters' and '*tong lo yan*', as locally employed collective identities, we confirmed women participants' aspiration to leave victimhood and to support other abused women. Through reviewing how these emotional, social and tangible resources had helped us bring forward the action inquiry, these resources were also made more visible and ready for participants in carrying on future actions. It was said to be useful for highlighting the support and resources available in the face of the marginalization of formerly abused women in the formal domestic violence services in Hong Kong. Achievements in the inquiry group further increased women participants' confidence in their ability to accomplish the visions and missions of the group. Next to these, concerns/worries over the collaborative relationship with the local political group, continuation of constant comparative analysis, skills in carrying on emotional support for other abused women, and unfinished mother-son/daughter partnership building were identified and discussed in the reviewing phase of termination. As termination was planned to be a prolonged period, time was allowed to redress the concerns/worries raised in the reviewing period.

In the second phase of termination, participants discussed, formulated and implemented action plans for redressing concerns/worries/problems expressed in the reviewing stage. As 'being annexed' was identified as the major threat in collaborating with established organizations, we worked out principles and regulations for negotiating the partnership with existing organizations, and clarified the details of the existing collaboration with the local political group in particular. These principles and rules were made to secure an independent identity of the group for safeguarding group participants' unanimous agreement to collaborative details and the collaboration's fitness to the visions and missions of our project. Next to it, training sessions on constant comparative analysis, emotional support skills, and mother-son/daughter partnership in parenting were also

intensively carried out in this redressing phase of termination. When we were approaching the end of the inquiry, women participants perceived constant comparative analysis as an essential skill to make subtle experiences visible and available for discussion. Therefore, they requested the practitioner-researcher (me) to pass on the skills before separation. Women participants realized that they relied too much on me for carrying out/facilitating constant comparative analysis in the group, so they elected YY and PF to be the major 'trainees' in learning the skill. These training sessions were carried out alongside the other training sessions on emotional support simulation workshops, and mother-son/daughter partnership making sessions in June 2013, for preparing the termination. Fear of separation escalated by the lack of skills and unclarified problems was thus far redressed by these new action plans. Emotional attachment to the practitioner-researcher was revealed, but it was not in a devastating manner, as inter-dependent relationship was encouraged and facilitated in this CGI instead of the sole dependence on the initiating researcher. The continuing support among members reduced the stress of separation in the termination process. With the help of mobile phone technology, communication tools, and online platforms (i.e. whatsapp, viber, facebook and wechat), both women and teenage participants were able to stay in touch with, and seek advice from, the practitioner-researcher whenever necessary. This supporting network is still maintained through the use of mobile communication aids.

#### 3.3.3.2.5 Working principles

##### i. Egalitarian footing

Participation presumes equality, which does not imply the levelling of differences, but the equal entitlement to being included in the community (co-existence), in making sense of social experiences (epistemological participation), and in constructing similarities and differences (political participation). This egalitarian footing is not granted, but achieved with immense effort in addressing practices that marginalize, subordinate and repress one's rights to participate in different layers of social life. In CGI, practising unfamiliar practices, articulating experiences differently, acquiring/developing creative linguistic tokens for the unfamiliar, communicating views, and negotiating for commonalities and differences were willfully prompted, in order to encourage practices that presume 'equality'. In this regard, the initiating researcher should assume the undeniable responsibility to attend not only to the problems under study, but the relationships and

practices formed in the inquiring process through which problems are identified and solved. When CGI is translated into social work practice research, the initiating social worker should be able to suspend him/herself from the managerial practices that prioritize outcomes and efficiency (outcome/input); instead, s/he should be able to initiate and prompt practices that build up participative relationships and yield a higher degree of equality.

Reason and Heron (2001) contended that egalitarian footing in designing the inquiry is critical for the success of authentic collaboration and, in turn, an authentic participatory co-operative inquiry. Since the initiating researcher's inquiry design usually precedes the one constructed by/with co-researchers, s/he usually assumes more power over the participant-researchers in inquiry design or setting out the frame for the research. In this regard, it is strongly advised to initiate the inquiry group by allowing 'group members (to) internalize and make their own the inquiry method so that an egalitarian relationship is developed with the initiating researchers' (p.185). However, an expert-novice and researcher-subject distinction could be reproduced easily in interactions between the initiating researcher and participant-researchers, particularly when these distinctions are prominent in both the general society and the academic field. The initiating researcher needs to be aware of the ways s/he acts, speaks and interacts with others to avoid prompting and reproducing the unhelpful unequal distinctions (see chapter 4, on pragmatic rationality).

Interestingly, sometimes participant-researchers could hold more power than the initiating researcher if they could gate-keep the access to the field or recruitment of potential participants. In this inquiry, the mother-head figure made use of her influence on the other participants (withholding the consent to participate) to negotiate for a collaboration with her favoured political group<sup>21</sup>. The initiating researcher, in face of the

---

<sup>21</sup> The political group-participants collaboration: The collaboration with the political group was first suggested by a member of the inquiry group. She was the previous chairperson of a local survivors' group and the vice-chairperson of the political group. When I was approaching individual potential participants for recruitment and introduction of the project, I realized that the chairperson had already 'talked' to them and requested their support for collaborating with the political group. Therefore, most of those I had approached refused to sign the consent for participation until the details of the University (project)-political group collaboration got settled to their satisfaction. According to the ethical principles of confidentiality, respect of individuality and coercion-free collaboration, we composed an agreement in the first meeting with the input of potential women participants before they signed the consent for participation. This marked the start of the political group-participants collaboration. With the increasing sense of group identity later in the inquiry process, the collaboration with the political group was more likely to be described as *'inter-institutional collaboration' between the 'inquiry group' and the political group*.



pre-existing power plays, should be alert to the potential costs of building equal footing and should structure the maximum space for achieving equality and fuller participation from the outset of the collaboration. I deliberately challenged the leader status of the mother-head gatekeeper, which she assumed on me, by bringing the discussion and decisions about the political group-participants collaboration back to the inquiry meeting. I engaged all the participants concerned with discussing the content of this collaborative relationship. I encouraged each participant to speak their views (at the beginning participants views were quite equivocally positive), and then I explicated my concern over potential threats of exploitation, repression of voices, and marginalization rooted in the lack of infrastructure for equal footing in this collaboration. These concerns were first raised for examination and discussion, and they led to varied opinions from women participants in making sure that their voices would not be misrepresented, their decisions about the production and dissemination of findings would be taken seriously, and their personal details would not be revealed on any occasion. On the basis of the discussion, we collaboratively drafted an agreement of collaboration for the political group, so as to make sure all the concerns of members were properly addressed before the collaboration actually kicked off.

On the participant to participant level, equality was understood by members as no one's opinion/voice was to be missed. It assumed that a minority's voice was as important as the majority's. Therefore, majority was not enough for bringing about a decision/conclusion, but unanimous agreement. Conclusions and action plans which did not receive 100% endorsement would not be taken forward for actual actions. Instead of rushing into conclusions or actions, the differences revealed in the decision making process were further deliberated and explored in the group meetings, in order to seek more inclusive alternative understandings of the lived experiences, problems, and solutions. 'Talking stick' was employed to ensure that everyone got the chance to deliberate his/her views and respond to others without interruption. When debates were heated and everyone wanted to dominate the conversations, the 'talking stick' was found to be particularly helpful for reserving participants' rights of speech. Nonetheless, the room for uninterrupted expression increased the possibility for participants' opinions to be heard, and it also helped each member of the group make sense of different, and sometimes outlying, experiences.

Without doubt, the achievement of egalitarian footing in CGI could be next to impossible without the readiness for democratisation of knowledge production in the academic field. Universities/research institutes as the gatekeeper, on both academic quality and research ethics, have to be equipped with knowledge about the multiplicity of human knowing and the ethical foundation for democratisation of knowledge production. Otherwise, research endeavours that attempt to rectify the domination of mind-based rationality and principle-based ethics will be filtered off in the ethics review procedures.

## ii. Empathy

An authentic collaboration/participative relationship between initiating researcher and other co-researchers has to be built on open and trustable communications among members. These communications should not be dominated by instrumental exchanges, but empathetic sentiment to understand each other's views and experiences (Ho et al., 2010). Through empathetic understanding, members could have a deep understanding of each other and create solutions to problems that were grounded in each individual's experience. Empathy is to go beyond the particular to the universal (among members). Ho et al. (2010) raised an example from their workshop about a group of design students who suspended their hearing so as to simulate their experience of the world without hearing. From the bodily experience of the loss of hearing, students designed a game with the hearing impaired design partner to enjoy music-like rhythm of dance with bottles of coloured water. The solution to enjoy 'music' in a world without hearing is created when empathetic understanding is attained, while the proposed solution creates a new experience for both design students and the design partner, but is grounded in the experience of both sides.

In developing an empathetic understanding over each other, they could not avoid examining each other's lives and their experience 'in depth and in detail'. Heron and Reason (1997) continued that 'it is likely that they will uncover aspects of their life with which they are uncomfortable and at which they have avoided looking' (p.185). From either the participative view or ethical view, participants of the group have to develop platforms for managing emotions and distress. In chapter 5, we can see how emotional disturbances were prioritized and carefully attended to by locating one and the others within the 'victim-chungsangje classification'.

iii. Maintaining openness and enabling changing the rules of the game

Professionals, no matter how open they are to involve 'others' in their field of practice, could not avoid acting, interacting, and reproducing the values, norms and rules embedded in the field (Ho et al., 2010) to benefit the privileged in the research design. In this regard, Ho et al. (2010) proposed 'constantly changing the rules of the game' as the mechanism to counterbalance power differentials embedded in a field, in order to achieve the 'interest in disinterest'. For real participation of 'others' to take place in a professional practice, or vice versa (the participation of human professionals in users experts' field of practice), there has to be built-in mechanism(s) for participants to challenge the rules of the games employed and displayed in the process. For doing so, it is necessary to explicate the rules and their underpinnings at the beginning of the practice. However, values, norms and rules are dispositions that actors acquired without necessarily knowing them consciously. CGI, therefore, should serve as a process for unveiling these dispositions in use, so as to maintain openness and transparency about values, norms, and rules in operation, and make them available for challenges.

I made explicit, at the beginning of the inquiry, the values, norms, and rules embedded in the fields where I had been predisposed in, for instance, social work practice research, GTM, and participatory inquiry. This is for educating co-researchers to learn how to step into the field, while paradoxically providing a force for argument that brings changes to the rules. Only when participants learn the rules, can they critically examine the rules and challenge the rules which are restrictive to their participation in the game. Hence, unreflective practice of participatory research could give rise to a paradoxical situation – participatory researchers force their way of participation on other participants in order to achieve ideal 'participation' in the inquiry process. The reflection-action-reflection cycle enables researchers to make the unconscious conscious, the unspeakable presentable, and the embodied communicable. Carey (2009) also reminded us about the domination of consumerism embedded in the history of the user participation movement. In her view, unawareness to the prevailing consumerist culture in the promotion of user participation could beget laissez-faire practices, which, in fact, advocated self-reliance in problem solving rather than collective participation. Unarticulated and unchallenged capitalist ideologies could also lead to victim blaming identities constructed around the abuse and surviving experiences of women (Nissim-Sabat, 2009).

#### iv. Reflexivity

A participatory inquirer has to be vigilant to his/her formation of self and how that affects the construction of understandings about the 'outside world' and guides his/her interactions with 'others'. As long as a human being is dynamic, changing and displayed differently according to the contexts of relationships, reflexivity is hence an awareness of the being of a being in different social localities. This variation of reflexivity is named as 'relational reflexivity' (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007). It is an awareness nurtured in reflective practices, such as writing reflective notes, constant analysis of personal performances and constructing understanding of oneself, when lived experiences and 'personal' practices are disclosed and articulated. Reflexivity is central to advancement of knowledge because it helps us locate the boundary of our frameworks for knowledge making, and hence creates a space for revising it with immediately 'unintelligible' sayings/doings that we encountered in social practices.

By engaging myself in reflective practices, I came to realize the influence of professional composure/distance on my self-disclosure in this CGI. Despite my strong aspiration to participatory principles, I still experienced times of hesitation in disclosing myself, particularly when it threatened professional composure/distance. Goldstein (1994) articulated that social work professionalism had been framed by 'strict abstinence' and 'experience-distant neutrality' for years. This understanding of professionalism requires practitioners to minimize self-disclosure because it may subvert the therapeutic relationship between social workers and 'clients'. Goldstein continued to criticize this negative view on self-disclosure, arguing for its constructive effect on engaging 'clients' and psychological healing. I am also convinced by the participatory paradigm that the appropriate 'distance' is not sustaining the 'expert-client' divide, but fusion of situated knowledge by communicative actions and empathetic understanding. Bearing the various conceptions of professionalism in mind, I felt even more frustrated in making choices of self-disclosure in practice.

Self-disclosure could take many forms, including: 'wearing a wedding band, decorating an office according to personal tastes, dressing stylishly or not as the case may be...revealing feelings, experiences, or problems that are similar to those of the patient' (Goldstein, 1994, p. 419). No one could completely shut down self-disclosure as long as s/he is interacting with others. The attempt to achieve equal footing among participants in the

inquiry could never flatten the contours in education, culture, generation, life exposure, and history that constituted uniqueness of participants. This realization came through a journey of reluctance in displaying my differences because I did not feel admitted by women participants in the core of the community at the beginning. I carefully chose my clothing to minimize the revelation of difference in economic status, I avoided academic/professional jargons to tune down the practitioner-user divide, and I also tuned in myself to women participants' dietary habits in pot-luck lunches to minimize the cultural gap. Despite this, the drastic change of attitude from women participants towards me happened only when I disclosed my history of once being in a highly controlling and conflicting relationship (see Chapter 4). After that, I felt more comfortable to show my differences wherever it did not reproduce unhelpful social divisions, because the worry of exclusion from the community had disappeared.

Pondering my journey of self-disclosure in this inquiry, I have discovered that self-disclosure could take place passively or actively. Sometimes, self-disclosure will be deliberately obscured by purposeful actions of self-concealment, i.e. changing personal styles in clothing and diets. These distinctions of self-disclosure could be seen in the way I contributed to the practice of 'sisterhooding' through active self-disclosure, and how I concealed myself to minimize the 'expert-client' and 'resourceful-deprived' divides. Someone may criticize self-concealment as artificial or inauthentic, or even unethical. I continued to reflect on the issue of self-disclosure in participatory social work practice research, and wondered if the pursuit of authenticity (a fixed and persistent self) was the utopia of Cartesian self and hence the positioning of a context-specific construction of self as inauthentic. Whether or not to disclose and what to disclose or conceal are, for me, more dependent on how far it helps solving problems that concern the participants and regulating the relational context in a more participatory sense. Reflexivity enabled me to be aware of how the construction of myself related to the 'others' and how those relationships framed the construction of knowledge and social practices for solving problems arising in the post-separation context of intimate partner violence cases. Writing this thesis further affords me a prolonged reflective journey to see how I constructed myself in the inquiry, as a 'historically disenthralled sister', through different ways of self-disclosure and self-concealment (see 4.4.1).

The appropriateness of self-disclosure/concealment is gained in the context, depending on what, how and when. It is premature to venture the contention that self-disclosure is intrinsically beneficial to the social worker-user collaboration; whereas, privileging self-concealment over self-disclosure is evident in nurturing unresponsive relationships to meet the psychological, social and tangible needs of women. The need for role models to leave victimhood in the post-separation context requires self-disclosure of workable experiences and coping abilities; meanwhile, the improvement of family care practices rests on the evaluation of participants' parent-son/daughter experiences. Drawing on the relational turn in reflexivity, I would say that the helpfulness of self-disclosure is not its 'authenticity' but how far the particular presentation of self (lived experiences) is relevant and practical to the concerns of the community.

After all, reflexivity helps me discover that I did not always uphold coherent philosophies/conceptions about social work professionalism. On reflection, the incoherence is unsurprising because it is yielded in the different traditions and conceptions of social work that I have engaged in— I was trained in conventional social work module in the early 2000s in Hong Kong, during which time I learnt about Felix Biestek's 7 principles, which told me that the emotional involvement in worker-client relationship had to be 'controlled'. Meanwhile, I engaged for years in working with academic staff, who taught narrative therapy, post-modernist theories, and phenomenology, through which my conception of 'Cartesian self' was challenged. The unresolved differences in the conception of (professional) self could possibly have influence on the writing of this thesis, putting much emphasis on transforming autonomy and the concept of self by the relational lens which provides greater potential to transcend the positivistic and constructivist models of 'professional' self.

#### **3.4 Institutional ethics review: the limitation of Hobbesian model and the urge for expanding the ethical lens**

This research underwent two institutional ethics reviews without obtaining an approval which was eventually granted by the chairperson of the ethics review committee by exercising her discretionary power. The ethics review was carried out by 3 reviewers, who needed to unanimously agree on the proposal and the relevant research ethics procedures, in order to grant approval. The first ethics review submission was made on 3

September 2012 and its rejection and all the comments from the 3 reviewers were received on 10 September 2012. The second ethics review submission was made on 24 September 2012 by resubmitting a revised ethics review application form, enclosing a detailed response to reviewers' comments (see Appendix 3.4), and a cover letter from the supervisor. However, it also failed because 'the first two reviewers have again rejected the submission and the third has approved it', as stated in the email from the ethics review committee administration on 17 October 2012. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> ethics review, the first reviewer required amendments on the information sheet while the second reviewer gave no concrete reason for his/her rejection. In response to the shutdown of communication by the second reviewer, the supervisor sought assistance from the chairperson of the ethics review committee to look into this case. After two months' investigation, the ethics approval was granted in late December 2012 on the discretion of the chairperson. In this case, we can see that ethics review committees can have a strong impact on approving or denying the legitimacy of a research project, and they are the major gatekeeping mechanism in current health and social care research (Downes, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2013). Therefore, the ethics reviewers' comments were of paramount significance in understanding how ethics were defined and limited in a way that could filter off Participatory Action Research projects (PARs), CGI in this case, from the major research domain.

The ethics review processes in this research generated useful comments for polishing up the ethical considerations and protection measures for inquiry participants. However, some comments were found to be impossible to solve by technical adjustment, but required a paradigmatic change in understanding research and science. The conventional framework of ethics review, which expects the reviewers to guarantee the researchers to have solved all the ethical problems before going into the field, reflects a Hobbesian model of ethics and inhibits the recognition of more contextualized forms of ethics, i.e. ethics of care. By analysing the process of obtaining the ethics review approval and the responses from the reviewers, 'failing to see abused women as active problem solvers', 'being entrenched in the Hobbesian model of ethics' and 'failing to engage in partnership with researchers with different approaches' are identified as the major obstacles for PARs with abused women to be admitted into the mainstream research enterprise.

In the following, I would like to first analyse the ethics review procedures undertaken for this research, and to point out the gap between the current ethics review procedures and the demand for contextualization of ethics. I will also delineate the ethical considerations that informed the design of this CGI with formerly abused women to demonstrate the need for expanding the ethical lens in institutional ethics reviews.

### ***3.4.1 Ethical hurdles to participatory action research with formerly abused women in the framework of traditional research ethics committees (RECs)***

PAR, an umbrella category that includes CGI, per se, appears problematic for traditional ethics review committees often because of its lack of 'clarity' in the course and consequences. PAR openly addresses the complexity and dynamicity of human practices, which do not follow linear causation that marks the primacy of traditional science. Objectivity and linear rationality entrenched in the enlightenment history presume the existence of absolute truth and a clear (linear and step by step) explanation of truth/reality (Reason, 1994). These metaphysical assumptions support traditional ethics review boards, which originated in medical science, and entailed the Hobbesian model of ethics (Blake, 2007). Researchers are expected to have a god's eye view in detecting all the possible harms and benefits to individual participants and the target group as a whole before they implement their studies. Meanwhile, ethics are assumed to be achieved by strictly following rules that safeguard the participants as informed by the god's eye knowledge. The researchers are presumably the more objective knowers who know better and obtain more qualified knowledge than those who are being studied. A power differential is therefore created between 'researchers' and the 'researched' while the former is automatically assigned the protection role and the latter the 'victim' role. Ignoring the limitation of the Hobbesian model of ethics and rule-based ethics could curb participatory research that redress the ethically problematic 'problem-free researcher and vulnerable researched' divide.

#### 3.4.1.1 'failing to see abused women as active problem solvers'

*Reviewer 1: 'vulnerable group'*

*Reviewer 2: 'with a group of vulnerable people'*



*Reviewer 3:* 'the emphasis seems to be more on the content of the intervention—i.e. the therapeutic process of developing 'co-participative' relationships...rather than establishing new knowledge', 'details are needed of all collaborators who will be involved in the study', 'the vulnerable nature of the participants'

The blanket designation of abused women to the label of 'vulnerable group' is worth re-examination because it suggests that 'vulnerability' is a quality, but not a situation; it also says anyone who has been victimised is more likely to face coercion and exploitation in their everyday lives (Downes, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2013). The unreflective use of 'vulnerable group' contradictorily entraps abused women in the identity of 'victims' by reinforcing the image of being deficient, powerless, and less capable of protecting their own interests or even their children's. The reviewers' comments could show how abused women are still located on the service receiving side, i.e. they have to be secured from a statutory or private agency, to receive therapeutic intervention, and are dismissed as collaborators in this participatory research. The automatic equalization of 'victims' and 'vulnerable' colludes with the entrapment model which ignores or plays down women's strengths in resisting violence and coercion and surviving everyday hardships. We disagree equally with the view that formerly abused women are problem-free or problem-saturated. The different mixtures of weakness and strengths are evident in the domestic violence literature, such that the term 'victim-survivor' emerges to capture the complexity of abused women's lived experiences. This CGI allows us to see how formerly abused women identified 'victimhood' as the stumbling block that had been standing in their way to exercising personal strengths and mental resources to solve problems (Chapter 5).

#### 3.4.1.2 'being entrenched in the Hobbesian model of ethics'

*Reviewer 1:* 'Outcomes are uncertain', 'no indication that guarantees of support for group members has been secured from a statutory or private agency'

*Reviewer 2:* 'I am not convinced that all potential risks have been addressed', 'I do not feel I could confidently say that everything has been done to minimise risks of harm to the research participants'

*Reviewer 3:* 'It is implied that at least some of the participants are already known to the researcher...it is unusual...for people known to the researcher to take part in a study'

It is argued by Blake (2007) that the Hobbesian perspective ingrained in institutional ethics review falls foul of ignoring the social relationships in which the researchers and research participants engage. Researchers are seen as atomised individuals whose malfeasance would likely go unreported, and they have no pre-existing social obligation to others in a research setting. Institutional arrangements are justified to stand in and protect the 'weak', e.g. statutory or private agency. The presumed objectivity also implies that the researchers can know all the benefits and pitfalls of the research in advance, so that s/he could have protected the 'vulnerable' before really engaging with them. The complexity of social reality, as I would further argue in chapter 7, leaves no room for social work research and the ethics review of it to dismiss the fact that researchers and research participants are social beings. An utterance by a social being requires responses to be meaningful, while the responses depend on the interplay of different social practices in a particular context of practising. Meanwhile, the acts and responses themselves are constitutive to, and can change, the practices in return. In this regard, all the knowledge that once worked could hardly be immediately meaningful, relevant, and useful in another practice-research context. The relevance, fitness, and workability of pre-existing knowledge have to be gained in the local construction of meaning within the particular community displayed and shaped by practices of its members (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 7). I concur that the protection agenda has to be maintained in the quest of practice research ethics, less by a procedure-based ethics than by a contextualized one. We need honest, trustworthy, equal, and caring relationships instead of untrustworthy, distant, and imbalanced research relationships with an imaginary social vacuum, as promoted by Hobbesian perspective, to make sure protective measures gain local relevance and workability to be effective. Ethics review committees should thereby advocate sensitivity in engaging people in the field to promote more ethically accountable and equal relationships for generating effective protective measures for all.

#### 3.4.1.3 'failing to engage in partnership with researchers with different approaches'

*Reviewer 1: 'too intrusive and personal'*

*Reviewer 2: 'a poorly specified intervention', 'equally poorly specified evaluation',*

*Reviewer 3: 'no details are given of the methods for analysing the study data', 'presumably the evaluation is not independent—with a small group of participants, it will be easy for the researcher to identify the responses from each participant'*

Social research is lively and vibrant and keeps developing techniques and methodologies to excel in ethics and quality of knowledge. It consists of diverse traditions and innovations, and insufficient support in catching up with the developments could bar ethics reviewers from appreciating the less conventional forms of social inquiry, i.e. participatory evaluation, which is non-positivistic and process-based. Innovative methods and methodologies are usually yielded to address the pitfalls of the previously existing research tools which are never neutral. Research tools determine the translation of data into evidence which allows us to make sense of social 'reality' (Køppe, 2012). Developing different tools could help us expand our understanding of the subject matter and devise new solutions to problems. Ethics review committees should be supported in respect to methodology in order to participate meaningfully in meeting the ethical challenges arising from the field of social research. Reviewers' ability to appreciate, as well as their knowledge about ethical debates rooted in the use of research tools, will be helpful to highlight relevant ethical concerns. In case of lack of methodological support (as refer to Appendix 3.4), additional space for communication between the researcher and the ethics reviewers will be needed to explain clearly the different assumptions and forms of ethics held by unconventional research designs, such as PAR and Cooperative Inquiry. From the experience of this CGI, the dialogical relationship between the ethics review committee and the researcher is found to be productive and should be maintained throughout the inquiry process. It on one hand created a need for the researcher to attend to and document the emerging ethical challenges in the inquiry, and on the other hand it enabled the supervisor and the ethics review committee to respond to those challenges by critically examining the approaches generated from the local context. This researcher-supervisor-ethics review committee collaboration was maintained throughout this CGI after the chairperson of the ethics review committee took over the review. It proved helpful in the negotiation of ethics for involving teenage children of women participants in the inquiry. Instead of avoiding the ethical challenges, the collaboration conscientiously worked to ensure the best arrangements were made to increase the chance of achieving more ethical inquiry practices.

To see ethics review as a form of social practice, the traditions, norms, and procedures of which guide and bind reviewers' practices are as influential as reviewers themselves in the ethics review process. In my case, I would argue that the format of one-off ethics review procedure reinforces the Hobbesian traditions and positivistic values by limiting and requiring reviewers to address all the ethical concerns and avoid all forms of risk in the single discrete pre-field work ethics review. The reviewers were not given room to form a prolonged partnership with the researchers in addressing and negotiating contextual ethics, but left with the only option to perform the review with rule-based ethics.

As previously mentioned, the review processes provided useful comments for deepening the thoughts about how to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and friendlier approaches in recruitment. Appendix 3.4 (the right hand side) also shows how comments from reviewer 1 and 3 were taken into account and how they further led to revision of 'consent procedures', 'consent forms', and the 'information sheet'. However, many comments also suggested that reviewers were not supported in appreciating participatory paradigm and its correspondent methodology and research concerns. Comments from the 2<sup>nd</sup> ethics review submission allow us to see that communicating misunderstandings is beneficial for closing the gaps, whereas paradigmatic partisanship/attitudes that shut down the dialogue may be devastating to advancement of social research, and to the attainment of greater social responsibility and research ethics (see Reviewer 2 in Appendix 3.5).

### **3.4.2 Ethics underpinning this CGI**

Co-participation in research is itself an invitation to ethical research practices (Liamputtong, 2007), and participatory endeavours are ideally 'sensitive method(s) used with and for vulnerable people' (p.130). This is to challenge the traditional research by re-examining the researcher-researched distinction, which maintains the objectivity of a distant researcher by suppressing voices of the 'researched' and researchers' influence in data collection and analysis. This distinction also supports the 'blanket designation' of abused women as 'vulnerable' participants (Downes, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2013), who are seen as incapable of solving their problems, but require objective studies to generate solutions for them. This distinction embedded in the traditional researcher-led academic

practices renders abused women's views, strengths, and abilities ignored or undermined. Advocates for co-participation argue that the researcher has to be at the same time the research 'subject' to be studied, while the traditional research 'subjects' are 'co-researchers' (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1994). This approach aims also to redress the power differential between academic knowledge and laymen knowledge that denies the legitimacy of local knowledge held by people living in the phenomenon. Co-participation is deployed as 'a methodological resource to bring together dualities and recognize the plurality of realities', and to make research designs be 'interactive, contextualised and humanly compelling, because they invite joint participation in the exploration of research issues' (Lather, 1991:52 quoted in Birch and Miller, 2002: 94).

Co-participation is easier said than done because the presence of participants/users/stakeholders in the research process does not guarantee participatory practices (Croft & Beresford, 1996; Hague, Mullender, & Aris, 2003); non-participative practices, attitudes, values and ideologies lurking in human encounters and interactions could still work to inhibit the achievement of co-participation. Attention to contextual conditions that contribute to non-participative practices and labourous search for emerging/potential opportunities for addressing the unethical practices are the undue responsibility of social work practitioner-researchers in CGI. This form of ethics is elaborately discussed in recent literature on the 'ethics of care' and 'relational justice' (see Chapter 7). It urges participants in CGI to develop care for 'others' in the formation of 'self' and the construction of 'autonomy'. It also allows us to see that justice, equality, and autonomy could be possible only when caring relationships are developed among human beings. Care as the precondition for 'rule-based' ethics widely employed in institutional ethics review committees could be achieved only locally in the practical relationship context. More importantly, these alternative forms of ethics allow us to see that ethics is not guaranteed by rules, but hard earned in the practising of ethical decisions. Birch and Miller (2002) suggested that participants should be involved in the remaking and renegotiation of the ethical dimension of research. They even proposed timetabling 'ethical talk sessions' in which the field notes of participants and that of the 'researcher' could be shared and discussed, so as to produce ethical narratives jointly in the spirit of full participation. This inquiry is aware of the need to negotiate ethics with participants, and to challenge non-participative/discriminatory practices. 'Partnership

making' in the inquiry was sustained in this inquiry to accommodate to changing life circumstances and needs of participants.

In practice, the trusted partnership between my supervisor and I became an important means to bring together the institutional and local ethical considerations. In negotiating ethics for involving teenagers in our inquiry (Chapter 6), women participants and I prepared ourselves to actively eliminate coercion in our relationships with the teenage participants. We sought different means to allow teenagers' to exercise autonomy at home and in the inquiry group, and recognized their rights for equal participation in all aspects of the inquiry. We worked together to compose an ethics review document about 'children's participation' submitted to my supervisor and the chairperson of the ethics review committee in March 2013. My supervisor gave feedback on the suitability of written consent, and suggested more attention to the competence of the potential participants. These considerations were brought back to the inquiry group for further discussion, and led to re-design of the consent giving mechanism with their 'children'. My supervisor and I collaborated to bring ideas across the fields, the inquiry community, and the institutional ethics review, in order to facilitate communication and understanding between them. The ethics review committee's (primarily the chairperson) readiness for listening to the inquiry participants and its openness in engaging with continuous ethics negotiation made a difference in promoting fuller participation of the marginalized groups.

For researching in the domain of domestic violence, it is unethical to solely focus on the research tasks but ignore/marginalize the lived experiences of participants. Therefore, the inquiry group is also a place for rapport of resources, skills, and emotional exchanges. It also services meeting participants' practical needs for social and emotional support, child care, food, clothes and even temporary shelter. Therefore, communicating lived experiences is a key component pertaining in each inquiry session in, which participants could share their life events and the life challenges they have encountered. Meanwhile, it became a site for members to solve problems together by contributing their knowledge, skills, experiences, and resources. Through explication, reconstruction and mapping the lived experiences of each other, inquiry participants can form a network of relationships (a socio-relational condition) for negotiation of the ethics of care and the ethics of justice.

Ethical practice requires the practitioner-researcher to work with abused women and their 'children' in a way to lessen chances of re-victimization. Without discounting the need for avoiding re-victimization, telling personal trauma-related stories and giving personal accounts of abuse should not be immediately equalized with being intrusive/unethical. It depends more on how these stories/accounts are attended to and used, and how far the participants have control over their narratives. Given that participants are not coerced to participate, they are more likely to act in their terms in telling or not telling their stories. Instead of avoiding the personal stories, re-victimization should be eliminated by more attention in constructing and sustaining a caring relationship that provides recognition to personal voices and marginalized stories. Domestic violence services could easily stagnate without the input of knowledge from the personal stories/accounts of victims of domestic violence. This on the contrary reinforces the re-victimization of abused women and their children on the system and policy level. Particularly given the virtual lack of formal services for formerly abused women in Hong Kong, it would be more ethical to develop a caring context for engaging abused women in working out practices for post-separation needs than continuing to ignore them (Downes, Kelly, & Westmarland, 2013). Participants are, as proposed in participatory paradigm, owners of contextual knowledge for problem solving. Furthermore, they are supposed to have control over actions that affect their lives (SWD, 2011; British Association of Social Workers, 2012). Ethics review committees should be able to work with the initiating researchers and other participant-researchers in constructing and maintaining a friendly and helpful relational context in knowledge generation as far as possible. This collaboration would be useful to ensure the principles of risk reduction and protection from further harms (see fig. 1.1), as stated in the two official published guidelines for handling cases of spousal abuse and child abuse (SWD, 2007; SWD, 2011), are practised with care for all participating members.

### ***3.4.3 Expansion of ethical lens***

Problems encountered by this CGI in the ethical review processes highlight the urge for expanding the ethical lens in order to translate the appreciation of alternative ethics, next to the rule-based ethics, into the actual practice of ethics review. The flexibility necessary for the ethics of care was perceived as a lack of clarity in research and absence of certainty in outcomes. The misunderstanding of the nature of CGI as outcome-based

evaluative research might also further tighten the flexibility for contextualization of ethics and knowledge production. Ethics of care which directs our attention to achieving ethics through promoting the wellbeing of participants in context was found to be marginalized at the beginning of this ethics review process. In addition to the blanket designation of 'vulnerability' to abused women, the ethics review committee tended to avoid the 'sensitive' and 'vulnerable', who were more in need of care and assistance, than to carefully work out strategies with the initiating researcher and other participant-researchers to promote their wellbeing. Instead of being a gatekeeper for the malfeasance conducted by researchers, the ethics review committee should see itself as an active ethical partner for meeting contextual ethical challenges. This collaborative relationship among ethics review committee, supervisor and the researchers enabled the achievement of both institutional rule-based ethics and a contextualized ethics of care in this CGI. This collaboration was particularly useful for translating ethical principles into workable measures for ensuring coercion-free participation, confidentiality, and safeguarding abused women and their children. This collaboration did not only recognize that the ethics review committee, the supervisor and the researchers are connected with each other in a nexus of relationships, but also held them responsible for the betterment of each other within the relationship context. Moving beyond the Hobbesian model of ethics further requires continuous methodological support for the ethics review committee, so that different approaches to data collection and research ethics can be appropriately appraised.



---

### Understanding the 'practice' of CGI through the relational lens: 'Partnership making', '(trans)forming identities', and 'displaying a family-like community of practice'

---

#### 4.1 Introduction

In *Participation in Human Inquiry*, Reason (1994) metaphorically termed the practice of PAR as drawing together the 'common souls', which I interpret as a reflection of the 'relational' underpinnings in his participatory ontology, which is entirely different from many social science orientations that build on the culture of 'individualization', 'linear logic' and the 'distinction of subject/object and body/mind' (Ribben-McCarthy, 2012; Gergen, 2001; Reason, 1994). The realization of the necessity for both differentiation and relation (as a continuum of distance) is transcending to the 'individuality-collectivity' dichotomy: By the former we have got perspectives, while with the latter we can revitalize the alienated unconscious participation prevailing in the western history of consciousness development (Reason, 1994). The relational underpinnings in PAR allow us to see how Reason's participatory turn echoes with the emerging 'relational' literature on learning, knowing, practice, and understanding human activities in general (Gergen & Gergen, 2004; Gergen, 2001; Ribben-McCarthy, 2012; Schatzki, 1996), with a common focus on 'relationality'. By that 'individuality' and 'autonomy' are reconstructed in terms of distance(s) with others instead of total disengagement with others.

By locating Reason's participatory turn in the larger relational endeavour of contemporary social research and social philosophies, the practice of cooperative inquiry could be considered in a new light. The relational lens suggests that human sense making (primarily linguistic/symbolic) and actions (bodily, experiential and interactive) are constituents of each other. Through these perceiving acts (mental and bodily), self-consciousness is formed at the creation of otherness (the consciousness of not-me) (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Therefore, self is understood variably with many other social theories, e.g. rational choice theory and socialization theory, which promulgate the notion that a 'person' is 'endowed with' or 'is a substance, place, or realm that houses a particular range of activities and attributes' (Schatzki, 1996, p. 22). Assuming this new concept of self, social inquiry cannot be reduced to the study of mental scheme,

interpretive structure of people, internalization of values and communicative rules; neither can it rest on a total rejection of 'self' which legitimates focusing narrow focus on symbolic structure and social discourse (Reckwitz, 2002). Knowledge is then considered as being constructed within relations formed among the (relational) self and (relational) others for solving particular problems in the context (Gergen & Gergen, 2004).

To capture knowledge making with a high level of complexity, the theorizing is conducted in a new site called 'practice'. Practice as concurred by Schatzki (1996), provides the anchorage for the realization of I-ness, which is often the starting point for many social theories in making sense of social order and human activities. In a particular practice, the 'I' experiences, interprets, acts and interacts through one's specific ensemble of identities construed in other different practices one simultaneously engages in. Meanwhile, the identity constructed in that particular practice could serve the (trans)forming of one's ensemble of identity in other practices. A 'practice' of cooperative inquiry is therefore not only an operation of reflection-action-reflection cycles that bring about pragmatic solutions to problems, but also a formation and transformation of identity and self (see Chapter 5).

Reckwitz (2002) provided a meaningful clarification of the term 'practice' by differentiating it from 'praxis' that means the whole human action, but affiliating it to 'praktiken' that means a way of doing things, for example, cooking, consuming, working, understanding, and caring. A practice could be exercised by a collection of people or carried out alone, while the number of performers does not affect the sociality that it carries. For example, having an English afternoon tea and *YumCha* are ways of tea-tasting that could be performed alone but still implies a sense of collectivity. The practice turn requires us to see how the interconnectedness of thinking, interpreting, acting, interacting, and relating is played out in social life. The different ways of thinking, doing, understanding and communicating things as the site for analysis resemble a lot of the different ways of knowing in Cooperative Inquiry and PAR in general. Focusing on social practice as the pivotal object for analysis on one hand acknowledges its dynamicity, while that does not dismiss its characteristics of an entity by perceiving it as 'nexuses of local phenomena interrelated in diverse shifting and contingent ways' (Schatzki, 1996, p. 10). The characteristics of entity do not immediately regress to totality thinking, but are the immediate momentary orderliness of human activities in the practice. This orderliness is

argued to be mediated by understanding/intelligibility, hence, it renders new events, which do not conform to the code as the niches for shifting the order and the orderliness. In this regard, unfolding the practice of CGI is not only unveiling the orderliness, but also the contingency of orders, the shifting, threats and restoration (if any) of the orderliness in the field of practice.

This chapter is an attempt to unfold the practice of CGI carried out with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters, by explicating the dynamicity and orderliness contextually brought about by the inter-related shifting of identities (chapter 5 From Locating Victim-Chungsangje to Care and Service Rendering and chapter 6 From 'Being Cared' to 'Equal Partners'), the momentary making of partnership (also chapter 6) and the displaying of a family-like community of practice in this inquiry. Thereby, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical outline of the practice of this CGI, as well as a foundation for the reading of chapter 5 and chapter 6 in which, meticulous development of linguistic concepts and related changes in group activities will be presented for illustrating the interlocking relations among (inter)subjectivity formation, partnership making and redistribution of responsibility. In this chapter, I will focus more on how the interlocking relations, as detailed in chapter 5 and 6, associate with the displaying of 'we-ness' in this inquiry; simultaneously, the changing, shifting and contingent we-ness may at the same time service identity formation, partnership making, and the distribution of responsibility unevenly. Theorizing practices, in the 'post-nineteenth-century-modern' world, has given rise to the third strand of social theory, practice theory, out of the traditional 'homo economicus' and 'homo sociologicus' divide (see Reckwitz, 2002). The theory constructed and presented in this chapter can be considered as an endeavour of this emerging domain, with specificities in working with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters in a CGI. In this discussion, I will critically examine the identities, partnerships and we-ness formation in this inquiry against the purpose of participation facilitation on which was bestowed on this CGI as well as PAR. Key issues arising from the inquiry that cast light on the protection and equality agenda of domestic violence will be outlined and further discussed in chapter 7.

## 4.2 The practice of CGI with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters and its implication for understanding participation

The inter-connected and mutually constitutive relationships among shifting identity, making of partnership, and the displaying of a community of practice is best captured by Escher's painting (1948), *The Drawing Hands*<sup>22</sup>. 'Partnership making' and '(trans)forming of identity' are the two drawing hands constantly constituting each other. The hands and their relations become the context in which a collectivity/group/community is displayed (putting the pens, paper, pins and the two hands themselves on the same page) in a way 'family practices' and 'action inquiry' are performed. I call the inquiry group a family-like community of practice because it displayed a dual-dimension of practising family and action inquiry simultaneously. Family displayed in this inquiry provides a context for the construction of familial identities (sisters, brothers, mothers and children) and family relationships; while the latter allows the construction of the division of labour and collaborative relationships in services and action organization and implementation. In this regard, partnership making, (trans)forming of identity and displaying of a community of practice were constitutive components of each other. Despite the separated discussion of each component in this chapter, the audience must bear in mind that they were in *practice* constantly interlocking with each other, and all influenced the inquiry practice as a whole.

The mutual constitutive relationship between partnership making and identity (trans)formation is ubiquitously observed in collaboration with both women participants and their sons and daughters. The victim identity, substantiated on woman participants' experiences of physical traumas, psychological fragility, social isolation, and other forms of vulnerabilities, was barely a neutral description of undesirable experiences, for that we have a range of descriptions to choose from<sup>23</sup>. It presumes the social relations 'victims' have with others, including both victims and non-victims. The weak and blameless image of victims suggests that they should stay together for more power and a louder voice. It also motivated women participants in this group to commit in the inquiry as a means to companionship, immediate mutual support and care in the short run, and resources

---

<sup>22</sup> For the picture of the painting: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/ba/DrawingHands.jpg>, retrieved on 15 Jan 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Poor Fate (Meng6 Fu2, 命苦); Troubled, (Laau2 Gaau6/Sap1 Zai6, 撈攞/濕滯) and pitiful (Caam2, 慘) etc.

garnering in the long run. Nonetheless, victim identity denotes that formerly abused women deserve assistance from non-victims who are expected to be sympathetic to victims' needs and traumatic experiences (Nissim-Sabat, 2009). By engaging in victimhood and being acknowledged as such, a particular 'teleoaffective structure' simultaneously worked to guide how participants ought and ought-not to feel, express, value, and pursue (Schatzki, 1996). This teleoaffective structure is also manifested in many women's movements, which employ 'victimhood' for garnering resources and social support from the larger public (Dunn, 2004; Dunn, 2005). The forming and transforming of identity are hence not simply the formation of 'I', but also simultaneously the formulation of relations with others; it guides how participants should express themselves, respond to others, and accomplish different social practices.

The linking between identity and partnership also reveals itself within the mother-son/daughter relationship. In this inquiry, the normative mother-child practices were found to have enjoined mother participants and their teenage sons/daughters to an un rebuttable mother-to-children hierarchy. Such a hierarchy was found to be unpropitious to meeting the ends of 'reconciling with sons/daughters', 'caring' and 'participatory mother-son/daughter practices'. 'Children' as an identity for the teenage participants was avoided and replaced by 'brothers/sisters', '*gorgor* (elder brother)', '*lan lui* (beautiful girl)' and 'youngsters' that carried a stronger connotation for equality. These changes also changed the distribution of responsibility and interactions in care giving activities. This converges with Schatzki (1996)'s articulation on the three major avenues for linking sayings and doings in a social practice, i.e. understanding, rules and 'teleoaffective structure', that they give orderliness to a practice while they themselves are contingently manifested through the practising of related acts.

Similarly, membership and group identity (in relation to other groups available in the society) are also dynamically displayed along the shifting identities and the contextually negotiated partnership, as well as the emerging understanding and performing of sisterhood/brotherhood/motherhood/childhood. The group was, at the beginning, understood by many of the participants as a 'pay-back' in gratitude to NF (who invited them to join the inquiry), who once saved their lives. The 'we-ness' was first displayed as a 'benefactor-beneficiary relationship', with NF at the centre and me at the periphery as an indirect beneficiary of the good deeds committed by NF. As informed by the

participatory paradigm, where 'personal' interest and willingness were honoured, I responded to the 'benefactor-beneficiary relationship' by inviting potential participants to consider their own interest, willingness and possible influences in their lives by participating in this inquiry. By responding to my invitations, women participants and I were reconstructing the inquiry as a relatively interest/goal-driven practice which entailed the 'we-ness' that was bound in future achievement instead of purely history with others. Continuous participation in the making of this community inevitability renders its membership contingent and precarious. Despite the clear guidelines for confirming a membership (as required by the institutional ethics review), the membership in practice was abidingly constructed among members through discussion on who should be included and who shouldn't. The construction of victimhood and 'chungsangje' in chapter 5 elucidates how participants distinguished themselves from 'victims' by assigning themselves as 'chungsangje' who were sharing a membership on the foundation of their perceived readiness to care for the 'victims' instead of being cared for.

From time to time, linguistic constructions were generated through articulation and reflection of embodied experiences in solving problems that we encountered in the group. The explication of these non-verbal bodily knowing and learning of body techniques (e.g. health boosting exercises, Qi Gong and techniques for comforting abused women) enabled the transfer of bodily knowing from oneself to another (Crossley, 2007). The prominent focus on language in this thesis does not set aside the other forms of knowing as trivial or auxiliary, but it discerns that communal understanding and sense making are inevitably mediated through the use of language (Reason, 2003), whether it is propositional, ordinary, or even symbolic. Embodiment, in a sense making and problem solving, has to be recognized as equally important because it is fundamental to 'participation' in any kind of social practices, and a quality of human intelligibility that gives social life orderliness (Schatzki, 1996; Wenger, 1998).

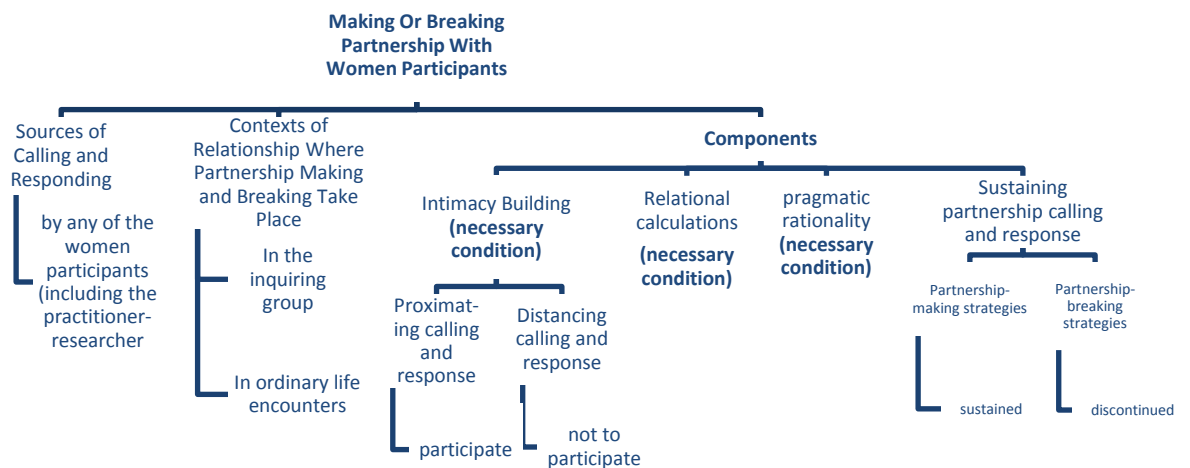
Finally, the meticulous deliberation on partnership making, identity (trans)forming and displaying of a community of practice will aid in arriving at a theory of participation. I will propose that full participation of oneself (relational) in a social practice is realized by participating in three layers of participation, namely social participation, epistemological participation, and political participation. The first denotes the admission to a community of practice, the second sings the inclusion of differences in sayings, doings and meaning

making, and the third speaks the need for transforming antagonistic (essentially mutually exclusive) relationships among differences into agonistic (unessentially mutually exclusive but necessarily distinctive) relationships, by such differences could work as the drive for human flourishing and more democratic practices.

### 4.3 Making partnership

In making partnership with formerly abused women, decisions to participate and continuation of the partnership were found not to be entirely made upon the goals, vision, and intentions stated prior to the inquiry (in the invitation email, leaflet and the consent forms), but also considerations on intimacy building, relational calculations and pragmatic calculations. Meanwhile, the content of such a partnership varied with contextual understanding of partnership constructed through partnership calling and responding played out in the process. By comparing partnership making with women and that with teenage participants (chapter 6 and diagram 6.2), ‘relational calculation’ and ‘pragmatic rationality’ were more obvious and frequently observed in partnering with women participants.

#### 4.3.1 The concept of ‘making or breaking partnership with women participants’



**Diagram 4.1 The concept of ‘making or breaking partnership with women participants’**

Making/breaking partnership depends on whether the necessary conditions are met and the partnership calling and responding are sustained. Relational calculations, pragmatic

rationality and intimacy building were necessary for making the decision to participate in this inquiry. Only given these, could the content of the partnership be negotiated in a sustained partnership of calling and responding. Without successfully passing the relational calculations, the scrutiny of pragmatic rationality and the intimacy building process, participants would either decide not to participate or even withdraw their participation. Partnership-making/breaking began from the first encounter with women participants, i.e. the first invitation email I sent, the first leaflet that arrived at their hands and, unexpectedly, the way the leaflets were passed to them (it turned out to be more crucial than the content of the leaflet itself). By analysing how the invitations were made and how they were responded to, I realized how meanings and partnership had been constructed in the ongoing calling and responding interactions.

Calling and responding were not limited to verbal or linguistic expressions, but acts of different kinds (speech acts, behaviours, facial expressions, emotions and symbolic expressions). Calling and responding could be initiated and sustained by any woman participant who was involved in that particular context of interactions, where different participants could hold on to/employ different ways of knowing to make sense of our partnership. Thereby, the resulting partnership understanding was literally not determined by a single individual, nor a single perspective, for example, the one ascribed in the leaflet. Instead, the understanding of partnership was always manifold. Given that the acts of calling and responding presume the practices each participant was simultaneously engaging in, they are also where identities of women participants were displayed/formed. An example from the field notes on the introductory session with YT illustrates that identity formation and partnership making are interlocking components in the practice of this CGI,

*...I told her that the introductory session was not simply a dissemination of information, but a process for exchanging ideas which were crucial to develop this inquiry into a useful solution generating process. I intended to orientate YT with a new frame about introductory session, so that she could perceive the 'prepared materials' as guiding but not prescriptive. I also encouraged YT to ask question at any time during the introductory process when she came across anything worried/interested her. I also contrasted this research with traditional research that the latter usually expected no change of research plan whereas the former invited*



*participants to revise wherever appropriate for better solution to their problems. All these strategies were carried out with the intention to re-orientate/reframe the introductory session which was, to some extent, restricted to be carried out with 'approved prepared materials' which had been found to adhere to the 'giver-receiver', 'knowledgeable-laymen' and 'organizer-participant' image. There was an episode, YT asked, 'Could you please tell me the questions before you start recording? I am afraid that I could not answer the questions properly.' 'What questions?' asked me. 'You said you are going to tape-record today's meeting, aren't you going to ask me questions and I going to answer?' 'Oh no! I am not going to ask you questions in a way other researchers usually do. This is, as I have explained to you, to keep record of the process by which we develop understanding about the project, its purposes and expectations on the roles of participants' I said. 'Oh really? I thought tape-recording is always that kind of thing.' Said YT, nodded her head. (Field notes, dated 15 Jan 2013)*

Referring to this episode, disregarding the fact that the 'equal' and 'researcher/researched' duo-status of participants were deliberately emphasized verbally in the introductory session and in the leaflet (see Appendix 4.1), my invitation acts were understood differently because of the practices the respondent had engaged in. In this case, YT had been engaging in a lot of research studies where she was treated as a passive interviewee who was obliged to answer questions 'properly'. She therefore immediately followed her understanding of 'research practice', the rules and teleoaffective structure as ascribed in that particular understanding, in making sense of, and responding to, my acts in this particular context where our interactions were understood as 'researching'. Her responses were carried out according to her conceptual understanding of 'research practice' and carried on both that particular understanding of 'research practice' and her identity as a passive interviewee. If I were not aware of the 'research practice' presumed by YT's act of 'asking for questions' and responded with 'offering guiding questions', I would have put both of us in the reproduction of traditional research practice that perpetrated the researcher-subject distinction.

In the following, I will continue to discuss the different components of 'making or breaking partnership with women participants' and their influence. The chronological order is followed in order to increase the clarity of articulation and easy reference to the

changes in identity forming and displaying of we-ness. 'Decision to participate' and 'continuation of partnership' were considered as distinctive activities in making or breaking a partnership because decision to participate is the necessary condition for making a partnership; for those who rejected participation or withdrew from participation in the inquiry, no partnership-making practice(s) could be furthered. Continuation of partnership consisted of acts that gave substantial content, including: meanings, rules, tasks, projects, division of labour, and teleoaffective structure, to the 'partnership'. Through calling and responding acts, the content was constantly constructed and the form of partnership was displayed. In light of this, making or breaking partnership and its relations with other components of practice would be articulated through these two distinctive partnership-making-related activities.

#### 4.3.1.1 Decision to participate: relational calculations, pragmatic rationality and intimacy building

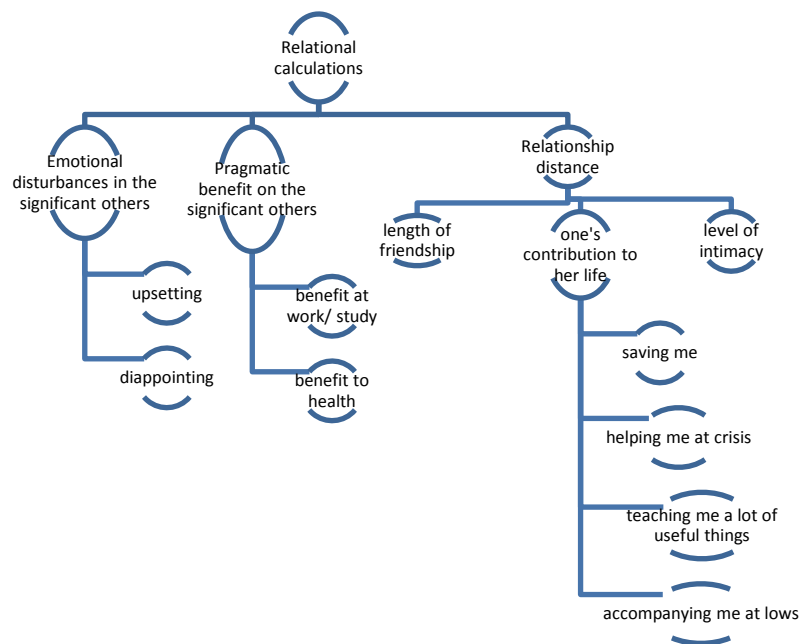
The invitation to a CGI was not simply an invitation to 'collaboration', but also an ethical invitation that presumed the individual's rights to information, informed decision making, and coercion-free consent giving. By intentionally avoiding forceful wording, actions, and environments in the recruitment process, we assumed that women could take action/make a decision only on behalf of themselves, i.e. her personal interest, benefit, affiliation to the goals and values. Introductory sessions were therefore undertaken to make sure that the researcher had secured *everything* to guarantee potential participants sufficient information about the inquiry and a coercion-free decision making process. Surprisingly, this procedure based ethics contrasts very much with some 'natural' ethical practices engaged in by women participants (relational calculations); however it balanced out the primarily relational-based collective undertaking in women's ethical consideration and their decision to participate.

In the introductory session carried out with 7 potential participants (6 of them later decided to participate in the inquiry), meanings/understandings of initial invitation callings were differently understood. This echoed with Gergen & Gergen's (2004) articulation that the meaning of words had to be completed by the response of the person who attended to one's calling. With sensitivity to how the callings are understood and responded to differently, I would argue, the initiating practitioner-researcher could explicate the different practices presumed in the (inter)actions and respond in the

moment to prompt more participatory practices. This is of paramount importance in leading to fuller and more well-informed decision making. This is because potential participants are not forced to comply with the individual and procedure-based ethical/decision making frameworks, but rather to broaden out the spectrum of rationality in consent giving which could lead to clearer and better informed decisions to participate. In the introductory session, ‘relational calculations’, ‘pragmatic rationality’ and ‘intimacy building’ were discernible enough to have guided the participants’ decision to participate and their way of considering ethics.

#### 4.3.1.1.1 Relational calculations

Relational calculations were performed by YY, KW, SW and PF in making their decision to participate in this inquiry. This is a set of considerations to determine how people in a relationship with the decision-making participant would be affected by a particular decision. This concept consists of at least three properties, ‘emotional disturbances in the significant others’, ‘pragmatic benefit on the significant others’, and ‘relationship distance’, which guide women participants’ decision making about their participation in the inquiry activities.



**Diagram 4.2 The concept of relational calculations**

The calculated gain of ‘emotional disturbance-pragmatic benefit to significant others’ was found to encourage decisions to participate. This concept first appeared in the first introductory session carried out with YY who was worried about upsetting someone dear

to her, i.e. NF and PF, in making participation choices. She would prefer making participation choices which were less likely to result in emotional disturbances for NF; for better, a choice that might result in pragmatic benefit to NF, i.e. giving credit to the organization where NF and PF were working at (佢而家幫XX做嘢, 但係無乜嘢CASE嘛. 所以, 如果可以係同XX合作, 咁就對佢工作好啲囉 NF is now working for XX, and there are few cases taken in. If the project could become one in collaboration with XX, it would better justify her work). YY thence decided to participate in this inquiry as it was considered less risky of upsetting NF and PF, while it generated potential benefit to them at the same time.

*I explained to YY everything she needed to know, including the original idea of the project, roles of participants, rights and responsibilities to participation and confidentiality and possible use of data. I left a copy of the consent forms to her and resend her a softcopy of the information sheet next day after the meeting. The consent form for participating in the research will be further discussed on 20 Jan, before going further into any other discussion. Though her decision to participate in this project had been made before the introductory session was carried out, she refused to sign the form because she would like to confirm that NF was satisfied with all the collaboration details before they officially give consent to participate. The trust to NF was the main reason for YY to participate and therefore she would carefully examine every administrative procedure to ensure it was not way too far from NF's expectation...*

*It is very interesting that she rounded up the meeting like this, 'hm... research of this kind (co-operative inquiry) is hard to be carried out, I mean, without the support of people. You should know women who suffered from domestic violence would rather have easy solutions to their problems than involve in something with no guarantee of solutions and time frame. I agree that it is helpful for them to get involved in developing solutions, but you know it is pretty rare.' YY said. (Field notes, dated 9 Jan 2013)*

In YY's case, even though her personal view on this CGI was not very positive (not confident in its effectiveness in problem solving), she remained and chose to participate after weighing the cost-benefit on significant others.

The calculation of relationship distances is variably manifested by potential women participants in the introductory session. The closer the relationship that they have with the inviting person (e.g. the longer the friendship/the more intimate the person was), the more likely women participants would decide to participate.

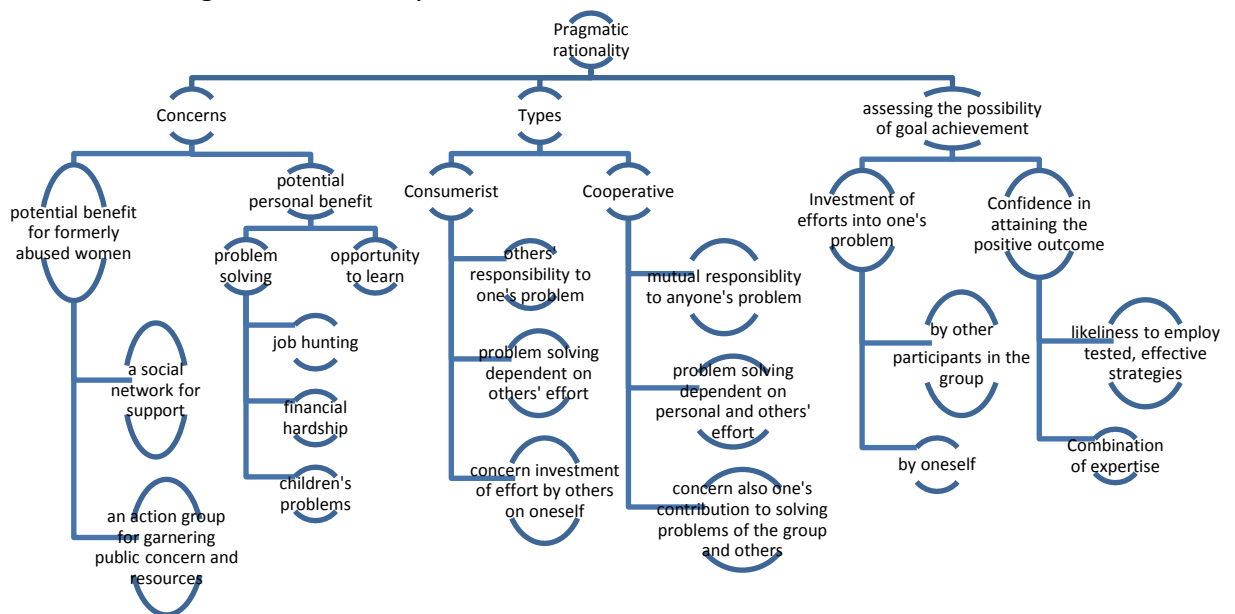
*I took the initiative to raise the issue regarding the collaboration with XX because it would be a piece of precious information for her to consider when to sign the consent. She had been alert to the collaboration issue and told me that she would prefer signing the consent on 20 Jan when the collaboration was fixed. She said this at the end of the conversation, 'you have to understand, I know you because of NF. Without her, I would not have met you.' This was the ending statement of KW for showing her support to the collaboration plan. (Field notes, dated 11 Jan 2013)*

SW's decision to not participate in the inquiry also exhibited a calculation of relational distances. SW was formally recruited two months after the inquiry group's establishment. At the point of recruitment, the group had already set some agenda for action and inquiry, and established some basic principles in running inquiry activities. The unfamiliarity of the established ways of saying and doing created discomfort in SW as she could not 'feel the same sisterhood she enjoyed in the past' with the participants. After attending the first inquiry meeting, the low level of intimacy perceived by SW immediately drove her away from participating in the group discussion and further activities. In that particular session, SW felt rejected and excluded when women participants were performing the 'devil's advocate' (which was a technique intended to help participants understand alternative perspectives and strengthen arguments) in composing the statement for children's rights and participation. Although the purposes of devil's advocate and its underlying principles were explained to SW, it conversely highlighted the unfamiliarity she had with the group. SW even refused to return to the conversation, and locked herself in the kitchen to avoid further discussion. Although extra care was directed to her after this incident, SW decided not to participate in the group.

Given an understanding of relational calculations, it was unsurprising that YY had made her decision to participate long before the introductory session because the leaflets about the inquiry were given to her by NF and PF, whom she considered very important people to her. She even termed the introductory session as an 'understandable ritual (我

明白呢啲係點都要做既)’ of research. The decision making of YY did not rest on maximisation of personal benefit, neither did it rest on her agreement to the values, goals and principles underpinning the inquiry; instead, it rested on her relationship with NF and PF, whom she thought had saved her life. She openly told me that she clearly understood that the consent had to be given on individual basis, but she did not want to run the risk of upsetting NF by signing anything before the settlement on collaboration details with XX (the organization where NF and PF were currently working at). KW even said that her participation in ‘my project’ was largely dependent on her friendship with NF through which she knew me. On the other hand, PF wanted to honour NF with her participation in this inquiry because it reflected the vision and dedication of NF who had been committed to combating wife abuse for more than 20 years. PF also named NF as mentor of her life because NF had been coaching her in dealing with domestic violence cases and organizing actions. Although relational calculations were not directed to NF in the case of YT, she still performed relational calculations to assess the possibility of disturbances caused to her daughter, SY, and her mother. Therefore, the decision to participate in this inquiry, by YY, KW and PF, were primarily made on the basis of relational calculations; while YT employed majorly another form of rationality in making her decision to participate.

#### 4.3.1.1.2 Pragmatic rationality



**Diagram 4.3 The concept of pragmatic rationality (at the beginning phase)**

Pragmatic rationality speaks of the practical concern over results/consequences brought about by the inquiry, to the benefit of the woman participants/other formerly abused women, for example, the inquiry's relevance to personal problems, opportunity to learn, and potential in developing supportive social network for formerly abused women. It also consists of considerations for assessing the potential effectiveness of the inquiry in attaining the preferred outcomes, i.e. investment of effort into one's problem, likeliness to employ tested effective strategies, and the combination of expertise. Data collected from the individual introductory sessions with YT, NF and HL can demonstrate the use of this kind of rationality. The pragmatic orientation was in line with participatory cooperative inquiry (Reason, 2003) that problem solving was the ultimate goal for human sense making. However, in the encounters with potential participants who employed pragmatic rationality, the pragmatic rationality that I upheld was found to be different from that upheld by them, even though we shared similar pragmatic concerns. By analysing the introductory session held with YT, two types of pragmatic rationality, consumerist and cooperative, were first conceptualized. The questions asked by YT and my responses are worth scrutiny (see Appendix 4.2).

In the conversation with YT, her first question revealed a concern of personal benefit, such as whether her problem could be addressed through this inquiry; the second question was relatively more relational because it concerned annoyance that might be caused onto others. However, YT also suggestively asked if there would be someone investing their efforts in solving her problems. The third question was a check for confidence in attaining a positive outcome because policy change would be required to solve her problem (which also echoes with her personal experience of being a member of a survivor advocacy group). Apart from the demonstration of pragmatic concerns, YT's expressions of her concerns and responses I gave to those expressions suggested two divergent understandings of partnership in problem solving. The 'unbalanced' focus on 'I/my benefit' as expressed in YT's questions, and her continuous seeking of assurance that the other members would solve her problems, in fact disturbed me at that time. It was the regular understanding about 'service delivering practices' in Hong Kong (similarly in other capitalist societies) that the success in problem solving was entirely dependent on the effort the service providers invested in solving it. YT's emphasis on 'I/my benefit'

was understood by me as ‘unbalanced’ or ‘over’ because I interpreted her expressions in alignment to the consumerist model of social service provision<sup>24</sup>, with which I disagreed. By responding to YT’s questions and concerns with alternative emphasis on ‘everyone’ and ‘each one’, I was engaging YT in thinking about another form of partnership in participating in this CGI. My invitation to cooperative pragmatic rationality, instead of the consumerist one, was unexpected by YT who responded with some disappointment (head down and murmured ‘I understand’). Despite the divergence in understanding partnership that underpinned this inquiry, YT decided to participate in the inquiry as long as she was informed about her right to withdraw whenever she did not feel comfortable to continue.

HL’s response to my invitation to cooperative partnership varies hugely from YT’s. HL joined the inquiry in April, while our inquiry had been running for 3 months and while clearer objectives and tasks were set. HL found this inquiry matching her personal life-learning endeavour, while the combination of people in the group had proved to be effective in achieving her learning goals, i.e. knowing more about domestic violence policy, knowing how to comfort abused women who had just left home, handling the mass media, organizing activities, and polishing one’s cooking skills. Since service development/delivery was not her anchorage in understanding her participation, but personal growth and life-learning, HL did not draw on the consumer-provider relationship to make sense of this collaboration. Hence, the mutuality in sharing responsibility and investing effort that underpinned the cooperative pragmatic rationality (as informed by the literature on cooperative inquiry, participatory research, and user movement) were easier to fall in line with her expectations.

Regarding the rationality behind NF’s participation in this inquiry, it was not known at the moment she signed the consent form, as she signed it straight away without asking questions or saying a word after the introductory session. However, her decision to participate was revealed bit by bit in the process, particularly when she found other participants were not performing up to her expectation.

---

<sup>24</sup> Before going to the fieldwork, I was informed by the literature on user movement in the UK about the problematic nature of the consumerist model (Huage, Mullender, & Aris, 2003). As the consumerist logic assumes no part on the consumer in contributing to the solutions of the problems, and also an ultimate power to criticize the effort paid by the providers in delivering solutions; consumerist logic was perceived by me as unhelpful in developing a collaborative relationship among participants who voluntarily contributed themselves in improving others’ lives.



*'Why do you think I have to be in this inquiry? Is this for me? Do I really need it? Honestly, I don't need it. Why should I spend a day with you and not take a break? It is all for you (women participants). I want to take this opportunity to make you grow, to set up a platform for you to support each other...to do something' NF said angrily. (15<sup>th</sup> session)*

When women participants were showing diverse opinions on 'going public', NF who equated 'going public' with 'full recovery from abuse/trauma' said the above to demonstrate her sacrifice in promoting the betterment and growth of other women participants, for the purpose of gaining more support for taking the group and its members public. It was uncertain if it revealed NF's decision making in participation, but it revealed the rationality available to NF in dealing with the decision to participate in this CGI. 'Ah Ting (me) is here' and 'the project is just right for it (her purpose of developing/training up formerly abused women)' were the ways she assessed the potential achievement of the goals she attached to this inquiry. My presence had been repeatedly confirmed as the major source of manpower in driving this inquiry group, but the phrase 'Ah Ting (me) is here' may also point to NF's relational calculation in making the decision to participate. However, there is no further data collected to directly confirm the relational calculation of NF's decision to participate.

Pragmatic rationality continued to prevail throughout the inquiry in making participation decisions in activities, such as the press interviews, the government public consultation on domestic violence services, and the drafting of the statement for the rights of the child; it often determined the decision whether or not we, as a group, would initiate/organize certain activities, such as the mother's day event, setting up of the group's facebook page, and formalization of emotional support services for abused women who had just left.

#### 4.3.1.1.3 Intimacy building

This concept is theoretically convergent with 'intimacy building' with teenage participants, but substantially different (the referring acts, speeches and other indicators). The concept of intimacy building is composed of 'proximating calling and response' and damaged by 'distancing calling and response' (further details, refer to chapter 6). Among all the strands of 'proximating calling', i.e. nickname calling, pleasing, declaring their love

and asking for reconciliation, 'sisterhood-ing' was more distinctive and prevailing in building intimacy among women participants. Sisterhood-ing captures the callings and responses that referred to and sustained the practice of sisterhood<sup>25</sup>, including calling each other sisters, taking care of and supporting each other in the name of sister, being more generous to 'sisters' (compared to 'non-sisters'), remembering the birthdays of sisters (forgetting those of 'non-sisters'), prioritizing the needs of sisters (compared to 'friends') and always standing up for sisters. Sisterhood-ing was extended from women participants' pre-existing relationships in which they had a history of accompanying each other in shelters or fighting for social resources together as a pressure group. They met each other at the lowest point in life and felt the comfort and support from each other when their biological family members were absent (most of them were new immigrants from the mainland China). In this regard, sisterhood became one of the most important ties to social life that, in their experience, successfully reduced social isolation caused by abuse, deprivation, control, and migration. When women participants referred to their leaving experiences, they always said 'lucky that I had you/sisters at that time'. Furthermore, sisterhood also demarcated the boundary for membership. I was aware of this sisterhood as early as the inquiry started because I was referred by many of women participants with the 'you and us' distinction, and because of working with them at the periphery of their sisterhood.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2013, we were circulating personal logs and reflective notes as usual in the group for reflection on the different inquiry experiences of the participants. In mine, I was reflecting on how I got on the academic pathway to research in domestic violence against women in Hong Kong (Appendix 4.3). In the reflective notes, I shared about my past experience of being in a highly controlling and conflicting relationship for years, and its influence on my choice of research interest. I was not surprised that participants saw me differently when this fact was revealed (I only expected responses of sympathy which I had prepared myself to reject politely); but I was surprised by how they reconstructed my membership/identity differently after this inquiry meeting. They began to call me 'sister' and to invite me to join their social activities outside the inquiry group. I responded to the reconstructed membership and identity with acceptance by picking up this identity in naming them and myself. This change indicated to me that the intimacy

---

<sup>25</sup> In this particular context, 'sisters' referred to women who had once suffered from partner violence whatever the form and duration.

built around 'sisterhood' required the participants to register themselves as abused women by revealing their personal experiences of being manipulated/abused. Registration to sisterhood had a transformative influence in terms of intimacy, as it led to higher inclusion in social life, increased likeliness of sharing personal views (in both formal and informal contexts) and higher tolerance to difference in opinions. This registration to sisterhood required continuous performance of the sisterhood-ing acts by which distinctive and extra depth of relationship was constituted and sustained. However, being included in the 'sisterhood' also created challenges in performing the role of a PhD student and a 'practitioner-researcher', who was bound by academic rigours and ethical commitments. I will further discuss these challenges later.

Intimacy building among women participants was therefore not merely building up a sense of belonging or trust in each other, but also a continuous demonstration of special care, sister (abused women) identity and family extension. Formulation of sisterhood was not unique to this inquiry group, it was widely practised in feminist movements and feminist informed practices (Krane & Davies, 2002; Hewitt, 1985). It was realized in the American history that womanhood/sisterhood was deliberately constructed by activists and women historians as a counterpart to patriarchal culture. Sisterhood was believed to be grounds for solidarity and support. Furthermore, it was also a source of 'exclusion, prejudices, and prohibitions' (Hewitt, 1985, p. 300). As long as you were unable to register in the sisterhood, you were unlikely to have a peek into this particular 'women culture'. In addition, this sisterhood also bounded participants within a particular ethics of care and tolerance, which sometimes involved self-sacrifice. The tolerance was the highest to sisters who were still suffering from partner violence and more to those who display emotional fragility after leaving (this is extensively discussed in chapter 5). In practising this 'sisterhood', I recognized that personal benefits were often supposed to be secondary to the vulnerability of 'sisters'. Hence, 'contributing to the betterment of the vulnerable sister when you are able to' became the rule of thumb. This teleoaffective structure manifested in the practice of 'sisterhood' alternately inhibited women participants who identified themselves as survivors, instead of victims of partner violence, from expressing their vulnerability and needs (also see chapter 5).

On top of the general features of sisterhood we shared with feminist movement and practices, there was a distinctive feature in the sisterhood formed in this inquiry. That

was the presence of a mother-head figure. As I argued, sisterhood-ing was a practice of family extension, the understanding of which was inevitably linked to the understanding of family practice existing in the Hong Kong Chinese society. Drawing on Schatzki (1996)'s social theorizing, I would contend that sisterhood-ing was a constitutive practice performed, attributed, prompted and responded to as part of the family practising by this inquiry group. Acts of caring for the young, taking care of the sick, and protecting the weak could be seen as constituting a family and presuming an understanding of family practising. Hence, the participation of Yuen, son of YY, began with the renaming of him as 'GorGor' (elder brother), which was immediately understood as an act of brotherhood-ing, and in itself was a practice that constituted 'family practice'.

As a result of such an understanding of 'family practising' and the participants' history with NF, it was natural that the 'eldest, most experienced, nurturing and resourceful' participant in the group was constructed as the mother-head figure of this family-like community of practice. At times, the mother-head figure's pushy, harsh and even sarcastic sayings and doings were understood by women participants as her nurturing agenda. 'It is good for me/you' was the most frequent utterance by women participants in response to the mother-head figure's authoritarian sayings and doings. As long as I did not share their history with the mother-head figure, from my point of view, those sayings and doings were seemingly disrespectful, i.e. shouting at others, diminishing someone in public and criticising someone's ability. Without comprehending the family practice at work, these sayings and doings of the women participants were completely out of my intelligibility. My inability to make sense of these sayings and doings also highlighted my different understanding of family practice in which no authoritative figure was legitimized and uncontested because no authority was naturally given. To remain in the loop of sisterhood, while rejecting legitimization of diminishing sayings and doings from the mother-head, I chose to respond with strengthening the arguments of the diminished women participants to develop their choice of actions. Meanwhile, I tried to integrate the useful contributions that the mother-head figure had made into an alternative course of actions. Gradually, sisterhood-ing was strengthened among women participants as understanding of lived experience became more inclusive, and the authoritarian mother-head was less legitimized after different experiences of surviving were validated. These subtle changes in intimacy building in fact created a dramatic shift in understanding the 'family practice' which later in the inquiry process influenced the relations with teenage

participants (women participants' giving up of their mother-head figure in relating to their sons/daughters).

#### 4.3.1.2 Continuation of partnership: sustaining partnership calling and response

To this point, we should be able to see that partnership calling and response began at the moment an invitation is sent to a person. The inviting acts to partnership include the content and method of presentation and delivery of the invitation. These acts were meaningless until they were made sense of by a responding act in a relationship context. The relationship context regarded here is not a 'combination of people in a particular moment', such as fixed group membership or a family unit. It is the nexus of relationship people that are linked together to enable the inviting and responding acts to be understood. For example, asking for help responded by helping hands at the cost of self-sacrifice was understood as a practice of sister care within a context of relationships where formerly abused women were linked together by the overlapping practices of 'family' and 'action group'.

The relational calculations played out in decision making for participation also had a bearing on reproducing a set of pre-existing relationships, which were gradually unfolded in the inquiry process. Hand in hand with intimacy building, 'sisterhood-ing', 'brotherhood-ing' and 'caring' were understood and responded to as family practising in this inquiry. The familial partnerships set the teleoaffective structure for 'family members' to value 'love', 'care' and 'self-sacrifice'. The construction of 'victim-chungsangje classification' discussed in chapter 5 was found to be the guiding framework for care and service rendering in this inquiry group, while it also organized how sympathy and tolerance should be expressed to different categories of 'sisters'. Pragmatic rationality emerged in the introductory session with YT, HL and NF, and that revealed in my invitations, per se, implied particular forms of partnership. Consumerist pragmatic rationality was carried with the user-service provider distinction, in which the service provider was the means to serve the needs of the users. By requesting other women participants for more investment of time and effort in her problems, the participant practising consumerist pragmatic rationality was inviting other participants to take on the identity of a service provider and herself as a service user. From time to time, this consumerist pragmatic rationality was performed in the inquiry group even though it apparently went against the 'participatory principles' as stated in the inquiry framework.

One of the most typical episodes was KW urging other participants to solve her financial crisis caused by the sudden termination of governmental financial assistance. Despite spending a day and even more on devising solutions for her problem, she angrily shouted at us for not investing enough time and effort because she still had to make a phone call and write a letter to make things happen.

*KW burst into anger, 'all of you just keep asking me to do this and do that, if I can do it I don't need you at all! You said you were going to help me, but at last I am the one who do it? Is this the 'help' you are talking about?' We all paused for a while. (Field notes, 30 March 2013)*

This consumerist pragmatic rationality came to the awareness of women participants when sayings and doings that presumed it were repeatedly performed in the inquiry meetings. The constitutive acts of this practice were also contrasted by sayings and doings that presumed cooperative pragmatic rationality, e.g. taking the initiative to share responsibility in care and service delivery, considering how one's own sayings and doings are significant to the results of collective actions, helping each other to achieve better (sharing/teaching successful tips, skills, and experiences), and contributing wherever one could (food, time, expertise, experiences, and labour power). Cooperative pragmatic rationality engaged performing participants in shared responsibility, mutual respect, and equal partnership. As the two practices got more often performed and more identifiable in the inquiry group meetings, I deliberately invited women participants to explicate and articulate them by 'constantly comparing sayings and doings', to sketch the shapes of our collaboration. The researcher identity promulgated through acts of 'academic inquiry' enabled us to translate our implicit and vaguely understood practices (bodily/experiential form) into accessible presentational or propositional forms. Such a process also allowed us to engage in evaluative practices to, first, determine which framework of practice we preferred the most; and second, to amalgamate different parts of the explicated practices to develop our own framework of practice according to the agreed values and goals of this inquiry.

Choosing one among many other possibilities of frameworks of practice could easily risk marginalizing the lived experiences of the women who performed the unchosen framework of practice. It is where I advocate for the attention to the 2<sup>nd</sup> layer of participation, epistemological participation, which is central for promoting 'partnership'

in a CGI. Although all participants are responsible for promoting equal partnership/fuller participation, we could not ignore the fact that not every participant has ever participated in 'epistemological participation'. Even though some have practised it, it is not for sure that they will perform, attribute, respond and prompt it persistently in the inquiry. Instead, attending to the peculiar participation of formerly abused women, who had been coerced, controlled and deprived in many aspects of life, enabled us to discover the 'learnt silencing of personal voices'<sup>26</sup> prevailing in the inquiry. 'Learnt silencing of personal voices' was a common response of women participants in the face of differences in sayings and doings, or when the mother-head was exercising her historically established authority to interpret realities *FOR* other women participants, for example, terming YT's refusal to go public as regression to victimhood. In this regard, the practitioner-researcher has an undeniable responsibility to perform, attribute, prompt, and respond to the practice of 'epistemological participation'.

It is also worth noting that the inclusion of one's sense making should be differentiated from the inclusion of one's opinions. Inclusion of one's sense making is the unfolding of the practices one is simultaneously engaging in; by that, one constructs particular identities, partnerships and realities. In the construction of the 'victim-chungsangje identities' delineated in chapter 5, chungsangje-becoming was constructed to encompass the different practices YT and HL were performing in making sense of themselves in relation to the violence against them, their former abusers, their daughters, victimhood, survivorhood, and the public. Chungsangje-becoming was not the terminology employed by anyone before the reconstruction, but constructed in the articulation of practices that were unintelligible to those well fitted in the existing identity categories. This happened to reposition YT and HL's lived experiences back in the collective map in making sense of formerly abused women's departure from victimhood in the post-separation context.

---

<sup>26</sup> Women participants, except NF, tended to withdraw their opinions when they were not well supported by the majority. 'Tongue tied in expressing different opinions', 'withdrawing opinions if different views were expressed', 'I don't want to say', 'I have nothing to say' and 'prolonged silence with unrest body movements' were indicators that constituted 'silencing of personal voice'. By making this practice explicit, women participants were invited to make sense of these sayings and doings; and they believed that 'silencing of personal voice' was learnt through living with the controlling abusers who had never regarded their voices as important.

#### **4.4 (Trans)forming identities**

As previously argued, identity and 'self' are not fixed but constituted locally in practice. The contingency of identity and self resembles the fluidity of knowledge construction in dynamic social practices.

*'Who a person is consists in the particular ensemble of subject positions she assumes in participating in various social arenas. This ensemble is woven from the possible positions offered to her by practices in these arenas. And it is woven around certain determinations called "nodal points" that form the core of who she is at a given moment. This melange is unstable not only because the nodal points and constitutive mix can and do evolve, but also because there can be no presumption that a given identity amalgam is coherent' (Shatzki, 1996, p.8).*

In the following, I will outline the identities that evidently formed and transformed in the inquiry alongside the emergence of local knowledge and changes of local practices.

##### **4.4.1 The practitioner-researcher**

Social work practitioner-researcher was the first identity I took on to introduce myself to potential participants (see Appendix 4.1). However, this identity was not endorsed by potential women participants as they did not consider it as determinant factor for their decision to participate. They perceived the identity as 'something doesn't matter', and understood me as the indirect beneficiary of the good deeds done by NF to them in the past. This beneficiary identity was more obviously prompted in interactions with YY, YT and PF. This marked the beginning of my recruitment phase.

Immediate analysis of data allowed me to discover 'relational calculation' that fortified the benefactor-beneficiary relationship and obscured 'autonomous' choices. In conducting introductory sessions with YT, PF, NF and HL, I tried to encourage considerations that are more 'individual-based'. The diminishing of 'relational calculations' unexpectedly encouraged the revelation of 'consumerist rationality', which located me at the service-providing end. I rejected the identity of pure service provider by inviting all the women participants to be equal partners in sense making and actions for devising services for formerly abused women. However, for quite a while, my identity in this inquiry group was perceived as an initiating 'outsider' instead of a partner.



However, the revelation of my personal history of being in a controlling relationship turned me from an outsider into a 'sister'. The 'sister' identity served as the 'nodal point' to form who I was at the particular moments when the practising of sisterhood was prompted and sustained inside and outside the group. However, as suggested by Schatzki, this 'nodal point' is unstable and therefore not always appropriate in my interactions with the other 'sisters'. Even though the sister identity allowed me to be involved in their sister talks, including all the secret talks about how they were discontented with the behaviours of other sisters<sup>27</sup>, from time to time, engaging in the sisterhood from my historical conditioning (not being helped by anybody in the group, undertaking my education in Hong Kong and being trained as a researcher) revealed differences in seeing things and interpreting sayings and doings encountered in the inquiry meetings (different subject positions). This historical conditioning rendered me with the identity of 'historically disenthralled sister'. By differentiating me from their shared history, through the identity of 'historically disenthralled sister', women participants were able to highlight their specific suffering from the occasionally authoritarian or paternalistic behaviours of the mother-head. Interestingly, the identity of 'historically disenthralled sister' positioned me as the women participants' shelter from the angers and irritable temperament of the mother-head/role model. Whenever I provided sheltering acts, the identity was reproduced.

In this regard, I began to bring the 'learnt silencing of personal voice' to the foreground as it began to cause problems in participation and creating power differentials. Instead of sheltering, I turned to supporting easier expression and fuller articulation of experiences from the women participants who were marginalized in the epistemological participation in the inquiry. I did these jobs by jotting down whatever was said in the group for all the participants to construct meanings together. These acts were considered by women participants as 'documenting', 'analysing' and 'strategizing'. In those practices, I was repeatedly called the 'writer' and the 'strategizer'. These titles were also to acknowledge my long-term engagement in tertiary education and research. As long as these identities did not seem to carry power differentials in problem solving, I did not deliberately reject/reconstruct them.

---

<sup>27</sup> Carol Smart (2007) also addressed the work of Frankenberg (1957) on gossip which was perceived to bring about conformity in the community and a way to express diversity in family living.

The experiences of identity transformation as articulated above encourage us to revisit the 'insider/outsider' debate in social research. The identity of 'historically disenthralled sister' calls into question the notion of 'going native' which establishes in the situation that a person immerses too much in a particular shared identity/set of social properties, but loses sight of one's differences in other subject positions or social properties one holds. The identity of 'historically disenthralled sister' shows that women who share the membership of 'sisterhood' (insider), due to the history of abuse/controlling relationship, could differ from each other in many other aspects of their life, whereas not sharing entirely the same set of properties/histories/life practices does not necessarily lead to a total rejection of one's membership in a community (seen as an outsider). In other words, being considered as an 'insider' by a community does not smooth the contours between one and the others, and an insider identity requires continuous display of 'commonalities' within the community. Shaw and Holland (2014) distilled from different social work qualitative studies to show that social work researchers are usually both 'insider and outsider' in research practice. 'Historically disenthralled sister' also echoes with White's (2001) recognition of the heterogeneous nature of social settings that has led to a review of the 'insider-outsider' dichotomy and given rise to a more nuanced articulation of being 'inside out' and 'outside in' in ethnographic research. White (2001) also acknowledged the importance of being 'inside out' to social work practitioner-research, as it gives practitioner-researchers a critical eye on their taken-for-grantedness in everyday practices.

The taken-for-grantedness of my daily practice as a social work trained researcher was regularly 'problematized'/'destabilized' by unexpected and at first unintelligible sayings, doings and responses performed by other participants in the inquiry group. These immediately unintelligible incidents highlight the boundary of my 'field(s)' which enables and limits sense making; they disclose where I do not share the same social practices and identities with the other participants. My identities as 'writer' and 'strategizer' are clear examples of many other 'insider out' identities constructed in this inquiry group. The practises carried out by 'theorists', 'analysts' and 'researchers' are subject to reinterpretation in the inquiry group so as to develop other participants' 'intelligibility' over 'academic inquiry' which is completely alien to other participant-researchers in this case. The identities of 'writer' and 'strategizer' acknowledge, respectively, the major tools (words and tables) I used in sense making and the feedback mechanism of my

written work that informed the group's further actions. 'Documenting', 'fact finding', 'evidence collecting', 'articulating', 'analyzing' and 'evaluating' prompted by me highlighted the 'outsider' dimension of me in the 'sisterhood', meanwhile they opened up 'sisterhood' to action-inquiry practices that the original 'sisterhood' did not normally perform. This tremendous tension between 'inquiry practices' and 'family practice' has brewed an interesting form of community in this inquiry—a family-like community of practice (see 4.5). This tension is probably common in many community-based participatory research projects and reflected in the different 'degree to which the research aims to bring participants into the academy or, alternatively, bring the academy into the participants' everyday lives and cultures' (Shaw & Holland, 2014: 26).

In addition to the socio-spatial dimension as articulated with shared and unshared social practices, the negotiation of insider-outsider has got a temporal dimension. The problems identified by/presented to the community of practice have strong influence over the negotiation of the insider/outsider status of members. For example, when the community needed to solve problem of sisterhood-breakdown, family practices were more prominent and became central for negotiating 'insider/outsider'; when the community needed to understand their parent-son/daughter problems, inquiry practices would become central for negotiating 'insider/outsider'. In this regards, I find Wenger's 'peripherality'<sup>28</sup> is more capable in capturing the dynamic changes in the position of participants in this inquiry group. This concept also tells us how an outsider aspect of a member of a community could allow trans-boundary learning to happen.

Therefore, a community, in which a membership is defined, is neither a static nor an unmalleable structure. Instead, it is displayed and shaped by multiple social practices being performed and prompted in the problem solving process. 'Family members', 'sisters', 'brothers', 'inquirers', 'writers', 'strategizers' and 'doers' are identities constructed within different social practices performed in this 'family-like community of practice'. 'Insider' and/or 'outsider' are negotiated contextually in relation to the social practices the participants perform at a particular moment, in solving a particular problem. Therefore, by looking at how the 'insider' and 'outsider' statuses are negotiated, we can

---

<sup>28</sup> It is to differentiate the form of non-participation, which is the necessary condition to bring a participant from the 'outsider' position to a more 'insider' position, from 'marginality' which is 'a form of non-participation prevents full participation. Here, it is the non-participation aspect that dominates and comes to define a restricted form of participation' (Wenger, 1998: 165-166).

explore how members of a community employ different social practices in solving their problems, and how these social practices alter the shape of the community in return.

#### ***4.4.2 Women participants in relation to their experiences of abuse and the pre-established relationships***

Relating to the experiences of being abused was definitely a main task for abused women in the post-separation stage. It determines whether the abuse and the abusers are history or part of their current life. These relating acts were practised, revealed and reproduced in the inquiry meetings. In these practices, women participants constructed identities that denoted their relationships with the abuse, the abuser, sons/daughters, filial ties, family members, and the larger society against the particular nexus of relationships in which these relationships were expressed. This finding also echoes with Smart's (2007) articulation of memory and her saying of 'the past still matters'.

Victim identity dominated at the beginning phase of the group, and justified the need for solidarity. This victim identity was constructed to show the influence of abuse in women participants' current lives. Meanwhile, to locate their ex-partners as the victimizers, women and sons/daughters were victims, and the society was equally morally responsible for the victimization. As CGI required participants to commit themselves in problem solving (instead of passively consuming services), the victim identity (and the relationships it denoted) was not helpful in taking this agenda on board. 'Chungsangje' identity was constructed instead to sail women participants from a bitter history towards a brighter future. It also denoted their helping relationship with 'victims' who were still suffering from abuse or its consequences. By locating themselves at the service providing end, women participants identified themselves as contributors to the betterment of formerly abused women and the society in general. When the mixture of characteristics of victim and chungsangje were made visible in the inquiry, either the victim or the chungsangje identity framework became 'unfit' for women's lived experiences. Chungsangje-becoming was then constructed as an alternative identity to avoid the dissolution of sisterhood and oppression against different ways of sayings and doings. In reflection, the chungsangje-becoming identity was inherently risky for relapsing to 'chungsangje' identity because it sustained that chungsangje was better than victims and chungsangje-becoming. Therefore, this identity was in fact ontologically unstable.

However, this identity was practically useful because total departure from victimhood into chungsangje-hood was potentially threatening to 'sisterhood', which had been giving warmth, sense of belonging, care, support, and 'family' feelings to formerly abused women.

Chungsangje-becoming had its significance also because of its adherence to women participants' historical conditioning where their vehement hope to leave victimhood and enter chungsangje-hood was found to be sustained by successful cases. Reversibly, the limited successful cases in this inquiry group became the authority figures (role model and mother-head) that hindered the emergence of alternative understandings of lived experiences and alternatives for surviving. The 'role model' in the group was constructed in histories and relationships pre-established among women participants prior to the outset of the inquiry (see Appendix 4.4 for the four power-relationships, namely the helping-the helped, the resourceful-the deprived, the experienced-the inexperienced and the recognized-the unknown).

The power differential pre-established prior to the inquiry was found to be altered by the entering of the 'historically disenthralled sister' (the practitioner-researcher). Women participants who understood things or would like to act differently from the role model/mother-head constantly went to the practitioner-researcher as a niche for developing alternative narratives and understandings of lived experiences. In this regard, the practitioner-researcher could be in a good position to help make different voices 'visible' in the group by: (1) Attending to differences in doing and understanding in the group practices, and raising the differences in the group for further articulation of experiences. The practitioner-researcher could open up chances for developing alternative understandings and ways of practising. (2) Encouraging differences and not trying to necessarily arrive at agreements. By reacting to differences with 'welcome', 'appreciation' and 'attention', differences would be given a new meaning other than acting against the 'role model'. By articulating the differences and developing them into coherent narratives in the group, new ways of understanding things and new identities could be introduced. When the old and new were not immediately compatible with each other, the practitioner-researcher should try to keep the alternatives instead of getting participants to agree on one unifying understanding. Last but not least, increasing the diversity of successful cases in the inquiry group could expand the stock of lived

experiences that once worked for some formerly abused women to leave victimhood. This also increased the possibilities of practices and identities that women could engage in for leaving victimhood which was constantly reproduced and reinforced in seeking help from domestic violence services, and it is destructive to women's exercise of strengths and self-confidence.

#### **4.4.3 Sons/daughters of women participants**

'Children' as an identity was discernible for being diminishing to teenage participants in this inquiry because it suggested that their opinions, decisions and sayings and doings were immature compared to adults'. Teenage participants were unsatisfied with the identity of 'children' which was reproduced in the conventional parent-child practice. This unwelcome practice was named by Yuen, son of YY, as 'single-log bridge' practice where the parent was identified as an agenda setter and a policeman/authority figure. 'Single-log bridge' care was widely practised by women participants in our group, and therefore most of them were experiencing relationship tension and even breakdown with their sons/daughters. Drawing reference from the gradually more participatory and equal family practice practised in this inquiry, women participants developed new ways in relating to their sons/daughters, in order to invite them into partnership. 'Children' were therefore no longer the identity carried on by the new form of family practising, but 'sons/daughters', 'babe', 'piggy' and 'baby', which manifested intimacy, and 'gorgor (elder brother)', 'lan lui (beautiful lady)' and 'teenage friends', which presumed equal status with the 'adult' women participants. Introduction of this more participatory and equal form of family practising altered the sayings and doings of both women participants and teenage participants in the care giving practices. It also transformed the care giving practices in the family from solely the responsibility of 'mothers' to shared responsibility of mothers and sons/daughters (see chapter 6). By performing this partnership making and identity (trans)forming work, a community was produced to link participants together for determining the goals, tasks, aims and strategies carried out within the community.

#### **4.5 Displaying a family-like community of practice**

An emphasis on shared experiences of oppression was identified in feminist shelter intervention as on the one hand blurring our vision to the existence of the heterogeneity

of abused women, and on the other hand to their roles other than 'sisters', for example, mothers (Krane & Davies, 2002; 2007). In addition to sisterhood, motherhood is also consistently performed by some abused women within and without the abusive relationship. It also affects the future plans of women who have left the abusive relationship (Moe, 2009). Participating in this inquiry is not an exception to the involvement of 'children' and mothering. In the inquiry, motherhood was practised beyond the traditional 'family' unit, but within the family-like inquiry group. This echoes with the emerging stream of family studies, which focuses on the displaying and doing of family (Smart, 2007; Ribben-McCarthy, 2012) as a response to the realization that families are not limited to the understanding of the household, but the kinships people make with others outside their bloodline. This family practice is also found to be prevalent in Chinese Confucius and Taoist culture that the former celebrates the notion of 'within the four seas, all men are brothers' and the latter sees the universe as children of Tao and Nature (Saso, 1999, pp. 5-6). Although Hong Kong Chinese familialism deserves special regard because of its degree of resemblance to traditional Chinese familialism, (quasi-)kinship networking was still evident in the post industrialization era in Hong Kong (Lau, 1981; Leung, 1998).

Saso (1999) also stated that '...the family is the center and focus of the village and household life. Festivals, rites of passage, economic success, health care, and psychological support are all a part of its function' (p. 7). Evidence from this inquiry also indicated that, through the inquiry group, women participants wanted to rebuild/preserve a family that they had lost in surviving violence and separation. From this particular family-like community, women participants wanted to secure care and support, and to fulfil their desire for kinship and intimacy. Therefore, the family practising carried out in the inquiry group gradually yielded the 'teleoaffective structure' of this inquiry group, and steered it to develop care and support services for formerly abused women, by classifying them as 'sisters'.

In Chinese culture, nurturing, nourishing and gestating are the female aspects of nature that define women; this peculiar femininity is usually acquired through carrying out reproductive, nurturing and socialization duties in 'family' (Leung, 1998; Saso, 1999). This view enables us to reckon why the Chinese New Year Pot Dish gathering, the Mother's Day Event, health boosting activities, psychological support, and care services were

incredibly significant to women participants and other formerly abused women. A culturally sensitive understanding of Chinese family practices aids us in making sense of familial and relationship issues that took priority in the inquiry group, in order to secure sisterhood, motherhood, and familial relationships. When the 'family' performed in the inquiry was running smoothly, the attention and efforts of the group would be directed to the 'outside' and spared for actions, events, and work that promoted the general welfare of abused women. For example, challenging unfair policies, educating the public about abused women's life challenges and responding to negative understandings about abused women. In the 6-month inquiry, women and teenage participants collaborated in drafting a statement for children's rights and participation in Hong Kong, attended government's public consultation meetings for expressing their concerns over current domestic violence services, and conducted interviews with the press media for explicating the needs of families with history of domestic violence.

The family practices exercised in this inquiry group resemble some properties of the concept of utilitarianistic familism<sup>29</sup> constructed by Lau (1981), especially when women participants consistently employed 'victimhood' as the panacea for resources bargaining without considering other moral dimensions (e.g. principle of fairness or justice) of their demands. For example, 'we are abused women, shall our children have more money for extra-curricular activities?' (SW) and 'we are abused women, shouldn't we be exempted from waiting for public medical services?' (YT). At times, the utilitarianistic familism united with the consumerist pragmatic rationality to mar the evaluation of ethics in practice. Drawing on philosophical pragmatism, understanding of ethics has to be constructed, negotiated, and agreed locally (Reason, 2003). I then introduced regular sessions for ethical discussion and evaluation of our action plans and deliveries. This ethical practice was usually prompted through incorporating devil's advocate and role taking exercises in the evaluation agenda; sometimes, vigorous debates and confrontational exchanges resulted. Practising ethical evaluation and reification of those ethical decisions through actions and contractual procedures changed the practice of 'family' in the group, e.g. collaborating with 'children'.

---

<sup>29</sup> According to Leung (1998), Lau identified 6 dimensions of utilitarianistic familism in his study. They are: (1) putting familial interests above all other kinds of social interests, (2) the socio-political context is for the pursuit of familial interests, (3) utilitarianistic considerations are important to structuring relationships among members, (4) social status of the family is no longer important, (5) the recruitment of new members or the exclusion of blood and marriage ties are made much easier, and (6) growing egalitarianism in the family.



Therefore, complex interplays of different practices, i.e. utilitarianistic familialism, consumerist pragmatic rationality, relational rationality, participatory rationality, intimacy building (sisterhooding, brotherhooding, mothering and childrening), partnership making and moral evaluating, were taking place simultaneously in constituting this community of practice. These various practices constantly, but unevenly, shaped the 'we-ness' of the inquiry group. The concept of community of practice is employed here as it encapsulates the constitutive relationships among meaning making, identity, participation, practices and learning in understanding the formation of a group/community (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999; Wenger & Snyder, 2000); hence, this rendered this family-like inquiry group distinguishable from the conventional conceptualization of community as defined by similarity or proximity, and from the conventional understanding of Chinese family that structures itself for the preservation of bloodline and family status (i.e. centripetal family). After all, the community of practice displayed in this inquiry was particularistic in its combination of practices, which were performed by and constitutive to the (relational) selves of participants. Meanwhile, it revealed sociality by sharing the embedded-ness within the larger local cultures and beyond, for instance, utilitarianistic familialism, consumerist pragmatic rationality, relational rationality, and the participatory practices from the West (as prompted by the practitioner-researcher). In this section, I will try to illustrate how the abovementioned practices interplayed with each other and constituted a 'family-like community of practice', and then move on discussing its implications for 'participation'.

#### **4.5.1 A community of practice: social identities, meaning making, interactions and learning**

*'An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464).*

It is worth noting that a community of practice (CofP) is different from traditional forms of community, which are defined by a structured membership, as well as functional, geographic, or social proximity. Alternate to the fixed structure and unchanged shared

qualities (functional, geographical and functional) that determine 'membership' of a traditional community, what the concept of CofP can offer us is to escort us to unfold 'practices' that constitute the 'group' and give it 'shapes' at different moments. The quality changes manifested in a CofP characterize it as a distinguishable concept from social networks which assimilate the concept of *Zusammenhang* used by Schatzki to refer to the state of held-togetherness of entities that 'forms a context for each'. Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999) also contend that CofP is more compatible with social constructionism which as I argued earlier provides the philosophical foundation for the relational approach that converges with Schatzki's philosophical articulation of social practices.

Wenger (1998) theorized that CofP was formed when an aggregate of people mutually engaged themselves with each other for a common enterprise and worked by developing a shared repertoire. In this CGI, 'common souls' of formerly abused women engaged with each other in the pursuit of the welfare of formerly abused women in Hong Kong and the actualization of equal participation in domestic violence service development. Despite the huge similarity I can draw between my work and Wenger's community of practice in understanding the relationships among practice, identity, (inter)subjectivity, collectivity, power, and meaning, I depart from Wenger's work with an emphasis on *displaying* of a community of practice instead of formation. I argue that a community of practice has no substantial content, nor can it even be understood as a community, until participants acted and responded in a way to display some sort of 'we-ness', through language, minimized social distance, collective actions/responses, and shared repertoires. Therefore, the community did not exist in advance of activities, sayings, and doings that participants perform together (in a nexus of relationship), but was displayed simultaneously when those activities, sayings and doings were performed and performed again to render the 'we-ness' with substantial meanings. Through sharing languages, kinship, identities, stories of migration/victimization/surviving, dining habits, and parent-son/daughter practices, women participants began to construct meanings about their 'togetherness' in familial terms. Construction of knowledge through familial terms further guided the reproduction of familial practices, i.e. 'sisterhood', 'motherhood', 'childhood' and 'brotherhood' (with sons of women participants), and constituted a family-like community of practice. The family-like community of practice simultaneously served as the background for other practices to be understood, for example, identity (trans)forming, care and service rendering, partnership making and responsibility sharing

(Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). Schatzki (1996) gave a succinct articulation about the relationship between sayings and doings of participants and human intelligibility in a social practice:

*‘By “integrative practices” I mean the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life. Examples are farming practices, business practices, voting practices...integrative ones are collections of linked doings and sayings. The doings and sayings involved are joined by: (1) intelligibility of Q-ing and R-ing (etc.), along with “sensitized” understandings of X-ing and Y-ing (etc.), the latter carried by the transfigured forms that the dispersed practices of X-ing and Y-ing adopt within integrative practices; (2) explicit rules, principles, precepts, and instructions; and (3) teleoaffective structures comprising hierarchies of ends, tasks, projects, beliefs, emotions, moods, and the like’ (pp.98-99).*

In this regard, we can no longer assume that ‘formerly abused women’, ‘victims’, ‘welfare of formerly abused women’, ‘cooperative inquiry group’ and so on could be defined prior to the actual practice of the inquiry. Instead, all these constructs gained their significance and meanings only when they were employed, responded to, practised and reproduced in the practising of the inquiry, with a specific combination of participants and relationships. This finding is in line with the increasing recognition about the multiplicity of meanings of families, abused women and victimization in the literature (Krane & Davies, 2007; Krane & Davies, 2002; Ribben-McCarthy, 2012; Ribbens-McCarthy, Hooper, & Gillies, 2013; Smart, 2007).

#### **4.5.2 Displaying Yat-Ga-Yan (‘we are a family’) and the interplays of other practices**

*YY: This is called the ‘Green Home’. Green colour represents health, meaning that everyone here in this group has to be healthy. We shall stay with each other as if we are a family. In this ‘home’, I hope that everyone can have food, clothes and love (27 Jan 2013).*



##### **4.5.2.1 ‘Yat-Ga-Yan’: ‘sisterhooding’, ‘motherhooding’, ‘childrenhooding’, ‘brotherhooding’**

Although the family practices carried out in this inquiry resembled the properties of Lau’s (1981) ‘Hong Kong Chinese utilitarianistic familialism’, it is impossible to see this

particular concept of family as a universally applicable concept in understanding Hong Kong Chinese families. On one hand this concept was constructed 30 years ago in the background of an influx of Chinese mainlanders as a result of civil wars; while, on the other hand, the diversities encompassed in the term 'Chinese' and 'family' add extra difficulties in defining what a 'typical' 'Hong Kong Chinese family' is (Leung, 1998; Saso, 1999). Instead of assuming a typical and generalizable concept of Hong Kong Chinese familialism, it would be more productive to see how family practices are carried out in a local context that they presume an understanding of family, and to see how such an understanding<sup>30</sup> affects displaying of family in return.

In this inquiry, 'sisterhooding'<sup>31</sup>, 'brotherhooding'<sup>32</sup>, 'mothering'<sup>33</sup> and 'childrening'<sup>34</sup> were constantly prompted, responded to, performed and sustained in the inquiry group. Beyond these, 'cooking and dining together', 'sleeping in each other's home', 'taking care of each other's sons/daughters' and 'remembering each other's personal habits' were continuously promoted and performed among participants in 'doing family' in the inquiry. These practices were, as I argue, performed along with 'transfigured understandings' of family practising that was variably understood and carried out by participants. Despite the different family practices going on in the inquiry, *Yat-Ga-Yan* (the same family) was consistently employed to make sense of the relationships among participants, in particular when conflicts were intense. This suggested that the preservation of togetherness, sometimes at the cost of individuality (by ignoring differences and withdrawing personal opinions), was shared among the different family practices. 'Yat-

---

<sup>30</sup> Understanding is a broader term that can incorporate both conceptual understanding of a social practice and the term 'intelligibility' employed by Schatzki (1996) to refer to: (1) ability to carry out, (2) identify and attribute one's sayings and doings, and (3) prompt and respond to acts that presume a social practice. The term 'understanding' used throughout this thesis has to be understood as referring to both 'conceptual' and 'practical' understanding.

<sup>31</sup> Calling each other sisters, taking care of and supporting each other in the name of sister, being more generous to 'sisters' (compared to 'non-sisters'), remembering the birthdays of sisters (forgetting those of 'non-sisters'), prioritizing the needs of sisters (compared to 'friends') and always standing up for sisters.

<sup>32</sup> Calling male teenage participants 'gorgor' (elder brothers), women consulting their sons on family and public matters (e.g. family finance, children's rights and services for families rebuilt after domestic violence), withdrawing from taking the lead in order to let 'gorgor' to take the lead in making intra-family decisions (e.g. distribution of time on leisure and work, attitudes towards each other and study arrangement of teenage participants themselves), women calling themselves 'muimui' (little sisters) and women acting like a 'muimui' (e.g. leaning towards 'gorgor' for protection).

<sup>33</sup> Self-sacrificed nurturing, i.e. 'All for your own good', 'why do you think I have to do all these? It's all for you, for your growth' and 'I don't need it, all because of you'; my-words-first, i.e. 'listen to me first', 'let me finish my words' and 'you have to listen'; using authoritative tones and responding positively to 'childrening' sayings and doings.

<sup>34</sup> Calling NF 'Ah Ma' (mum), serving NF with special food and drinks as an expression of filial piety, offering the best of whatever they had at home to NF (i.e. food and massage tools), celebrating NF's birthday in terms of an elder parent's birthday (i.e. preparing presents with prints of Chinese birthday buns, see <http://chineseculture.about.com/library/weekly/aa021901b.htm> for more details about the custom of celebrating the birthdays of elder parents in the Chinese culture) and responding to 'mothering' sayings and doings positively (i.e. thanking for the sacrifices, keeping their mouths shut when NF's speaking and being silent to the use of authority).

Ga-Yan' also worked as the dominant background for the following practices to be practised at the beginning of the inquiry.

#### 4.5.2.2 Relational rationality and consumerist pragmatic rationality

Relational rationality was tightly woven into the intimacy building and family making enterprises in this inquiry. Relational rationality revealed its compatibility with the family practices in preserving togetherness and more succinctly 'harmonious' togetherness. Where intense conflicts and strong egoistic behaviours were observed in this family-like community, relational rationality and family practices were simultaneously displayed to confront sayings and doings that referred to consumerist pragmatic rationality. Consumerist pragmatic rationality does not only refer to calculation and decision-making that direct only to personal interests, but also implies how those personal interests were attained. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we can see that consumerist pragmatic rationality positions the decision making participant at the service receiving end and other participants at the service providing end. Participants employing this rationality would assume their valued goals to be achieved by other women participants in the group without exerting much effort themselves. This rationality prevailed in this inquiry from lunch preparation, event implementation, preparation for the press interviews, and solving personal problems, such as resuming one's welfare provision and reconciling with their sons/daughters. As consumerist pragmatic rationality sets out to be 'different' from the altruistic orientation presupposed by relational rationality and the collective good pursued by familialism, practices of it at times received unwelcoming responses and even criticisms. For example, when KW scolded other participants for not paying enough attention and effort to handling her financial problems, which were caused by the sudden termination of social assistance, and did not want to write a few words to file a complaint, the mother-head figure, NF, said with burning anger,

*'Honestly tell you KW, I can't stand you anymore. You are a selfish person. You are just looking for what is good to you, but not what is good to others. Therefore, you simply want to talk about yourself and wouldn't listen! I have had enough of you!'*

This outburst was followed by demonstrations of a lot of care by other 'sisters' (including me), in telling KW how much we cared about her, what we had done to relieve her situation, and what solutions we had arrived at so far. We even spent another session on

devising a detailed action plan for tackling the legal and administrative obstacles lying in the way of the continuation of welfare for KW. These acts and sayings performed by women participants after conflicts could be understood as an invite to the conflicting parties back into sisterhood in order to avoid the breakdown of 'harmonious togetherness' that presumed a family. By reflecting and analysing field data alongside the inquiry process, the common responses to consumerist pragmatic rationality were found to have set back the participation of participants.

The total rejection of consumerist pragmatic rationality in the group was found to have taken individuality out of scene<sup>35</sup>. Expression of personal needs was held back by women participants in order to avoid being accused of being consumerist or egotistical. They tended to withdraw their opinions in response to anger, discontent, doubts, conflicts, and tensions expressed against their views. The more obvious were the withdrawing behaviours when signs of disharmony were made, and noticed by the mother-head figure (see (trans)forming identities in this chapter). As expressed by women participants, their withdrawing behaviours were out of their filial piety to the mother head figure.

*'You (the practitioner researcher) have to know, NF has very poor health. She is old now. She could not stand being enraged. We don't want any chance to irritate her.'* YY explained her withdrawal of personal opinions in the inquiry discussion. (out-group interactions after 18<sup>th</sup> session)

However, anger, discontent, conflicts and tensions were understood as disharmony only when they were responded with avoidance in the context of a family. To reconstruct the meaning of anger, discontent, conflicts and tensions, and to reconstitute the relationship context to more allowance of individuality, I began to respond to these expressions with calmness and curiosity for further articulation. Meanwhile, I invited participants to further elaborate their withdrawn opinions and views. Anger, discontent, conflicts, tensions, and withdrawal gradually occurred where we recognized the differences among participants, and realized the need for more understanding and mutual actualization. This also marks where participatory practices were translated, understood, and practised.

---

<sup>35</sup> It refers to the momentary relationships constructed among women participants that did not enable the expression of individuality. This resembles the concept of relational self and relational autonomy instead of the context-free and isolated Cartesian model of self.

#### 4.5.2.3 The participatory practices from the West: demand for mutual accountability, equality and ethical evaluation

Without individuality, we could make no sense of mutuality. The participatory paradigm is constructed within the paradoxical existence of individuality and collectivity, entailed by this duality<sup>36</sup> every existence of things/entities is understood in terms of relations (distance, quantity and quality of relationship) with each other. Alienation from the collective gives perspective and individuality; whereas embeddedness in the collective enables participation (Reason, 1994). In Western culture, the pathway to participatory practice germinated from the over emphasis on individuality and knowledge building in isolation with other beings around the world (Gergen K. , 2003). To heal the problem of the incredibly individualised culture, participatory practices attempted to reinstall relations back on the map of understanding individuality, autonomy and personhood, in order to carve a space for the individual-collective duality to be realized in social practices and social inquiry.

Even though this inquiry aspires to the same destination of participatory practices, the starting point for achieving such manifested itself to be different from what was discussed in the western literature. As I have discussed so far, relational considerations, togetherness, intimacy, and familialism were prevalently practised in this inquiry. It sometimes happened to the extent that individuality, differences, development of personhood, and self-interests were marginalized and even demonized. To achieve participation as portrayed in participatory paradigm, we engaged ourselves in activities that developed personhood, distinctiveness, and autonomy in coordination with other participants in the inquiry group. The development of (relational) self in this inquiry was treated as a remedy to the problem of 'unconscious participation' and repression of differences and individuality.

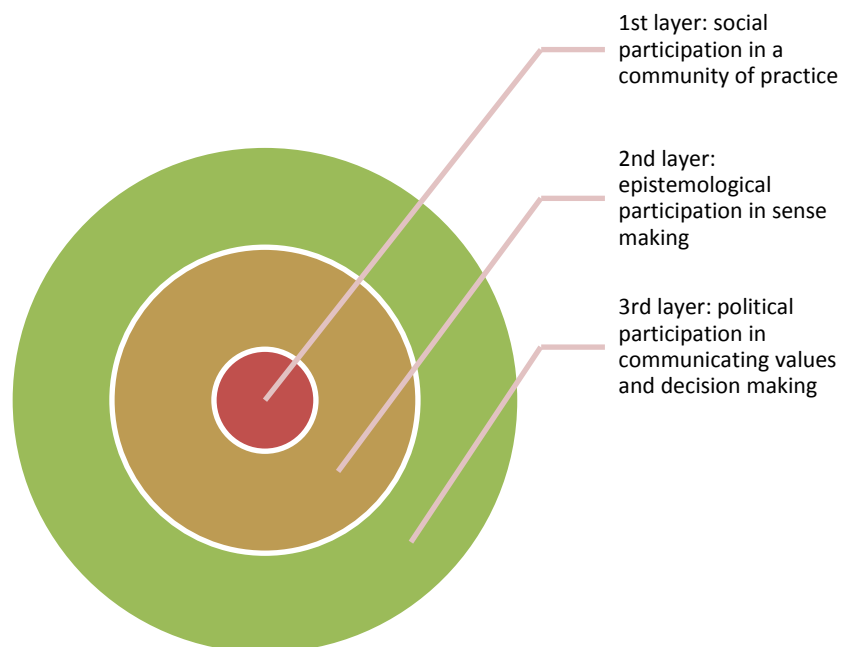
Thereby, three major ethical concerns, mutual accountability, equality, and care, of the participatory paradigm were understood and practised by women participants through, not only challenging consumerist attitudes, but also developing personhood out of the overwhelming emphasis on collectivity and togetherness (see Appendix 4.5). Borrowing from Schatzki's articulation of social practice, sayings and doings that were responded to

---

<sup>36</sup> The concept of duality has been discussed by Wenger (1998) that it should be differentiated from dichotomy, which sets two categories on mutually exclusivity instead of seeing them as different interacting entities.

in a way to refer to mutual accountability, equality, and care were the constituents of these practices. In this regard, sayings and doings that were carried out by participants in group meetings had to be appropriately responded to in a way that the three moral practices that underpinned participatory paradigm could be identified, carried out, prompted, and responded to. Unreflective mechanical operationalization of participatory research is NOT practising mutual accountability and equality, and does not constitute the practices of mutual accountability and equality. In lieu of participatory practices, the unreflective operation of PAR would fortify inequality and the traditional service provider-consumer distinction (Arieli, Victor, & Kamil, 2009).

#### 4.6 The three layers of participation and challenges against participation



Unfolding the practising of this CGI allowed us to see participants engage in different practices simultaneously in achieving shared enterprises of ‘welfare of formerly abused women in Hong Kong’ and ‘actualization of equal participation in domestic violence service development’. The practices participants performed in this inquiry gave participants and non-participants a sense of ‘we-ness’, and gave the ‘we-ness’ particular features and shapes. Wenger’s CofP is borrowed to discuss this we-ness because it enables us to see how identity (trans)forming, meaning making, mutuality, and learning interplayed with each other against the relationship context. The practising of different practices demonstrated to us how practices interplayed with each other in a way that



transformed the practices per se, and even reshaped the CofP. Above all, the focus on how inquiry participants (including myself) participated in achieving the shared enterprises has given us a chance to explore the different layers of participation in a CGI. Here, I am proposing a model of participation by teasing out different layers of participation that we had undergone in carrying out this CGI.

#### **4.6.1 1<sup>st</sup> layer: Social participation in a community of practice**

As discussed, the traditional theorization of community has dismissed a prevalent form of community that bases itself on a shared pursuit of particular enterprises. This kind of community may consist of people with different genders, races, sexual orientations, educational levels, family backgrounds, and geographical proximity. This form of community provides an arena for non-participants to learn how to say, do, respond, and make sense of things in ways to achieve the shared enterprises. Thus far, I have demonstrated that CGI had the potential to draw people with similar concerns/problems together, and to facilitate collaborative learning and problem solving, as well as create more inclusive and participatory inquiry practices. Being included in the membership of this inquiry, therefore, demarcated the 1<sup>st</sup> layer of participation—social participation in a CofP.

Joint enterprises marked the fundamental admission criterion for one's participation in a community of practice. The invitation to the 'joint enterprises' was uttered as goals/purposes/objectives in the inquiry leaflet (see Appendix 4.1), and understood, negotiated and renegotiated when formerly abused women responded to the invitation variably. The initial invitation per se had exclusive power that provided the starting point to define membership. In this regard, the 'drawing common souls' together was also an act to push away different souls, i.e. those who are not abused, formerly abused men, those who love consumerist practices, and those who are anti-egalitarianism. Gergen (2003) articulated this paradox precisely,

'...consider that when two or more people come into a state of positive coordination, they may create together a locally agreeable ontology, ethic and rationale for acceptable as opposed to unacceptable action. At the same time, such agreements will also create an exterior, a range of contrasts (that which does not exist, is not true, not good), or essentially a domain of the "not we".' (p. 50)

The construction of 'we-ness' began when the first inviting act was responded to by 'potential participants'. The sense of community grew stronger when more artefacts were produced that reified the 'we-ness', e.g. hopes and dreams through clay-making, solidarity through group photos, visions through leaflets for upcoming events, and demonstrating competence through records for services and events that we had held.

Full membership in this family-like CofP required women to register themselves in the sisterhood, demonstrating a history of being abused (any form). Meanwhile, 'sisters' were expected to participate in completing the reflection-action-reflection cycles for the shared enterprises. Hence, women participants treated the log-books, photo diaries, posters and documents produced in the inquiry and records of what they had done as signifiers of their membership. When new members were ready to join the group, women participants would immediately prepare personal log-books for new members to endorse their membership in the community.

Once the identities of 'sister' and 'doer' (people who walk the walk instead of talk the talk) became highly valued in the group, failures in carrying out practices entailed by these identities could put the person on the verge of membership crisis. Referring to my initial participation in this inquiry group, my registration in sisterhood was not completed until I performed and responded to acts of 'sisterhooding' appropriately. Alternatively, KW and YT who initially held on to more consumerist attitudes were not perceived and responded to as 'doers', but consumers who maximized their 'personal interests'. Their continuous demonstration of commitment, and investment of time and effort later rewarded them the title of contributors to the success of the group, and more recognition as members.

Social participation in a community of practice has limitations in understanding participation. Although it provides chances for relating to people who share similar pursuits, problems and concerns, it ceases to guarantee that one's knowledges and ways of knowing are ratified in the learning and problem solving processes. Therefore, in making the inquiry practices more participatory, we recognized that democratic participation has to stretch to other layers, which are epistemological participation and political participation.

#### 4.6.2 2<sup>nd</sup> layer: Epistemological participation

Epistemological participation refers to affirmation of participants' entitlement and ability to use their own terms/vocabulary to make sense of lived experiences, observations, told stories, and future aspirations. As we could see from chapter 3, different practices participants once engaged in would influence how they responded to the inviting acts carried out by the initiating participant; hence, this rendered the inviting acts, and the invitation as a whole, differently understood. To facilitate epistemological participation, differences in sayings, doings and sense-making are highly valuable. Differences/unintelligibility in carrying out, responding to and prompting a practice shed light on the different practices that participants once engaged in; they indicate the participants' identities that were formed in those practices, and drawn in practising the current social endeavour.

*'who a person is consists in the particular ensemble of subject positions she assumes in participating in various social arenas. This ensemble is woven from the possible positions offered to her by practices in these arenas. And it is woven around certain determinations called "nodal points" that form the core of who she is at a given moment. This mélange is unstable not only because the nodal points and constitutive mix can and do evolve, but also because there can be no presumption that a given identity amalgam is coherent. The identity of the socially constituted subject is thus precarious and unstable.'* (Schatzki, 1996, p. 8)

An example in this inquiry is (chapter 5) YT and HL's ambivalence to going public, which indicated their reconciling and friend-making practices in relating to the abusers, in which, identities of lover and friend were maintained for the former abusive partners. As the majority of women participants related to their abusers in alienation, indifference, and even hatred; the reconciling and friend-making practices and the corresponding identities became incoherent to normality. This highlighted Gergen's (2003) sensitivity to the potential exclusive effects of the 1<sup>st</sup> order of democracy (achieving coordinated/agreed actions), and the need to move on to the 2<sup>nd</sup> order of democracy that requires relating seemingly incompatible discourses through creative use of linguistic stocks available to re-describe common places and mutual concerns.

In this regard, opening up opportunities for constructing collegiality among differences should be maintained in promoting participation. In lieu of 'consensus', I would prefer the term 'inclusivity'. In grounded theory's terms, 'inclusivity' means developing concepts of higher abstraction to relate seemingly unrelated categories by their conceptual commonality. A typical example in the *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was relating 'diarrhoea' and 'spraying perfume' with the concept of 'body pollution'. Aided by the techniques borrowed from grounded theory, we successfully developed a spectrum concept for drawing formerly abused women living with victimhood, survivorhood and a combination of two under the same scope of surviving. Instead of a dichotomy (victim or survivor), the spectrum could accommodate more different life practices performed by formerly abused women in making their lives possible and less 'victimized'. Chapter 6 also demonstrates how constant comparative analysis helped draw out 'authority' and 'tenderness' as the duality in composing different parent-son/daughter practices which expanded the availability of acceptable, feasible and useful practices for organizing daily life activities carried out by women participants and their sons and daughters. The tension and conflicts between the authoritative mothers and always-naughty sons/daughters were obviously eased, and their identities as mother-child were transformed into mother-son/daughter, as a resistance to the inequality embedded in the term 'children'.

Therefore, in promoting the 2<sup>nd</sup> order of democracy, the initiating participant (and every participant) is advised to be cautious of the disparate practices that other participants bring in, and to encourage articulation of those practices in which to explore the identities, meanings, and ways of saying and doing things that constitute themselves and the inquiry underway. More importantly, by unpacking differences/unintelligibility, more linguistic stocks could be made visible, available, and handy for re-describing the lived experiences, observations and stories relevant and useful for achieving shared enterprises. But still, at times in this inquiry, we encountered moments that were degenerative to alternative meaning making and even obstructive to multiple voices, especially when the authority and paternalistic acts were responded to with 'learnt silencing of personal voices'. These situations required participants to engage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> layer of participation by which participants strived/restored a communicative space in which different values and ethics could be deliberated and antagonism is given a chance to be transformed into agonism.

#### **4.6.3 3<sup>rd</sup> layer: Political participation**

Both Gergen (2003) and Mouffe (2000) pointed out that political division between we/they is ineradicably incommensurable. The term political division has to be distinguished from social division of we/they, where the latter is the content (the constituents) of we and they, while the former refers to the necessary 'constitutive outside' for the constitution of 'inside'. As elucidated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> layer of participation, the content that defines we/they could be reconstructed with a new amalgamation of linguistic tokens to embrace each other under the same umbrella, and suit the momentary negotiated purposes/goals (pragmatic reasons), for example, the maintenance of sisterhood. However, after the reconstruction, the new 'we' still assumes in it a 'they' as its existential condition. In this regard, the 'political', as suggested by Mouffe (2000), exists as the constitutive quality of the we/they that makes any society possible. Her move from taking antagonism as threatening to democracy, to seeing it as a necessary quality for promoting it, sheds light on making sense of the 3<sup>rd</sup> layer of participation in this CGI.

Political participation of 'other women' was hindered when a tenant of understanding was perceived as an essentialist understanding of the subject matter, for example, 'formerly abused women must be victims'. Although a contingent understanding would become influential to further understanding of the subject matter in terms of providing the necessary linguistic tokens for sense making, it still rests itself on the indeterminacy of meaning making through language. By uttering and responding symbolically in the group, understandings over a subject matter, e.g. identity of abused women and partnership with sons/daughters, would be subject to continuous negotiation. However, if the contingent understanding was seen as essentialist and in absolute hostility with alternatives, 'antagonism proper', was constructed for the purpose of eliminating the 'others'. The construction of this type of antagonism was found to be perpetuated by the use of historically embedded authorities, such as the mother head and role model in this inquiry.

The pre-established relationship that entailed different threads of power differentials continued to be reproduced among women participants to keep both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> layer of

participation at bay. The simultaneous existence of the mother head and role model of women activism in our group forbade many participants to reveal their disparate opinions and silenced disagreements. In some cases, even though women participants' experiences were articulated and successfully interwoven with the collective fabric of sense making, the historically pre-established power differentials could discredit the alternative values and choices of actions that the alternative understanding entailed. In the discussion about whether the group should set up a facebook page for promotion and information dissemination, the role model defined the act of 'facebook set up' as 'taking every member public', while she also made use of her 'authority' as a well-known and experienced woman activist to confront those who were not ready to go public as potential damages to the image of 'chungsangje'. Even though we successfully negotiated to a point that a 'facebook page' could be for unidirectional information dissemination in which confidentiality and anonymity of members should remain protected, the authority carried by the identity of woman activist granted NF the final say about the 'effectiveness' of such a measure, and hence banned it from furtherance. Even though all other women participants did not seem to prefer this decision, they just gave in. YT said at last,

*'I don't know why we just can't go on with this plan. If our photos are not shown, I think we can manage to update people with what we are currently working on. But anyway, we will follow whatever you (NF) said.'* (15<sup>th</sup> session)

*'I am deciding it for your own good. We are not in rush to get ourselves public, I consider your situation YT, it's you. You are not ready. I of course prioritize our sisters.'* NF softened her voice after participants revealed their support to her decision. (15<sup>th</sup> session)

Alternative practices were hard to develop if participants in the group failed to recognize the contingency of knowledge construction, but saw the precarious descriptions of reality as facts instead of the symbolic creation contextualized in a particular socio-cultural-historical background. Although scholars advocating the Habermasian communicative methodology (Wicks & Reason, 2009; Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011; Padrós, Garcia, de Mello, & Molina, 2011) once contended that 'consensus' of different life-worlds could be reached through communicative actions, Gergen (2003) reversibly pointed out that the rationalism (win by better argument) embedded in communicative action in itself

requires legitimation. The problem of infinite regression to legitimation is argued by Mouffe (2000) as the result of failing to see that agreements are reached through participation in common forms of life instead of winning over someone by arguments. Therefore, the biggest challenge in transforming antagonism into agonism was the sense of uncertainty/insecurity created by the anti-essentialist stance, and the fading objectivity of knowledge. Extra hurdles to agonism will be seen when the 'objectivity' of knowledge was employed to justify and inform allocation of time and manpower in servicing abused women's pragmatic needs.

In overcoming the antagonistic relations among differences constructed and sustained by 'authorities' embedded in shared histories, I have realized the potential change that a 'historically disenthralled person' could make in alleviating the problem. As long as the 'historically disenthralled person' was not 'obliged' to practices that reproduced those power differentials, i.e. being a follower of the role model in women advocacies and enjoying the benefits/resources the role model brought to sisters, I was highly alert of any sayings and doings that assumed me to be part of those practices and would openly deny my membership in those practices. For example, I openly rejected NF's invitation to reframe our mother's day event under the sponsor's title in order to refuse the reproduction of the resourceful-deprived relationship among sisters. In the refusal to participate in those power reproduction practices, I was at the same time acting otherwise to suggest/produce solutions that rested on equal partnership, e.g. to stop acts of patronization by the sponsor while acknowledging its care for the community. The emergence of alternative solutions which did not reproduce the pre-established power differentials questioned the universality of the old solution and the power attached to it.

Therefore, the drive for transforming antagonism to agnoism was generated when the historically disenthralled person was a member of the community of practice (with joint enterprises and shared repertoire), while s/he refused to participate in the authority reproduction practices which reinforce the construction of antagonism.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Practising of CGI with formerly abused women allows us to understand that human beings are consistently engaging themselves in meaning making that is mediated by social relationships. This CGI demonstrated its potential in developing a community of practice,

through which participants constructed and reconstructed meanings in the service of resolving common concerns. By looking into the recruitment and development of this inquiry group, I have elucidated how identity (trans)forming and partnership making were abidingly subjected to re-construction through sayings and doings carried out by participants. It was also these sayings and doings that showed us how different practices were drawn into this inquiry group, and how they interplayed with each other to give this community a shape.

The family-like community of practice played out as the major background for other practices to be performed, in achieving our joint enterprises of promoting 'the welfare of formerly abused women in Hong Kong' and 'their participation in domestic violence service design and delivery'. The manifestation of familialism highlighted the different starting point in promoting participation from the western development of consciousness. The highly individualised and atomised person that precludes the recognition of relationality of different beings was not predominantly observed in this inquiry group. This presumed starting point for developing participatory practices only revealed itself when consumerist pragmatic rationality was performed. Inversely, strong emphasis on harmonious togetherness was found to be prevailing, in particular, for servicing the 'family building' practice. Constant comparative analysis, borrowed from Grounded Theory, demonstrated its potential in highlighting individual distinctiveness in making sense of seemingly collective, but still individually variable, lived experiences of intimate partner violence and its consequences. Grounded Theory also shed light on the importance of epistemological participation in a participatory inquiry.

Findings also propose that social participation in a community of practice is fundamental for participatory inquiry because it provides a nexus of relationships for participants to generate meanings, understandings and practical knowledges for problem solving. However, the community should not work to eliminate differences in constructing its togetherness because different/immediately unintelligible sayings and doings illuminate where exclusion, as well as participation, start. Differences and unintelligibility sketch the boundaries of local understandings, and indicate to us what lived experiences, narratives, and forms of life have been missed out or marginalized in the local context. This further arouses our concern over participants' need for political participation which could be hindered by 'antagonism proper'. Enabling participants to construct meanings of their



lived experiences in relation to those of other participants is transcending antagonistic relations among differences to agonistic relations. While it also encourages participants to appreciate the 'constitutive outside' of their collective identities. This is what I call the political participation in a CGI. In tackling the antagonism sustained in this inquiry, a historically disenfranchised, but socially connected 'person', was found to be in an advantaged position in challenging the embedded power differentials that inhibited women participants from transforming antagonism into agonism.

## Chapter 5

---

### **Re-constructing identity with Formerly Abused Women: 'Locating Victim-Chungsangje' and 'Care and Service Rendering'— Linking Propositional Knowing, Practical Knowing, Experiential Knowing and Presentational Knowing**

---

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Victim-Survivor hybrid is increasingly popular as terminology, employed to remediate the traditional problematic victim or survivor dichotomy by highlighting the 'mixed' experiences of weaknesses and strengths, entrapment and choices, and helplessness and coping in going through intimate partner abuse and its impact. The '-' emerges as a response to the well recorded complexity of experiences of abused women (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000), and the diversity of the ways of organizing those experiences (Davis, 2008). The '-' between 'victim' and 'survivor' is a linguistic infrastructure that allows room for 'identity negotiation' around the victim/survivor construction. This is also a measure to avoid marginalization of the experiences of abused women that fail to sit tidily within either the 'victim' or the 'survivor' constructs, for example, the theory of 'choice within entrapment and entrapment within choice' generated by Ben-Ari et al. (2003).

The problem of the dichotomy is translated from theoretical to ethical when it is employed to inform practices. Survivors' groups, informed by the 'victim empowerment frame', were ironically found to expel or downwardly compare abused women who remain feeling miserable, emotionally fragile, physically damaged and socially isolated

about themselves years after ‘surviving’ their history of abuse (Huage, Mullender, & Aris, 2003). This survivor discourse also results in the assumption of sole responsibility on abused women for resisting or overcoming the abuse against them (Leisenring, 2006). Meanwhile, domestic violence victim services primarily rest on the assumption that abused women are fragile and incapable of restoring their normality (Abrahams, 2007). This view is unsurprisingly defied by abused women for rendering their strengths and efforts invisible. The literature has also revealed abused women’s out cry of ‘I hated the word “victim”’ and resistances that affirm staying is a ‘choice’ (Ben-Ari, Winstok, & Eisikovits, 2003; Donovan & Hester, 2010).

In the course of this research, the ‘-’ space was travelled into, shaped and re-created when participants opened up lived experiences for other participant-researchers with whom they co-constructed identity narratives. The identity narratives were further organized into a classification schema of identity, which was recognized to have helped in organizing the care and service rendering within and beyond the inquiry group. Data collected from the care and service rendering and other inquiry practices were locally appraised, evaluated and reflected on, in order to re-construct the identity classification in order to meet the emerging needs in practice. The practising of this CGI also provided evidence to understand the importance of ‘differences’ and ‘unintelligibility’ in making the inquiry process more ‘participatory’. Attention to differences and allowance of time and effort for making sense of the unintelligibility were prerequisites for outlying lived experiences to be told and included in the collective linguistic stocks. GTM also demonstrated helpfulness in maintaining room for negotiation and promoting inclusivity. Shutting down the room for negotiation or for the emergence of differences was conceived of as non-participatory because, at the same, it shut down the room for alternative narratives to emerge, and reinforced the monopoly of a particular interpretation on a mixture of lived experiences. In this chapter, a strong message has to be delivered to readers—differences mark the beginning of participation in participatory action research—through articulating the ‘identity work’ carried out in this CGI.

## **5.2 From ‘Locating Victim –Chungsangje’ to ‘Service and Care Rendering’**

The victim- chungsangje (重生者, survivor) identity negotiation was constantly performed to locate where the problem lay and suggest where the solutions were. Through

constantly locating and relocating oneself and others in the 'victim-chungsangje' classification, individuals and the group were enabled to organize their expression of emotions, allocation of time and care, level of tolerance to mistakes, and division of labour in this inquiry. The reconstruction of identity around victimhood and chungsangje-hood became the focus of inquiry whenever the group practices required members to exhibit certain attributes that the current identity or identity classifications did not entail. As espoused by members of the inquiry group, conceptualization of 'victim-survivor' within the group (in contrast with normative definitions) is considered vital in directing them for further actions. The theory of '*Locating victim-chungsangje*' is therefore developed to capture the link between the 'victim-chungsangje' classifications and 'care and service rendering' practices. Women participants in this inquiry ventured to the '-' and created 'chungsangje-becoming' to denote their vehement aspirations to departing victimhood and entering survivorhood. Furthermore, it allowed flexibility in relocating themselves between the two poles of the spectrum. The continuous construction of 'victim-chungsangje' classifications, assessment of lived experiences, and assignation of identities assisted us in organizing our actions and meeting the emergent needs of women participants, for example, relocating KW as victim when she experienced a sudden termination of welfare, so as to provide her with more care, and prioritize her problem in group planning.

### **5.2.1 'Care and Service Rendering' Relevant to Victim-Chungsangje Identities**

#### 5.2.1.1 Care

'Care' was the foundation for the establishment of relationships and was common in the everyday language of women participants. Women participants stated they would never ever stay in a relationship with any person who did not care about them. The lack-of-care behaviours were always unwelcome in the group, while participants would underscore and criticize these behaviours for breaking the sisterhood/membership.

*'You just don't care! You just don't care about what's happening to me! Isn't taking care of the problems of us (group members) a purpose of this group?'* cried KW when she was struggling in the divorce procedures. I responded, *'We all care, and therefore we spent a whole day talking about your problem last week'*. Participants all nodded

*their head and told KW what we had done so far to the particular problem she was experiencing. (8<sup>th</sup> session)*

In this inquiry, women's perception of care was more often made explicit through contrasting it with the 'lack-of-care' behaviours and attitudes observed in practices of social work practitioners, policemen, and practitioners of other caring professions. 'It's our life and death, they (social workers) don't care', 'they just muddle (social workers) through our case', 'the lawyer just doesn't have time for you, they don't care' were indication of unsatisfactory care/service rendering; therefore, articulation and deliberation of this hinged on the 'care' abused women preferred to receive. The paramount attention to 'care' is argued to be gendered as it reflects women's way of understanding what is ethical practice. Gilligan (1995) terms this as the ethics of care which requires constant delivery of specialized attention to intimacy and the peculiar needs of the important ones in the relationships. Understanding abused women's perception of care is of paramount important because the lack of care is perceived by women participants as the cause for re-traumatization in the leaving process.

The concept of 'care' developed in this CGI consists of the properties of 'time spending on one's problem', 'attention paid to the person', 'patience' and 'tolerance to unreasonable acts/speeches'. 'Time spending on one's problem' refers to 'time spent on listening, understanding and making sense of their situations', 'time spent on handling the problems' and 'time spent on updating about the progress'. Instead of problem solving efficiency, women participants felt more cared for by the practitioners/'sisters' when sufficient time was given to them in the problem solving process.

*'I tried to call her. Only her secretary took up the call and asked me to leave a message. She never replied my call. The lawyer just doesn't have time for you.'* Said KW. (8<sup>th</sup> session)

'Attention paid to the person' was reflected by the displayed sensitivity to the needs and changes of the person who was experiencing troubles/problems, as well as by the displayed sensitivity to the resources and strengths she had or she lacked. Therefore, 'care' was very often demonstrated through explicating observations of each other, for example, 'your hair colour has changed', 'you are not looking well today', 'what makes you look so happy today?' and 'I have just realized you are so good at dancing'. Regarding

'patience' and 'tolerance to unreasonable acts/speeches', they were developed out of the understanding that abused women who stayed or began to leave were mentally disorganized victims and full of rage. Abused women in the inquiry expected practitioners/carers of them to be empathetic and patient in making sense of their situations, and sustaining the helping relationship even though they might occasionally direct their angers and discontent to them.

However, in my reflection, the disorganized experiences of abused women should not be explained in psychological terms and treated as abnormal. Disorganization is simply the nature of 'troubled' experiences that lay outside the abusee's intelligibility (Loseke, 2001). It may mirror the 'illness ideology' enshrined in the medico-pathological tradition of clinical psychology, by which 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)' is emphasized more than 'Post-Traumatic Growth' (Joseph & Linley, 2008). Without confronting the psychopathological frame, the abnormality embedded in the kindness of 'patience' and 'tolerance', 'care' could reproduce the 'normal-abnormal' power differential which reversibly belittles abused women who are struggling to make sense of their troubled lives. To move away from the 'normal-abnormal' distinction, I invited participants to unpack their pathological identity, such as describing their 'craziness' and 'abnormality' implied in sayings like 'at the beginning of leaving, we are all **crazy**' and 'we just couldn't listen to others and felt so angry when we first left...but you **will get well soon**'. By doing so, participants constructed understandings of the disorganized experiences, and re-examined the notion that 'a more organized person is more normal and privileged'. Very often, utilization of linguistic stocks obtained from different fields of practices was found to be helpful to propose useful alternative understandings of experiences for informing problem solving practices. They also marked the beginning of the co-construction of knowledge, since unintelligibility was revealed and opened up for alternative interpretations.

Table 5.1 shows the care rendered to participants and the other formerly abused women in this inquiry, and it was found to change with their victim-chungsangje locations. The '+' used in the table is the comparative intensity of different aspects of care as perceived to be needed by women participants. It doesn't represent any numerical calculation of care. Details of these changes would be delineated in parallel with the following elaboration of different victim-chungsangje identity constructs.

Care	Victim	Chungsangje-Becoming	Chungsangje
Time spending on one's problem	+++	+	None
Patience	+++	+	+
Intensity of attention	+++ (to be cared)	+	++ (role model)
Tolerance to unreasonable acts/speeches	+++	++	+

**Table 5.1 the change of care rendering with the change of victim-chungsangje location**

#### 5.2.1.2 Services

The emergence of services in the inquiry group was informed by the continuous analysis of practice data and evaluation of the situations. In this inquiry group, 6 different service practices were developed to meet the needs of formerly abused women according to the lived experiences of women participants. The services delivered in the group were: (1) emotional support sessions, (2) health boosting activities, (3) person-based problem solving conference, (4) group-based problem solving conference, (5) 'parent-child' sessions, and (6) re-engaging with the community actions.

The service rendering was also changing with the victim-chungsangje location (see Table 5.2). Chungsangje was perceived as emotionally stable and personally problem-free, therefore personalized and particularized services for them were considered inappropriate. Services that target the promotion of general well-being of a person or those offering learning opportunities would be considered more suitable to their needs. On the contrary, both victim and chungsangje-becoming were constructed to contain the consistent or spasmodic expression of emotional fluctuations; therefore, emotional support would be considered a service to their needs. More personalized and particularized support would be rendered to victims and chungsangje-becoming (in the victim-mode) because their problems were defined as more urgent, acute and devastating. The more personalized and particularized support on the one hand reflected

the principle of ‘care’, and on the other hand was considered more effective in handling the problems arising from the person’s particularistic situations. Victims would not be encouraged to engage in group-based problem solving conferences which aimed at solving problems that stand in the way of designing, planning and delivering services for other formerly abused women. This was because victims were framed to be ‘too weak to take care of too many things’ as ‘her own problems are enough to smash her’. Therefore, interestingly, ‘chungsangje-becoming’ were the most welcomed in participating in the activities and services designed and delivered by the group due to the mobility and the flexibility entailed in the identity construct.

Types of Services	Victim	Chungsangje-Becoming	Chungsangje
Emotional Support	√	√	
Health Boosting	√	√	√
Person-based Problem Solving Conferencing	√	√	
Group-based Problem Solving Conferencing		√	√
Parenting Sessions		√	√
Re-engaging with the Community	√	√	√

**Table 5.2 the change of service rendering with the change of victim-chungsangje location**

### 5.2.2 ‘Locating victim-chungsangje’

‘Locating victim-chungsangje’ is a behavioural concept that captures the ways women participants constructed understandings about their vulnerability, ability and strengths, attachment to abusers, level of confidence, degree of dependency, and level of suffering of themselves and of other formerly abused women, through which they can organize the allocation of care, degree of patience, tolerance, generosity, and service engagement towards the well-located person. Failing in locating oneself or one another within the existing categories will result in: (1) creating new classification, or (2) the lack of ordering

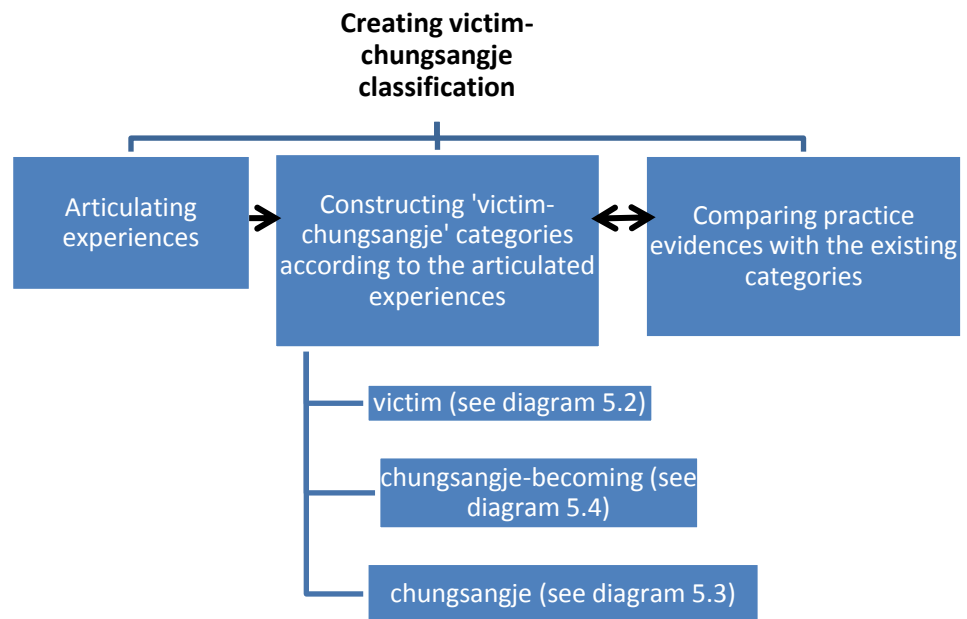
in rendering care and services. Disagreement in locating a participant usually reflected disagreement in understanding the problems and solutions, i.e. the care and service needed.

'Locating victim-chungsangje' consists of two sub-concepts, 'creating victim-chungsangje classifications' and 'assessing and assigning'. The enrichment of linguistic categories in the 'victim-chungsangje' classification is driven by all forms of failing in assigning women participants in a 'fit' category. Evidences of fit/unfit were collected and appraised in the group meetings, so as to help members modify their way of caring for and relating to each other. Discrepancies between the participant's location and evidences collected in practice could trigger re-construction of the classification. For example, when the inquiry group was considering going public, the originally narrowly defined concept of 'chungsangje' was challenged. As the action required women participants to be ready for the public eye, including public criticisms, disclosure of history of being abused, and gossip in the neighbourhood, the differences in readiness and attitudes towards going public literally clashed with the narrowly defined concept of chungsangje. Within the naïve framework of 'chungsangje' identity, participants had to consistently display strengths and positive attitudes towards 'challenges' and should be fearless of criticisms; whereas the evidence from the practice showed that many participants were not so positive about taking the challenge on board. This tension between the identity classification and practice evidence eventually led to a lasting discussion on the concept of 'chungsangje' and revisions of the concept for incorporation of a broader variety of surviving abused women.

#### 5.2.2.1 'Creating victim-chungsangje classification' and the corresponding 'care and services'

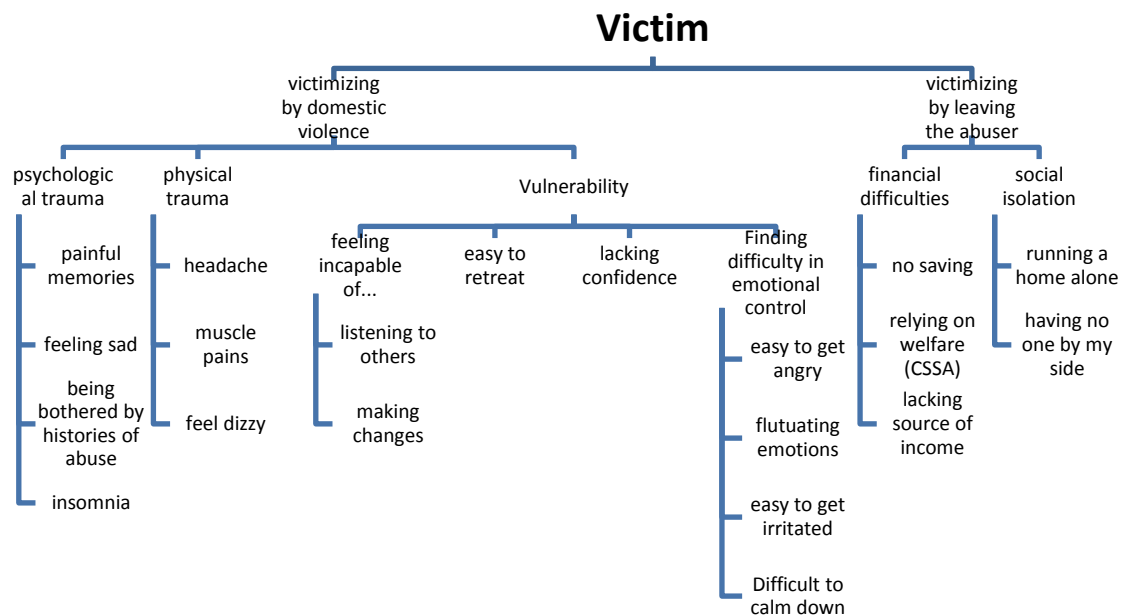
The 'victim-chungsangje classification' obtained in this inquiry should not be treated as fixed and exhaustive, but as emergent constructs that were generated for organizing care and service rendering in this particular inquiry. In the following, the emergence of different categories of the 'victim-chungsangje classification' will be presented, and be coupled with details about the correspondent 'care and services' that are expected to come along when someone is well located within the classification.





**Diagram 5.1 diagram showing the process of ‘creating victim-chungsangje classification’**

### 5.2.2.2 Victim



**Diagram 5.2 The concept of ‘victim’**

The ‘victim’ identity dominated the discussions and performances of participants in the 1<sup>st</sup> inquiry meeting. Due to the notion that ‘victims weren’t able to stand on their own feet’, women participants wanted to join together for stronger support and assistance in meeting their post-separation needs. In the 1<sup>st</sup> inquiry meeting, women participants spent a lot of time explicating their problems, sufferings and difficulties for being formerly abused by their intimate partners. The two forms of victimizing revealed by participants

were 'victimizing by domestic violence' and 'victimizing by leaving the abusive partner'. The former referred to the physical and psychological sufferings that were directly caused by the violence against them, and it included, as well, their vulnerability, which was perceived to be caused by domestic violence. The concept of vulnerability was further developed in latter inquiry sessions when participants realized that their ability to control emotions in face of comments and criticisms had been severely trampled on by the abusive relationship. The vulnerability experienced by women participants was articulated in the group and was argued to be the consequence of long-term coercive control and violence. After all, 'victimizing by leaving the abusive partner' refers to financial hardship and social isolation which are indirectly caused by the violence and sustained or even escalated in the process of leaving (see diagram 5.2).

The construction of victimhood in the group was mediated through expressions about traumas, sadness, miseries and unfair treatment imposed upon the speaking women participants. These expressions were usually partnered with sentences like 'we need help', 'you cannot leave us uncared' and 'if I can do it myself, then I won't...'. These phrases reflected an expectation for external assistance, care and services. In the following, along with the development of the concept of victimhood, I will also delineate women participants' view on allocation of care, services, and resources in dealing with abused women assessed and assigned to be 'victims'.

#### 5.2.2.2.1 Development of 'victimhood' and corresponding 'care and services'

The 'victimhood' constructed in this inquiry refers only to the post-separation sufferings and vulnerability, as women participants were all formerly abused women who had physically left the abusers at least 2 years previously. In the 1<sup>st</sup> session, by articulating their sufferings for being formerly abused, women participants located themselves as 'victims' of domestic violence. This was to deny the impression that 'leaving the abuser can cure all the problems of abused women', which was obviously reflected in the absence of social services for formerly abused women in Hong Kong. By attributing their psychological and physical trauma to the violence against them, women participants could perceive themselves as in the recovery stage of victimization; alternately, staying abused women were still subjugated to the cause of victimization. KW and YY repeatedly said in the group, 'we are now talking about those who have left the abusers, not those

who are still in there.’ The differentiation allows participants to focus on victimization of formerly abused women, their needs, and the corresponding services that are needed.

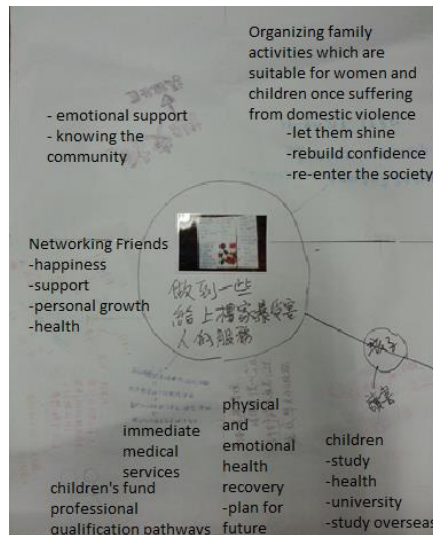
In the practitioner-researcher’s field notes:

*This sort of sayings was heard many times in the encounters. I remembered YY repeatedly told us how hiking and staying in the nature can heal her insomnia; meanwhile, KW always echoed YY whenever this experience was told. Here simulated a recurring conversation between YY and KW,*

*‘I always asked her to go hiking with me. You know, it is good for her. She needs it. She just didn’t trust me. The big rock in the midway is the most beautiful and comfortable place for us to take a good rest. YY always slept on it so deeply and even snored.’ giggled KW.*

*YY nodded her head, ‘yes indeed. It is a very comfortable place. You can also watch monkeys playing around. Sometimes I will bring a book with me, staying there for hours. The warmth of the sunshine is also a source of comfort. The rock is so warm, so that lying on it was like having a spa.’ YY usually continued, ‘hiking helps me to sleep better. I constantly suffered from insomnia. I just couldn’t sleep at night. However, whenever I come down from the mountain, I can sleep very well at night. It has now become an important part of my life.’ (Field note, dated 27 January 2013)*

The construction of victimhood in the 1<sup>st</sup> session, therefore, set out a map for navigating where the problems of formerly abused women lie, and where they would expect actions and responses by the inquiry group. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> session, women participants prepared a mind-map to guide us through how the construction of victimhood suggests actions and solutions to problems.



**Fig. 5.1 mind map on service planning for formerly abused women composed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the inquiry**

The mind map (as shown in fig. 5.1) indicated the primary directions of services which were perceived by women participants as helpful to address the needs/problems of formerly abused women in Hong Kong. The content of the mind map could be broken down into 18 indicators and categorized in Table 5.3. The indicators are noted in the following:

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. Emotional support                                     | 15. Emotional health recovery |
| 2. Knowing the community                                 | 16. Planning for future       |
| 3. Let them shine  | 17. Children's health         |
| 4. Rebuilding confidence                                 | 18. Children's education      |
| 5. Re-entered the society                                |                               |
| 6. Enhancing parent-child relationship                   |                               |
| 7. Networking friends                                    |                               |
| 8. Enhancing happiness                                   |                               |
| 9. Enhancing personal growth                             |                               |
| 10. Health boosting                                      |                               |
| 11. Immediate medical services                           |                               |
| 12. Fighting for children's funds                        |                               |
| 13. Recognition of qualification obtained somewhere else |                               |
| 14. Physical health recovery                             |                               |

Categories	Indicators	Proportion of attention
Dealing with psychological vulnerability	Rebuilding happiness and emotional stability: 1, 8, 15  Confidence boosting: 3, 4	5/18 (27.78%)
Dealing with physical vulnerability	10, 11, 14	3/18 (16.67%)
Dealing with social isolation	2,5,7,13	4/18 (22.22%)
Dealing with children's benefits	12,17,18	3/18 (16.67%)
Dealing with mother-child relationship	6	1/18 (5.56%)
Personal growth	9	1/18 (5.56%)
Future planning	16	1/18 (5.56%)

**Table 5.3 Categories of services devised by women participants in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the inquiry**

The heavy emphasis on 'dealing with psychological vulnerability' outweighs the others and 'dealing with social isolation' follows. The third and fourth most frequently mentioned services for formerly abused women are categorized as 'dealing with physical vulnerability' and 'dealing with children's benefits'<sup>37</sup>. Except 'dealing with children's benefits', all the other three most attended issues are largely similar to the victimhood constructed by participating women in the 1<sup>st</sup> session. In the following, each of the three would be individually elaborated with its corresponding care and service rendering.

*The psychological and emotional fragility.* Sadness, depression, anxiety, emotional breakdown and mental disorientation were everywhere in women participants' victim stories. The psychological traumas and instability resulting from the

---

<sup>37</sup> This later was collapsed with 'dealing with mother-child relationship' as the mother-child relationship was perceived as outweighing the importance for the benefits of children. This also facilitated the emergence of 'parenting sessions' developed in collaboration with teenage children of women participants. More details are delineated in Chapter 5.

violence against them, and by social isolation, justified the paramount importance of emotional support services for members of the group.

*'Our sisters just can't be happy. Every of us were the same. When we had just left the bad guy (abusive partner), we were very unhappy. Even though people around us were celebrating for the Luna New Year, we were impervious to the heated atmosphere. You just can't be happy.'* Said YY. HL furthered, *'I had exactly the same experience. I met NF for the first time in a Luna New Year celebration. Sisters in the shelter took me there. I hadn't felt thankful for their kindness; instead, I found them annoying and offensive. I thought, "I am now very depressed, why are you so happy when I am so miserable?" You will feel even worse.'* (17<sup>th</sup> session)

The depressive mood did not cease with time, but may continue on in their lives after leaving the abusers, particularly as new hardships, e.g. financial difficulty, sickness and stress at work, arrived. Emotional instability was also frequently displayed in the inquiry meetings, and sometimes, to an extent, weakened the supportive network among women participants and their relationship with children. The emotional instability of members even at times caused difficulties for working together.

*'You may not know her temperament. She (one of our participants) scolds and yells at me whenever I can't perform according to her expectation. It is very difficult to stand it. It is stressful.'* Said PF. (4<sup>th</sup> session)

*'Tingting (me), let me tell you what my experience was for getting along with her... She (one of our participants) had very bad temperament. She even said things that really hurt me. She once said, "I realize why people look down at you, new arrivals from the mainland China. You are just not up to the standard".'* Said YT. (during the recruitment period)

*'I was so sad when I heard my daughter repeatedly calling me "useless"! I locked up myself in the toilet and she came over to check if I were good. After*

*finding me OK, she started calling me “useless” again. I was nearly driven mad, so mad that I was scared of beating her up! I burst into tears and ran away from home. I thought I might have stayed in the park alone for at least 3 hours. That was at night.’ Said YT. (7<sup>th</sup> session)*

*‘Honestly tell you KW, I can’t stand you anymore. You are a selfish person. You are just looking for what is good to you, but not what is good to others. Therefore, you simply want to talk about yourself and wouldn’t listen! I have had enough of you!’ NF said with burning anger. (7<sup>th</sup> session)*

Women participants argued that emotional problems were commonly shared by all formerly abused women and would firmly stand in their way to ‘recovery’. As long as the victimhood constructed within the inquiry group embraced ‘psychological trauma’, ‘difficulties in emotional control’, and other forms of vulnerability (see diagram 5.2), heavy emphasis was put on emotional support during the service design. Even more emotional work would be rendered to formerly abused women who still displayed the victim characteristics as listed.

*Social isolation.* Every woman participant in the inquiry group had experienced isolating tactics exercised by their former partners, including phone monitoring, restriction on social life, over loading women with housework and childcare work, and stalking. These tactics were usually championed by coercive acts, such as scolding, humiliating, threats, and physical violence. In this regard, when abused women decided to leave the abusive partners, they usually had little connection with the neighbourhood and with family and friends. Moreover, 5 out of 7 women participants and all the 4 children participants were born, raised and educated in the mainland China; the cultural differences and tensions<sup>38</sup> between the two places

---

<sup>38</sup> The year before the inquiry, the tension between mainlanders and HongKongers was heightened by a number of social events, such as, D&G photo-banning incident, in which, a security guard forbade local people to take photos of their window display, but allowed people from the mainland China to do so ( see also, <http://www.businessinsider.com/dolce-and-gabbana-officially-apologizes-to-hong-kong-protectors-2012-1?op=1> ). This incident triggered the long-repressed anger of local people against the mainlanders who were since then called ‘locust’ by many HongKongers. This is a term used by the media as well to emphasize their view on the greediness of some mainlanders and mainland new arrivals who ‘eat up all the resources in Hong Kong but contribute nothing’. Following the D&G photo-banning incidents, there has been much indecent

left the mainland-born participants more stressed in connecting with the society, and with more negative labels to conquer.

Women participants thereby perceived the inquiry group as one of the strongest social bonds that they could trust and rely on for support and understanding. In the 1<sup>st</sup> session, when we were 'making our dreams with play-doh' in the inquiry group, most of the participants expected the group to provide 'companionship' to fulfil their needs for 'warmth', 'intimacy', 'home feeling', 'sisterhood', 'communication' and 'support' (see Appendix 5.1). Responses from the 2<sup>nd</sup> session further suggested that tackling social isolation may need services and actions that help formerly abused women 'understand the community', 'network friends', 're-enter the society', and have their qualifications/abilities recognized. Therefore, on top of the provision of care, understanding, and companionship, career search services were also carried out in the early stage of the inquiry. Surprisingly, the process of developing career plans helped women participants recognize how their physical and emotional instability might have obscured them from doing a full-time job. This realization drove the inquiry group to focus more on restoring the physical and mental health of participants, by collaboratively solving problems that adversely affect participants' physical and mental state, for example, improving the strained relationship between women participants and their sons/daughters, and parenting. Despite turning away from career planning in the later stage, the inquiry group still insisted on strengthening the participants' knowledge about Hong Kong society. HL always emphasized her identity as a new immigrant, and because of this she called for more empathy towards her ignorance of common practices in Hong Kong; she articulated the importance for learning about community resources, social policies and locals' way of living.

*'We are new immigrants that we may not understand how things work here in Hong Kong. Therefore, we need to learn. Please, if you could, please tell us*

---

behaviour by mainland tourists, such as defecating on public transportation and in restaurants, which was widely reported in the media.



*more about what do you mean by “conflict of interest”. HL asked for elaboration on the meaning of ‘conflict of interest’ when I raised this issue in a discussion on a promotional event. (22<sup>nd</sup> session)*

The realization of the importance of understanding the community also led to a series of discussions on local domestic violence policy and children’s rights in Hong Kong. The discussions were organized and compiled into a presentation and a document<sup>39</sup> delivered to the legislative council of HKSAR, advocating for the welfare rights of children who witnessed intimate partner violence. It was also a document for urging the government to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Underlying all these learning tasks, the provision of care, companionship and understanding were always expected from the group to tune up the strength of the network.

*Physical trauma.* Violence against them not only caused immediate pain and wounds, but also left women participants with long lasting physical trauma, e.g. disposition of bones, headache, dizziness and poor health, which they have to live with for years.

*‘My ex-husband when he got mad he would crash my forehead against the floor. Boom! Boom! Boom!...I am still suffering from strong headache.’ said YT. (18<sup>th</sup> session)*

After years of repeated violence, abused women might suffer from multiple health problems at the moment they left the abuser. On one side, they needed multiple health support, while on the other side, the financial deprivation after leaving the abusive partner usually kept worsening the health state of both women and children.

*‘My son and I have been eating instant noodles and canned food for 2 months already. They were all preserved food, just not healthy for a boy in his puberty.’*

---

<sup>39</sup> On children’s rights: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr12-13/chinese/panels/ca/papers/ca0318cb2-838-16-ec.pdf>

*We all started to get sick...I have got sore throat and strong stomached.'* said KW. (8<sup>th</sup> session)

Certainly, all other hardships that cause tremendous distress to life would harm women and their children's physical health, and could cause psychosomatic disorder.

*'My work stresses me out. I can never leave before 9 p.m. and need to carry out numerous road shows all alone on myself. I am unable to sleep at night and feel very weak when I wake for tomorrow's work.'* said PF. (18<sup>th</sup> session)

*'I don't know why. I just feel painful for every part of my body. I have got strong headache and all the spots (pointing to the red dots spreading all over her body) here. I could not sleep at night... Usually, I manage to have a 2 to 3-hour nap at dawn.'* KW told us about her physical problems when she was struggling with the social welfare department about her application for CSSA and was being told that her housing benefit would soon terminate. (12<sup>th</sup> session)

Appraising participants' physical and mental situations together in the group, through the examination of evidence, either observed or told, the inquiry meetings were redesigned to incorporate more health boosting physical exercises, and were held at locations close to the nature if the weather permitted. Providing the physical and psychological victimization were constructed within the 'victim' concept, 'health boosting', became a basic undertone for organizing the inquiry meetings.

In my field-notes (dated 27 January 2013), it is written:

*Outdoor exercises were considered, by women participants, as the trump card for restoring health from their traumas. Each of them would feel dizzy if they stayed in the city, particularly where the traffic was heavy, e.g. Mong Kok, Shum Shui Po etc. They wrestled bitterly with strong headaches, muscle pains and insomnia nearly every day. PF once said,*

*'NF told us that getting housed was just the start of everything. The real problems were in the days ahead. I did not understand what she meant until I was housed... The painful memories, the financial difficulties and the burdens for running a home alone...they all came in a sudden and could smash you...'*



**Fig. 5.2 Members doing pressure point massage, dancing and exercises in the country park during the inquiry meeting (masks added to protect privacy)**

Either dancing, stretching exercises, or pressure point massages were scheduled in the inquiry meetings. These activities were all led by women participants, who had experiences of living with the pains, poor health conditions, and other physical traumatic aftermaths. Thereby, they also had developed strategies that helped them to soothe pains and improve health. Strategies applied and evaluated to be effective by individual participants would then be brought back to the inquiry group for sharing and testing. This process allowed women participants to have more practical references about how to improve health conditions.

*'Yes, YY and I can go hiking together every morning because it takes us just a couple of minutes to reach the starting point of the trail.'* KW said. (1<sup>st</sup> session)

*'The "Yuen Dim" therapy (pressure point therapy) is easy to learn. Even though I have forgotten how, I can check that out online. There are videos on YouTube. For those who haven't got internet, we have got a number of handbooks here.'* HL said. (10<sup>th</sup> session)

*'You can do all these dances at home or wherever you are. It doesn't cost you a penny, but can keep you fit.'* PF said. (9<sup>th</sup> session)

The practicality of these references came from the similarity of the conditions shared by participating women, such as the location where they were housed, the resources available to them and the physical problems they were suffering. However, the practicality of health boosting exercises introduced and tried out was not given, but it required women participants' translation of those references into local practices to achieve. Given the similarity in living conditions, the suggested solutions may be easier to find its fit in the lives of participants, while participants' understanding and appraisal of the strategies played a more crucial role in judging the practicality and the tendency for the strategies to be tried out in practical lives.

*'I cannot be exposed to strong sunlight. My skin was oversensitive to sunlight that exposure to which will cause allergy.'* YT argued. NF insisted, *'it was because of your fear of sunlight, the toxin in your body could not be removed. Sunlight is very good to health. It helps you to warm your body and improve circulation. The more you are scared of sunlight, the worse is our health condition.'* YT still stayed in the shadows of trees. I went close to YT and see how she was doing. YT said, *'I just can't... I am feeling very dizzy after doing exercise in the sun.'* I asked her to take a break in the shadow until she felt better. She kept explaining to me what being 'photosensitive' is while she was doing the pressure point exercises in the shade. (Field notes, 13 April 2013)

In the above scenario, YT still tried out those pressure point exercises that other women participants were doing, but all under the shade of the trees. She was not resisting, but making a translation of the references taken from the group into something that solved her problems instead of causing one.

#### 5.2.2.2.2 Specific care and services for 'victims'

'Victims' were expected to be given the greatest degree of care when compared to all other categories, the 'chungsangje-becoming', and the 'chungsangje'. For members who display characteristics of, was assessed and assigned to be 'victims', the group would increase the care rendered to the persons. KW's unexpected

termination of welfare support and housing was able to indicate the difference in care rendering between 'victims'/'chungsangje-becoming' and 'chungsangje'.

In a number of sessions, we suspended the issues on the agenda in order to deal with KW's emotional disturbances arising from the termination of financial assistance by the Welfare Department.

*'We spent nearly the whole session on you. Why? Because we know you, KW, are now suffering so much from the financial problem ...' said NF. (8<sup>th</sup> session)*

In the process, all participants had been very patient to KW even though she might suddenly and repeatedly shout at the participants.

*'She has really bad moods... she is now the boss ...we need to put up with it.' PF said when KW was so irritated and shouting at everyone for not helping her in the process of CSSA application. (12<sup>th</sup> session)*

It took more than 2 months for the financial assistance problem to be settled, and all participants always kept an eye on KW's emotional and physical state, and her performance in the inquiry group, so as to inform the group how to react to her situation and ensure her needs were not left unmet.

*In the afternoon session, KW was lying on a bench a bit away from the group, pretending to sleep. We all knew she was not sleeping, but begging for someone to care for her. Though the parenting issues that we had just realized between participants and their children were so worth examination, we suspended the agenda and invited KW back into the group. 'KW, are you feeling OK? Or you are very tired that you need a nap?' I asked. 'I am OK!' KW replied, 'you may just continue, I can overhear your conversations here.' I invited her to come back to the group if she had problems to discuss. She began with her shouting...then, she turned to talk about her welfare issue and the legal problems encountered in the divorce procedures. (Field Note, dated 30 March 2013)*

The tolerance to some unreasonable acts and speeches was also raised when KW was in the 'victim' mode.

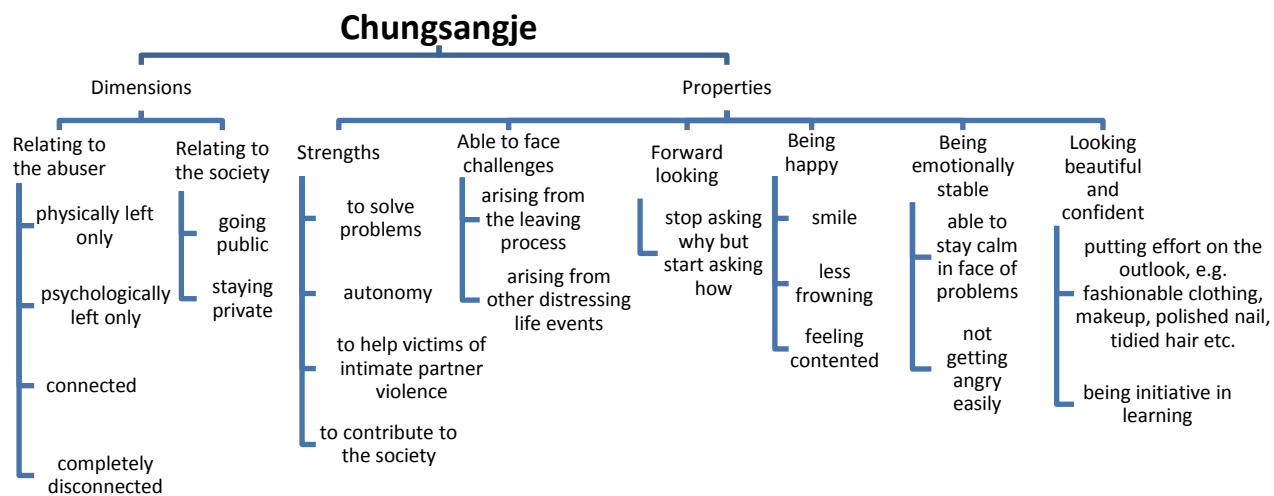
*KW burst into anger, 'all of you just keep asking me to do this and do that, if I can do it I don't need you at all! You said you were going to help me, but at last I am the one who do it? Is this the 'help' you are talking about?' We all paused for a while. In other situations, I know NF would have already responded with the same degree of anger, but she did not this time. I broke the silence, 'KW...you have to understand, you are the litigant in the divorce case. Even though we desperately want to help, you must be the one who takes action. We cannot act on your behalf. We tried to figure out what the problem was in your case, and see if it was a technical error that we could solve within existing procedures. But still, you have to write the letter and post it with your signature on.' NF continued with unusual calmness, 'KW, you always think that we can do everything for you. You are just having your arms crossed, waiting for the success to come. It is impossible.'* (8<sup>th</sup> session)

The unexpected termination of financial assistance caused by the sticky divorce process offered a lot of evidence for understanding how the rendering of care was altered according to the change of 'victim-chungsangje' location. Before the situation became visible, KW was located as 'chungsangje' who was expected to be more positive in problem solving. However, hurdles encountered in the leaving process became a cause of victimization, compounded with the observed instability in emotions and the deteriorating physical state, KW relocated herself and was relocated by the group as a 'victim'. This completely changed the way the group offered care to her, and the expectation that KW had on the group's response. In summary, *the 'victim' location accords with an increase of care*, i.e. increase in time spent on one's problem, patience, intensity of attention, and tolerance to unreasonable acts/speeches.

*'Person-based problem solving conferencing', 'emotional support' and 'health boosting exercises' are found to be the major services expected and rendered to*

'victims' in the inquiry group. 'Problem solving conferencing' was to remove the cause of victimization. Meanwhile, 'emotional support' and 'health boosting exercises' were remedial measures to the traumatic psychological and physical consequences. Other forms of services, such as parenting sessions and re-engaging with the community (refer to table 5.2), were suspended in the group for prioritizing the victim's needs above all.

### 5.2.2.3 Chungsangje



**Diagram 5.3 The concept of 'chungsangje'**

The concept of 'chungsangje' was developed from the naïve framework, which contained only a set of properties, into a more sophisticated framework that contained dimensions, which were 'relating to the abuser' and 'relating to the society'. The dimensions allowed varieties, and therefore made the chungsangje concept more inclusive in locating participants. The 'strength-based' description remained the undertone of the concept, but the strengths could be displayed either in 'private', 'public', or 'both'. Moreover, through the reconstruction of the 'chungsangje' construct, participants realized that the strengths of them could be recognized either when they physically or psychologically left the abusers; and after physical separation, when they were either in connection with or completely disconnected from the abusive partner (see diagram 5.4, *dimensions*). Moreover,

'relating to the abuser' was found to be a crucial factor that affected women participants' decision for actions. For the participant who left the abuser physically, but not psychologically, would retain a desire to reconnect with the abuser (YT). Hence, she wanted to conceal the socially undesirable behaviours that her ex-husband had practised, so as to pave a way for possible reconnection in the future. For the participant who physically and psychologically left the abusive partner, but remained in connection with him as a friend, she would also consider public actions inappropriate because it was a gesture contradictory to friendship (HL). Without the reconstruction of the concept of 'chungsangje', the naïve framework allowed only those who could take up the challenge of 'going public' to be located as chungsangje, and excluded the rest. Before the reconstruction, a participant in the group who did not want her face to go public was even asked by another member to stop calling herself 'chungsangje' which alternatively was an identity she loved to hold onto.

#### 5.2.2.3.1 Development of chungsangje' and corresponding 'care and services'

The concept of 'chungsangje' began to consolidate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session and had been the dominant identity of participants for about 2 months. In the 2 months, 'chungsangje' was just a flimsy and monolithic concept that referred to formerly abused women who were, after all the destruction done by domestic violence and the leaving process, still beautiful, precious, shining, and able to live respectable lives. Quoted here is an excerpt from my field notes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session:

*The emphasis on strength, in combination to participants' expressed wish to demonstrate their ability to make a living and live beautifully and respectfully, reminded me of 'survivors'. I told them about the term used in the literature as a move to reject the 'weak', 'passive' and 'incompetent' image of abused women, and they fancied so much about this 'strength-based' description and termed it as 'Chung Sang Je'. NF said 'survivor' was also the term she used in establishing her formerly chaired mutual-help group. Participants hate the word 'victim' as a way to denote their identity. PF even said, 'I hate keep telling*



*people how miserable I am. I am not. I am able to stand on myself.'*  
*Participants were happy to denote themselves with 'Chung Sang Je' and added this into the name of the group, resulting in a new and final title of the group/project as 'Chung Sang Je the Pearl's Project'. (Field note, dated 2 February 2013)*

The creation of 'chungsangje' was mediated through the articulation of participants' strengths and the moments they had lived with confidence, dignity, and pride. Most of these glorious moments took place before migrating to Hong Kong, where their qualifications were recognized, their jobs were secured, and their abilities were appreciated (For details of the stories, please see Appendix 5.2). PF, YT and YY realized they were undermined and made inferior to others in the process of immigrating to Hong Kong. In a conversation (2<sup>nd</sup> session),

*'In fact, our sisters are all very capable.'* YY

*'It is the Hong Kong government which does not recognize our qualification. Many of us received much education.'* YY and YT

*'We have to have confidence in ourselves'* PF

These stories and conversations established the properties of 'chungsangje' as a state of living, of which women participants could live as strongly as they used to. The term 'chungsangje' explained also why the word 'Heng Chuen Je' (倖存者), which could be an alternative translation of 'survivor', was not chosen because it was incapable of capturing the 'born-die-reborn' sequence of their lived experiences.

The establishment and continuous employment of 'chungsangje' as an organizing concept for actions, care, and service rendering were beyond the mere rhetoric fanciness entailed by the term. By comparing the data when 'victim' and 'chungsangje' (naïve framework) were constructed, it was realized that the construction and employment of 'chungsangje' was related to the emergence of new demands in the inquiry group. To develop services that meet the needs of

formerly abused women as accorded to the mind-map, women participants realized the amount of hard work, effort, and different abilities that were required. The 'victim' identity created in the 1<sup>st</sup> session was no longer helpful for further actions because it did not allow participants to make their strengths, abilities and determination visible and accessible. They needed a new term to capture the strengths that they had had, so as to increase their linguistic stock for making plans and devising actions. Through examination of the strengths, capabilities, and skills that they had in the past, participants were able to find out the cause of their lack of confidence (a belief in personal strengths). That is the disruption of formal recognition and informal recognition caused by the process of moving to Hong Kong.

Migration is not just moving from one place to another, but it leads to cutting off of formal and informal social networks. These networks are the basic conditions where one's abilities, strengths, skills, personality, and charisma are recognized. They could give rise to two types of recognition that are fundamental to women participants' self-confidence, 'formal recognition' and 'informal recognition'. According to the codes obtained in Appendix 5.2, formal recognition refers to a 'leading role at work', a 'professional qualification', a 'professional role at work', and a 'educational qualification'. Meanwhile, informal recognition refers to 'being trusted', 'being appreciated' and 'being included in social networks'. Migration to Hong Kong and the social isolation reinforced by the abusive relationship, collude with each other to disconnect women participants from their previous social networks, leaving them in a situation where their strengths and abilities received no recognition or appreciation.

*'At the time I left, I still thought he was so right that I was useless. I was always insufficient for everything. I used to truly believe in such description about myself...' I said, echoed by all other women participants. (2<sup>nd</sup> session)*

Thereby, 'confidence boosting words', such as 'you are great', 'all owe to you, we can successfully...', 'we will make it through', 🙌🙌🙌 and 👍, became one of the

commonest responses to participants' commitment. In case of failing to obtain formal recognitions, due to the emergence of new qualifying criteria (i.e. English proficiency and computer literacy), women participants turned to rely heavily on 'confidence boosting words' as compensation.

The effectiveness of the naïve framework of 'chungsangje' and 'confidence boosting words' was not challenged until participants of the group were urged to go 'public' in the 13<sup>th</sup> session, in April. April was a month occupied with press interviews and evaluation on press meetings.<sup>40</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> press interview aroused participants' interest in public education as a way to re-engage with and contribute to the betterment of the society. Members aspired to educate the public about the needs of formerly abused women and their children, and to promote the group as a platform for mutual support and domestic violence service development. For keeping a tracked record on what the inquiry group had done, and to promote it within limited resources, I suggested setting up a facebook page for 'Chungsangje the Pearl's Project'. However, the 'photo posting' issue aroused concerns of women participants, and 'confidence boosting words' were no longer useful for them to resolve their concerns. This action also sparked an identity fight among participants and highlighted the differences in understanding 'chungsangje' within the group. The conflicts and discussions illuminated the limitation of the 'chungsangje framework' in use

---

<sup>40</sup> The first interview was initiated by the inquiring group to respond to the latest news about an abused woman being stabbed to death by her ex-husband, who had been charged of common assault. The second one was in fact not a press interview initiated by the group, but the group would like to support the case handled by the office of a legislative councillor. The group began from then to work as an emotional support group for those who had left the abusers (mainly cases referred by the Caucus and the legislative councillor's office) and were in need for support from 'sisters'. The inquiry group also played a supportive role in the third press interview although the interviewee was our group participant, KW. KW was suffering from financial difficulties due to the termination of her social assistance by the Social Welfare Department. She was also a case from the Office of the Legislative Councillor, but she sought emotional support from our group and hope the group could help her plan for the aftermath if the media didn't work this time.

We observed and jotted notes in the press interviews (data collection), and then analysed the data in the inquiry meeting to understand what practices were more effective in conveying our messages or attaining the purposes as stated beforehand. We came up with some agreements on 'how to deal with the press?' (in Chinese).

The activities, ‘exploring the personal images of ‘chungsangje’’ and ‘stating how far you are from the dreamed self-images’, were designed to help participants to break the monolithic and dominant ‘chungsangje’ image in use (see Fig. 5.3 and Fig. 5.4). These strategies were planned to resolve the conflicts in understanding ‘chungsangje’, and allowed everyone to have a say on what that was. The activities were later perceived by participants to be helpful in illuminating on developing a ‘deeper’ and more ‘consensual’ understanding of what ‘chungsangje’ means to participants. On top of these, the activities unexpectedly served as an evaluative mechanism for women participants to assess their location within the ‘victim-chungsangje classification’. By articulating their experiences in running this inquiry group, serving formerly abused women, and advocating for domestic violence policy change, women participants grew to be more aware of what they were ready to do and what they weren’t. This self-evaluation informed the group about how much manpower was available for media work, and how the group should be promoted with appropriate protection to women participants. More importantly, it helped the group to alter its care and service rendering according to the barriers identified by women participants in the evaluation process. The barriers and characteristics that stopped them from becoming ‘chungsangje’ were then conceptualized as ‘chungsangje-becoming’ to indicate the problems that concerned participants at the moment. This relocation also helped the group to adjust their expectations of each member and redesign activities for meeting the needs that arose.



**Fig. 5.3 Different faces of ‘victims’**



**Fig. 5.4 Different faces of 'chungsangje'**

Most of the participants in the group agreed that they were yet to have lived a chungsangje's life as they envisioned. Some of them were living closer to the survivor image, and some of them were further. That later helped us construct another identity concept called 'chungsangje-becoming'.

Despite variations, by articulating what each participant believed to constitute a 'chungsangje', we agreed that chungsangje shared a couple of properties in our understandings. 'Happiness', 'confidence', 'emotional stability', 'capability to solve problems', 'beautiful outlook', 'able to face challenges', and 'having no hard feelings about the abusive history' were found to be shared features of participants' chungsangje images.

As shown in the pictures above (Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4), chungsangje images shared common features of more gentle eyes, smiles, and a more polished outlook when compared to the victim images. Women participants explained their drawings like this (18<sup>th</sup> session):

*'I used to be an angry woman. I always had an angry face. I was so unhappy in the past; there wouldn't be any smile on my face. After surviving all these (miserable experiences), I have my smile back on my face. I am now looking less angry as well. Please also attend to my hair, I have a beautiful hairdo too.'* Said YT (5 in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4).

*'He once grabbed my hair and hit my head against the wall. I was so angry and therefore I then shaved my head. I just murmured in my heart, "I cut all my hair, and see how he could ever try again to grab it". I am now free from the*

*violence...I can have my hair back. I can look whatever way I want.'* Said HL (2 in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4).

*'I always felt troubled deep down in my heart before becoming a chungsangje. You can tell from the picture that I had got messy hair and looked so bothered on the face. After surviving the violence, I feel calmer and look calmer than before. You can see I pay more attention on myself and have my hair dyed...(followed by laughs).'* Said YY (6 in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4).

*'My eyes used to be filled with emptiness. I always looked angry, like everybody in the world had treated me so unequally. After coming out from the violence, you can look at my eyes, they are beautiful and energetic. Though I am now yet to be living according to my dreamed image of chungsangje (see 3a), but I soon will. I am still feeling shocked when difficulties come (pointing to the O-shaped mouth), but will gradually learn to face it calmly and even with a smile (pointing to 3b)'. Said PF (3, 3a and 3b in Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4).*

Women participants presented, through drawings, the differences between the lived experiences inside and outside the abusive relationship in terms of facial expressions and outlook changes. The smiles on the faces marked the emotional changes when they were going through emotional disturbances aroused by their abusive history, where they never found a smile. Smiles are more than an expression of happiness, but, as told by participants, a symbol of leaving the miserable abusive history behind and getting ready to move forward. Therefore, it was also a change of life orientation, from backward looking to forward looking.

*'We used to love asking "why?" Every day we woke up with the question of "why it happened to me? Why?" It didn't help at all. It just made you feel unhappy and even more troubled. We now begin to ask 'how' but not 'why'. It is 'how to solve the problem' but not 'why it happened to me'. This definitely makes us feel better, and believe in ourselves being able to change the situation.'* YY said. (19<sup>th</sup> session)

The eyes were said to be the reflection of their confidence and emotional stability because eyes of chungsangje all look energetic and stable. This shared feature was said to contradict the victim image of being 'angry', 'troubled' and 'empty minded'. The violence and long-term suffering from its consequences rendered participating women in very unstable emotional state. Some of them would even generalize their hatred to the abuser to people outside the abusive relationship, and got to be easily irritated by people's actions. This kind of incidents repeatedly happened in the inquiry group, for example, asking questions about a participant's situation was constantly interpreted as expressing doubt about the reliability of her words. These responses were articulated in the group and understood as the conditioned behaviours that they had learned through living with their doubtful abusive partners and dealing with the doubtful social workers, who were always vigilant to their reliability. In addition to the lack of confidence escalated in the process of migrating to Hong Kong, women participants had developed close to reflexive defence mechanisms, by that they would immediately get angry when people asked them questions, gave critical comments or argued otherwise. Therefore, the replacement of angry eyes with energetic and calm eyes was a representation of the success of unlearning the conditioned behaviours (they called them 'habitual errors'), so that they can interact less defensively but more confidently with people around them.

The chungsangje pictures shared another feature that was a polished outlook. The increased attention to their outlook was a regaining of autonomy because how they looked, dressed, and styled had been severely controlled and influenced by the abusers. Wearing fancy clothes usually aroused suspicion from the abusers that they were engaging in extra marital affairs. Furthermore, the financial deprivation and overemphasized mothering role in the abusive relationship restricted their allocation of scarce resources to their children, and left them neglecting the care for themselves.

*'I had to pay the debts for the bad guy (the abuser) and to work immediately after I had arrived to Hong Kong... even though I had very limited amount of money, I cared so much about the learning of my son. He was called Dai Luk Zhai (大陸仔, meaning new arrival boys from the mainland China, carrying an interiority connotation) at the school and he couldn't stand failing to catch up with the English standard... I saved HKD\$3000 to buy him an electronic dictionary. But the bad guy just sold the machine for his gamble!' YY said. (13<sup>th</sup> session)*

This also shed light on the importance of financial stabilisation after leaving. Stable financial provision enabled women participants to plan for resources allocation, so as to make caring for both of themselves and children much easier. They would not be worried about a sudden cut off of resources for the basic needs/learning chances of their children and they could start planning for themselves. The differences in their outlook were the evidence of how they allocated resources to 'love themselves' as said by HL.

#### 5.2.2.3.2 Specific care and services for 'chungsangje'

The care rendered to 'chungsangje' was different from 'victims' in all aspects. Some of the differences were qualitative whereas some were a matter of degree. These differences were found by comparing the care rendered to NF, perceived as the only one who had completely gone through the process of becoming, and that to KW and YT who were more recognized for their victimization. Except NF, every participating woman brought their problems to the group for discussion and solutions. NF located herself as completely reborn from the victimizing experiences by stating that 'I do not need this platform. I am here because of you. I want to accompany you and make you grow'. As NF was perceived as the only one in the group who had been successfully 'chungsang' (reborn), she was always considered as the role model of women participants. Therefore, she received far more attention and respect than those 'chungsangje-becomings'. This location had never been challenged within the group. This consensual agreement on NF's chungsangje



location in fact restricted her from talking about her problems, though at the same time it entitled her to legitimacy in advising how to become a chungsangje. This chungsangje position, on one hand, marginalized the problems experienced by NF as irrelevant to formerly abused women, but just day-in-and-day-out problems possibly encountered by everyone else. On the other hand, it rendered the influences of domestic violence on her invisible in the group, as she did not recognize herself as having any problems related to her history of being abused. That was why she thought she primarily came for contributing, but not receiving. At the most, some learning might take place when new experiences came along.

Participants needed a representative of 'chungsangje' to consolidate their hope of becoming reborn from the miserable history of abuse and sustain their 'chungsangje-becoming' identity. However, the limited presence of 'chungsangje' paradoxically created a power imbalance within the group as it became the role model (in our group, nearly the ONLY role model) for the chungsangje-becomings and victims to learn about how to offset the influences of intimate partner violence, i.e. overcoming emotional instability and traumatic experiences, and equipping oneself to help those who were still suffering from the impacts. However, the limited references for getting through the problems of victimization had restrained participants' translation of workable experiences and therefore made the reference itself authoritative (the only method for achieving a particular end). Coupled with the largely reduced 'patience' and 'tolerance to unreasonable acts' to 'chungsangje', as compared with victims, the repeated demonstrations of rage by NF were rarely challenged in the group, but severely criticized out of the group context on several occasions. It was plausibly because the practice of 'locating victim-chungsangje' needed a 'chungsangje' role model to sustain it, and such a practice was found useful for the participating members at the moment for designing, adjusting, and providing care and services for targeted people. In contexts where 'locating victim-chungsangje' was not useful, participating members would not be as patient as in the group to preserve their relationship with the

‘chungsangje role model’. Careful handling of the in-group and out-group dynamics is crucial to stop rumours and prevent breakdown of trust among members.

The monopoly of workable/successful experiences did not stop on its own, but would be reproduced in the group and consolidate its domination. For example,

*During the evaluation sessions, PF and YY were counted as ‘very brave’ for revealing their history of being abused to the public and were dubbed by NF (the former chairperson) as ‘the role model for sisters’. As told by PF and YY, the press interview speeded up the ‘coming out’<sup>41</sup> process of PF and YY. This was also very similar to NF’s walk of ‘from victim to chungsangje’. With the deep-rooted power of NF among women participants, her appointment of role models became a powerful definition of chungsangje, rendering those who want to go for other walks of surviving difficulty in carrying on the identity of chungsangje if they do not follow the same walk. This alarmed me of the threat that Mullender et al. once faced in running survivor groups. The limitation of identity construction was mediated through a number of ‘authoritative identity defining strategies’, e.g. ‘questioning alternatives’, ‘degrading alternatives’, ‘showing suspect to alternatives’ and ‘initiating threat against adoption of alternatives’. It involves the use of the unbalanced power that one has in the group, to define what should be valued and what should not, what a concept refers to and what to exclude, when conflicts in defining take place. (Detailed transcription, please see Appendix 5.3)*

From this point of view, successful/workable experiences provided by formerly abused women themselves were a double-edged sword, which could, on one hand, serve as translatable knowledge that other women participants could simulate in order to solve their problems, whereas, on the other the hand, its lack of diversity

---

<sup>41</sup> It was very similar to LGBT communities that Chinese abused women felt ashamed for being battered by their husbands. They thought it was their failure to conserve the traditional form of family and people would perceive them inferior to women who live in marriage.

could reinforce the domination of those references and become a limiting factor that inhibits participants from solving problems alternately. This also explicated how the chungsangje position may cause harm to the participatory principle underlying this CGI.

The domination of successful/workable experiences was sometimes diluted by the presence of me who, from their point of view, was a 'sister' who once suffered from a controlling relationship, but differed way too much from them because of my educational background, forms of abuse experienced (no physical abuse ever taken place), and the lack of victimizing experiences caused by the process of leaving the abuser. Even though I was located more on the 'chungsangje' end, they did not consider me as a close reference for solving their lived problems in the journey 'from victim to chunsengjia'. However, on many occasions the group launched policy discussions in the inquiry meetings, or actions, activities, and services for other formerly abused women or themselves, and my social work training and university-based research experiences alternatively served as a source of workable references for making sense of the policies, or as effective measures for organizing actions and activities. A typical example was noted in my field notes as the following:

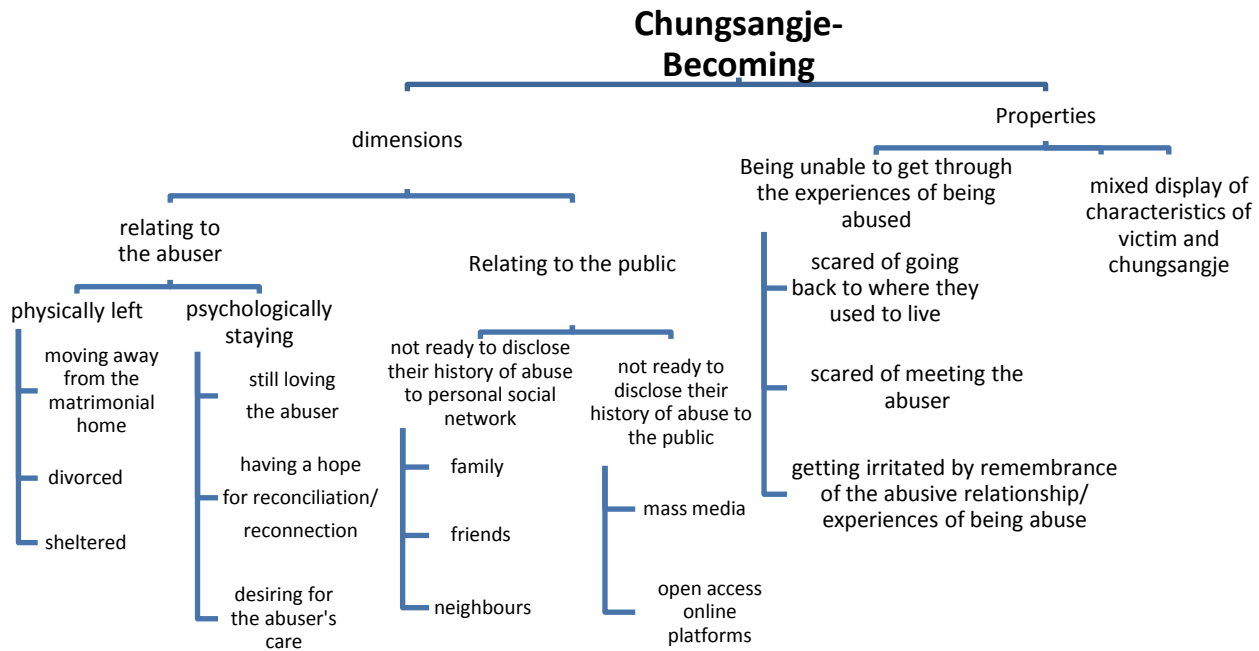
*YY and Yuen have been in a tense relationship recently because YY thought Yuen spent too much time on computer games but did not study for the English exam; while Yuen told YY that he had already paid full effort in English revision, but the result was still not good. In this session, Yuen and YY wanted to resolve their conflicts with the help of the group and see how Yuen could learn to improve his academic results. I was located to be the role model for children because women participants found me owning properties which they wanted their children to possess. I refused to be a role mode though, whenever children encounter academic related problems, they would come and seek my opinions. This had been part of their agenda since the beginning of the group as they kept urging me to*

*provide activity-based services for children, and I refused to do so because I refused to establish a service provider-service receiver relationship with children and women participants. (Field Note, dated 21 April 2014)*

The spirits of participatory paradigm drove me to engage both teenage participants and women participants in devising measures to achieve what they expected for themselves in school and in parenting at home. These then served as references for how the parenting and parent-son/daughter relationship could be improved, and study plans could be implemented with the contribution of both the parent and sons/daughters. The practices of these references would be reported back to the group for evaluating its effectiveness and improving the next-round's practices.

In sum, the position of Chungsangje, though on one hand allowed the establishment of hope and practices for surviving traumatic experiences, on the other hand, it created a power imbalance among participants. Participants located in such a position must be highly sensitive to the power play entitled by the position, unless the experiences would become authoritarian and limiting to the choices of other participants; to most, it could forbid other participants to survive alternatively from the experiences of the particular 'chungsangje'.

### 5.2.2.4 Chungsangje-Becoming



**Diagram 5.4 The concept of 'chungsangje-becoming'**

'Chungsangje-becoming' (is a translation from the Cantonese term '重生緊' which is an in vivo code obtained from practice) represents women participants whose rebirth is underway. The construction of 'chungsangje-becoming' arose from participants' realization that 'from victim to chungsangje' was a process in which they might not be able to constantly fulfil all the qualities of a 'chungsangje'; conversely, they discovered more about the influence of abuse on themselves and their way of believing and behaving by reflecting on and making sense of their problem solving or service rendering practices. Also, through explicating the personal image of chungsangje, women participants were enabled to locate whereabouts they were on the way to their dreamed image of self. The location also signified where women participants found barriers and problems that hindered them from being what they wished themselves to become. The barriers and problems were articulated in the group and conceptualized as the properties of 'chungsangje-becoming'.

‘Chungsangje-becoming’ is composed of four properties, ‘physically left but psychologically staying’, ‘being unable to get through the experiences of being abused’, ‘not ready to disclose their history of abuse’, and ‘mixed display of characteristics of victim and chungsangje’. Displaying any of these was sufficient for women participants to locate themselves as chungsangje-becoming. For those who were located by the group as chungsangje, but by themselves as chungsangje-becoming, i.e. PF and YY, their identity negotiation prevailed throughout the latter half of the inquiry.

‘Chungsangje-becoming’ differed from ‘victims’ in terms of stability and frequency of displaying victim characteristics. The differences were drawn by women participants to differentiate themselves from formerly abused women who had just left the abusive relationship and suffered from multiple problems caused by both the abusive relationship and the leaving process. In terms of living conditions, chungsangje-becoming were less unsettled, for example, permanently housed and financially secured. Services rendered to ‘chungsangje-becoming’ were therefore focused more on hands-on skill training and relevant policy learning, in order to prepare them for helping others. For instance, emotional support workshop and policy statement writing were held, with the help of ‘chungsangje’, for polishing skills and increasing knowledge in running services for victims and ‘chungsangje-becoming’ beginners. Occasionally, when their victim mode came, an emotional support and person-based problem solving conference would be held, in order to help ‘chungsangje-becoming’ participants overcome the barriers that stood in the way of becoming ‘chungsangje’. For example, situation simulation that helped them handle what they were afraid of, i.e. encountering the abusers on the street and facing public criticisms on new arrival abused women.

#### 5.2.2.4.1 Development of ‘chungsangje-becoming’ and corresponding ‘care and services’

This realization of ‘not yet’ a ‘chungsangje’ was facilitated by the reflection-action-reflection cycles, and it led to the emergence of ‘chungsangje-becoming’. This

construct helped women participants to understand why they generally felt good about their situation but still suffered from emotional fluctuations and depressive moods sporadically.

*'Yes! I was just like MM...I would say yes at this moment, and say no at the next. I just couldn't understand my fluctuations. Honestly, in these 3 years, I have never been back to Tuen Mun where I used to live with the bad guy.'* KW said when we were exploring the persisting influence of abuse experiences on us. (19<sup>th</sup> session)

Physically leaving the abuser is the line drawn between 'victims' and the chungsangje-carrying titles, while 'psychologically stay-leave' is for differentiating 'chungsangje' and 'chungsangje-becoming'. As long as participants in the group were all physically living apart from the abusers, they commonly recognized that physically leaving was effective to remove the cause of victimizing and allow time for recovery and 'rebirth/chungsang(重生)'. Those who had not left physically would be considered as 'victims' as their cause of victimizing was not yet withdrawn. Alternatively, for those who had physically left but psychologically stayed, the group would locate them as 'chungsangje-becoming (重生緊)'.

*'I have known a number of sisters who have been living apart from the abusers for more than ten years. However, they are still suffering...they have not yet gone through the thing. It is not a matter of time, but your psychological state...if you can break through the psychological barriers that inhibit you, it is your success. Success does not necessarily mean one in advocating a policy or making changes in services.'* said NF. Replied YT, 'I think I am not there yet.' (18<sup>th</sup> session)

'Love', 'hope for reconciliation' and 'desire for the abuser's care' were conceptualized as 'psychologically staying', meaning that abused women who had physically left still had some form of psychological dependence on the abusers for care, love or connection. This form of staying was found to have inhibited women

participants from acting for their own sake, but they always considered the impact that their acts' had on the abusers or on the relationship with the abuser, even though the impact might not be substantiated. For example, YT claimed that she did not want her face to be exposed on the facebook page because she was afraid that her ex-husband would know where she lived and then stalk her and her daughter. Whereas, she also told us that she had recently asked her brother to contact her ex-husband so he could pay them a visit, but failed because he had no interest to meet her and her daughter at all. After counter-checking with YT about her worries, she gave the following account of her fear,

*'If he had never ever gambled, he would not have done that to me. He was a gentle person who cried bitterly when he divorced me. He wasn't that bad.'*

*Said YT. (18<sup>th</sup> session)*

Living in the name of 'chungsangje' denotes not only the strengths that abused women display in surviving abuse, but also the brutality of their former partners. Therefore, telling others about their abusive history would at the same time negatively label their former partners. Women participants who maintained a good connection with/wanted to maintain a good connection with their former partners would be worried about carrying the name of 'chungsangje' in social life outside the group context. In this regard, 'readiness to disclose their history of abuse' was not just a reflection of how far women participants had digested the traumatic experiences, but was also influenced by the way they would like to relate to the former abusive partners. Only those who had both physically and psychologically left the abusers would be less worried about negatively labelling their former partners, and felt easier in disclosing their history of abuse in their personal social network.

The barrier for disclosing their history of abuse to the public rested more on women participants' fear of handling public criticisms which could be extremely destructive to the mental health of them. Recognition of their faces may also increase women's fear of being labelled as incompetent and insufficient, and might lead to



fewer opportunities to get a job. YY once lost an opportunity to work in a Chinese massage centre after being identified as an abused woman in a press interview, by the employer. Only those who had a secured job, a strong personality and well-developed argumentative skills in this inquiry group found going public less challenging, for example, NF, PF and YY.

*'maybe it is about the personality...I couldn't stand that (humiliating criticisms) at all. Why people misunderstood us? There is at least one third of Hong Kong population disagreeing with us, misunderstanding us and even asking us to fxxk off. If I were in the position of PF, I would be sure I could not stand it. When I read the online responses to PF's press interview, I felt sad for a whole day and night. If I were her, I would have lived like I had gone back to my old bad days...'said YT. (15<sup>th</sup> session)*

*'I think when I last time did the interview with the press, I had already had the readiness to go public. People going up to my facebook page can see a clear picture of me. I won't use pseudonyms...' PF said and further talked about her response to the sharp-tongued online criticisms. (15<sup>th</sup> session)*

Chungsangje-becomings were able to display lots of strengths in managing their lives after leaving the abusive partners; however, it did not mean that they were able to manage their history. YY analyzed the participants' accounts for turning from victim to chungsangje and gave the following account,

*'We all followed a similar route of transforming from victim to chungsangje. When we just left, we couldn't accept the fact that we were abused and kept asking why. Why did this (violence) happen to me? Why I married such a violent man? Did I do anything wrong so that I deserve such punishment? The first step of becoming chungsangje was to "stop asking why but start asking how". After we were able to accept the fact that we were abused and there's no why, we then began to ask "how". We were therefore enabled to look out for resources and services to solve our burning problems, such as housing,*

*schooling of children and financial support. This was how all of us step out of victimhood.’ said YY. (19<sup>th</sup> session)*

This was conceptualized by participants as ‘turning from backward looking to forward looking’. This strategy drove participants to exercise their strengths to solve problems and improve their living; meanwhile, it left the past behind and unattended. When discussions, interactions, and incidents triggered participants’ remembrance of their abusive history, they could collapse instantly because coping strategies had not yet been developed sufficiently to handle the impacts of traumatic memories. Anything hinting or resembling their abusive history could bring about vigorous emotional response.

*We were sitting together for dinner with a few glasses of wine. The atmosphere was warm and happy. YY and KW began to talk about their hiking fun, and then YY played a joke on KW’s male hiking friend by naming him “boyfriend no.1”. We all laughed and asked how many boyfriends were there in total. KW suddenly slapped on the table angrily and yelled, ‘Enough! It is enough! What boyfriend you are talking about? You are being disgusting!’ We all stopped joking as it came to something of no fun. I asked KW with a calm voice, ‘why you are so angry? YY was just joking, and you definitely know she was. What makes you so angry?’ (YY chimed in and defended for herself. I asked her to allow KW to speak.) KW outrageously answered, ‘It isn’t fun at all. You have just reminded me of the bad guy! Same! Entirely the same!’ I asked again, ‘What is the same?’ ‘He always asked me where had I been and whom I had hanged out with. He always suspected me for having affairs with other men. What have been said entirely resembled what he said in the past!’ (Field note, dated 23 Dec 2012)*

This kind of situation frequently occurred with KW and YT in the inquiring process. As long as no one knew what might resemble aspects of their history with the abusers, their anger and emotional fluctuations became unexpected and unavoidable. Participants’ accounted for these fluctuations as the consequence of

being 'too busy for solving burning problems and left no time to deal with the past'. They also found this the major problem faced by formerly abused women when they were securely housed and financed by the government. Participants, who were still suffering from this problem, were located as 'chungsangje-becoming' because they displayed strengths in problem solving, while they also displayed the impacts of the abusive relationship on their current lives.

Women participants' venture into their emotional fragility allowed them to regain control over their emotional reactions because they began to understand their emotional triggers, and about how their past affected their presence. After times of exploration into the fluctuations, KW said the following with a huge smile,

*'I don't care about what is boyfriend no.1, or no.2, or no.3 anymore. You can just call them anything. It won't bother me anymore. They are anyhow who they are.'* (21<sup>st</sup> session)

Joseph and Linley (2008) also pointed out that rumination of the stress-triggering events was crucial to post-traumatic growth. It could bring the events to consciousness and render the person an opportunity to reappraise them in a way that brings about positive coping strategies and a more adaptable 'assumptive world'. The fears of meeting the abuser and going back to where they used to reside were found to be indicators of 'being unable to get through the experiences of being abused' as well. These fears were reduced by undergoing simulation of fearful situations and pragmatically preparing oneself to face the situations. The fear itself usually inhibited women participants from thinking about the fearful situations, making them even more scared of the situations due to the lack of psychological preparation and coping skills. 'Simulation of fearful situations' was employed constantly in the inquiry group to enable participants to start preparing for the situations, and for other participants to contribute their experiences of how to deal with similar situations. This practice not only provided a safe environment for participants to think about and equip themselves for the fearful situations, but

also one to engage them in evaluating their understanding of the situation, their fear and the practicality of different solutions to them.

*'Actually, YT, as you told us ...yours (ex-husband) refused to meet you and your daughter. Why do you think he will stalk you if he knows where you are living?' asked YY. 'I just don't want to have any contact with this troublesome person.' Said YT. YY furthered, 'then why you asked your brother to contact him for paying you a visit? I don't understand.' NF said, 'how do you know if he hasn't got a new family yet? After years of disconnection, you won't know.' 'Erh... I don't know. Yes, I don't know...'YT. YY asked, 'Have you ever phoned your ex-, knowing more about his situation?' 'No.' YT replied. 'If you called him, he wouldn't know where you are living; meanwhile, you may know how substantial your fear is ...' YY continued, 'Can you accept that he may have already had a new family?' YT said, 'I don't think he will. He cried so bitterly when he divorced me (All of us were shocked by the fact that the divorce was initiated by YT's ex-husband instead of YT)... he hugged me and cried ...He was missing me so much.' I asked, 'if he had not initiated it (divorce), would you divorce him?' YT said, 'I don't think so.' (18<sup>th</sup> session)*

After detailed articulation of YT's fear, the fear was reconstructed in the group, from 'the fear of meeting her ex-husband' to 'the fear of knowing he was no longer in love with her'. YT agreed that she still had the hope that he would care about her and the daughter; however, evidence to the contrary told YT that her ex-husband had no interest in meeting them, which increased her fear of further encounters with him because encounters may simply provide more evidence of this unacceptable fact. Simulation of fearful situations ran through different sessions whenever fearful situations were brought up in group meetings.

In sum, 'chungsangje-becoming' was constructed as a category to help women participants to differentiate themselves from 'victims' and define themselves as departing from 'victimhood'; meanwhile, it allowed them to display victim characteristics in the pursuit of their own 'chungsangje' images. The flexibility

embedded in this construct permitted women participants to articulate their weaknesses, fears, unsure feelings towards their abusive partners, and other barriers that forbade them from achieving their 'chungsangje' images. The development of 'chungsangje-becoming' construct runs parallel with Brené Brown's (2012) ethos of braving 'vulnerability'. She argued that vulnerability is not a weakness, but the capability to be wounded and the necessary condition for a meaningful life. She articulated that we have three myths about 'vulnerability', known as: (1) vulnerability = weakness, (2) we don't do vulnerability, and (3) vulnerability is letting it all hang out. The first two myths are found to have strong relevance to 'locating victim-chungsangje' because equating vulnerability with weakness at times obstructed women participants in admitting fear, anger and emotional disturbances. In order to stay 'strong', upholding the identity as 'chungsangje', NF even denied her vulnerability and rejected people's concern over her well-being. Alternatively, the 'chungsangje-becoming' construct presumed an active role of participants in overcoming vulnerability and barriers, and confronted the 'can't stand on our own feet' assumption underlying the 'victim' construct. The availability of 'chungsangje-becoming' also led to the development of new forms of services, specializing in the removal of barriers and getting through the experiences of being abused.

#### 5.2.2.4.2 Specific care and services for 'chungsangje-becoming'

Care and services rendered to 'chungsangje-becoming' were shaped by the manifestation of the victim and survivor characteristics. More care was directed to women participants located in this category when they displayed victim characteristics; whereas less care was directed to them when they displayed the strengths to stand up to challenges and to serve people. When victim characteristics were displayed, the group would pay more attention to, spend more time on, and be more patient and tolerant to the 'chungsangje-becoming'. For example, disruption of the group discussion was usually unwelcomed, but would be exceptionally welcomed when it was due to women's disturbances caused by the

abusive relationship/by the process of leaving the abuser, e.g. mental collapse due to the mental fragility caused by the violent relationship in YT's case, and physical collapse due to physical fragility caused by termination of welfare in KW's case.

Increased care was considered helpful for taking 'chungsangje-becoming' through the victimizing experiences. 'Meal preparation', 'childcare' and other forms of physical care to women participants would doubtlessly relieve their life stress and allow more time for recovery. Moreover, caring words and supporting behaviours, such as phone calls and companionship, reproduced sisterhood by which understanding, help, and useful experiences were more assured. After the care and services rendered to 'chungsangje-becoming' in their 'victim' mode, they were assumed the restoration of personal strengths to fix their problems and even fix those of the others. Care would be reduced back to minimal until victim characteristics were displayed again. Therefore, the care rendering to 'chungsangje-becoming' fluctuated as much as the mental and physical fluctuations experienced and expressed by women participants located in this category.

Most of the time, services tailored for 'chungsangje-becoming' were designed, modified, and rendered according to the participants' displayed barriers in becoming 'chungsangje'. The '*barrier removing activities*' practised in the inquiry were 'articulation and analysis of incidents of fluctuations' and 'simulation of fearful situations'. The former enabled women participants to make sense of the impact of their history of being abused on their current mental state and behaviours, while the latter was a practice of conferencing by which useful experiences of handling similar fears and fearful situations would be discussed, evaluated, and translated into practical solutions. The conferencing also served as a site for further data collection, which helped in making sense of the fearful situations, redefinition of the situation and even relocation of participants. The redefinition of situation and relocation of participants according to the emerging data from speech and actions provided a new orientation for women participants in the group to organize their expectations and care provision as well (see YT's case,

p.193). Hands-on learning activities were conceptualized as '*chungsangje property-building activities*'. It was action-based learning which required participants to learn through the reflection-action-reflection cycle. Actions required women to move from propositional knowing to practical and experiential knowing; by which, participants had to shape their body in a way to achieve the helpful and practical techniques. Any failure to perform the particular sets of body techniques was an important source of data for participants to understand how their bodies had been shaped; nonetheless, it suggested the discrepancies between practical knowing and experiential knowing, the evaluation of which allowed participants to learn about how their habitual practices deterred the achievement of new strengths and competence. For example, PF learnt that she had been authoritative in parenting through activities that involved inviting her son into a fairer mother-son relationship in daily life decision making; KW learnt about her inertia to act when she was asked to take actions for her legal problems; YY learnt that her monitoring behaviours in reverse inhibited her long-awaited independence of her child. Therefore, new realization about one's habitual performances would at times redefine the problems and its causes.

*'We used to think those are problems of our children, but did not realize it's our problems instead. Our problems are closely related to children's problems' said YY. (20<sup>th</sup> session)*

The hands-on learning activities held in the inquiry included 'policy statement writing on domestic violence services in Hong Kong', 'statement writing for children's rights (specific to children of families of IPV)', 'community resources investigation', 'emotional support for lately left abused women', 'case simulation workshops: on listening and giving response', 'Mothers' Day BBQ event for lately left abused women' and 'parenting practices'. Evaluation of these activities would be held each time after practice, in order to consolidate good practices, dig out problems, and suggest further improvements for similar activities.

#### 5.2.2.5 Assessing and Assigning

The 'locating' of members within the 'victim-chungsangje' classification was achieved by the process of 'assessing and assigning'. 'Assessing and assigning' took place throughout the inquiry, by which women participants collected and appraised data about oneself and others for assigning each member a location within the existing classification (see Appendix 5.4 for locations of members). Data emerged from the inquiry practices served as the major data source, while out-group practices would sometimes be employed for assessing and assigning. This was particularly the case when participants had lots of out-group interactions in daily life. If data revealed in group practices did not match any existing categories of 'victim-chungsangje' classification, there was a chance for revising the existing classification, or when the individual did not agree with the location assigned to her, location negotiation would persist until the assessment and assignment of location by oneself, and that by the group, coincided with each other.

Assessing involves collection of data and appraisal of them. Data collection was carried out by each of the participants who took notes, wrote logs and constantly observed the performances, behaviours, and emotional expressions of one another. The appraisal was usually facilitated by 'constant comparative analysis' method, which was carried out by writing down data on paper labels and comparing them against each other for making sense of what the data revealed. For example,

*Given that all participants have already left the abusive partners and are usually not concerned about the impact our lives may have on our previous partners, YT and HL's cases began to catch our attention. We began to compare YT and HL's case for making sense of the differences. We wrote down 'physically left (個人離開左)' then moved on to asking YT about her mixed feelings in contacting her ex-husband. She later talked about the love story between herself and her ex-husband, plus a side-line story about how much her mother-in-law was jealous about the intimacy between them. Her love was revealed from the words she told. YY asked if YT still loved her ex-husband, YT defended her ex-husband and said that their relationship would not have*



*deteriorated if he had never gambled. YT even said she would not have divorced him if he had not initiated it. The 'love', 'desire for reconnection', 'desire for care' etc. were found to be concepts representing YT's way of relating to the ex-husband. These concepts contradicted with 'anger', 'feeling indifferent', 'fear', 'desire for separation' etc. found in many other participants. The comparison gave rise to the concepts of 'psychologically staying' and 'psychologically leaving'. (Field note, 25 May 2013)*

However, constant comparative analysis was not the only method for understanding group data, but at times, participants had their ways of interpreting data that they had collected. It could be interpretations supported by experiences, case-to-case comparisons, and personal hunches. Since the assessing process could occur at personal level, constant comparative analysis was nearly abandoned in the self-assessment process in which individual participants employed their own methods in reviewing lived experiences, examining data on their performances and making sense of themselves by comparing their understandings of data against the 'victim-chungsangje classification'. Under two conditions, when the self-assessment did not agree with the group-assessment, or in cases when the data could hardly fit into the existing 'victim-chungsangje' categories, either revising the 'victim-chungsangje classification' or 'engaging in location negotiation' must take place to resolve the disagreements.

#### 5.2.2.5.1 Group-assessment and assigning

Group assessment of participants' location took place by appraising evidence arisen from group practices together in the group, in order to help indicate where one belonged. Participants collected data about the strengths, weaknesses, vulnerability, resistances and impacts of IPV on themselves and each other. By giving data meanings, participants transformed voluminous and piecemeal experiences into intelligible, organized, and accessible linguistic stocks. They would be compared to the existing 'victim-chungsangje' classification for assessing oneself and others' fit to the existing victim-chungsangje categories. Experiences and

performances of participants that generally matched the existing categories would be located within it and gave no marginal gain in the linguistic stocks. Instead, the emergence of new data that did not fit the existing categories would drive the development of new linguistic constructs to capture, summarize, and organize the mixed lived experiences of women.

The group assessment was never a linear process of data collection and interpretation, but it involved back and forth negotiation in meaning making of data. The unresolved conflicts in interpreting data usually led to further collection of data in practice. For example, YT's refusal to return to the 'victim' identity and dislike of 'going public' (which was a *chungsangje* property in the naïve framework) manifested disagreements in interpreting data. The disagreements eventually brought about a long session examining YT's experiences of getting along with her ex-husband to provide more data for understanding her reluctance in disclosing her history of abuse. On the one hand, the new data urged the group to reconstruct the existing *chungsangje* framework, while on the other hand, they were conceptualized in the group to give rise to the invention of 'chungsangje-becoming' as the intermediary between victim and *chungsangje*. The negotiation was usually painstaking because no easy conclusion could be drawn on how to interpret data. The negotiation process was facilitated by the insistence on constructing unanimous interpretation, which was crucial to prohibiting early conclusions drawn by a single form of knowing and interpretation; hence, this allowed the flourishing of different forms of knowledge making<sup>42</sup>. Nonetheless, this prolonged negotiation also enabled the emergence of different grounds for evaluating the quality of knowledge, such as relevancy to participants' concerns, practicality for solving problems, and inclusiveness of experiences and views, other than traditional criteria upheld by the academia.

---

<sup>42</sup> Participants received more education and were more used to taking notes on the group happenings, while some participants might find drawing and photo recording more accessible for them to express concerns; participants with years of experience in working for abused women would tend to utilize experiences as the foundation for interpretation, while some participants would rely on comparing data to similar cases seen by them for insights, and some might just love making hunches. I, as a trained researcher in grounded theory analysis, could hardly divorce the habit of doing constant comparative analysis.

In this regard, the use of 'authority' to stop the negotiation would be the most harmful to the participation of participants, while 'authority' was sometimes not intentionally exercised by a person to another, but historically constructed and embedded within a set of social relations (group relations in this case) that resulted in 'learnt silencing of personal voices'. Many practices and incidents in the inquiry group revealed the pertinence of authority, which was historically constructed and continuously reproduced by on-going group interactions, for example, calling NF 'Ah Ma' (my mother)<sup>43</sup>, preparing special food and treats for NF, not standing up for different opinions against NF's, and not saying anything against her. This authority was *not* created by violence or deliberate exercise of force, but the 'helping and being helped' relationship shared across members in their personal history with NF.

*'Did you tell her that her words hurt you?' I asked YT. 'No, I didn't! She is the saviour of my life. I dared not to tell her about that ... It is inappropriate to say such things against my saviour, even though I think she was doing something wrong. If I can no longer bear it, I would just disappear from her sight.'* Said YT. (during the recruitment period)

*'You don't understand. She treats you differently from the way she treats me. She was always so angry...you have to understand, she saved our life and we are not going to do things against her. You are different because you are not like us.'* PF said. (6<sup>th</sup> session)

The power differential was also sustained by other strands of relationship pre-established between the 'role model' and other participants. 'The experienced-inexperienced', 'the recognized-unknown', and 'the resourceful-deprived' were strands of relationship identified between the 'role model' and the 'lay participants' and were pre-established prior to the inquiry. These strands of relationships were found to be reproduced in this inquiry group, and to make the participation of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Parents, both mother and father, are authority figures in a family. The calling of 'mother' differentiated NF from the normal sisterhood. It also highlighted her leading role and authority in nurturing and supporting the sisterhood built among formerly abused women.

'lower-hand' vulnerable and less possible. Thereby, any use of authoritarian attitudes, definitive statements, affirmative words and tones<sup>44</sup> by the 'role model' would further reinforce the entrenched 'authority' in this particular set of relationships. These acts would lead to silence or sudden change of view point of other participants, and at times stopped negotiation. When the authority figure was more aware of her influence by stepping backward in the discussion, other participants would be more likely to follow their own line of logic, such as the mind-map drawing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session, in which NF chose to be the last one to speak.

#### 5.2.2.5.2 Self-assessment and assigning

Self-assessment and assigning carried data collection and appraisal beyond collective group assessing and assigning practices. Individual participants who had more engagements in different forms of social life, such as volunteering in social service agencies, actively engaging in the local neighbourhood, or working as full-time/part-time staff would be more likely to provide alternative evidence for locating oneself differently or shedding light on the limitations of the current identity constructs. These alternative evidences are the source for creating new linguistic constructs for the group, so as to capture alternative experiences and life practices.

Articulating the lived experiences obtained in diverse life practices in group meetings invited members of the group to co-construct with the participant an alternative self-understanding which could hardly be seen within the group. For example, the exclusion experienced by PF at the workplace, and the emotional instability caused by mental fragility, suggested to our group that PF's lived experiences were not tidily fitted into the chungsangje category. Also, it shed light on how the lack of 'employer-employee' relationship in our group limited us from seeing PF's vulnerability in striving for proving one's workplace competence and for being included in local labour culture. This eventually led to relocation of PF

---

<sup>44</sup> 'I know what it is...', 'you stop first, let me finish mine...', 'you don't know it...', 'I have been doing that for years...' etc. were usually identified prior to the silence of participants or sudden change of viewpoints of them.

from chungsangje to chungsangje-becoming, which she felt happier to live with because her sufferings and problems could be expressed more easily after relocation.

However, self-assessment and assignment could take place without explicating one's lived experiences in the group meetings. Women participants might have observed and analyzed themselves in daily practices, and might have already developed a conclusive understanding about their experiences. In case of this, the woman participants would simply tell the group about her interpretation of personal experiences, but not opening up lived experiences for further examination. 'I am OK with this (identity)', 'This is who I am', 'Don't worry, I am completely OK' were phrases employed by women participants in indicating their refusal for other members' participation in interpretation. Although refusal to open up one's lived experiences for further interpretation was found to inhibit the co-construction of knowledge, no force or any form of coercion was justified for digging into one's lived experiences without permission. Otherwise, this will repeat the problematic paradox of participation as delineated in the literature (Arieli, Friedman, & Agbaria, 2009), and result in non-participatory practices instead. In this condition, as long as members of the group were not invited to co-construct understanding with the participant, disagreement in assessment and assigning would tend to persist.

To conclude, self-assessment and assigning not only served as the main source for alternative identity construction in this CGI, but also helped in depicting the boundary of the group experiences by demarcating what the group practices were unable to reveal. In this regard, self-assessment and assigning has to be safeguarded in conducting CGI because it was helpful in conquering the monopoly of group experiences in constructing participants' identities. Negligence to the risk of monopoly may inhibit development of alternative linguistic stocks that assist development of more helpful and preferable identities in coping with women participants' life challenges. Moreover, willingness to open up lived experiences

for the group should always be respected even though disagreement on one's location persists.

In the following, I would like to further describe the two conditions that occurred in the process of 'assessing and assigning' in this CGI. One of them led to reconstruction of the identity framework and the other resulted in relocation of participants. Delineation of which may shed light on solving the data-theory mismatch and conflicts in identity location.

#### 5.2.2.5.3 Condition 1: When evidences did not match with the existing categories

This situation happened when data revealed experiences, behaviours, emotional expressions, performances, and interactions that the existing collective repertoire could not capture. In other words, the happenings were just unintelligible at first sight, and they required other linguistic tools to construct meanings to contain them. For example, the naïve framework of chungsangje was not challenged at the beginning because no actions were required from participants to behave accordingly. Until this framework was employed to inform practices (from practical knowing to experiential knowing), i.e. going public to advocate for the needs of formerly abused women in the media and online platform, behaviours, reactions, emotional expressions and performances of participants were completely 'unintelligible' from the view of the naïve framework of 'chungsangje'. Refusal, hesitation, and expressions of being unsure would become unintelligible from the view of the naïve framework of 'chungsangje'. New linguistic constructs were demanded for describing them in a way helpful to inform care and service rendering to formerly abused women. This condition engaged participants in an intense challenge because it could be easily turned into a battleground for situation definition — which involved making the disagreeing others agree on one's definition of the situation/happenings.

*'If you dare not to go public, please don't call yourself chungsangje. You are not chungsangje. Don't ever try to fake this up.'* NF said to YT. (15<sup>th</sup> session)

Treating the 'unintelligible' and unfit experiences as indicators of unregistering from the membership would be extremely dangerous because it on the one hand inhibited the flourishing of knowing and meaning construction, while on the other hand, it excluded women participants with different lived experiences from support, care, and services. Failure to explore and make sense of the 'unintelligible' would risk fixing the linguistic constructs in use, and render the constructs being restrictive to expression of differences. In the face of unintelligible experiences, the focus should be redirected to developing their linking with the constructs currently in use, instead of forcing the lived experiences into the presumed shape. Relating to the 'unintelligible' by reconstruction of the 'chungsangje' construct sustained the collaborative relationship and secured the platform for co-constructing useful knowledge for problem solving.

Grounded theory analysis performed a significant role in promoting inclusion of differences by linking concepts together through conceptualization. Theoretical coding became the technique to organize differences under the same umbrella concept, for example, type, dimension, and process. The employment of theoretical coding was found to be helpful to facilitate inclusion and maintain collaboration in cases of the emergence of anomalies. In this inquiry, by conceptualizing the 'unintelligible' as a 'type' of ways in 'relating to the society' by 'chungsangje', women participants who did not want to go public due to varied reasons could find a niche to continue caring and serving others (stay in the community of practice).

5.2.2.5.4 Condition 2: When the self and group assessment and assignation did not coincide

Given diverse sets of relationships and settings that were available outside the group, e.g. workplace, neighbourhood, friends, and the greater family, women participants could have different properties, characters, strengths and weaknesses of themselves constructed within those contexts. These constructions may sometimes be very different from the constructions produced in the group; this

resulted in disagreement between the self-assessed location and the group-assessed location (given there was an agreed construction among other members. Sometimes, the group may not agree on the same construction as well). This form of disagreement would bring about the location-negotiation between the participant and others. The participant disagreeing with the group would engage in a set of self-evidencing behaviours by which she suggested evidence to prove herself otherwise. In this regard, talking about one's sufferings and problems should not be treated as merely an expression of needs, but also a process of proving one's victim identity, which is strongly linked to the increase of care and emotional support services. Through talking about sufferings, a participant provided evidence for other participating members to agree on her self-assessed 'victim' location within the 'victim-chungsangje classification'. Meanwhile, other participating members may challenge the evidence, and disagree on the self-assessed location by showcasing their data and interpretation.

Although location-negotiation did not guarantee an agreed location, it maintained the room for participants to secure alternatives in understanding themselves, and led to alternatives in understanding their problems and finding solutions. Maintaining the room for disagreement was of paramount importance because it was the site where alternative life practices could be revealed and new interpretation of evidences to emerge. Moreover, it increased the flexibility of linguistic constructs to accommodate the life changes of participants in a particular relationship context. In our inquiry group, the refusal of returning to victimhood by YT gave rise to the development of the 'chungsangje-becoming' construct, which later allowed PF to explicate her life hardships<sup>45</sup> by relocating herself from 'chungsangje' to 'chungsangje-becoming'.

---

<sup>45</sup> PF experienced emotional disturbances (insomnia, distress, emotional fluctuations etc.) and realized her incompetence at the workplace. Meanwhile, the 'chungsangje' location failed to provide her linguistic stocks to articulate her experiences of sufferings, stress and the need for support. She therefore asked the group to attend to her new assessment about herself, so as to convince the group to relocate her into 'chungsangje-becoming' instead of 'chungsangje'. In the negotiation process, PF raised a lot of evidence about her incompetence in serving abused women at work, and about the return of her mood fluctuations. Given the new evidences told by PF, she successfully altered the group-assessment and assigned location.



### 5.3 Conclusion

In this inquiry, despite a new collective identity being constructed by venturing into identity construction with formerly abused women, identity work with formerly abused women is still underexplored. The development of 'victim', 'chungsangje', and 'chungsangje-becoming' demonstrates that formerly abused women need 'identity work' to help them organize their expression of needs, and to inform the care and service rendering in a post-separation support group. To avoid excluding different/outlying lived experiences of formerly abused women, identity constructs have to be constantly examined, evaluated, and revised.

Lived experiences are usually chaotic and disorganized. Therefore, we need diverse linguistic stocks to make sense of it, and linguistic constructions to shape them into intelligible plots. In this inquiry, the identity construction process also illustrates how experiential knowing is translated into presentational and propositional knowing which then informs practical knowing and the next round of the reflection-action-reflection cycle. In this regard, the only way to ensure practicality of identity constructs to formerly abused women is to build them locally in practice. When 'identity' concerns the participants, and the chaotic lived experiences are opened up, linguistic references from different life practices could be drawn to enhance the identity construction. As linguistic references are obtained from particular sets of life practices and the relationships engaged in by the participants, the greater is the diversity in lived experiences the greater the diversity in understanding and doing things differently. This also marks where new understandings may emerge.

Therefore, venturing into identity construction with formerly abused women is a never-ending process, and the constructs achieved in a venture could never be conclusive. They could just work as a linguistic reference for sensitizing participants to the plausibility of organizing lived experiences in identity work. The practicality of the constructs is not prescribed but gained.

Lastly, the victim-chungsangje classification developed in this inquiry has in fact embedded in it a power inclination by implying that chungsangje is better than chungsangje-becoming, and even better than victim. This power inclination, as I would maintain, is deeply rooted in the culture of individualization by emphasizing the value of 'personal agency' and 'autonomy'.

## Chapter 6

---

### From 'Being Cared' To 'Equal Partners': Transforming 'Your Problem' to 'Our Problem' and 'Your Responsibility' to 'Our Responsibility' Through Making Partnership With 'Children'

---

#### 6.1 Introduction

Democratization of the mother-daughter relationship between the mother-head and other women participants reshaped the inquiry community. In a way, the teenage participants' quest for participation and autonomy was easier to be recognized and reified. Mothers and other women participants became more willing to acknowledge teenage sons and daughters' urges for autonomy, avoid 'looking/talking down' and promote equal partnerships. Partnering with teenage sons/daughters in this inquiry echoes the expanding trend of 'child participation' in care planning, service design, and research. It has been merited by the emergence of new childhood studies, the rise of equality and individualistic rights, and the increasing emphasis on user involvement in measuring service accountability (Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

Banking on the concept of rights, women participants and I carefully involved teenage participants in knowledge production. However, knowledge coproduced with them conversely challenged the traditional concept of children's rights, which had been constructed around the 'Cartesian model of self' (conceiving personhood as individualistic and formulated by acquiring competences naturally with aging). The individualistic concept of rights failed to recognize the significance of 'relations' in the construction of personhood, while the concept of 'competence' is devised from the ideal 'adulthood' (as an equivalent to full personhood), so to restrain rather than facilitate the participation of children in 'adult activities' and decision-making (Freeman M. , 1992). Conversely, the 'relational model of self' (conceiving personhood as an ever-changing construct developed in relational contexts) allows

us to see competence as acquired through participating in communities of practice, and autonomy has to be sustained in the communities by encouraging their self-expression and well-informed decision-making. Given a participatory community, at where 'partnership-making' practices are maintained, 'children' are more likely to formulate their identity as equal partners with other members of the community, regardless of their age. Some of the latest literature has already revealed a focus shift to the relational contexts where the 'children' identity is constructed (White, 2002), and partnership with 'children' is formed (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006); more importantly, it promotes children's participation rights in relationships where the lives of children are less 'disrupted' (Hooper & Gunn, 2012). This inquiry joins the 'relational' approach in making sense of participation of teenage participants, and has given rise to a theory about their transformation from 'being cared' to 'equal partners'.

In the following, I will focus on the cooperation and co-production of knowledge among teenage participants (aged 12-17), their mothers, other formerly abused women, and me (the practitioner-researcher). 'Making and breaking of partnership' sheds light on how the relationship could be shaped closer or further to equal partnership where equitable respect and concerns are delivered and contained. Analysis also reveals that 'partnership-making' should be sustained among participants throughout the inquiry, in order to ensure the negotiation for the form of partnership is participatory. Equal partnership and participatory negotiation of collaboration between women participants and teenage participants transformed the ownership of the problems from 'yours' to 'ours', and redistributed responsibility in daily care rendering and problem solving. To denote 'full personhood' of teenage sons and daughters, the term 'children' was deliberately discarded throughout this CGI. Terms like 'teenagers', '*gor gor* (elder brother)' and '*lan lui* (beautiful ladies)' were used instead, in order to alleviate the imbalanced relationship abidingly implied in the 'mother-child relationship' construct. Meanwhile, the traditionally unilateral mother-to-children care was transformed into collaborative care projects.

### **6.1.1 Children's rights: the 'Cartesian model of self' or the 'relational model of self'?**

Freeman's (1992) philosophical articulation of the morality of children's rights potentially represents many analogous endeavours in advancing children's rights and participation. He leaned on new childhood studies to argue that children are 'able' to participate as rationally and as consciously as 'adults' in many decision-making activities, such as voting. 'Competence' therefore sets the base for involving children as social actors (instead of research objects) in research (Powell & Smith, 2009; Freeman M. , 1998) and as equal partners in solving social problems, such as environmental conferences for children (Blanchet-Cohen & Rainbow, 2006). Ironically, as both Freeman (1998) and White (2002) pointed out, the conception of 'agency' advocated in UNCRC lacks the participation of 'children' in the writing of it. The uncontested conception of 'competence'/'agency' inevitably supports the exclusion of some children who could not/refuse to think, work and live in the way that 'adults' do. This uncontested concept of 'competence' suggested in UNCRC sets a particular form of adulthood as the destination of growth (reached at the age of 18), and is synonymous to 'maturity' that excludes the 'immature' children from accessing the full entitlement of rights. Instead of a vague concept of 'maturity', Gillick's competence offers a more defined assessment for children's participation in giving consent, based on their cognitive ability to 'understand and appraise the nature and implications of the proposed treatment, including the risks and alternative courses of actions' (Wheeler, 2006, p. 807). However, cognitive ability is not a natural product of physical growth but also the result of the social environment, and training that children live with. Without reflecting on the underlying individualistic assumption of growth, this assessment of competence still dismisses that participating in life decisions is in fact a process of nurturing their cognitive competence in understanding and appraising their life choices. Involving children in decision making has a developmental function. This narrow understanding of 'maturity'/'competence' presumes one's ability to make

independent decisions and to reason in one's best interest. This concept of 'individualistic autonomy' perceives human beings as individual persons thinking, understanding, and acting entirely independently of 'others' (Freeman, 1992). This contrasts with 'relational autonomy' which sees 'autonomy' as something possible only when 'the community is willing to allow the individual to make claims and participate in the shifting of boundaries' (Minow, 1987, p.1885, cited in Roche, 1999). The Cartesian model of self that underlies this dominant discourse of children's rights fails to see 'competence' as a social construction and, more importantly, autonomy is not the precondition for participation (Roche, 1999).

Viewing 'competence' from the lens of the relational approach, we could see skills are not acquired naturally with age, but by participating in social practices that link beings in a nexus of relationship (Schatzki, 1996). Given that participation is the prerequisite of competence, children participation is not merely a 'rights' issue, but an 'obligation' to involve children in different communities of practice for learning how to solve their concerns and problems arising at that moment. Otherwise, children will be rendered 'silent and invisible by the attitudes and practices of adult society' (Roche, 1999, p. 476), and they will stay 'vulnerable' due to the prolonged isolation and exploitation from the adults' world. Therefore, children's protection and participation are two faces of a coin in supporting the well-being of children. Instead of leaving children alone in the decision-making as entailed by the Cartesian model of self, building autonomy should be considered as engaging the 'vulnerable' in a friendly, ready-for-conversation environment to solve problems together. This could be translated into engaging children in communities of practice that could develop them into 'competent persons'<sup>46</sup> valued in the community. Protection that isolates children from supportive relational contexts and important communities of practice could be even more traumatizing.

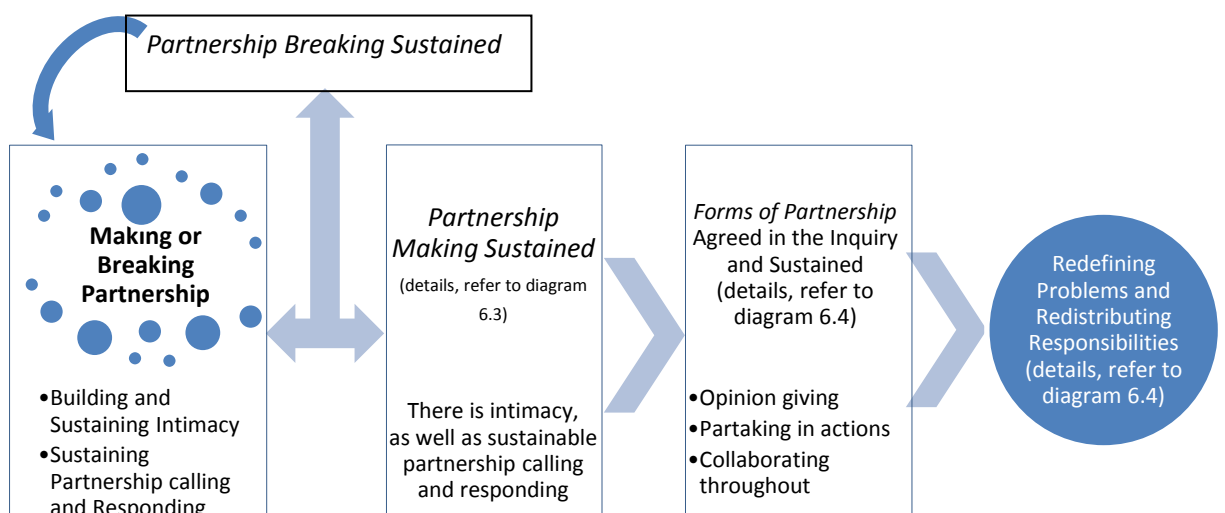
In terms of ethics, adhering to the Cartesian model of self in advancing children's rights can easily side-line the talk of self-responsibility. It is worth noting that the

---

<sup>46</sup> Person-in-relationships is referred to here (White, 2002).

responsibility discussed here is not the same as ‘blaming the victim’ because ‘blames’ and ‘victimhood’ are the products of the individualistic culture that assumes one can stand alone without others (Nissim-Sabat, 2009 ). The responsibility I refer to in this chapter has to be understood with a new anchorage in the relational model of self, that it is the morality that happened before any understanding of the content of a calling, but at that moment, one attends to the calling (Derrida, 1988 ). It means that at the moment ‘adults’ attended to ‘children’s’ callings/expressions or vice versa, there is a presumption of responsibility on both sides for the relationship and meaning making within that. Gergen (2001) realized that the ‘Rights Talk’ was built on the unexpressed premise that people with rights ‘roam at large in a land of strangers’, where they presumptively have ‘no obligations towards others except to avoid active infliction of harms’ (p.172). This, at the same time I would say, frames children into passive consumers of benefits, instead of involving them as active social agents in working towards their welfare.

## 6.2 The grounded theory of ‘Making or Breaking Partnership’: transforming ‘your problem’ to ‘our problem’ and ‘your responsibility’ to ‘our responsibility’



**Diagram 6.1 The grounded theory of ‘Making or Breaking Partnership’**

'Partnership' is a two-fold concept in the grounded theory of 'making or breaking partnership'. One is partnership as a relational context, in which egalitarian stances are reproduced and sustained whereas power imbalance standing in the way of equal voices is challenged. The other one is partnership as a form of collaboration, which outlines how far teenage participants and women participants are involved in the design, action and evaluation of certain actions. 'Making or breaking partnership' represents the former, while the latter refers to 'forms of partnership agreed on in the inquiry and sustained in the family practices'. For reasons of clarity, 'partnership' and 'collaboration' will be employed for denoting the difference.

Rather than a static relationship, partnership making implies a dynamic and continuous process for promoting egalitarian practices between mother participants and their sons/daughters, and between women participants and teenage participants. Only when partnership making could be sustained by continuous 'partnership calling and responding' and 'intimacy building' initiatives, could participants move on to negotiating their form of collaboration for actions. By contrast, either failing to sustain the 'partnership calling and responding' or 'intimacy building' would also deter further negotiation for any form of collaboration. The fluctuations in participation of teenage participants taught us to stay alert to the partnership-making and partnership-breaking callings and responses, unveiled in both daily life and group practices. Abiding examination of the experiences in partnership-making/breaking can offer evidence to adjust ourselves, in order to sustain a participatory relational context for collaborative problem solving.

In working with teenage participants, three forms of partnership were negotiated in the group, namely 'opinion giving', 'partaking', and 'collaborating'. They were constantly negotiated within the group, and executed and sustained in both group and family life practices. Findings suggest that maintaining openness in the form of collaboration could increase its adaptability to the changing relationship conditions



and life situations encountered by participants. Otherwise, rigid adherence to a form of collaboration could break the partnership, and discourage participation of the teenage participants, who would either withdraw their voices or terminate their participation completely.

Through 'making partnership' and negotiating the forms of 'collaboration', many problems that were initially considered the problems of women participants were seen from a new lens and transformed into the problems of 'us'. Working with teenage sons and daughters of formerly abused women in problem solving, on the one hand shed light on alternative solutions for post-separation care and protection, while on the other hand it suggested to women participants that their sons/daughters were not the source of problem, but the resources for bringing mutual betterment. The redistribution of responsibility in problem solving and the emergence of new solutions could never be possible without involving teenage participants' ways of doing things. In the latter half of this chapter, the redefinition of problems, emergence of alternative solutions and redistribution of responsibility will be detailed alongside the different forms of collaboration negotiated in this inquiry group.

### ***6.2.1 Making or breaking partnership with teenage participants***

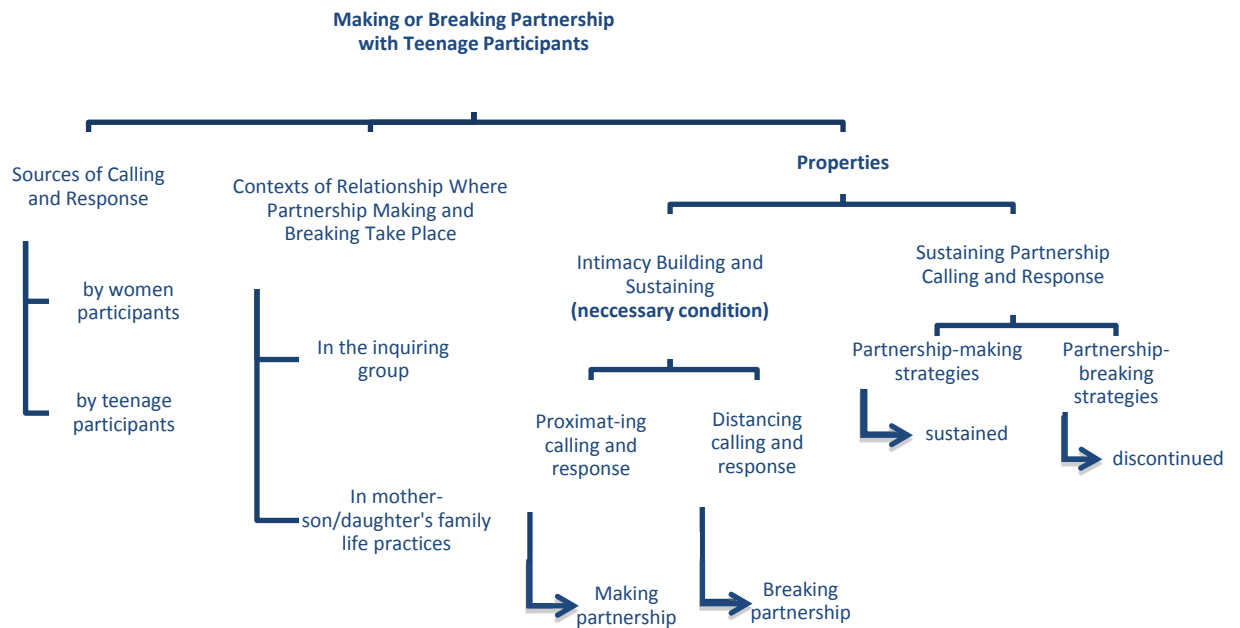
Yuen's participation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session absolutely woke us up to the teenage participants' out cry for partnership. Yeun's mind-map (fig. 6.2) challenged the taken-for-grantedness of adults' knowledge as fuller, better, and more privileged than 'children's'. As the mind-map revealed the unnoticed problems and needs of young members of families who had witnessed intimate partner violence, women participants began to realize the value and validity of the knowledge held by their sons and daughters since then. After reading Yuen's mind-map, participants said the following:

*'Don't think they are little, they know a lot.' Said YT.*

*'They know better than us how to use mind-map. We don't know what it is but it is just something they are very used to in school. They can do better than us.'* Said NF.

Having learnt about the previously undermined ability of women participants' teenage sons and daughters, we became more willing and motivated to take a closer look into the behaviours of whom we once called 'children'. Nonetheless, as all the mother participants were experiencing different degrees of tension in their filial relationships, Yuen's venture for making partnership elicited the seed of hope in mother participants for reconciling with their loved ones.

By unpacking and revisiting the family life experiences, women participants were more open to new interpretations of those experiences, hoping to dig out their sons/daughters' 'partnership callings' and to identity partnership making and breaking strategies. Women were particularly interested in behaviours that were once perceived as disturbing and mischievous because 'partnership callings' were very often demonized in parental family practices. Reframing the uncooperative behaviours of teenage sons/daughters not only developed our sensitivity to the outcry for partnership by sons/daughters, but also transformed the relationships among us—mother participants, their sons/daughters, and other women participants. With the increasing effort towards unpacking and reinterpreting the experiences in getting along with sons and daughters, mother participants were more able to identify 'partnership callings' and to give positive responses promptly either in the group context or in their family life practices. Successful and failing experiences in making partnerships would be shared in the group and evaluated, while the knowledge generated from these sessions would then serve as references for developing helpful and positive responses for future partnership making with teenage participants.



**Diagram 6.2 the concept of ‘making or breaking partnership with teenage participants’**

‘Making or breaking partnership with teenage participants’ could be initiated by either teenage participants or women participants in both group and daily life contexts. In the process of making partnership with teenage participants, two components –‘intimacy building’ and ‘partnership calling and response’—were identified. Building the sense of intimacy with teenage participants was found to be the *necessary condition* for making of partnership, while the making of partnership is constituted by sustained partnership calling and responding. The conceptualization of these two components was inspired by the scholarship of Derrida (1988). Whose concepts of ‘calling and response’ were first discussed in the group meeting held on 2 March 2013, in which we discussed how meanings were generated through callings and responses within the abusive relationship. These concepts later gained their ability to capture how meanings, interactions, and practices were created and sustained with teenage participants in the group and

daily life practices, and they were employed in guiding our partnership-making and collaboration with teenage participants.

#### 6.2.1.1 Intimacy building

Intimacy building was mediated by verbal and non-verbal exchanges and it continuously shaped the relationship in which the exchanges were carried out. In a relationship where the intimacy was largely damaged, the calling for partnership would receive no response and eventually vanish in the air. PF in our group experienced how her callings for partnership were ignored by her son at the beginning of our 'mother-son/daughter project'. Through examining her mother-son stories and her failures in making partnership with her son, we realized that the lack of intimacy was a major factor in the failures.

*'I agreed that our relationship had changed a lot after breaking up with my ex-husband. There were a lot of changes in life not just for me but for him as well in leaving the abusive relationship. I did not handle it well enough maybe... he used to be very close to me when he was little. He was so lovely and adorable. I ran a beauty salon in the mainland China before I came to Hong Kong. GW (son of PF) loved playing around in the salon after school and we always had lunches and dinners together... but now, I don't even know if he has been back home or not. We rarely dine together. He didn't enjoy having meals with me probably I don't know. He sometimes came back with some girls and I just didn't like him doing this. That's my place. He shouldn't have treated it like a hotel.'* PF kept complaining about the problems of her son. (8<sup>th</sup> session)

The breakdown of intimacy was realized not just in PF's relationship with her son, but was shared across many women participants' mothering experiences.

*'I once asked my son to call me in advance if he would come back for dinner. Otherwise, I will not cook anything for him! No matter what, I had no appetite for dinner (at that time). If he didn't come back for dinner, I*

*could just eat anything... However, the fact is that...he comes back for dinner every night! I said that was just like turning him away from having dinner at home. I was treating him not like a family member, this place not like home. I knew he was very unhappy! ...Later on, I sent him a message, saying, "Babe, mum will cook you dinner every night".' KW had her tears running down the face while recalling her story with her son, Dai. (8<sup>th</sup> session)*

In the group meeting held on 23 March 2013, we discovered that many participants had the experience of projecting anger and bad moods onto their sons and daughters. By reflecting on these incidents, we discovered that sons/daughters were usually the last resort for emotional support and ventilation in the post-separation context. Women realized that they were deprived of reliable relationships for emotional support after years of isolation from society by intimate partner violence. Stresses abused women encountered in the process of separation, such as financial hardship in the 'home building' and the distressing legal procedures of divorce, custody, visiting, and maintenance arrangement, usually drove women participants to the verge of 'mental breakdown'. In the highly stressful situations women participants found themselves in, they often spoke ruthlessly to their sons and daughters.

The disruptive post-separation life sometimes could trigger mother participants' hostility towards sons/daughters when they failed to meet their expectations. Examples of this kind could be identified in many family life practices, and one of the most often cited experience was 'waking up "children" for school'.

*'...when I am tender to her, she is tender to me. I normally call her "babe"...and if I asked her to wake up by saying like "babe, wake up!", she would softly responded with "yes" and wake up immediately. She might also say "Good morning, mama"...If I were unhappy at the moment, I would have said "SY, you have to wake up now!" and she would curl around the blanket and refuse to wake up. She changes from time to time.*

*Sometimes, she would ask angrily “why did you call me like that?”. She heard everything... If I had added her surname in front of her name, she would be even angrier!’ said YT and many participants immediately added in their examples. (7<sup>th</sup> session)*

This was also the first snapshot that sensitized us to the power of name calling on intimacy building between women participants and their sons and daughters. By analysing the examples of ‘waking up children for school’, we discovered that name calling that highlighted the filial intimacy could result in more ‘cooperative’ relationships and reactions; on the contrary, name calling that implied alienation and strangeness could lead to what women participants used to call ‘uncooperative’ behaviours. This realization steered us to attend to what mothers did instead of what sons/daughters did in making sense of the tension built between mother participants and their sons/daughters.

By exploring different experiences of ‘intimacy building’ and ‘intimacy breaking’, we were able to conceptualize the interactions into ‘proximating calling and response’ and ‘distancing calling and response’. The former could facilitate intimacy building whereas the latter could ruin it. ‘Proximating calling and response’ including ‘calling his/her nickname known only by their mums’, ‘pleasing sons/daughters’ (with praises, food and gifts), ‘declaring their love’ (verbally, by letters, cards and mobile messages), and ‘asking for reconciliation’ (saying sorry, showing their dedication to make their relationship better and explicating how much they missed the good old days with their sons and daughters). ‘Proximating calling and response’ were tried out in the everyday life with teenage participants by mother participants who later called this category of behaviour as ‘courting our sons/daughters’. This was because they came to realize the fragility of intimacy in mother-son/daughter relationship and understood that their intimacy with sons and daughters was not given but hard earned. Through practising ‘intimacy building’ and evaluating the failures, we developed a concept called ‘distancing calling and response’, which were found to have marred ‘intimacy building’. The properties of ‘distancing calling

and response' were 'treating sons/daughters as outsiders' (calling the full names of sons/daughters, declaring their sole ownership to the property shared between themselves and sons/daughters, withdrawing their care, living together by rules and certifying the dissolution of mother-son/daughter relationship), and 'emphasizing wrongdoings of sons/daughters' (proving them wrong, not giving the chance for correction of mistakes, and repeatedly condemning sons/daughters' problems). Either in the group or in family life, the 'distancing calling and response' could immediately break the foundation for partnership and take teenage participants to the verge of terminating their participation.

*Today when we were discussing the media work we had done in April and when NF and I were appreciating the effort that KW had made in improving her care-free attitude in handling her own problems, Dai suddenly stood up in rage. He said to us, 'Really? Do you really think so? (About KW having put much effort in handling her problems) I can't agree with you.' Honestly, I was so shocked. Dai even ran away from the scene after saying that and we tried to ask him back. We asked him to stay and have lunch with us, telling us what he disagreed with. He just said he was tired and had no appetite for lunch. Dai always loved having lunch with us and it must be something about his mum making him so unhappy that he left us with an empty stomach. We let him go and asked him to let us know if he felt sick. Certainly we were so shocked and then turned to KW in the hope of an answer. She didn't look shocked at all and we were even more shocked by her reaction. (Field notes, dated 21 April 2013)*

After attempts at covering up the breakdown of intimacy with Dai, KW began to tell us how 'asking her son to sign *Shui Zhai Zhi*'<sup>47</sup> (衰仔紙, declaration of not providing

---

<sup>47</sup> 'The declaration of not providing support to parents' has been argued to go against the traditional Chinese value of filial piety (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2012). Filial piety is considered as the most important virtue among all virtues in Chinese culture and therefore, in Hong Kong, the 'declaration' is usually called 'Shui Zhai Zhi' (衰仔紙) which means 'paper for the poor and bad children'. This negative connotation running underneath the name of 'Shu Zhai Zhi' created very tough moments for both KW and her son because KW was advised that she could continue with the welfare support only when Dai, who had just aged 18, declared that he was unable/unwilling to provide for his mother. Although it was perceived by the

support to parents) had damaged her intimacy with Dai. Dai had been very unhappy with KW's decision to request him to sign the declaration because he perceived it as denying their mother-son relationship, and declaring his failure to live up to the traditional Chinese filial piety. Meanwhile, KW thought she had no option but to force her son to make this humiliating declaration that did not represent his wills, in order to continue to receive financial support from the government.

We responded to Dai's anger towards his mum, KW, by working out acceptable solutions and alternatives to signing the declaration<sup>48</sup>. This dramatically altered the relationship between KW and Dai and also that between Dai and the other women participants. Dai on one side restored his intimacy with KW, while on the other side resumed his participation in our group and was willing to partake in our Mother's Day event for taking care of the young children (aged 3-6) of recently left abused women.

*After starting the course for a week, KW happily told us, 'He (Dai) has been so well-behaved and lovely recently. He even cooked me dinner if I had to attend classes in the afternoon. He sometimes asked me what I wanted to eat. You say how lovely my son is? He had never cleaned any dishes.'* (17<sup>th</sup> session)

This experience enabled us to learn that hostility induced by 'distancing calling and response' could diffuse to other aspects of life, unless it was addressed immediately once created. Therefore, women participants usually shared the experience of finding it impossible to nail down what exactly happened in the first place to worsen their relationship with sons/daughters, while they could cite a huge amount of daily life examples of how bad that was. Having learnt that 'intimacy' could be

---

government that it is a 'simple financial declaration' (The Hong Kong SAR Government, 2009), the name 'Shui Zhai Zhi' widely employed by the public absolutely carries on criticisms to those who sign the declaration.

<sup>48</sup> Later on, the group supported KW in enrolling on retraining programs as preparation for re-entering the job market. This on one hand proved to KW her self-value, and on the other, showed Dai that his mum was not trying to be lazy, and take toll on their filial relationship. At the same time, we were working with KW to sort out solutions to extend her welfare support.



easily damaged by microscopic daily life exchanges, the group turned to being vigilant of the words we spoke, the behaviours we performed, and behaviours performed by one another in the presence of teenage participants. Anything happening to signify 'distancing calling and response' was immediately corrected by women participants themselves.

*Yuen loved sitting by our side and listening to what we were talking about. He always liked to be the last one to speak. He was playing with his basketball around us while KW was talking. KW found herself so disturbed by the noise of playing basketball and annoyedly asked Yuen to 'stay away' if he wanted to play basketball instead of joining the discussion. NF immediately stood in and said, 'why did you ask him to stay away? He likes to stay here with us, and we should let him be. We could nicely ask him if he could turn down the noise by playing the basketball more lightly.' Yuen was certainly aware of the problems caused by the noise and he instantly turned down the noise, in order to cause less nuisance while staying in the discussion. (Field note, dated 17 March 2014)*

Partly due to the intention to create a 'homely' atmosphere in the inquiring group (see chapter 4, on the part of dream-making), and partly by the later learning of the importance of intimacy in 'making partnership', we deliberately employed lots of 'proximating calling and response' in the group to sustain this necessary condition for negotiating collaboration. The intimacy building work was not merely carried out in the relationship with teenage participants, but also among women participants who had openly addressed that their relationship with the key participants was a determinant factor for their decisions to participate (see Chapter 4). Both the caring work we did and family-like activities we performed in the group were understood as 'proximating calling and response' which had been serving the 'intimacy building' agenda. Among all, 'dining together' was one of the most prominent features of our group meetings because it, on the one side, provided the basic care for participants' need for food, while on the other side

reproduced the family practice of 'dining together' that represented the willingness to share and the sense of 'togetherness' in the traditional Chinese family image. In the inquiry, each family would prepare at least one dish for lunch on the meeting day, so that participants would not have to spend much to enjoy a big feast. By the end of each meeting, we would also discuss what to cook for the next meeting, so as to ensure a more balanced diet for both the women and the teenage participants. This practice at the same time helped members who suffered from financial difficulties to enjoy food and better nutrition at least once a week. This also served as the main supply of food for KW who had to temporarily live on food from the food bank during the inquiry.



**Fig. 6.1 Pictures showing how the need for food was catered in the group and how the family-like 'dining together' experiences were reproduced in the inquiry group meetings.**

Next to 'dining together', in performing 'proximating calling and response', we also used nicknames in calling teenage participants (sometimes in calling women participants as well) if they felt comfortable with it (in fact, all of them liked us calling them by their nicknames). Some nicknames were invented in the course of the inquiry to represent the unique identity and experiences that are uniquely shared within this membership, for example, 'Yuen Gor Gor' (elder brother Yuen), which represented the group's recognition of Yuen's contributions, the family-like relationship built among us, and his responsibility to take care of us.

### 6.2.1.2 Sustaining partnership calling and responding

Alongside intimacy building, we were also striving to sustain the partnership with teenage participants. The partnership conceptualized here refers to a rejection of the traditional uncontested power imbalance embedded in the 'mother-child' and 'adult-child' relationships. Both of them assumed the deficiency of knowledge of 'children' as being 'childish' or 'immature'. Therefore, callings and responses to partnership in this inquiry commonly shared the underpinning of equally weighed voices of 'adults', mothers and teenage participants. Callings and responses to partnership were conceptualized through observing and analysing speeches/gestures/actions, which challenged the aforementioned power imbalance, in both group interactions and the out-group living together experiences with teenage participants. Through the reflection-action-reflection cycles of 'partnership-making', we came up with a category of 'partnership-making' and 'partnership breaking' strategies. In the following, I will present how we learnt about the 'partnership-making' and 'partnership-breaking' strategies through the unfolding mother-son/daughter stories and the reflection-action-reflection cycles for 'making partnership'.

The concept of 'sustaining partnership calling and responding' was first developed in response to Yuen's calling to listen to his views as we had listened to other women participants. By addressing Yuen's calling for partnership in making sense of the needs of formerly abused women and their children, we began to develop knowledge about how to sustain 'partnership' and identified what interrupted it.

*After finishing our own mind-map on the same poster, we began to discuss each of our thoughts pinned down on the paper. Amidst our discussion, Yuen who had been sitting all the way next to us fetched YY a piece of paper on which he had prepared his own mind map (see the above). He kept asking his mum to read it. He asked her to read again and again in order to make sure she had gone through the details of his mind map. He*

then turned to other members, urging them to circulate the mind map for discussion. He didn't have many words (verbal), but his body language obviously told us that he had a lot to

tell. He first went to NF

and asked her to read it as his mum had done. We then circulated the mind map within adult members and all of us were very shocked.

The shock, for me at least, was firstly from our ignorance to the needs of the child of our participant until he took the initiative to raise them to us. Secondly, it was because of the content that showed to us how complicated the problems faced by children were, after they had lived with intimate partner violence against their mothers. Last but not least, the shock came from the capability of this child aged 12 in articulating what troubled his life currently with extraordinary clarity and intelligibility. (Field notes, dated 23 Feb 2013)

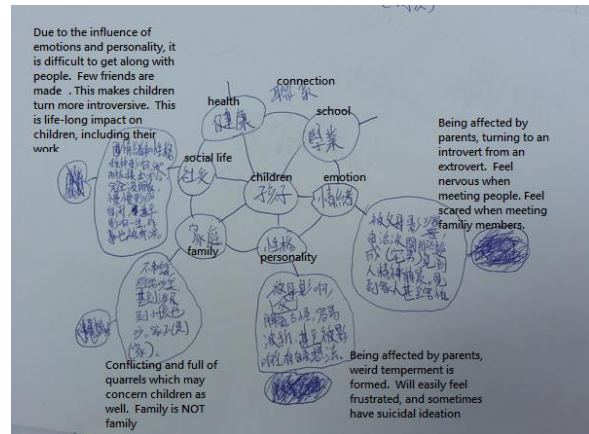


Fig. 6.2 mind-map prepared by Yuen

By reflecting on how we responded to Yuen's calling, we understood that Yuen's willingness to participate in the inquiring group was the result of our positive responses to his calling for partnership. Yuen's mind map suggested to us the insufficiency of our knowledge of the needs and experiences of 'children' who lived in families with intimate partner violence. This, at the same time, challenged our definition of the situation as 'the "adult group" sitting together for serious stuff while a child was sitting next and playing around'. Though that definition was largely unconscious, fortunately, the 'adult group' did not hold on it when the mind-map was presented to YY; if it had, Yuen would have been asked to go back to playing and so as not to 'disturb us'. With hindsight, we recognized that 'listening', 'attending to', and 'reading into details of their views' were necessary in positively

responding to teenage participants' callings for partnership. By reading the mind-map and discussing each item in real depth, Yuen was confident that his views were seriously considered in the group for service design, and therefore he stopped urging us to keep an eye on it, and even left us for some more play.

Partnership-making efforts were sustained by further preparing ourselves to collaborate with more teenage participants. Women participants agreed that we should collaborate with teenage participants according to the same participatory principles that underpinned our CGI. In the discussion, the first issue that came across in the group meeting was about how to ensure coercion-free participation of teenage participants. In this regard, we invited teenage participants to design the mechanism that they believed would work well in protecting their freedom to join and leave the group.

*Women participants and I thanked the contribution of Yuen in our last inquiring session and explicated to him and Dai about our views on their participation, particularly our promises of treating them as equal partners, ensuring their participation to be entirely voluntary, and our respect to their views. After then, I asked Yuen and Dai if they were still willing to join the group. They said they had to think about it. YY began to say, 'Son, it was you who asked us to get you involved'. Yuen withheld his words and sat back. I said (and immediately followed by a number of members as well), 'YY, you have promised not to force him to participate... and (turn to Yuen) it's ok if you don't want to, or you need some more time to think about this.' I continued, 'if, I say if you and Dai are going to participate in our group, what do you think is helpful for ensuring you participate entirely voluntarily?' Yuen thought for quite a while and Dai was relatively silent. Yuen said, 'if we want to join, then, we will join. If we don't want to join, they can't drag us to.' I asked, 'if mummy keeps asking you or scold you or just drag you to the meeting, what should we do?' Yuen replied, 'eh...we should tell you! So that, you can stop our mums from doing so.' I asked,*

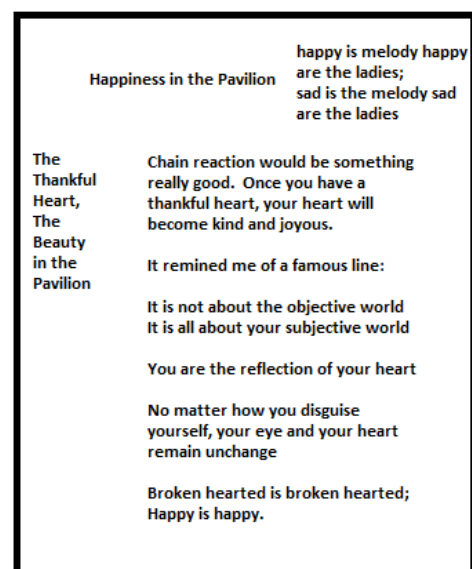
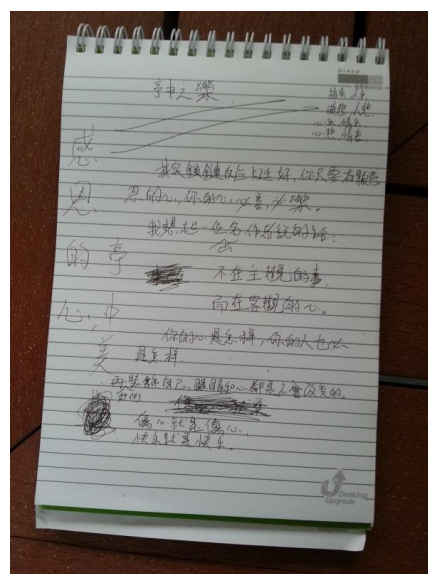
*'shall I stand in and make sure you are not forced to be in? Like having our group to suspend your involvement for a while until you feel OK to join us again?' Replied Yuen, 'Yes, that's good.' I asked, 'but how can you tell me if your mum is forcing you to come?' 'I can whatsapp you.' Said Yuen. 'Dai, is that what you also agree on?' I asked. Dai said, 'yes, that's good.' 'Is every member in our group agreeing on this mechanism to ensure children's participation is entirely voluntary?' YY said, 'yes, I feel alright with it.' Other members also said yes to this plan. Dai continued, 'sometimes, I just couldn't be here regularly because this is the last year of my secondary school and I could join only when I have time.' NF said, 'Of course, you don't need to attend every session, just take your time.' I said, 'you participate only when you feel comfortable, able and willing to.' Dai said, 'OK.' (Field notes, dated 2 March 2013)*

From the experiences of inviting Yuen and Dai into partnership with us, we learnt that espousing participatory principles was insufficient to 'partnership-making'. The 'withholding' and 'sitting back' of Yuen, after YY questioned him about his ambivalence for participating in the group, he suggested to us that 'partnership-making' had to be sustained by 'the practising of participatory principles' both in the group and in family life practices. Actions, gestures, and expressions that reproduced the power imbalances embedded in the 'mother-child' and 'adult-child' relationships would be working in contradiction with the participatory principles that we espoused. By discussing the above episode in the afternoon session on 2 March 2013, we discovered that 'ordering' or 'interrogative speeches' were the reproduction of the hierarchical relationship between mothers and sons/daughters. The hierarchical undertone of these behaviours ran against the participatory principles and resulted in 'withdrawal' behaviours of teenage participants. Whereas, 'inviting teenage participants to problem solving' was found to be more able to encourage the participation of teenage participants because we had seen teenage participants responding to such an invitation with fuller elaboration of their views, ideas, and decisions. Teenage participants' design for ensuring

coercion-free participation demonstrated to us that respect for their views and ‘ensuring their views had real impact’ on actual practices should be coupled in order to sustain the partnership. Illuminated by the emerging understanding of how to sustain ‘partnership calling and response’, we agreed to dedicate some more sessions on unpacking the living together experiences of mother participants and their sons/daughters, in order to help us identify both partnership-making and partnership-breaking actions that are overlooked in our daily life practices.

The unpacking of mother-son/daughter stories was scheduled on 17 and 23 March 2013, in order to increase our competence in sustaining partnership making and collaboration with teenage participants. At the moment, we were still waiting for the ethics approval for ‘children’s participation’ from the university. Before all, we started our inquiry as usual by practising our group dance that unexpectedly taught us another lesson on ‘partnership making’:

*Once the music started, we all turned so quiet. It was like having all our memories flashing back along the song. After times of practising, Yuen who had been staying with us all the way again fetched us a piece of paper. On which he wrote some poems and prose (see below) to describe what struck him when he was watching us dancing.*



**Fig. 6.3 Poem/proses written by Yuen**

*We invited Yuen to talk to us what the poems/prose were about and, this time, he was so willing to explain to us what he thought. Surprisingly, he was not as quiet as I thought he was. He was an outspoken boy who loved observing, thinking, and was very sentimental. He loved jotting down his feelings and sharing them with us. I would say he was so ready for communication. He liked knowing what we were doing and contributing his views to what we were doing at the moment. He said, 'you are going to perform it somewhere at some point, aren't you? I have somehow come across another version of sign language for this song on the Internet. I think that was even more beautiful. Should I check that out for you as well?' The whole group was so excited and said 'yes' to him and kept saying thanks to 'Yuen Gor Gor' (Elder brother Yuen)*

Mothers usually assumed they had full knowledge about their sons and daughters, and therefore could make decisions on their behalf. This assumption was challenged by Yuen's presentation of his prose/poem in which words were not organized in familiar alignment and groupings. Women participants one after another questioned their own ability to make sense of Yuen's words and his experience of watching us dancing. The complete unintelligibility, arising from the flourishing of different forms of knowing and presenting, was highlighted by the participation of teenage participants. It gave women participants a chance to suspend their reading/understanding over their 'children' and therefore open themselves up to alternative understandings of their sons/daughters. By inviting Yuen to explain himself to us, women participants and Yuen were engaging in the co-construction of meanings in making sense of Yuen's experience of participating in the group.

The ethics approval for 'children participation' was granted on 23 March 2013 - it happened to coincide with our last scheduled session on unpacking mother-son/daughter stories. Revealing these stories was a process filled with both laughter and tears because unfolding mothering experiences facilitated women



participants in recognizing how their experiences of being abused, personal values, and lived experiences with 'children' had shaped their mothering work. Women participants came to know that they had an uncompromising agenda in mothering, i.e. taking care of children's health, ensuring enough food for children, supporting children in academic achievement, managing time for children, and making children happy (see Appendix 6.1). Women agreed that these agendas reflected their personal values of being a mother. In this regard, failing in achieving any of these mothering agendas could be easily translated into failure in mothering in general. This then induced frustrations and a sense of guilt in the mother participants.

*'SY once asked me a math question, and it took me quite a while to figure out the solution. She turned away from me and said she would be looking out for some classmates to help. I was so angry...thinking that I couldn't help her.'* Said YT. (7<sup>th</sup> session)

*'I cooked him dinner and specially prepared his favourite, fried eggs with tomatoes. I got everything ready on the table and asked him to come along for dinner. He was sticking to his computer for online games...and no matter how many times I had asked him to give a pause and dine with me, he simply had his butts staying on the computer chair. I was so mad at that time... I had dinner myself and poured away all the food on the table and scolded at him for ...I don't know how long.'* PF recalled the last dining memory with her son. (8<sup>th</sup> session)

The help role of a mother upheld by mother participants obscured mother participants from appreciating their sons and daughters' ability to solve problems for themselves or by seeking help from others. At times, mother participants might even feel they were not needed anymore by their 'children'. These stereotypes of mother and mothering work were recognized to be a source of hindrance to partnership because it did not allow flexibility in agenda setting for performing 'mothering' work, and also did not allow negotiation on how care should be delivered in the mother-son/daughter relationship. At worst, this particular form of

mothering created dependence rather than encouraging the development of autonomy.

As we became more conscious that sons and daughters had kept sending out 'partnership callings' in daily life which were overlooked by us, we scheduled an additional session on digging out successful and failed experiences in sustaining partnership-making. We analyzed the data collected in this inquiry session, and the additional session held on 30 March 2013, to illuminate the following: (1) how to initiate 'partnership callings' through learning the calling strategies employed by teenage participants, (2) how the 'partnership callings' were overlooked in daily life, and, more importantly, (3) what kinds of 'callings to relationships' mother participants had sent through family life practices. These inquiry focuses remained in the latter practices of partnership-making with teenage participants and yielded a longer list of 'tested' partnership-making and breaking strategies.

#### 6.2.1.2.1 'Partnership callings by teenage participants' revealed in mother-son/daughter stories

Despite the way the callings were expressed, they shared the effect of alleviating the power imbalance embedded in the conventional 'mother-child' relationship in which mothers were perceived as the life mentors of their children who were always the wrong doers/problems to be managed. Through either 'demonstrating their capability to do well', 'arguing/reasoning for their actions/behaviours against their mothers', 'taking up responsibility in self-care and caring for others', 'showing initiatives to communicate their views and opinions equally with "adults"' or 'inviting mothers/other "adults" to live the way they live (in contrast with living the way mothers/adults want them to live)', teenage participants were reclaiming their voices in relation to their mothers. By analysing these callings scattered in the mother-son/daughter stories, we were able to conceptualize them into three major categories of strategy, namely, 'building common language', 'developing common life practices', and 'guiding the way to partnership'. Having learnt about the ways of making callings, mothers and other women participants in the group began to

imitate the calling strategies carried out by their sons and daughters for developing a more equal and collaborative relationship in family life and in the inquiry group.

*Building common language.* This could be carried out through ‘inviting people to learn their language’ (slangs, tones and daily expressions) or ‘inviting people to make sense of things together’. The former were actions employed by teenage participants to seek our acknowledgement of their ways of saying/seeing/describing things. They loved to share with us the latest slang that went viral in their networks, and how they express emotions and relationships with these ‘trendy terms’. Bui, daughter of HL, shared with her mother the phrases she normally used to describe old ladies and young girls on the internet, while PF’s son asked her to learn to speak foul language as he did with friends,

*‘After asking him out for dinner last time, he suddenly asked if I wanted to be friends with him. I was so surprised. He kept on saying if I would like to be his friend, I had to speak their languages and act the way they act....I would not say foul language, so, what can I do?’ asked PF in the group session talking about ‘how to court your son/daughter’. (20<sup>th</sup> session)*

In addition to learning one’s language, teenage participants would also invite mothers and women participants to make sense of things (a collection of experiences, emotions, feelings, information, observations and various encounters) together. These callings were often not expressed directly by asking ‘what do you think about...?’, neither were they ‘advice seeking’ tones or expressions, but they were largely delivered with ‘ambiguous’, ‘condense’ and ‘unclear’ expressions which required us to unpack them together with teenage participants. Yuen’s mind-map, his prose/poem, and Dai’s opinions for the statement on Children’s Rights were examples of this kind. At times, teenage participants may even use ‘metaphors’ to describe their views, for example, ‘collagen’, ‘single-log bridge’ and ‘concrete’ in describing different mothering styles. However, all these invitations usually indicated that teenage participants were holding lightly their interpretations

of things, and were ready for us to go beyond the surface meaning, unpack their callings and construct meanings with them.

Building common language with sons/daughters could be initiated by mothers as well. HL had been trying very hard to catch up with the terminological trends, in order to maintain smooth communication with her daughter.

*'I had peeped at how she responded to her friends on QQ [online communication tool developed in the mainland China, similar to ICQ] ...what I did was to imitate the way she called her friends, and the way she called me in front of her friends. I saw her calling me 'Lo Jia' (older sister) on QQ, and I just used the same term to call myself after learning about it. I would say, "Hey, Lo Jia is going out tonight. Do you want me to get you anything?" I just want to use the same words she uses in communicating with friends. We are equal, equal as friends.'* HL explained to other women participants how she maintained the friendship with her daughter. (20<sup>th</sup> session)

HL also advised women participants to stay in touch with the society, make more friends of different lifestyles and stay curious. She argued that the key to staying up-to-date was to live beyond homemaking, and learn more about how other people live. Through these efforts, HL was able to bring in new 'terms' and experiences to her daughter. Given that almost all mother participants had been condemned by their sons/daughters for being outdated, this strategy appeared to be promising in turning the table.

*Developing common life practices.* Teenage participants not only taught their mothers the 'trendy terms' that they use, but also how to live up to the trends, for example, trendy online communication tools, mobile apps, fashion trends, beauty trends, and jokes. As revealed by women participants, their sons/daughters at least sometime in their relationship were enthusiastic in sharing their lives with their mothers. They wanted their mothers to be in, and to share life with them. Mothers who were more ready to try new things would attract more invitations

from their sons/daughters for developing common life practices. Bui, HL's daughter, constantly introduced her mum to the latest trends of nail polishing. As with the welcome from HL, Bui regularly experimented colours on the hands and feet of her mum. Moreover, HL would actively try out new communication tools used by Bui, so that they could have shared experiences in making friends. More than inviting mothers into their life practices, teenage participants sometimes would invite mothers to allow them to get involved in mothers' life practices as well.

*SY asked me to add her in our whatsapp group because she wanted to be part of it. I was curious of her initiative because this was the first time we met anyway. However, it was still good to have her being involved in our inquiring group because YT would feel less torn between the inquiring group meeting and having a weekend break with her daughter. (Field notes, dated 27 April 2013)*

SY's calling for participation received a huge welcome from group members because such a change was unexpected, as Siu did not respond to our invitation sent through her mother in late March. YT was also very delighted to have her daughter in the whatsapp group because she thought it could let Siu know more about what we were doing on weekends. After getting involved in the group, Siu took up the role of reporting live conversations of group members to YT who was still saving money for a smartphone (device for communication apps). Moreover, Siu volunteered in taking care of younger kids in the mother's day event and in drawing pictures for promoting our group. YT also became more available for group meeting after SY's involvement because Siu was more willing to negotiate with her about the care plan during the group meetings. All these happenings demonstrated to us how partnership could transform the problems of 'women' into the problems of 'us' (women and their sons/daughters).

However, developing common life practices became a bit easier only when women were physically, financially, and mentally more stable after leaving the abusive

relationship. Women participants revealed that they had suffered tremendous stress, emotional fluctuations, and a range of difficulties in leaving their ex-husbands; those experiences severely impeded them from developing common life practices with their sons/daughters. Other than the daily care routine, women participants always said, 'we basically had no mood for anything other than settling in as soon as possible.' Nonetheless, women participants would have even withheld information about their difficulties, sickness and problems from their sons/daughters, in the hope of 'NOT letting our problems overshadow their childhood'. Therefore, it was not unusual for women participants to have no/few common life practices, other than the daily care routine with their sons/daughters after leaving. KW even said she had no idea why her son (aged 18 during the inquiry) came back home as late as 4 a.m.

Furthermore, the financial difficulty encountered by formerly abused women highly limited their choice of activities in the leisure time when they were more available for developing common life with their sons/daughters. Sadly, the lack of specialized services for formerly abused women and their children in Hong Kong marginalized their need for rebuilding intimacy and partnership through common life practices. Women participants also found the current government subsidized parent-child activities not very suitable for them.

*'I still remember how that happened. You know I had little time to go out with Siu in the leaving process, and I just felt sorry for all this. After settling down in the new home, I asked the social worker if there was any outing activity suitable for us. I just wanted to take her out on the weekend. In the activity, all children were accompanied by their fathers and mothers. I was with SY... (YT frowned)... and a child asked her mum why Siu was not having a father. Siu was running into tears and yelled at the girl, "I have a father! I have a father!" You just don't know how much that broke my heart.'* YT told (2<sup>nd</sup> session).

The limitation of choice in leisure activities would be usually eased after settling down, particularly when women participants had saved some money and gained more knowledge about the availability of subsidized activities in the community. However, it was undeniable that the lack of specialized activities for formerly abused women and their 'children' in formal domestic violence services had left these families with a need for a friendly, safe and welcoming social life entirely unattended to.

*Guiding the way to collaboration:* Sometimes, teenage participants were more sympathetic to our inability to respond to their callings appropriately. Even though we tried, and obviously they saw us trying, we could still get it wrong in doing so. Numerous examples could be cited for this (see also 'callings to relationships unconsciously sent by mother participants' in this chapter), for example:

*'I know, I know I have to respect him as he was turning to adulthood soon in just a couple of months. But I just couldn't help reproaching when I saw him taking girls home. As you said before, it was so normal for him to have girlfriends...and he doesn't have much money... this seems to be the only choice he has anyway...'* PF talked to us as if she was confessing for her paternalistic response because she had just observed some positive changes in her relationship with GW. (20<sup>th</sup> session)

Certainly, the mercy from teenage participants was not given. If we were lucky enough, our 'partnership-breaking responses' would receive understanding from teenage participants; however, when mercy was not granted, we always had to pay extra effort to gain the trust back.

Sustaining the partnership calling and responses between women participants and teenage participants was therefore not straightforward because it involved not only imitation of partnership making strategies, but also change of mothering habits. In this regard, it was also an experience of disenthraling oneself from the old form of self-determined mothering, and engaging in a new form of collaborative caring project. As described by women participants, it was something that was firmly

seated in one's values and experiences of being abused; these experiences had to be re-examined and re-interpreted in order to free them from the old life narratives and engage them into new ones. When teenage participants understood the hard work their mothers were undertaking, they would be more sympathetic to their sporadic paternalistic manners and some partnership breaking actions.

When teenage participants were able to consider the efforts their mothers were making, they would send out messages that guided the mothers' way to collaborate with them.

*'OK. You should still password lock the computer as I am honest to you I won't be able to control myself if I am given free access to it. However, you have to trust me that I am able to deal with my study plan. You just don't have to closely monitor how I am going with it... everybody here agreed?'* Yuen said, in our group meeting, when YY had been strongly annoyed by his decline in school results and brought up his study problem in the group. (13<sup>th</sup> session)

*'I tell you all, the way most of you are parenting your children was like "single-log bridge" which allows no alternatives at all for us. You determine everything and we just couldn't say no. I think aunt HL's way of parenting is more flexible. It was like 'collagen' which provides us support while being flexible enough for accommodating to our wishes. You should learn to be like that.'* Yuen gave his view after listening to the parenting experiences of women participants. (20<sup>th</sup> session)

6.2.1.2.2. 'How partnership callings from sons/daughters were overlooked' and the 'callings to unequal relationships were unconsciously sent by mother participants'

Callings to partnership from sons/daughters very often did not appear immediately acceptable and pleasing, and sometimes looked absurd and offensive at the first sight. Especially when teenage participants tried to develop a common language or



common life practices with mothers who spoke and lived very differently from them, the 'callings' could look even more ridiculous to women participants. Therefore, their invitations were usually ignored by mothers and even labelled as 'being uncooperative'.

*'My son told me to learn the slangs they use. He even asked me to speak foul language...you know the mother fxxking words...I am his mother, how could I say that to myself? Isn't that too ridiculous if I have said "fxxk your mother" to his face? That is insane.'* said angrily by PF. *'Yes, they always talk in slangs. I just couldn't understand.'* Said YY. I turned to PF and asked, *'...Well...Do you think he was doing something different from how you described your relationship with your son? You said he was ignoring you and just wouldn't respond to you at all even you had demonstrated your care to him.'* NF continued, *'Yes, he was asking you to join him!'* PF responded, *'Shall I join him saying the mother-fxxking words then?'* I turned to PF again, *'He was asking you to join him in speaking the same language, but it doesn't limit to foul language. It could be something else. He was getting you to know the way teenagers were living. For example, they use terms like 'Wat Gai' (屈機). It took me some time to understand what it meant and how it was used.'* NF continued, *'Yes, sometimes you can teach him a couple of new terms that he doesn't know.'* PF replied, *'see. I think there's much to learn then... the word "Y" constantly used in our whatsapp group ...what does it mean?' "Y" is "why". The short form.'* I replied. (7<sup>th</sup> session)

In face of these 'uncooperative' behaviours, women participants usually responded with the use of authority by either reproaching them for their absurdity or simply stopping them from talking/doing so. In revisiting the mother-son/daughter stories, 'uncooperative' incidents cited by women participants were revealed, including 'blaming mothers for taking them to Hong Kong', 'inviting mothers to speak foul language', 'postponing the tasks assigned by their mothers', and

'laughing at their mothers for being useless and outdated'. All these incidents turned the power hierarchy in the conventional mother-child model upside down, and required the women participants' responses in order to render them positive meanings for the construction of partnership. As we had learnt that any calling required a response to complete its meaning, women participants' responses with hostility, anger, and alienation adversely termed the disgruntled teenage participants as 'uncooperative', 'inappropriate' and 'problems to be managed' rather than 'yelling for equal voices', 'courage to speak up', and 'opportunities for developing alternative ways of living'. In addition, the use of authority was to reproduce the mother-child hierarchy, and lead us away from partnership. The use of authority was found to be expressed in many ways in the mother-son/daughter stories, for instances, 'ordering', 'controlling' and 'interrogating' (see diagram 6.3).

From the conversations quoted above, the invitation to speak foul language was at first seen by PF as the rejection of rebuilding intimacy or starting a partnership; however, by unpacking and reinterpreting the experiences in the group, PF was able to find an alternative understanding of GW's response. We saw GW's action as partnership calling for building a common language, which was a positive response to PF's effort in partnership making. Instead of continuous use of authority, PF later performed more partnership-making strategies, i.e. learning terms employed by GW in calling his friends, learning the latest slang, introducing GW to her work life and group life, and developing a common language and common life practices with GW. GW's relationship with PF was getting better after times of reflection-action-reflection cycles of 'making partnership', and she also shared with us her most 'trendy haircut' done by his son in the whatsapp (a mobile communication tool) group. PF even said her relationship with her son had not been that good since leaving the abuser.

In some cases, mothers would like to impose their understandings or definitions of situations on their sons/daughters; thereby, teenage participants' initiatives to venture their understandings of things were either neglected or repressed.

'Imposing' behaviours carried out by mothers tended to call for responses that presumed either 'submissiveness' or 'rebellion'. Therefore a battle for definition of situation would be easily triggered by the imposing behaviours. Yet worse was that a battle for definitions of situations/understandings of things forbade the development of partnership, and made it less possible to construct new meanings, understandings, and definitions that incorporated different lived experiences and ways of knowing for different participants.

*'You are lazy! I honestly tell you, you are just lazy!' YY said to Yuen. Yuen replied with some anger, 'I have told you I have already paid the fullest effort in revision but the results were still not satisfying. I have no control over that.' 'How much time did you spend on your computer and how much time did you spend on your books? Tell me! You tell me!' YY answered back. 'I have spent a lot of time on this! I did not play any computer game in the examination week.' 'Was that enough? You tell me, was that enough? You should have spent more time on English! This is your weakest subject among all.' YY continued to pick on the 'mistakes' made by Yuen. I could not help watching the fight going on and therefore I stood in. 'Yuen, could you take me your English textbooks, please?' I asked. He took me the book and I nicely asked him to read the words for me. He stopped after reading roughly 10 words. I asked again, 'why do you stop?' 'I don't know this word.' Said Yuen. 'What would you do if you find words that you don't know?' I asked again. 'I will look up from the dictionary...but I have already forgotten how to pronounce it.' Replied Yuen. 'What would you do after looking up the words from the dictionary?' I wanted to know more about how Yuen did his revision. Yuen then replied, 'Erh... nothing...just continue on.' 'Well...this book is completely brand new, isn't it? Have you ever used second hand textbooks in your life?' I asked. 'No. Never...never.' Said Yuen. (Field notes, dated 21 April 2013)*

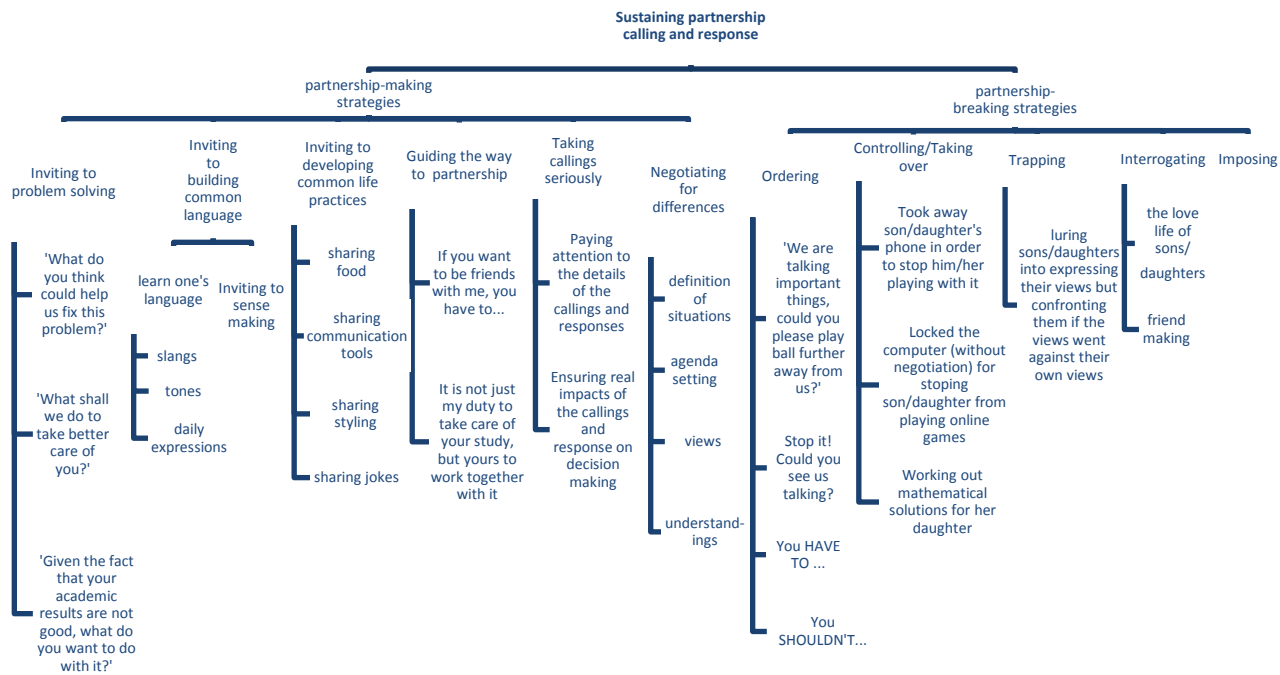
The explanation of the 'poor' English results could be neither 'lazy' nor 'out of control', but something else, for example, lacking language learning skills. However, YY's imposition of her explanation on the 'poor' English results of Yuen— 'you are just lazy! – triggered a battle over the definition of the situation. The battle engaged YY and Yuen into a competition of 'evidence provision', in order to gain legitimacy for their own definition/understanding. This battle led away from alternative understanding because it seized the chance for re-examining the lived experiences of Yuen in revising English and YY's understanding of 'laziness' (in this case, length of time spent on revision instead of the effort of looking out for effective English learning methods).

The damages to partnership due to the lack of readiness for negotiation were also identified elsewhere in the inquiry, and many of them related to women's grip on the mothering goals set out by themselves. SY's help seeking ability that had challenged YT's mothering agenda was unexpectedly responded to by rage,

*'She once asked me a math problem, and I couldn't solve even I had been thinking hard to do so. She then told me that she would be asking her classmate...I turned to be so angry.'* Said YT. (7<sup>th</sup> session)

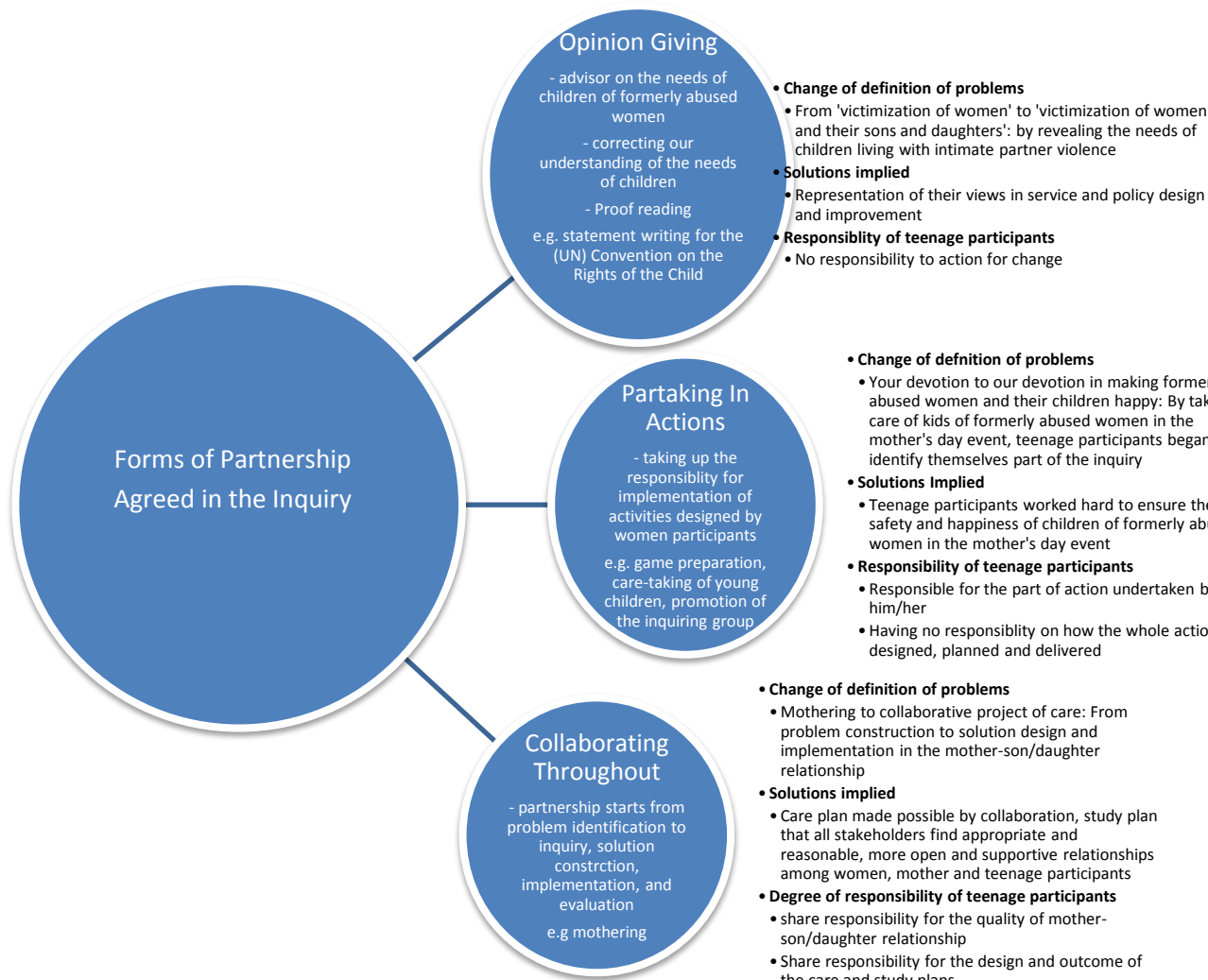
By re-examining these experiences, women participants reconfirmed that 'readiness for negotiation over differences' was critical to partnership making as it had proved itself in the 'mind-map drawing incident'. Any action that shut down the room for negotiation was, to all extents, terminating the partnership. Nonetheless, 'negotiation' carried out by 'imposing' one's understanding on the others was found to turn the 'negotiation' into a battleground where no-one could win over the other because the understanding/definition of situation remained unable to capture the multiplicity of lived experiences, views, and life practices. Another tricky 'partnership-breaking' strategy employed by mother participants was 'trapping'. This was serving the same purpose of imposing their understandings on 'children', but in a trickier way. Women participants name this strategy 'trapping' because they had very often lured their sons/daughters to speak

their views by pretending to be open and ready for alternatives, for example, views on dating someone before 18. However, when the expressed views went against theirs, mother participants would turn to confront their sons/daughters with their own views. YT described her daughter's response to her 'trapping' behaviour, 'Hey, we absolutely don't need to talk. You can just get it straight. Just say what you want!' Instead of 'imposing' and 'trapping', revisiting the lived experiences of each other, getting to make sense of the realities in each other's terms, and trying out their ways of living were found more promising in producing a more encompassing and inclusive understandings of the situation co-lived by mothers, sons/daughters, and also women participants. By practising these 'partnership-making' strategies, the mono-vocal understandings either held by women participants or teenage participants were found to be transformed, and they also illuminated how problems could be solved differently in the partnership.



**Diagram 6.2 The concept of 'sustaining partnership calling and response': A summary of the 'partnership-making' and 'partnership-breaking' strategies discovered in this inquiry:**

### 6.3 The Three Forms of Partnerships and Transformation of Problems



**Diagram 6.3 The relationship between 'forms of partnership' to 'redefining problems and responsibility'**

Teenage participants' membership was endorsed by their explicit agreement to be member of the group. It took place only when the partnership-making was sustained in both the group and their own family life. It was discovered that partnering with teenage participants had transformed the inquiring group from a community of practice that focuses on women's issues to one that also attends to issues arisen from the relationship with teenage participants, and that affects the lives of the teenage participants. As informed by the inquiry findings, the form of

partnership was determined by considering a collection of factors, i.e. availability of time, their interest in that particular topic, and clashes with tutorials and extra-curricular activities. In light of this, even though teenage participants did not attend the meetings as often as women participants, and varied in the form of partnership from event to event, and issue to issue, they were part of the community of practice sustained by this CGI. Although teenage participants did not always participate in the core of the community of practice, that did not discount their full participation in the inquiring group, as it was guaranteed in the partnership-making process that allowed them to participate fully in the three layers of participation. Wenger had an enlightening insight into participation in a community of practice by distinguishing 'peripheral members' from 'marginal members' (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999). It was pointed out that marginal members were those prevented from full participation, while the peripheral members were those who chose to remain peripheral even though they could become core.

'A community of practice may or may not have an explicit agenda on a given week, and even if it does, it may not follow the agenda closely. Inevitably, however, people in communities of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems' (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, pp. 139-140)

CGI, as primarily driven by the interest and commitments of members in exploring problems and solutions that concern their lives, has intrinsically embedded in it the flexibility for negotiating the meeting agendas and forms of partnership in devising solutions. Nevertheless, it relies on the acknowledgement of the capabilities and knowledge of participants, whose lived experiences, successful strategies, and failures are to be shared within the group for the purpose of devising solutions (practical knowing). Alongside the continuation of the reflection-action-reflection cycles, the inquiry group enjoyed the flourishing of knowledge in running services for other formerly abused women, resolving problematic identities and, in



collaboration with teenage participants, delivering care to both abused mothers and their sons/daughters.

### ***6.3.1 'Opinion Giving' for Transforming Needs of Women to Needs of Women and Their Sons/Daughters***

Opinion giving was the first successfully negotiated partnership taking place at the beginning of our inquiry when Yuen presented his mind-map to us (women participants). Yuen invited us to listen to his views on the needs of 'children' of formerly abused women and, by continuous partnership-making calling and responding that followed, he later agreed to be our 'advisor' in making sense of the service needs of formerly abused women *and* their children. The mind-map was repeatedly employed, with the permission of Yuen, by women participants on various occasions, i.e. in a government public consultation on domestic violence services in Hong Kong, in composing the statement for the Forthright Caucus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in an event for advocating children's participation in Hong Kong.

More participation than 'opinion giving' was considered inappropriate at the beginning of the inquiry group by both women participants and Yuen. Before the governmental public consultation, the form of participation of Yuen was repeatedly discussed among both women and teenage participants, while Yuen's worries and our worries were fully expressed and considered. Our worries about Yuen exposing to the 'public' in the identity of children of formerly abused women echoed with Yuen's own unwillingness to carry that title in relating to others in the society. Moreover, at the time, we had not yet agreed on a mechanism to ensure voluntary participation of teenage participants before the consultation day. It appeared to us too risky to request further participation of teenage participants in any inquiry activities. Even though the mechanism was designed and agreed to be put into implementation on the morning of the consultation day, the workability and reliability of that mechanism was still to be tested in practice. In this regard, at that

moment, 'opinion giving' provides an appropriate distance for Yuen to present his views to the public on the needs of children who have witnessed intimate partner violence, meanwhile, it allowed him sufficient flexibility in negotiating his identity in relation to the violence experienced by his mother.

In this collaboration, Yuen gave permission to the presenting women to display his mind-map in the consultation, and to express his views on his behalf. We also secured anonymity throughout the presentation where possible. The first draft of the presentation was written collaboratively by YY and Yuen at home, and the wording was modified in the group for increasing clarity of expression. Yuen's 'opinion giving' role continued in the later statement writing. Compared to women participants, our advisors, Yuen and Dai, shared less responsibility for producing and guaranteeing the quality of the end product, i.e. the presentation in the governmental public consultation and the statement on UNCRC. As said by Yuen on 17 March 2013, 'I am here to advise you on how to write it. Of course, sometimes, I will tell you what the better terminologies are.' Therefore, in the process of writing the statement, Yuen and Dai had contributed many ideas, but were not involved in the writing at all. During this process, we realized that teenage participants in our inquiry group loved using compact expressions and even metaphors in expressing their views. In this regard, women participants had to constantly consult our 'advisors' for unpacking the meanings of their ideas. In this 'opinion giving' partnership, we also realized that Yuen and Dai were increasingly confident in our determination to sustain the equal partnership because they were becoming more active in expressing their views and even requesting to be involved in partaking in the inquiry actions, such as game preparation for women participants, taking care of younger children of formerly abused women in outdoor activities, and teaching women participants how to engage with their sons/daughters.

This inquiry group was initially set out to 'concentrate' on the service needs of formerly abused women in Hong Kong for the purpose of working out solutions to

improve the current domestic violence services. However, our focus of inquiry was transformed by the partnering with teenage participants - (1) from working with formerly abused women to working with formerly abused women and their sons/daughters, and (2) from working to meet the service needs of formerly abused women to working to meet the service needs of formerly abused women and their sons/daughters. The partnership built in the process of the inquiry not only illuminated the separate needs of two different groups of participants, but also brought to the surface the problems and power imbalance in the mother-son/daughter relationship, and those in the adult-child relationship. The focus on the problems encountered by individual women participants, such as career planning, search for happiness, physical health problems, and mental stress was expanded to include problems encountered by their sons and daughters, and also those encountered in collaborating with them, for example, study problems, partnership making, intimacy building, and emotional support for sons and daughters.

### ***6.3.2 'Partaking in Actions' for Transforming Your Mission to Our Mission***

'Opinion giving' dominated the beginning phase of our partnership with teenage participants, and the next dominating form of partnership negotiated in the inquiry group was 'partaking in actions'. The negotiation of this form of partnership reflected teenage participants' increased confidence in making partnership with us, as they had shown less hesitation in challenging their mothers and other women participants in the group. Yuen had become very used to the role of 'advisor' after a month's participation in the inquiry, and he constantly corrected us amidst discussions and 'proof read' our writings. Dai, who rarely expressed himself, also demonstrated a drastic change in the inquiry in that he openly challenged our appreciation of his mother's positive changes, and was willing to bring his rivalry with KW back to the group for solutions (see intimacy building). Siu and Bui who had been hesitant in joining our group suddenly requested for adding them to our 'whatsapp' group. 'Partaking in actions' differs from 'opinion giving' that the

former assumed teenage participants the responsibility for action to change whereas the latter assumed no role in making changes to the situation. Therefore, 'partaking in actions' engaged teenage participants not only in speech acts but also in other forms of knowing in the cooperative problem-solving process. In this inquiry, teenage participants had partaken in game preparation and delivery in the group meetings, taking care of young children during outdoor activities, and doing online research for improving our dance performance. The involvement of different forms of knowing of teenage participants allowed us to undergo the reflection-action-reflection cycles together. This provided us more opportunities to engage teenage participants in constructing richer knowledge in care and service provision for formerly abused women and their children.

In the Mother's Day Event (for details, please refer to Appendix 6.2), Siu and Dai had demonstrated to the inquiry group the positive effect of their *perseverance*, *patience* and *companionship* to the safety and happiness of formerly abused mothers and their children. Yuen and Bui refused to volunteer in the Mother's Day Event because they had no interest in taking care of children, while Siu and Dai agreed to help because they thought they would be there 'anyway' (given that they currently had strong intimacy with their mothers). However, Siu and Dai performed very differently from what they called 'would be there anyway' because they chose to stay when they were asked by Yuen and Bui to come and play some computer games. More than that, Siu and Dai worked on more than what they had promised (looking after young children in games), and helped whenever they could see a role for them, for example, packing gifts and preparing flowers. By reflecting on the event, Siu and Dai's tolerance to the boredom of not playing by themselves, patience in taking care of the mischievously behaving younger children (i.e. pouring water on others, showering the glittering powder on the floor, and damaging the cards made by other children), and companionship to children whose mothers were not willing to play with them were said, by their mothers and themselves, to be very different from their 'normal practices'. Siu who was described by YT as angry and bad tempered was extraordinarily gentle and patient to young children. When

she returned from a long wait for the mother who did not want to play with children, she said, 'I just didn't want him to stand there alone waiting. So, I stood with him, waiting.' Many women participants were moved by this scene as it told us that teenage participants were sensitive to the needs of other children and knew what to do to best help them through. Dai, who kept an eye on the safety of children during the 'card making' session, also revealed that 'computer game was so tempting'. I had a moment thinking about leaving and play computer games. But...aya... that's not good.' In the sharing and evaluating session after the Mother's Day Event, we reflected on our participation in the process and collectively agreed that the altering of 'normal practices' by teenage participants was a valuable effort in making a difference in the life of formerly abused women.



**Fig. 6.4 Picture of Siu (the leftmost) and the family she took care of in the Mother's Day Event (masks added to protect privacy)**

We realized from the Mother's Day Event that partaking teenagers began to perceive 'action for providing care and services to formerly abused women' not just our (women participants/mothers) problems, but also theirs. Even though Yuen and Bui asked Siu to leave early for some computer games, she stayed with the family she chose to care for. Siu who had been hesitant in joining our group even eagerly told people by the end of the event that she was a member of our inquiry group. She also contributed her drawings to a promotional event of the group when we were ready to launch it to the social activists' network.

However, no trajectory of participation should be assumed here, for instance, from 'opinion giving' to 'partaking' and then 'collaborating'. As suggested throughout

this chapter, the form of partnership that both women participants and teenage participants would like to take on board depends on a variety of considerations. It could be children's interests, clashes with extra-curricular activities, tests and examinations, moods, and the most important factor, their relationship with their mothers (see partnership-making). At any time that 'partnership-breaking' took place, teenage participants could suddenly withdraw from any participation in the group. As agreed, the prolonged absence of a teenage participant would be directly addressed by me to see if they encountered any problems in participation.

### **6.3.3 'Collaborating' in Transforming Mothering to Mutual Care Project**

'Collaborating' meant that teenage participants were willing to engage in partnership with women participants to follow through the process of inquiry, beginning from identification of problem to the reflection-action-reflection cycles that followed. In a collaborative partnership, both teenage and women participants were ready for taking the responsibility of design, implementation, and improving the outcomes of the solutions co-constructed in the inquiry meetings, instead of leaving all the consequences to either party. In this inquiry, 'mothering' was the only issue addressed in a 'collaborative partnership' with teenage participants (almost only Yuen). Approaching the end of this inquiry, 'mothering' was found to be a problematic term by women participants on reflection because it termed 'the problems arising from the mother-child relationship as children's problems and mother's responsibility'. After many learning cycles in 'making partnership with teenage participants' and in 'solving problems through partnerships', women participants all nodded their heads when YY said the following in the last parenting session,

*'we all used to think it was the problem of our children. It was them poorly behaved, them being lazy, them being unreasonable... but after all, we have found it was us...problems. It was us making them behave that way.'*  
(20<sup>th</sup> session)

On the grounds of this new understanding, women were more willing to negotiate their mothering goals with their sons and daughters and define problems together; more importantly, women and their sons and daughters could work together to design and implement strategies or measures to make the goals come true. Through collaborating with teenage participants in addressing problems arising from the mother-son/daughter relationships, we had transformed 'mothering' into 'mother-son/daughter practices' that ensured care was rendered to both the mother and the child through their collaboration.

Collaborative partnership was successfully achieved between women participants and Yuen in handling the problems arising from the mother-child relationship between YY and him. At the very beginning of the inquiry, it was always YY who brought her problems in mothering back to the group, seeking advice for how to 'properly manage' her child, including making him more hardworking, nurturing his perseverance, boosting his confidence and locking him out of computer games. However, her endeavours went entirely contrary to her son's callings for partnership that took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the inquiry. Yuen's calling for partnership allowed us to see how the 'real concerns' and 'needs' of Yuen were largely ignored when the mothering goals were all set by YY. YY shared her feelings after reading the mind-map prepared by Yuen,

*'Actually, I know all these problems. He might have told me sometime in the past. But I ...I just...' (2<sup>nd</sup> session)*

The mind-map prepared by Yuen had not only expanded our understanding of the needs of children of formerly abused women, but also helped us learn about specific problems faced by Yuen in becoming a happier and more motivated teenager. Yuen thought that children of formerly abused women could be turned into a 'Zha Nam' (nerd, 宅男) (see fig. 6.2), an introvert who loved staying at home and indulging oneself in the virtual world, because of the emotional disturbances experienced in the conflicting and disruptive family relationships. However, YY saw Yuen's 'addiction' to computer games as a consequence of his weakness in self-

control and laziness. Even though Yuen repeatedly emphasized that he had already made a full effort in doing revision, his 'addiction' to computer games was always the counter evidence that discounted his claim. The tension between mother-centred mothering upheld by YY and the 'making partnership' project promoted by the group had carried on for around 2 months after the first calling for partnership (mind-map) was identified in the group.

When we were learning how to make partnership in the group, Yuen was also becoming increasingly active in our group meetings. He had become so used to being our '*Gor Gor*' and 'advisor' who would guide us through the difficulties in understanding the lived experiences of children of formerly abused women, and how their experiences could inform policy and service improvement. This advisory role continued until 21 April, when Yuen agreed with YY that they would bring their relationship distresses to the inquiry group for discussion because both of them found it more helpful in conflict resolution.

The presenting problems were initially tied around the poor academic results of Yuen, particularly in English, and his lack of perseverance in making a difference. However, in order to sustain our partnership-making principles, we suggested Yuen tell us more about his views on achievement. He began to tell us about his stories of 'converting from a confident happy kid to a depressive introvert', his nostalgia for the good old days in mainland China and his love towards his father (the abuser was his step-father). Like the women participants, Yuen began to unpack his lived experiences for the co-construction of meanings in the group, in order to seek alternative solutions to live the energetic and motivated life he once lived. Instead of poor academic achievement as the central problem of 'mothering', the collapse of self-esteem, loss of supportive social network, and detachment from his father's love were found to be central to the maladaptation of Yuen in migrating to Hong Kong. In due course, YY also gained chances to resolve misunderstandings that had been standing between Yuen and herself.



*'I always can't understand why did you divorce my dad? If you didn't divorce him, I would have been doing very well in the same school, living nicely in the same big house and could play guitar with him. Why? Why you just went away with uncle D?' Yuen stared at YY and questioned. Surprisingly, YY was very composed and calm. She replied, 'Son, do you know, when I left your dad, he had already sold everything he had on gambling. I had been working to support the whole family including your grandmother (mother of Yuen's dad) for a very long time. I was at that time sacked from the industry and I could no longer bear the debts. The big house you fancy for was not there! It was not there already! At that moment, I met uncle D who promised to take care of both of us. I just thought, I was a divorced women with a son...he did not mind about all these...' Yuen was very shocked. I could tell from his face. He was gobsmacked and immediately grabbed a smartphone for GAMES. I finally understood why he loved computer games so much because this was where he could escape from all the life disturbances and chaos. A couple of us asked Yuen nicely to put down his phone and talk to us. We still had to look for practical solutions. (Field notes, dated 21 April 2013)*

The unpacking of the transition stories of Yuen on 21 April 2013 was definitely a breakthrough because this was the first time we started to partner with each other from problem identification to solution design and implementation. Since then, Yuen decided that he would like to stay in the 'Band 1' school<sup>49</sup> he was studying and tried harder to achieve better because he believed that his frustration was the main source of his academic failures, instead of his inability. In order to attain his preferred outcome in academic study, Yuen invited us to watch him and remind

---

<sup>49</sup> There is no official banding system for secondary schools in Hong Kong, but there is a banding system for primary school students. Primary students are allocated to 1/3 bands according to the results in the standardized internal assessment tests. Students allocated in band 1 will be the first group offered a place in their preferred secondary schools, then band 2 and band 3 students consecutively. Secondary schools which are consistently full after the first round of allocation would be called 'band 1' schools because they take up most of the 'best scored students'. Details, please see also [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/SecSch\\_E\\_2014\\_web.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/primary-secondary/spa-systems/secondary-spa/general-info/SecSch_E_2014_web.pdf)

him whenever he stuck to computer games again. He agreed to password lock the computer and he did not want to have the password because he thought he was 'weak in self-control' and 'need(ed) someone to monitor'. At the same time, he said he would not be feeling embarrassed anymore for repeating secondary 1<sup>50</sup> because he would be more familiar with the school materials than the other students, and he found this to be constructive in rebuilding his confidence. In the end, he promised to work with us to make his study plans work. Sometimes, Yuen would report back to us on how the measures were going in practice and we would evaluate them in the group meetings.

Since then, Yuen became our regular collaborative partner whenever we came across issues about 'mothering'. Beyond giving opinions, Yuen would also act to help solve the problems. Yuen once advised YT on how to get along with Siu when we discussed problems that we encountered in 'mothering'.

*YT reported in the group meeting, 'Yuen came directly to me when we were having lunch. He said, "Aunt, you must not employ tough measures to SY. She would not listen. She is the kind of person works better with soft strategies." Aha...Yuen is just so smart! He really knows SY.'* (13<sup>th</sup> session)

SY, who had been very hesitant to join our group, requested to join our group on 27 April. While we were still in surprise, YT told us that Yuen asked her to invite Siu to join our group because he found himself having benefited a lot from participating in it. It was Yuen who convinced YT to put our invitation forward to SY.

In June 2013, after spending a month on victim-chungsangje identity construction, we went back to our recurring interest—mothering of formerly abused women in the post-separation context. This time, Yuen took charge of reviewing what we had

---

<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of the discussion, Yuen strongly requested to be allowed to quit the school he was studying at because it used English as the medium of instruction. He thought it was too hard for him to get over this hurdle of language and he would like to change to a school using Chinese as the medium of instruction. After unpacking his transition stories with us, we tried to make sense of his current withdrawal behaviours together with the help of his lived experiences; we agreed that the frustration could be a more determinant factor resulting in the poor academic achievement instead of the language hurdle being too high. In light of this, we agreed to work with Yuen to try again, if he was given chance to stay in the same school next year.

learnt so far and facilitating our discussion on different strategies in relating to and supporting sons and daughters after leaving the abusive partners. At that moment, we had stopped calling teenage participants ‘children’ because we were fully informed about their capability in reasoning, making good choices, and taking action to solve problems. Moreover, all the mother participants had already achieved some progress in making partnership with their sons/daughters, so that they were more aware of how to sustain partnership-calling and responding in daily interactions. Yuen had become a regular partner whenever we had ‘parent-son/daughter relationship issues’<sup>51</sup> on the group meeting agenda.



**Figure 6.5** picture showing Yuen and YY collaborated in reviewing what we had learnt in the past 5 months (masks added to protect privacy)



**Fig. 6.6** Picture showing how Yuen and YY collaborated in facilitating us to share views and experiences in a parenting session (masks added to protect privacy)

In the above session, a hierarchical typology on ‘mother-son/daughter care practices’ was developed alongside the sharing of experiences relating to sons/daughters and trial-and-error in making partnership. We compared experiences and made sense of different strategies in handling the ‘mother-son/daughter relationship’ and rendering ‘care’ within it. With particular contribution from HL, who had very different mother-daughter practices, and Yuen, who had lived experiences to evaluate the value of different alternative practices, we finally conceptualized four types of ‘mother-son/daughter care practices’,

---

<sup>51</sup> The name evolved in the process by recognizing that the group sessions were dedicated to building knowledge about collaborative caring in the mother-son/daughter relationship, instead of having only the mothers or sons/daughters to bear the consequences of problems arisen from the mother-son/daughter relationship. Therefore, the term ‘parenting session’ was renamed by the women participants, while Yuen did not care much about the naming of the sessions.

namely 'single-log bridge', 'liquid iron', 'collagen', and 'concrete' (Fig. 6.7 and Diagram 6.5).



Fig. 6.4 A hierarchical typology of parent-son/daughter practices constructed by paper and labels

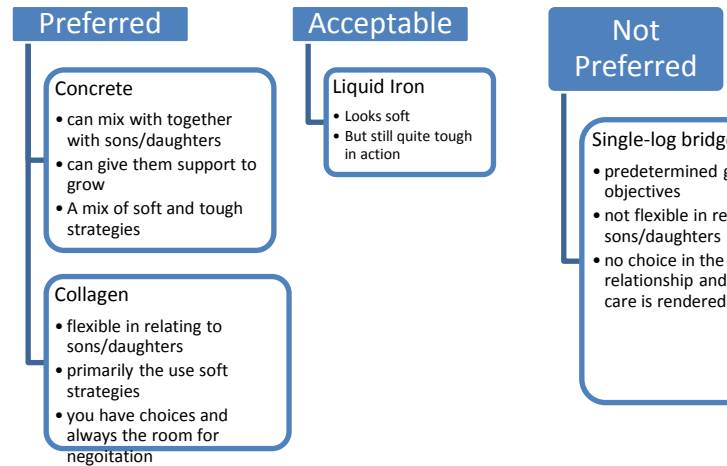


Diagram 6.5 A hierarchical typology of parent- son/daughter practices

Everyone took turns to share their lived experiences with their mothers/sons/daughters in the group. Meanwhile, participants would appreciate and respond to the experiences told in their stories. YY went first in sharing her changes in 'name calling' of Yuen, from full name to nickname, in order to show him that he was always so precious in her eyes. However, when it came to 'partnership calling and responding' Yuen said that it was not consistently maintained.

*'Why did you deliberately make your mum angry last time? Could you help us understand more about this kind of actions?' I asked Yuen. He replied, 'Oh yea... it's just because we are angry. They (mothers) always order us to do things when we are busy. I just don't like it! So, I will say, "leave it there and let it (laundry) get mouldy!" But I didn't mean it.'* (13<sup>th</sup> session)

While women participants continued to share their failing experiences, HL responded with her successful experiences in 'partnership-making'. Her successful experiences allowed us to see what kind of practices could be more likely to keep

the ball rolling during partnership making. More importantly, the differences between HL's practices and the other majority of women participants shed light on how the failing strategies were commonly exercised.

*'I deliberately brush on nail polish bizarrely on my toes, and then lifted them on the table. When Bui came out from the shower room, she just couldn't stand the ugly look my toes had. She then asked me to let her redo the nail polish. I of course happily stretched my legs on her laps and let her do it...'* proudly said HL, *'She did it so well and I enjoyed being helped by Bui.'* I asked other participants, *'what do you think is the difference between your way and HL's way of relating to sons/daughters?'* KW immediately said, *'she knows her daughter cares about her while our sons just don't'. PF interrupted, 'In her case, her daughter cares about her more than she cares about her daughter. In contrast, we are always the one who cares so much about our sons.'* YY interrupted as well, *'yes, we are always the one who cares.'* YT was in, *'we always want to replace them and take over their responsibilities.'* KW continued, *'as said by NF, we always sort out solutions for them, and they turn to be irresponsible to our needs because they think we are strong enough. It seems that we are so strong that we don't need help at all. They just can't see that we need help too! Maybe we should try to pretend to look weak...(laugh).'* YT went on, *'since they were little, we have been taking over their work and responsibilities, everything they need to do, we do for them...like spoon feeding them.'*  
(20<sup>th</sup> session)

By constantly contrasting the failing and successful strategies (see diagram 6.3) in relating to sons/daughters, and solving problems with them in partnership, we were able to draw out properties that distinguish the two categories. Failing strategies were always characterized by predetermined goals and objectives set out by mothers, and were not flexible in relating to sons/daughters. Those strategies almost gave no choice for teenage participants on how problems should be solved

and how care could be rendered. Yuen described mothers performing these strategies as like forcing sons/daughters to walk on a single-log bridge, which led to only one destination across the river. In this regard, these practices were then named as 'single-log bridge mother-son/daughter practices', which usually included tough strategies, such as 'scolding', 'punishment' and 'use of mother authority'. The mothers' obsession with their dreams and their own 'mothering agenda' was identified as a major contributor to 'single-log bridge' mothering practices. Women participants criticized their own 'trapping' strategies, i.e. pretending to be open and listening, but awaiting opportunities to twist their sons/daughters into their dreamed shape.

To the contrary, the successful experiences suggested a high degree of flexibility in relating to sons/daughters and in negotiating the goals and objectives of a family life practice was key to partnership making. Choices (and also the choice to say no) were always available in this kind of practice, and soft strategies, such as 'opinion giving', 'suggesting' and 'inviting', were more likely. Yuen named this kind of mother-son/daughter practices as 'collagen' because of its supportive attitude and the employment of largely soft and flexible strategies. HL's mother-daughter practices were rated by Yuen as his most preferable form of practices among others in the group. This also allowed him to evaluate his 'mother-son practices' with YY, by comparing his experiences with the available concepts. Yuen conceptualized another form of mother-son/daughter practice, called 'liquid iron', in his self-evaluation. 'Liquid iron' was said to reflect the current practices in his relationship with YY, in that they looked soft but were still quite tough in practice. When YY asked Yuen which type of mother-son/daughter practices he preferred the most, Yuen came up with a fourth concept, 'concrete'. Although this concept was not generated from lived experiences of any participant in the group, it was still highly valued because it provided an anchorage for understanding teenage participants' preference in collaborating with their mothers. This was seriously considered as an option for mothers who were still struggling to find their sons/daughters' preference (i.e. KW, PF and YT).

The term 'concrete' was composed by the words 'water' and 'mud' in Cantonese. The two components also represented the two distinctive characteristics of 'concrete' mother-son/daughter practices. 'Water' was used to present the ability to 'mix', 'mingle', and 'merge' with sons/daughters, while 'mud' represented the substances mothers could offer to build up their sons/daughters according to the strengths and dreams they have, and bring their ability to another level. This form of practice was distinguished from 'collagen' by its 'son/daughter-centred' orientation.

*Yuen tried to tell us the difference between collagen and concrete, 'Collagen doesn't guarantee that mothers will let go their goals or agenda. It just tells that mothers are flexible and more willing to negotiate with us within a limited number of choices. They are similar, only in a way, that they both provide support and flexibility in relating to us. But the major difference is that "concrete" practices allow us to set our goals, our dreams and mothers are there to support our own build-up of success.'* (20<sup>th</sup> session)

#### **6.3.4 Transforming Your problems to our problems, your responsibility to our responsibility**

The women participants' collaboration with Yuen transformed the problems arising from the mother-son/daughter relationship from 'family matters' into 'inquiry matters'. This encouraged the construction of useful knowledge for reducing conflicts, relieving tensions, and promoting intimacy and making partnership in the mother-son/daughter relationship. The participation of Dai, SY, and Bui also contributed to the redistribution of responsibility in carrying out group services and activities. Serving and caring were in many aspects no longer 'adults only' practices, but the joint effort of women and teenage participants in promoting the mutual and the larger good for formerly abused women and their 'children'. By 'opinion giving', the absence of service for formerly abused women, which was

initially considered as a women's problem, was transformed into the problem of both women and teenage participants. Yuen and Dai advised us in mapping the service needs of formerly abused women, and in writing up the statement on the implementation of the (UN) Convention for the Rights of the Child in Hong Kong. Their contributions changed the orientation of the group from a single-focus to a dual-focus inquiry, developing knowledge that addressed the service needs of both formerly abused women and their 'children'. Partaking in the Mother's Day Event, promoting happiness, and improving the service for formerly abused women and their children became the mission and responsibility shared by both women and teenage participants. Through reflecting on the experiences and analyzing observations on the event day, Siu and Dai began to realize that they were able to promote the happiness and safety of young children of formerly abused women. They did more than 'will be there anyway', and utilized their different forms of knowing to make sure young children were accompanied, safe, and happy in the event. These changes had an effect on teenage participants' distribution of time, in that they were more willing to spend time on taking care of young children of abused women than they had been.

The collaborative partnership for improving 'mothering' turned out to be illuminating on the problematic nature of the 'mothering discourse'. Mothering constructed as strategies to control, monitor and manage problematic children was found to be the main source of many problems arising in the mother-son/daughter relationship. Even though mothering also carried a nurturing connotation, the nurturing itself was always directed to the goals and dreams set out by mothers. After many cycles of reflection-action-reflection in handling problems that had occurred in various mother-son/daughter relationships, we developed the practical competence and theoretical knowing about how to reduce the problems embedded in the problematic discourse of mothering. That was 'making partnership' with sons/daughters. The partnership sustained in the mother-son/daughter relationship, and in the group, redefined 'mothering' as a 'mutual care project', and redistributed the responsibility for solving the mother-son/daughter related



problems. The potential for teenage participants in caring for their mothers and solving problems together was realized wherever possible. Yuen, who was described by YY as unmotivated and lazy, was becoming more and more active in taking care of himself and making the filial relationship better. He was also very active in contributing his views and experiences in promoting the partnership-making of other mothers in the inquiring group. The abandonment of the term 'mothering' and the use of 'mother-son/daughter practices' demonstrated the group's dedication to reject the power imbalance constructed around the mothering discourse, and to promote partnership in the mother-son/daughter relationship. Almost all mother participants, except YT, appraised that they had benefited so much from collaborating with Yuen in the 'mother-son/daughter practices'. YT was the only one revealing that there was not much change between herself and SY. In general, women participants agreed that 'mother-son/daughter practices' were the greatest success among other lines of inquiry simultaneously running in the group.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: A new focus on mutuality and partnership making in protection services**

The majority of literature, concerning the situation of children living with domestic violence, focuses on children witnessing marital violence and relegates women to the periphery (Lapierre, 2008). Mothers and 'mothering' are conceived of as an uncontested means for fulfilling the needs of children; failures in meeting developmental needs or children's maladapted and violent behaviours are seen as the mothers' responsibility. However, formerly abused women's lives are never less disrupted than their children's (Krane & Davies, 2007). At the point of leaving, many of them have been trying for years to survive violence, death-threats, humiliations, poverty, and also the suffocating expectations of child protection. The problems suffered by abused women eventually arouse concern because their problems would doubtlessly affect the quality of their mothering and hence the children's welfare. This comes to the argument formulated by Humphreys (2000)

that we should protect children by supporting women. She contended that domestic violence services should be responsible for supporting women who are the main characters in the child care and protection agenda. Though it shows some concern over the benefit of women, women remain to be instrumentally employed for child protection, whereas the fulfilment of women's needs, which does not concern child protection, can hardly stand on their own (Featherstone B. , 1999). Particularly when children witnessing intimate partner violence are immediately seen as equivalent to abused children<sup>52</sup>, abused women's mothering would be under more stringent monitoring within the current child protection framework.

Featherstone (1999) contended that the state was concerned to 'fix motherhood in a way which stresses the importance of a very restricted model of mothering for children's welfare and indeed the cohesion of the wider social order' (p.45). The tie between a restricted form of motherhood and child protection services, as I propose, has polarized the interests of women and children, and restricted them to working within the mother-child relationship, without acknowledging the wider context of relationships in promoting the welfare of both. The findings demonstrate the importance of 'partnership making' with teenage 'children' in designing and delivering care and protection plans in the post-separation context.

Findings also cast light on 'how' to promote mutual care of formerly abused mothers and their teenage children. Maintaining a participatory relational context is found to be a pre-requisite for collaborating with teenage sons/daughters. This layer of partnership-making requires an abiding attention to power imbalance deeply entrenched in mother-son/daughter daily practices, the sensitivity to the symbolic stocks employed in our exchanges that signify inequality, and the endless effort in alleviating the damaged and antagonistic filial relationships. Beyond confronting the power imbalance, 'partnership making' also suggests the construction of new ways of engaging the previously exploited/exploitative

---

<sup>52</sup> Witnessing intimate partner violence could be traumatic to children, and may cause emotional disruptions in them (see [http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic\\_violence\\_topic.asp?section=0001000100220002](http://www.womensaid.org.uk/domestic_violence_topic.asp?section=0001000100220002)). Therefore, children's prolonged exposure to intimate partner violence can be seen as emotional abuse against children.

counterparts. In our case, it is through 'intimacy building' and 'sustaining partnership calling and responding' that the mother-child relationship can be transformed into a mother-son/daughter partnership. Identification of 'partnership callings' in the mother-son/daughter relationship is helpful to nail down the opportunities for rebuilding partnership in a broken and blame-filled relationship. As far as most of the mother-son/daughter relationships in our inquiring group were of this kind, partnership making became a promising solution for mother participants to reconcile with their sons/daughters.

The realization about the 'partnership calling and responding' enabled women participants to see how they had played their part in giving rise to the conflicting mother-son/daughter relationship, rather than focusing on their sons/daughters' deficiencies, and blaming them for behaving badly. This view is not returning to the deficit model of mothering (Lapierre, 2008), but neither is it surrendering to the competent model of mothering, because both conceive of 'mothering' as the sole responsibility of abused women to meet the problems/needs of children. Instead, findings here suggest that the polarized relationship between formerly abused mothers and their sons/daughters is ineffective in engaging both of them in solving problems together. Alternatively, unpacking the co-lived experiences between abused women and their sons/daughters could open up room for re-construction of 'mothering goals' and 'children's competence', while it also allowed mothers, teenage participants, and women participants in this CGI group to see where they could contribute in order to accomplish the care and protection work.

## Chapter 7

---

### Discussion

---

#### 7.1 Introduction

An imbalanced attention on child protection in conventional domestic violence services and the unintegrated women-centred and child-centred frameworks rooted in the feminist traditions has created a lot of tensions in handling cases involving both wife abuse and child abuse (Hanson & Patel, 2013; Chan & Lam, 2005). These systemic tensions are exacerbated by the 'parental deficiency model', which emphasizes that parents are responsible for family problems and are the major source of risks to children (Cameron & Freymond, 2006). It was reported that 30% of child abuse cases simultaneously involved intimate partner violence in Hong Kong (Chan, 2011). Furthermore, a strong correlation between them has been observed elsewhere in the world (Appel & Holden, 1998). To protect both women and children in cases where intimate partner violence and child abuse co-occur, a 'generalist' and 'eclectic' approach for integrating the women-centred and child-centred models suggested by Hanson & Patel (2013) does not seem to offer a promising future for guiding practice. Instead, it takes domestic violence social work practices back to the longstanding criticism of lacking 'scientific support' or even being 'haphazard' (Fischer, 1978). In addition, outstanding demand for demonstrating intervention effectiveness is observed in social work, under austerity and the expanding privatization of services. Empirical research approaches, such as single-system design (Fischer, 1978) and evidence based practice, have gained popularity for demonstrating effectiveness and achieving accountability in social work practice.

Alongside demonstrating effectiveness, accountability also implies the challenging of oppressive practices, treating clients with respect and dignity, replacing of the pathological perspective with strength based practices, engaging in emancipatory

practices, and grounding one's practices on basic human rights (Witkin, 1996). This version of accountability could only be achieved through decentralization of expert power that underpins the abovementioned empirical research. In other words, practice research methodologies and domestic violence social work that aims at achieving a fuller version of accountability should be able to 'include users' and 'facilitate participation'. This CGI braves the accountability challenges and builds practical knowledge with 'evidence' in a participatory manner. This inquiry testifies to a 'third way' to Service User and Carer Participation (SUCP), by promoting cooperation between social workers and domestic violence service users. Meanwhile, it reveals formerly abused women's needs for leaving victimhood, rebuilding personhood, and sustaining partnership with their children in the post-separation stage, as well as mitigating the multiple marginalizations that women participants experience. The findings of this research shed light on the development of post-separation domestic violence services in Hong Kong, and provide references for effective practices in promoting social worker-user cooperation in domestic violence service design and delivery.

Against this specific background, I will proceed to discuss how Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI), the innovative approach taken in this research, could lead to fuller achievement of accountability in domestic violence social work in terms of effectiveness and professional ethics. In the end, I propose that 'partnership making' and developing Communities of practice are crucial in integrating different approaches in domestic violence service, so as to bring about more relevant and ethical protection plans for women and their teenage sons/daughters in cases of intimate partner violence.

## **7.2 Cooperative Grounded Inquiry in the quest of social work professional accountability**

Social work is facing dual challenges in our era. On the one hand, it has to rebuild a relationship with the social research enterprise, for achieving and demonstrating

effectiveness (Shaw, 1999; 2010). Meanwhile, the new faculty of social work practice-research has to genuinely include users' voices, facilitate participation, and democratize local practices, in order to safeguard its professional ethics. This dual demand is evident in the normalization of 'user involvement' in research funding bids and also the request for users' views and experiences in running 'evidence-based' practices (Beresford, 2002).

To embrace this particular challenge, Cooperative Grounded Inquiry (CGI) was invented in this research to enhance the participation of abused women and their teenage sons/daughters to produce local, relevant and practical solutions for the 'here and now' problems encountered in the post-separation life. In the following, the concept of 'effectiveness' achieved in this CGI will be discussed with reference to the dominant understanding proposed by 'evidence-based/informed practice' in social work. I would venture that the medical model of evidence based practice sees 'evidence' as the reflection of social reality and carries on naïve empiricism embedded in modern capitalism. It dismisses the relational dimension in social ontology, such as the contextuality of meaning construction and social practising. Next to 'effectiveness', I argue that ethics has to be scrutinized in respect of the 3 layers of participation, proposed in Chapter 4, rather than seeing it as a natural consequence of participatory research. This inquiry also invites further research on how to promote different layers of participation of stakeholders in domestic violence services.

### ***7.2.1 Effectiveness***

The traditional researcher/practitioner-led research is restricted to representing only the knowledge of the providing end. Without the participation of the service-receiving end, social work knowledge is intrinsically insufficient for explaining and enhancing practices. In practical terms, social workers need survivors' feedback to improve practicality, responsiveness and the 'fit' of their practices. Very often, survivors' feedback is translated by social workers with their 'professional

knowledge' into new practices. These new practices are largely generated through methods of inquiry that 'claim to be "objective", "neutral" and "value free" and to produce knowledge which is independent of the persons carrying out the research' (Beresford, 2000, p. 499). This detached, 'scientific', and mind-based rationality that is entrenched in academic research has been criticized as failing to represent the experience of women (Reason, 1994; Beresford, 2000). It is claimed that knowing of women is more experience and relationship based; hence it is usually marginalized in the dominant patriarchal and linear logics of knowledge making. Beresford (2000) argued that service users are better placed to generate critical questions and knowledge claims about received beliefs in social work than outside academics and practitioners because they are on the receiving end of social work theory and practice in social work knowledge making. To promote a more encompassing and survivor-oriented form of knowledge building in domestic violence social work, practitioners' localized knowledge as the providing end, and that of women survivors as the receiving end, should both be incorporated.

In this regard, the effectiveness of social work knowledge achieved through imitating the medical model of evidence-based practice is deemed to be partial. This version of evidence-based practice marginalizes the role of service users in the process of evaluating; more importantly, it ignores how knowledges are practised by practitioners in the context, in order to bring about changes in relationships with the service users. This 'cook-book' approach of evidence-based practice was even criticised by medical practitioners (Smith, 2004). Unsurprisingly, this simple migration of evidence-based practice from medicine has received much criticism in social work for reproducing unequal researcher-researched relationship and the domination of positivism through prioritizing randomised controlled trial (Shaw, 1999). Frost (2009) further contended that reducing social work practice into the replication of a recipe constructed somewhere else was a huge mistake in evaluating social work because it ignores the formation of (inter)subjectivity and the continuous negotiation of relationships in its nature. Biehal and Sainsbury (1991) also pointed out that no universal social work values could be assumed,

since they were contextually interpreted and implemented by a particular combination of social, historical and political factors in practices. Despite the incompatibilities observed in the migration process, by riding on its potential to stop social work practitioners from practising haphazardly with trends, authority, and personal preferences, the popularity of evidence-based practice in social work remains. Meanwhile, the worries about social work's lack of useful knowledge still contribute to public mistrust and undermine social workers' professional identity.

For securing the professional identity and fulfilling the quest of accountability, social work scholars began to devise practice-research methodologies that address the complexity of contextual, contingent, and fluid social reality in social work practice (Frost, 2009). Reflective practice suggested by Jan Fook (Fook, 1996; Fook & Gardner, 2007) attempted to position the practitioner back in the centre stage of effective practising, through reflecting on the practitioner's unacknowledged presumptions, tacit knowledge, and the gap between 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use'. Shaw (1999) also argued that problems usually emerged in the course of practising, so that evaluative practice should be a continuous and conscientious commitment for assessing effectiveness alongside intervention, rather than assuming a problem-free application of a well-evaluated practice model. These attentions to the practising of social work depart from traditional theory-informed practice as they acknowledge the indeterminacy of social reality<sup>53</sup>. This also supports the development of the broad-streamed evidence-informed practice, in which questions like 'who decides what counts as evidence?', 'how should we use evidence?', and 'how true is the evidence?' are raised. Instead of embracing all the new challenges about the constitution of evidence, Smith (2004) contradictorily observed that rigid 'scientific empiricism', upheld by partisans of the narrow-streamed evidence-based practice, might see the different forms of

---

<sup>53</sup> The unpredictability and indeterminacy of social reality has been noted and articulated with Schatzki's social ontology in chapter 3, in which I attempt to give an account of the complex nature of social work as a form of social practices.



knowing as stumbling blocks or distractions for achieving a more 'scientific' knowledge base for social work. He also recognized a threat to the compatibility between evidence-based practice movement and authentic engagement of service users in the practice-research process.

#### 7.2.1.1 The need for contextuality and reflexivity

Participation of women and children in the design and delivery is one of the important factors for the effectiveness of domestic violence services (Humphreys, 2000). Achieving effectiveness as well as legitimizing a profession, in the globalized technocratic world, requires attention to 'contextuality', 'knowledge and theory creation', and 'reflexivity/critical reflexivity' (Fook, 2004). Contextuality alerts us to the uncertainty of universal knowledge, in that it also generates a demand for local knowledge produced at the site of practice. As long as knowledge production is not neutral and context-free, reflexivity is needed for revealing the particular social location of the knowers in knowledge production.

In this regard, to sustain the advancement of knowledge, we have to keep knowledge production open-ended by taking the knower beyond one's social location and enabling him/her to make sense of things differently. Therefore, advancing knowledge in domestic violence social work requires technology for providing conditions for continuous reflexivity. As argued earlier in this thesis, collaborating with users of domestic violence services provides a socio-relational context for the manifestation/learning/reproduction of different social practices both the practitioners and users have been engaged in. It encourages the unfolding of the construction of identities and re-examination of relationships. Moreover, it enables the display of different ways of understanding 'evidence' and determining what is important, practical, valuable, and effective for users and practitioners, rather than merely servicing the organizational management and technocratic policy makers in domestic violence service development. As long as effectiveness is determined by locally gained relevance and meaningfulness, Fook (2004) further argued that credibility of knowledge is achieved by 'transferability', which means

converting 'know that' (theories, evaluated practices and research evidence) into 'know how' (making real changes in the local context). From this point of view, transferability could hardly be achieved by experimental design or explicitness of findings, but it relies heavily on the practitioner-researchers' competence in translating 'know how' into something understandable, meaningful, relevant, and workable for users and other stakeholders in practice. This marks where user participation becomes relevant for the achievement of effectiveness in social work practice.

However, what arouses my concern over the realization of participation is Fook and Gardner's (2007) inclination to personalize the learning process by putting an unbalanced weight on personal narratives of critical incidents and personal reflection on one's taken-for-grantedness/formation of subjectivity. The beliefs in subjectivity and subjective narratives reflect the Cartesian concept of self, which denotes the existence of the knower as ontologically differentiable from the external world, while at most they are just interactive in shaping each other. The personal reflective journey, as perceived as the discovery of 'theory-in-practice' and the major process of knowledge production, also fails to see that the 'personal account' of critical incidents was co-created contingently in the relational exchanges in the critical reflective group. The site for social changes would be easily reduced to the individuals, whereas the collective changes required for bettering social practices would be brushed off. More importantly, the overweighting of focus on narrative construction in the practising of 'critical reflexivity' further divorces language from human practices. In Schatzki's understanding, the reflective sessions created an abstract understanding of a practice, but that does not constitute the practice itself; only when these understandings are 'translated' into acts, and the acts are responded appropriately to presume that particular practice, could changes to the practice be brought about. Although Fook and Gardner (2007) deliberately designed their workshops to allow reflective practitioners to talk about their changes in action in the group after 'unsettling the fundamental assumptions', they still fail to see the talk as another

co-construction of experiences, instead of a revelation of actions, reactions, performances, and interactions in practice.

Up to this point, I think it is clear to see why we need a 'practice turn' for achieving effectiveness in social work practice research. To engage with users in translating 'know that' to 'know how' and creating local knowledge with grounded relevance and meaningfulness, we cannot afford to dismiss the relational dimension in a practitioner/researcher-users collaboration since it provides the condition for co-existence and the co-construction of narratives, meanings, and practices that identify and solve problems more effectively. Nonetheless, action-orientation in social work practice research is crucial for applying rhetoric in making real changes in social reality, which is constituted by acts and responses that presume it, but not by disengaged abstract understandings of it.

The community of practice developed by a CGI is tailored for advancing social work knowledge by embracing contextuality, reflexivity, and the practice turn. It provides a site for social participation of different stakeholders. Furthermore, it enables continuous negotiation of goals, purposes, rules, strategies, and appropriateness of emotions/affections through practising towards locally relevant and meaningful goals (the construction of teleoaffective structure). As the shape of the community is displayed through acts and responses of 'doing a community', for example, 'sisterhooding' and 'motherhooding' in this inquiry, we have to consider how to promote a more egalitarian footing in the 'doing' of a community of practice. This inquiry reminds us to focus not just on 'structure' or 'model' of participation, but how participation could take place in different layers, i.e. the social, epistemological, and political participation in a community of practice.

Constant comparative analysis, the major analytical technique in Grounded Theory, was translated into creative linguistic construction activities for articulating lived experiences, and for making sense of observations and personal engagement in the community of practice. Aided by comparing notes, labels, pictures, photos, and diagrams, participants could construct a shared language in identifying problems,

developing solutions, and making sense of experiences. In addition, constant comparative analysis requires attention not only to similarities, but also differences. It promotes the revelation of diversities in making sense of experiences in the past, observations and interactions at the present, and also visions, missions and plans in the future. Diagrams and mind maps were constantly employed to chart the diversities existing among members, in order to assist the development of solutions and practices that rest on the diverse understandings of 'reality'. In this regard, each participant could find his/her own anchorage for participation in constructing realities, identifying problems, devising solutions, and making changes. This constitutes the practice of epistemological participation as a way to resist the overemphasis on the need for consensus building which could turn out to be just another tyranny led by elitism or silencing of differences under the banner of solidarity (Phillips, 1991). The concept of 'constitutive outside' employed by Mouffe (2000) assists us in understanding the exclusive nature of the formation of consensus that constitutes the sense of 'us'/'we-ness'. Lack of awareness in handling this ineradicable we-them distinction could lead to marginalization of outlying experiences through antagonistic expressions, e.g. undermining, and use of pre-existing authorities for silencing voices. The potential of the practitioner-researcher as a historically disenthralled but socially connected being was explored in this inquiry, for transforming antagonism that was sustained by pre-existing powers into agonism. Construction of linguistic concepts with a higher level of abstraction also helped participants establish connections among different voices and understandings, so as to generate more synergy for working with each other within diversities.

### **7.2.2 Ethics**

The increasing concern with social work ethics was argued as compliance as well as a counter-balance with the stringent managerial monitoring in social work in its quest for accountability (Banks, 2014). The elongated codes of ethics for social work professionals in different countries and the establishment of social work

groups for advocating professional autonomy reflect the two trends in the field respectively. The two trends also represent the diverse understanding of social work ethics, the consequentialist-utilitarian/Kantian/Kohlberg's version of morality, virtue ethics, and the ethics of care in social work decision-making (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987; Gilligan, 1995; Botes, 2000; Gray, 2010). The former is categorized as the rule-based ethics, which seek universal rules for making ethical decisions, while proper application of these rules in reasoning could help in achieving morality. Whereas virtue ethics refers to the personal virtues manifested in ethical decision making, and the ethics of care regards the caring practices tailored, and appropriated to others in a context of relationships. CGI could be seen as a counter-balance to the dominant managerial culture and a supplementary practice that promotes contextualization of ethical decisions aimed at human flourishing. This approach has demonstrated its potential in redressing the problems of rule-based ethics widely adopted in contemporary social work administration, which is particularly at its height in the growing popularity of the narrow-streamed EBP.

De-emphasis on relationship is criticised for shaping social work to be increasingly administrative, managerial, and controlling in nature (Banks, 2014), while CGI highlights the relational dimension through which social work knowledge and practices are generated. I propose that the relational dimension of CGI can bring about a different stream of ethics to social work practice research that the narrow-stream of EBP fails to deliver. Narrow-stream of EBP rests on the assumption of individualized personhood imbued with rationality and isolated autonomy that underpins most of the normative moral theories. This 'Cartesian model of self' is further strengthened by marketization of social services, the rise of consumerism, and the consequentialist-utilitarian social administration that promotes the belief in autonomous individuals and rational choices. These beliefs are also favoured in the austerity of social services because fair distribution of resources and procedural rightness are unprecedentedly in demand. The domination of this rule-bound form of ethics has marginalized ethics, which are exercised out of 'care' for others (Gray, 2010). This care is contended, by Gilligan (1995), as the primary condition for the

existence of the society, by attending to, and taking care of, the particular needs of those being cared for. Instead of seeing a person as an isolated individual, ethics of care proposes that human flourishing requires sustainable and nurturing relationships to carry it forth. Flanagan and Jackson (1987) also argued that the ethics of justice proposed by Rawls presupposed a person's care to, and for, one's community, so that s/he could have a sense that his/her own good, and that of those s/he cares for most, is attached to the abstract moral ideals. Although some literature focuses on the incompatibility of ethics of care and ethics of justice (Botes, 2000; Gray, 2010), an observable amount of literature is narrowing the gap between the two forms of ethics (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987; Banks, 2014). Further integration of ethics of justice and ethics of care is reckoned by reconstructing the rational individualized self that encapsulates ethics of justice and rule-based morality into the relational self, which enables the construction of 'relational autonomy' (Banks, 2014). This particular piece of literature is more relevant to the ethics promoted in CGI, and is found able to advance social work professional ethics in working with formerly abused women.

#### 7.2.2.1 The relational ethics: Ethics of care and contextualized ethics of justice

The reconstruction of 'autonomy' is the crucial advancement in constituting the new ethics of care. Gilligan's well-known book, *In a Different Voice* (1982), is a progenitor of the development of the ethics of care. It was grown out of research that interviewed pregnant women who were thinking about abortion, and from those interviews Gilligan found a version of ethics different from the ethics of justice, which was primarily based on the development of rationality through alienation from nurturing origins, and claiming independent personhood. This isolated personhood was further argued by Gilligan to be male-specific due to the normative orders in raising boys and girls. Unsurprisingly, Gilligan's ethical proposal received numerous criticisms from within feminism. Her scholarship was named as 'feminine ethics' rather than 'feminist ethics' due to its lack of footing for challenging the gender division, and instead just reinforcing it (Gray, 2010).

Nonetheless, the overemphasis on care, and the virtues of committing oneself for the well-being of others, inhibits women from developing 'individuality/autonomy', and evaluating the quality of the relationships in which caring practices take place. Similar to the research findings on 'motherhooding', the commitment in caring relationship to the mother-head as part of the Chinese filial piety was a double-edged sword because, although it sustained solidarity and care among participants, it hindered participants from expressing personal views, developing individualized life practices, and cultivating personal preferences. Ethics of care without building in the concept of 'autonomy' could easily relapse into traditional women's subordination to men under the banner of nurturing mothers. Gray posed serious criticism to this version of ethics of care (primarily Gilligan and Noddings) by saying, 'through the obligation to care, it diminishes women's ability to choose their relationships and to end relationships where care is not reciprocated' (2010, p. 1801). Gray (2010) further contended that self-respect and mutuality in a relationship are the pre-conditions for care to be ethical.

In spite of the potential risk of fixating women in their carer's role for their partners, the ethics of care implies validation of feminine ethics, which is of paramount importance to resist coercive control. Since coercive control over women was found to be mediated by the repression/invalidation/manipulation of women's femininity (Stark, 2007), ethics of care seems to offer a heuristic value for recognizing the feminine ethics and addressing the pitfalls of current rule-based ethics that have further marginalized women's experiences and life practices. To take on board the heuristic value of the ethics of care, 'autonomy', which is traditionally rooted in the Cartesian model of self that supports social alienation, rule-based universal ethics, managerialism and elitism, has to be reconstructed in order to fit the new ethical paradigm. 'Relational autonomy' is an emerging concept to acknowledge that 'autonomy' is not achieved naturally by ageing, but is conscientiously enabled by the relationships one is embedded in for forming his/her sense of personhood (intersubjectivity) (Christman, 2004; Ribben-McCarthy, 2012).

On the premise that autonomy is not naturally gained, nor possible without connections with social entities, we recognize that autonomy needs a socio-relational condition in order to develop and be sustained (Christman, 2004). Formerly abused women are particularly in need of such a condition, as I contend, as they are persistently influenced by patriarchal practices, which undermine the value of feminine practices, and by coercive controls, which inhibit their development of 'self/personhood' (Stark, 2013). The domination of victim discourse perpetuated by the current Hong Kong domestic violence service further confines abused women within the passive, weak and auxiliary image. For these reasons, women participants in this inquiry desired reconstruction of identities in departure from victimhood so that their strengths, beauty, and capabilities could be recognized. Findings revealed that the community of practice developed by CGI facilitated the development of a nurturing socio-relational condition for developing, sustaining, and exercising the construction of personhood and relational autonomy in the post-separation stage. The development of relational autonomy in women was also found to be beneficial to their sons and daughters for increasing their chances in developing their 'autonomy' within the mother-son/daughter relationship. Partnership making also emerged as a helpful strategy in achieving egalitarian footing in the co-existence, and hence, enabling 'relational autonomy', and characterizing the first layer of participation - social participation in a community of practice.

If 'relational autonomy' is the starting point for constructing contextualized ethics of justice (rules for public good), ethics of care is arguably primordial to the ethics of justice (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987). Both the literature and the findings of this research suggest that ethics of care and ethics of justice are not pragmatically and theoretically incompatible, but they are the necessary conditions for the emergence of each other. The dialogical relationship between ethics of justice and ethics of care was stipulated by Gray (2010). Furthermore, I have shown in chapter 4 that caring practices, as understood in terms of Chinese cultural-specific familial relationships, such as 'sisterhood' and 'motherhood', could risk extending



paternalistic practices, which must be reconstructed into more participatory ones. This presumes an ethical ideal in relating to others in a way that allows alternative life practices and identities more likely to be developed. This justifies the significance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> layer of participation, epistemological participation, in promoting participatory practices.

I would say the success of the second layer of participation relies heavily on 'relational autonomy'. Epistemological participation that concerns 'equality' and demands for equal representation in knowledge production came into play only in the condition where participants began to care for the well-being of the others, and were equipped with knowledges of how to promote 'relational autonomy', e.g. partnership making strategies. Instead of the cost-benefit calculation (traditional rational self), collaborating with formerly abused women in social work knowledge building is instead initiated out of the care towards formerly abused women whose needs are marginalized in the domination of victim discourse, and by their social position at the service-receiving end.

Therefore, the epistemological participation could be seen as a careful exercise of 'relational autonomy' through knowledge production practices, i.e. acting and reacting in a way to honour one's particular collection of life practices and lived experiences, to allow re-describing things and constructing knowledge that appreciate diversities in sayings and doings. With extra care on sustaining 'relational autonomy' in knowledge production activities, these activities, per se, constituted the practice of 'building relational autonomy'.

In facilitating the second layer of participation, CGI provides the footing for re-examining the power embedded in linguistic constructions, and offers tools for creatively amalgamating the linguistic stocks available in different life practices to make sense of lived experiences, desires, visions, and plans of participants. Instead of seeing linguistic constructions as a reflection of reality, CGI urges participants to make use of their terminology in describing their lived realities, and to borrow linguistic stocks available somewhere else so as to re-describe things differently. In

sum, CGI provides a critical anchorage to unpack the power perpetuated by dominant discourses that shape participants' identities, practices, speeches, performances, and interactions. Thereby, the second layer of participation is primarily characterised by validating the diverse ways of knowing, and making different understandings of experiences, evidences and realities visible for further discussion and evaluation (see chapter 5 and chapter 6).

When the privileged understandings of experiences and realities are challenged by the emergence of alternatives in the second layer of participation, the solidarity of the community would be challenged at the same time. This threatens the socio-relational condition by which 'relational autonomy' is sustained. In this inquiry, 'antagonizing' was found to be the major practice that endangered the community of practice, whereas transforming antagonism into other nurturing relationships between differences has gained its significance in maintaining the necessary conditions for pursuing 'relational autonomy' and the participatory production of relevant knowledges. The potential of a historically disenthralled, but socially connected, participant in transforming 'antagonism' into 'agonism' highlights the significance of shared history in the constitution of 'we-ness', as well as its 'constitutive outside'. By unfolding the shared history, and by being emphatically engaged in the contingent constitution of 'we-ness' with participants, we were more likely to 'see(ing) the bigger picture, question(ing) received ideas and see(ing) the possibility for another kind of world' (Banks, 2014, p. 20). The transformation of 'antagonism' into 'agonism' is conceptualized as political participation (see chapter 4). This level of participation requires participants to be able to see how the 'we-ness' and its 'constitutive outside' are constructed in their shared history, languages and practices. Meanwhile, they should be able to participate in reconstructing the 'we-ness' to incorporate emerging differences, and to re-stabilize the community of practice.

In conclusion, CGI has demonstrated its potential in nurturing a community of practice, in which formerly abused women were involved in different layers of

participation, and they gradually increased their understanding on how to promote, sustain, and reproduce 'relational autonomy' and translate the understandings to other areas of their lives, i.e. mother-son/daughter care practices. We could not naïvely believe that formerly abused women and their sons/daughters could therefore break free from marginalization caused by historical, cultural, political, and ideological reasons; however, we could see that CGI could help in developing communities for promoting equality, not just within the inquiry group, but beyond it.

### **7.3 Implications for post-separation domestic violence services**

With the rising demand for accountability, domestic violence services are now more cognizant of the detrimental effects of knowledge, solutions, and intervention that are generated in ignorance of users' experiences or within unreal partnership or are imposed by expert knowledge. As a participatory social work practice research with formerly abused women, this research affords us an opportunity to re-examine the victimhood and to investigate how a community of practice could offer a socio-relational space for identity reconstruction as a means to develop personhood and sustain relational autonomy. I have argued for the protective value of rebuilding personhood and (relational) autonomy earlier, with reference to Stark's coercive control, and I have reviewed how victimhood and survivorhood have been constructed in the development of the domestic violence movement and related services.

The lack of 'children's participation' as discussed in the literature review has strong relevance in understanding the mother participants' paternalistic and even coercive care practices that easily repressed or ignored the views and experiences of their sons/daughters (the single-log bridge practice, details refer to chapter 6). The long-term coercive control and marginalization, partnered with all the paternalistic care practices reproduced in sisterhood, shaped women participants' understanding and practices of 'parenting' in the post-separation context.

In the following, I will suggest some directions for post-separation domestic violence services as informed by findings of this inquiry. Furthermore, I will examine the potential of CGI in redressing the dichotomization of the interests of abused women and children, and that of domestic violence services and child protection/contact systems, as explicated in the literature.

**7.3.1 *Abiding construction of identities as a way to locate problems and solutions:  
Departing victimhood and venturing into the '-'* between victim and survivor**

Formerly abused women in this inquiry were overwhelmed by the experiences of victimization, and the dominant victimhood discourse, such that we identified that departing from victimhood was one of the most important needs in the post-separation context (see Chapter 5). However, survivor identity that enables recognition of strengths and abilities was found limiting to abused women's expression of problems and sufferings. The need for ongoing construction of identities around victimization and surviving has general implications for post-separation domestic violence services, as well as specific relevance to conducting participatory action research with formerly abused women. Encouraged by the action orientation carried on by this CGI, all the participants experienced the need for commitment to caring and serving formerly abused women. Women participants, who framed themselves as people victimized and abandoned by the welfare system or as deprived, helpless, and powerless battered women, experienced hurdles in identifying their available strengths, skills, and confidence in helping others. The weaknesses, powerlessness, and helplessness were therefore constructed as 'troubles' in their post-separation lives. Re-construction of victim identity is therefore a crucial step in departing from victimhood, and unleashing the strengths that abused women have, but which have been ignored/marginalized in the coercive controlling relationship.

The reflection-action-reflection cycles unpacked the victim identity and provided technology for re-examination of their work experiences, which highlighted the

capable side of their lived stories. The construction of 'chungsangje' enabled participants to regain confidence, perseverance and awareness of their strengths, skills, and abilities. 'Chungsangje' identity received a big welcome from the group in the rising practical demand for manpower, time, effort, devotion, and commitment to care and services delivery to other formerly abused women. However, when the challenge of 'going public' came along, the limitation of 'chungsangje' identity (naïve framework) was also realized. Identifying oneself as a pure survivor was found to have hampered women participants' expressions of their emotional fluctuations and needs for care. It was also employed socially to force women participants into a particular shape of 'chungsangje' rather than allowing the mixture of complex victimizing and surviving experiences to be displayed.

The formula story of 'pure victim' and 'villain abuser' supports that leaving the abuser is the only rational and appropriate way to handle the smart and villain husbands who are controlling and unchangeable (Loseke, 2001). It reinforces the naïve framework of 'chungsangje' identity by privileging 'leaving' among other 'choices' of relationships that abused women could have with their abusive partners. This echoes with the findings that having left the abuser physically and psychologically was the benchmark for 'chungsangje'. The formula victim story limited the possibility of resisting violence and violent husbands, and rendered leaving the ONLY choice to 'survive'/pre-requisite to be reborn. In the inquiry, the experiences of HL and YT were the most outlying of the formula stories because they chose to remain in connection with their ex-husbands. As 'chungsangje' failed in capturing the ambivalent emotions and women's intentions/practices in reconnecting with the former partners, the membership entirely rested on 'chungsangje' identity once experienced a crisis of dissolution when the unfit experiences kept unfolding in the inquiry. That's why, in Loseke's work (2001), she revealed how facilitators and other women in the abused women support group attempted to shape members' outlying experiences into the same (or at least similar) wife abuse story--men always wanted to control women, women were

always passive to the cause of violence; leaving was always preferred in order to stay out of villain men's control because men were next to impossible to change.

To save the solidarity without forcing women's experiences into the formulaic wife abuse story, a new identity was needed at that moment, in order to capture the outlying experiences, as well as relate them to the extant identities in use. The 'Chungsangje-becoming' identity was constructed by participants to bridge the unnecessary 'victim' or 'survivor' divide, and to relate women participants with outlying experiences back to the membership. It carved out the territory for participants, who were still feeling sad about their relationship breakdown, suffering from poverty, and failing to perform well at work to exercise strengths in the post-separation lives. It implies not just the hybridity of victim-survivor experiences in women's lives, but also women participants' aspiration to leave victimhood. It is a directional concept that captures formerly abused women's impetus of 'leaving victimhood and entering survivorhood'. The refinement of the concept of 'chungsangje' and the development of 'chungsangje-becoming' helped us broaden the spectrum of survivorhood, by recognizing that strengths and abilities of abused women could be exercised without disclosing their history to the public, and while they remained in connection with their abusive partners. This also affects the division of labour in the CGI group that 'chungsangje-becomings' were subsequently allocated to positions where public work was not required, for example, emotional support for abused women who had just left, and organizing parent-child activities for group members and non-members. Meanwhile, press interviews and public speaking were assigned to chungsangje who were willing to go public. 'Chungsangje-becoming is not ideal, but it is a pragmatic solution that has emerged from the context to solve the problems of membership dissolution, and sustain the vehemence to acquire and exercise surviving skills while enjoying room to express weakness. Instead, the experience of constructing 'chungsangje-becoming' has demonstrated the importance of ongoing construction of identities around victimization and surviving for facilitating understanding, attention, and acceptance of the diverse lived experiences of formerly abused women. It also

helped increase participants' flexibility and adjustability in devising solutions to emergent problems from practice.

**7.3.2 Encouraging participation and developing personhood through  
acknowledging disagreement and constructing creative linguistic stocks in  
saying and doing things**

The different understandings and body techniques are contained, produced, reproduced, and sustained in different life practices and lived experiences of different participants (Crossley, 2007; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). As long as people usually live their lives without necessarily talking about their lives, as in 'telling us about yourself' or 'telling us what happened in...', formerly abused women in this inquiry group were engaged in translating the 'embodied' and 'unspeakable' knowledge into words and intelligible stories through utilization of their linguistic stocks obtained in their life practices. Therefore, the differences in organizing, understanding, and doing things would reveal the particular sets of life practices engaged in by the particular participants. I propose that attention to social practices aids us in exploring into the construction of 'self' in inquiry participants. As contended by Schatzki (1996), 'self' is a particular contextualized combination of 'identities' constructed in the social practices one has engaged in, so that it is fluid and precarious. Therefore, in the practising of this CGI, group participants continuously constructed their identities and drew on the identities constructed somewhere else in order to create their 'selves' in coordinating their performances.

Therefore, to encourage participation and develop 'relational autonomy', safeguarding the space for disagreements, and the creative linguistic construction of lived realities are essential. Social work practitioner-researchers and participant-researchers are encouraged to protect the room for disagreement because it is utterly fragile, particularly in front of the pursuit of consensus, agreement, and wellness as the ultimate measure of quality knowledge. Disagreement could be stifled in group practices very easily by unintentionally drawing 'conclusive remarks' and

privileging agreements and similarities by saying 'we all agree that...', 'you don't know it...it should be...' or 'I have been doing this for years, I know what it is...' without attending to the fleeting appearance of differences in doing and saying.

The development of alternative ways of saying and doing things was realized to be smoother when no 'objection' was raised in the group. Objection is distinguished from disagreement by its purpose of repressing the emergence of new understandings, while disagreement is suggestive of new understandings. Objections could be expressed through anger, withdrawal behaviours, definitive statements, and any behaviour that stops others from expressing themselves. Whereas, disagreements would be expressed usually through articulation of experiences, elaboration of observation, illustration of data, and explanation of how a view is arrived at. Disagreement usually welcomes others to suggest alternatives in sense making of the 'reality'. Objection was seen on and off in this inquiry and had to be carefully addressed, or the group would have risked dissolution or running into non-participatory practices. The participants who withdrew from participation or expressed anger towards the alternative understandings must be invited to further express their views, so as to develop the 'objection' into intelligible 'disagreement' which was more open to dialogues.

Another obstacle standing in the way of developing differences in sayings and doings was the 'learnt silencing of personal voices'. As observed in the group practices, employment of authoritative statements and negative emotional expressions by 'role models' could reproduce the historically constructed power differential between the 'role model' and the 'lay women', and could stop the development of alternative understandings of lived experiences. Members were inclined to hide their views because of consistent invalidation of personal understandings of lived experiences, due to the presence of the 'role model' whose views, actions and attitudes were employed by members to define what was worth pursuing (see 'group assessment and assigning'). At times, members who did not agree with the way of understanding and doing things with the 'role models' would



rather withhold their views instead of bringing the differences to the surface. Although in Loseke's argument, the lack of 'successful case' in surviving through the scary problems in the process of leaving was counted as the most discouraging for women in the support group because it could scare 'the hell' out of them (p.120), in this inquiry, the presence of a 'role model' survivor was a double-edged sword. The presence of a historically disenthralled member could inversely open up opportunities for the historically marginalized experiences to come to the surface during group interactions. The historically disenthralled member was found to be in a legitimate position to question the taken-for-grantedness of the group practices without damaging the 'sisterhood'. The challenges raised against the taken-for-grantedness in the community of practice should reveal the care for betterment of members, or they would *not* be listened to, or would be treated as intentionally damaging to the sisterhood. Hence, a caring, trustworthy and collaborative relationship is the pre-condition for this 'historically disenthralled member' to work properly in encouraging differences and new understandings of participants' lived experiences.

Participants in a CGI have to bear in mind that any construction of identity is, by nature, limiting. A concept is a reduction of properties of complex 'realities'/lived realities, that makes the complexity understandable (Køppe, 2012). Social realities are complex due to their dynamic nature and unpredictability. In order to transform the complexity into something understandable/intelligible, we have to select and cluster properties of the complexity into identifiable units for further investigation. Therefore, the concept that names/identifies the complexity is inevitably reductionist in nature, and may exclude other properties that the complexity may hold. In this regard, whatever identity constructs are composed in the 'identity work' within the practitioner-survivor collaboration may share the same problem of limiting the exhibition of 'otherness'. Despite this, the inevitably limiting nature is not the reason to give up 'identity work' in this kind of action inquiry group. Instead, we have to be more aware of the fluidity and contingency of identity constructs, and ensure that identity construction takes place ongoingly

to capture the lived experiences that the abused women find problematic/troubling/unintelligible, and, more importantly, different. Only when these experiences were captured, alternative identity constructs away from the 'formula stories' could be given a chance to be articulated and made sense of.

### **7.3.3 Protection services: A new focus on mutuality and partnership making**

Polarization of women's interests and children's interests, next to the political agenda for fixing motherhood and the '3 planet' conflicts (Hester, 2013), is partially attributable to the historical tie of child protection scholarship to the children's rights discourse, based on the Cartesian model of self. By seeing mothers and children as two separate categories of individuals, we will also see their interests and benefits as independent of each other. By highlighting the separability of the interests of 'abused mothers' and 'children witnessing marital violence', we may be less sensitive to the possible impact of infringement of mothers' interests on children's. Coupled with the individualistic concept of competence sustained throughout the rights talk, unsurprisingly, the needs of the less competent children are prioritized over the more competent adult women. Therefore, it is generally acceptable if we have to sacrifice the interest of abused mothers for their children's best interest, while 'children first' has become the Golden Rule in domestic violence services. This explains why some literature advocates for the responsibility of mothers to perform outstanding mothering work to 'compensate the toxic environment' of maritally violent homes (Holden *et al.*, 1998), but pays no attention to whether these mothers would be stressed out by the extra demands (Lapierre, 2010).

Polarization of the interests of abused women and their children fails to see how their interests affect each other's. Moreover, it restricts protection work to be performed within the mother-child relationship, while overlooking the potential that protection of abused women and their children could be achieved through a wider relationship context where abused mothers, sons/daughters and many

significant others are involved, for example, sisterhood among abused women. Within the current child protection framework, abused women would become the only ones responsible for the negative impacts on their children, and would be asked to sacrifice more in order to perform 'adequately'. This highly restricted model of mothering advocated by the state, as Featherstone (1999) suggested, on the one hand, represses women's construction and exercises of alternative mothering, while on the other hand, I contend that it forbids emergence of children's caring capacities and their claim for self-care. Instead of polarizing 'children' and 'abused women', and their interests, the 'collaborating in transforming mothering to mutual care project' generated in this inquiry sheds light on treating women and child protection work as integral, by refocusing on partnership building within and beyond family.

Our findings attest to the mutuality and co-learning nature of mother-son/daughter practices through re-examining the mother-son/daughter stories, and partnering with teenage participants. Through partnering with teenage participants in negotiating the care goals and care plans, abused women realized their monopolization of care work at home (single-log bridge), and teenage participants realized how they could contribute to designing and accomplishing the care plans. Moreover, recognizing the mutuality as ubiquitous in the mother-son/daughter stories allowed abused women to see not only children's rejection to cooperate, but also their own exercises of control and power through 'mothering' and their impact on the worsening of filial relationships. Given the attention to mutuality, more activities which had been considered as 'adults only' were relaxed for the participation of teenage participants, for example, organizing activities, discussing policy, and setting the care agenda. This formed a community of practice that also engages teenage participants to develop capacities to care for formerly abused women and their children, advocate for children's rights, educate people about the needs of children witnessing domestic violence, and collaborate with mothers in accomplishing caring goals. Only when mutuality becomes central in protection services at the post-separation stage, are sons and daughters of formerly abused

women less likely to be treated as passive agents, and restrained from potential developments they could have in self-care and caring for their mothers and others.

#### 7.3.3.1 Nurturing children's rights for participation: Partnership-making with teenage sons/daughters in a family-like community of practice

Teenage participants were transformed from 'being cared' to 'equal partners' through partnering with women participants in solving common concerns in the post-separation context. The partnership enabled participants to increase their collaborative competence in solving problems, and this synergy in generating useful knowledge in return reinforced the commitment for sustaining the partnership (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Therefore, the findings of this inquiry apparently run equivocal to the notion that says 'competence' and/or 'autonomy' is the precondition for participation. Alternately, it is discovered that participation is the precondition for nurturing effective competence and appropriate exercising of autonomy in a community of practice. In this CGI, we learnt together to solve conflicts in order to work alongside each other, and to deliver appropriate care and services to members and non-member participants. Teenage participants developed their competence in taking care of their mothers, meeting mutually agreed caring goals, and contributing to the safety and happiness of other formerly abused women and their children. No competence and autonomy could be recognized without a specific relationship context that solves particular sets of problems (a community of practice). This CGI coincides with 'children's rights' advocacy in that it created a community, which, firstly, was dedicated to solving problems concerned with both abused women and their sons/daughters. Secondly, it allowed co-learning and development of relevant competence through reflection-action-reflection cycles.

However, 'real' participation rights are realized not simply by involving oneself in a community of practice, but also by sustaining a relationship context whereby participants are *not* coerced to participate, and are able to utilize their own lived experiences and different forms of knowing in constructing realities. 'Partnership

making or breaking' generated in this inquiry sheds light on how to create an effective relationship context for social work practitioner-researcher, formerly abused women, and teenage participants to collaborate in handling family life practices and emerging problems in their post-separation lives. 'Intimacy building' and 'sustaining partnership calling and responding' were found to be two basic components in developing an egalitarian relationship context whereby every participant was treated equally and non-negotiated use of power was continuously challenged.

Therefore, participation rights are not guaranteed in the degree of participation, as suggested by Littlechild (2000), but are dependent on the relationship context where the content of partnership is agreed. For example, teenage participants could be ordered by their mothers to participate in service design and their 'participation' is then a consequence of the removal of their rights in decision making. To avoid tokenistic children participation, more attention has to be paid in building an egalitarian relationship (partnership) among participants. Interestingly, findings also show that 'sustaining partnership making' could be successful only when 'partnership calling and responding' were sustained in the group as well as in family life practices with mother participants. Therefore, developing an effective relationship context for participation requires dedication from each participant in transforming their ways of relating to each other, not just in the group, but beyond.

To avoid ambiguity, it is worth clarifying that 'teenage participants' as employed here is not to reproduce the unhelpful age-based categorization of people under the age of 18, neither is it submitting itself to the competence-based approach by saying 'teenagers' are necessarily more competent than the younger. These approaches as I argued earlier suggest that reaching a certain age or competence is the pre-requisite for participating in decision making. On the contrary, teenage participants are emphasized as the referents in discussing the findings and delimiting the implications for post-separation domestic violence services, as they are perceived in a particular way in respect of child protection, social expectations,

and the autonomy that they are usually afforded in their daily life. Teenage participants were found to be included in child protection services that assume their ultimate say on children's benefit, while being afforded greater and greater expectation and degree of autonomy in daily life while they are approaching 18 (Churchill & Clarke, 2013). Obviously, it is problematic to see 'children' as a monolithic group in devising domestic violence protection plans. 'Children', as used before and in the following, is mirroring the use of this term in the literature, while findings generated from the participation of teenage participants could shed light on possible new thinking for the protection services by unfolding the diverse and pluralistic nature of 'childhood'. This CGI addresses teenage participants' rights for protection in a way not risking or sacrificing mothers'. In the following, I will continue to illustrate how 'partnership making' directs us to a less travelled practice of protection services by focusing on mutuality and partnership making.

#### 7.3.3.2 Collaborative care project in post-separation context: Taking women and child protection beyond 'mother-child' relationship

The developmental needs of women and children come forth at the post-separation stage of intimate partner violence, and it is unhelpful for protection services to carry on the old framework that treats teenagers/young children as passive subjects waiting for care and protection, and treats mothers as the only people responsible for all the negative outcomes. Featherstone (1999) clearly pointed out that mothering stories would grow fuller if we can explore how children impact upon mothers, rather than focusing narrowly on how mothering/mothers impact on children. Children are active social agents who act, react, and associate with people. Both mothers and children learn together in the process of 'mothering'. Hence, neither the deficit model nor the competent model recognizes that 'mothering' is hitherto a reciprocal process (Owens, 1997).

Therefore, by recognizing children's capacities to be carers in the family, we are putting the rhetoric of rights into action. In the old framework of child protection services, children's uncooperative actions would be easily perceived as

deviant/anti-social or the negative impacts from the previous family conflicts, and mothers, are expected to be responsible for all these outcomes. Alternatively, by shifting the focus onto mutuality and partnership building with children, we could see much of their rejection/uncooperative behaviour as 'callings for partnership'. Rather than automatically equalizing these behaviours with the negative outcome of witnessing violence, they could be seen as the failings of the restricted model of mothering that reinforces 'perfect motherhood' (Krane & Davies, 2007). Responding properly to children's callings for partnership is to free children's potentials and allow the emergence of 'autonomy' of both women and children in negotiating and achieving what is the best for themselves. Nevertheless, partnership also provides a relationship context where children's efforts in supporting their mothers are identified and recognized, while women's freedom for constructing motherhood and identities could be relaxed.

Another issue that prevails in the discussion about 'mothering' and 'child protection' is the unnecessary reconciliation of mothers' and children's interests (Featherstone B. , 1999). The feminist scholarships have prevalently framed 'mothering' either as restraining or fulfilling to women, hence, rendering ambivalences in mothering problematic (Coward, 1997; Featherstone B. , 1997; Krane & Davies, 2007; Lapierre, 2010). Though more and more studies are revealing the mixed feelings of being mothers, child protection services still expect mothers to represent/prioritise the best interest of their children. As long as protection work is currently restricted to be either fulfilled within the mother-son/daughter relationship or taken over by the state, mothers not standing on the same side of children are perceived as irresponsible and even failing (see Featherstone, 1999 for details of how it adversely affects women's identity work). If we see the welfare of both women and children as equally important, and stop blaming women for the 'negative outcomes' of children, we may see the possibility to meet their diverse needs by developing different communities of practice.

In our inquiry, the collaborative care project for mothers and their sons/daughters was carried out beyond the mother-son/daughter relationship, but with the involvement of other women participants and a social work practitioner-researcher. These people came together whenever mother-son/daughter relationships were problematic, or whenever any member's (both women and teenage participants) physical, emotional, and social needs were not met. As long as these problems had been identified as salient in the lives of participating women, the inquiry group was committed to contribute their expertise, abilities and experiences<sup>54</sup> in solving them. Since all the successes and failures in problem solving were reflected and evaluated within the group, the group gradually developed its own language in making sense of the mother-son/daughter problems and strategies usually employed by mothers in care giving. The partnership formed with teenage participants was maintained to display the three main criteria of a community of practice, as suggested by Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999)—(1) mutual engagement, (2) joint enterprise, and (3) shared repertoire—and also demonstrated its helpfulness in developing the competence of both women and teenage participants in respecting, collaborating, and taking care of each other. Participants in the group also shared the responsibility of taking care of each other's needs and problems, so that the needs of abused mothers and their sons/daughters were less likely to be left unattended.

Certainly, a community of practice (CofP) has to be nurtured, and not developed in a vacuum (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). It requires identification of people with eagerness to develop competence in solving the same enterprise of problems. This is similar to Reason's saying of 'drawing together the common souls', which lays the

---

<sup>54</sup> Here just cited some examples: I contributed the 'calling and responding' idea learnt from Derrida's scholarship on political friendship for making sense of the mutuality in any human relationship mediated through language, and the concept of children's rights and participation in engaging teenage participants in the group; NF kept taking snacks to the inquiry to sustain a welcoming gesture to teenage/young participants, and shared her successful experiences in relating to her nephews; HL explained to us how she had developed common practices with Bui; YY opened up her experiences in collaborating with Yuen throughout the inquiry; Yuen contributed his experiences of relating to YY and alerted us about our misunderstanding of his lived experiences; YT always shared her problems of getting along with Siu for highlighting the dominance of mother control; Siu demonstrated to us the capabilities of teenage participants in taking care of formerly abused women and children; KW elaborated how the welfare application made her relationship with Dai deteriorated; Dai told us how he was alienated from the mother-son intimacy through signing the declaration for not providing for his mother.



foundation for cooperative inquiry that aims at solving problems together with local participants. I would suggest both CofP and cooperative inquiry share a very similar orientation to human knowledge. They both share the focus on practice as the site for thriving of knowledge, and the emphasis on local language building for constructing problems and solutions. More importantly, neither of them take knowledge as universal, but highly contingent, local, and flexibly held. An apparent difference that I can easily identify between them was that the CofP was more of a framework of a learning community, while cooperative inquiry also gives us an orientation on how to make such a community possible. Intimacy building, partnership making, attention to diversities, and challenging unhelpful power differentials are strategies developed in this inquiry to illuminate how to nurture a participatory community for problem solving. Whereas, the inquiry technologies offered by CGI facilitate evidence-informed practices to solve problems arising from the post-separation lives of abused women and their teenage sons/daughters.

The findings of this research suggest the services move beyond the social worker-abused women-children triad, but engage domestic violence social workers and users in a CofP that is dedicated to solving similar problems together, for protecting both mothers and children. This practice avoids polarization of the interests of women and children, and actively engages them in taking up the responsibility to care for each other and solve problems together. The findings also demonstrate the potential of CGI in nurturing a community of practice for formerly abused women and their sons/daughters in solving lived problems together and developing partnership in care rendering in the difficult post-separation context.

#### 7.3.3.3 Possible future for the post-separation domestic violence services in Hong Kong

Hong Kong domestic violence services are built on a three-pronged approach which targets tackling domestic violence by providing: (1) preventive measures, i.e. publicity, community education, and enhancing social capital, (2) supportive measures, i.e. family services, housing assistance, financial assistance, and childcare

services, and (3) specialized services and crisis intervention, i.e. Family and Child Protective Services Units, the Family Crisis Support Centre, and refuge centres for women (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2008). Abused women identified by the Police and the social service agencies would be registered in the Central Information System of Battered Spouse and Sexual Violence Cases. Cases involving serious violence would be handled by a special investigation unit which comprises trained police and social workers from the Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs). Other identified cases of intimate partner violence would be referred to the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) of either the Social Welfare Department or NGOs. The responsible social worker of the case in the IFSC would normally be the case manager who coordinates different governmental departments for providing support and protection to abused women and their children. If urgent housing need is identified, the Police or the case manager would refer the abused women to women shelters which normally provide 2-week short-term stays. Termination of the case is said to take place when violence against the woman subsides (Social Welfare Department, 2011). In this regard, domestic violence services in Hong Kong are designed to meet the needs of women and their family members, whose threats of violence are consistently substantiated. This service provision framework apparently excludes their voices and turns a blind eye to the needs of abused women who have left the matrimonial home.

Various organizations are already alerted to the service gap, but they still fail to sustain quality services for meeting the needs of formerly abused women. The earliest founded women shelter in Hong Kong, the Harmony House, has been aware of the service gap, and has started developing 'after shelter services' and survivor volunteer groups to take care of the emotional and adaptation needs of women after leaving the shelter. However, these follow-up services would be usually provided to women survivors who have left the shelter for less than 3 months. Abused women normally take a couple of months to settle down in the new housing, and, as accorded to women participants' experiences, 'leaving is just the start and problems appear after you have settled down'. In addition, due to

austerity, Harmony House also realized that these services, though with good intention, were not carried out effectively (Harmony House, 2007). Regarding the follow-up services provided by the IFSCs, for both abused women and children witnessing family violence, they are usually administrative, and utterly more concerned with welfare application (The Forthright Caucus, Kwan Fook , & Civic Party, 2009). It could be claimed confidently that there are no formal, sustainable, and effective services available to deal with the needs as identified by women participants in this inquiry, for instance, specific services for handling *'psychological vulnerability'*, *'social isolation'*, *'physical vulnerability'* and *'children's benefits/parent-child relationship'* of formerly abused women. The underdeveloped services for formerly abused women could be understood as the failure to see that leaving the abuser is not equivalent to leaving victimhood. As suggested by the findings, leaving victimhood is a time-taking process in which women participants might undergo times of identity struggle, negotiation, assessment, and assignation. This inquiry also shows that women participants' attempts of living and practising like 'heroic survivors' contrarily confronted them with evidence that they indeed needed a process to do so, as well as care and help. The findings of this study not only highlight the service gap in Hong Kong domestic violence services, but also suggests some directions for service development in taking women away from victimhood.

The 'Chungsangje-becoming' identity developed in this inquiry happens to outline some concerns of formerly abused women in leaving victimhood. After leaving the abusive relationship, women may encounter the demand for connecting with new friends, neighbours and people from different backgrounds, after years of social isolation in the abusive relationship (Ho & Kong, 2010). Complicated by the psychological and physical vulnerability resulting from the long-term violence against them, and the need for help in 'navigating the unfamiliar social service and educational systems' in the new community (Tutty, 1996, p. 428), living a new life is not easy. Even though formerly abused women in the inquiry group were so driven to live a bright and beautiful life, they still expressed concerns in working it out.

These concerns include ‘how to relate to the abusive partner after leaving—both physically and psychologically’, ‘how to handle the traumatic experiences that still affect their current life’, ‘how to respond to requests for disclosure of personal history of being abused—both to personal network and to the public’ and ‘how to handle emotional/health fluctuations caused by all the complications’. These concerns arising from the inquiry group have vividly demonstrated women’s struggles in leaving victimhood, and have also showcased how a cooperative inquiry group can help in locating problems faced by formerly abused women. The reflection-action-reflection cycles, data collection, and analysis methods built-in in this CGI allowed instantaneous discovery, identification, articulation, and construction of problems, so that prompt responses from the group could be organized to meet the emerging needs of participants.

The utility of group work for formerly abused women is evident in research (Tutty, 1996), while the findings of this research also show that the practitioner-user collaboration provided a context for care and service rendering, and, more importantly, for differences in understanding and doing things that come to surface in group practices. The differences are crucial to push the knowledge boundary of all participants and to provide references in constructing helpful identities and solutions to problems. When women participants brought up their ‘troubles’ in the group, the set of relationships among members simultaneously becomes the context for re-examining and making sense of the members’ lived experiences. Loseke (2001) argued that ‘troubles’ in lived experiences ‘tend to be unpredictable in emergence, irregular in progression, ambiguous in meaning, and uncertain in development’ (p.107). Therefore, by opening up, reviewing, and articulating the troubled lived experiences in the group, abused women at the same time invite group members to make sense of their experiences that do not fit with the formula stories, and revisit the unintelligible experiences in their lives (or experiences lying outside their regular narratives of life). New identity constructs carved new territories for previously marginalized experiences to develop, and help organize group practices to meet the needs revealed in the newly recognized experiences. It

is not only the responsibility of the social worker/facilitator to promote the awareness about the importance of differences, but also that of all participants because their responses to differences matter as much as the social worker/facilitator.

Nonetheless, knowledge transfer from women's personhood and autonomy building to mother-teenage sons/daughters daily practices was observed in this inquiry. Democratization of sisterhood through 'partnership making' gave rise to the democratization of mother-child relationships and daily care practices, as well as leading to the reconstructed 'mother-son/daughter partnership' and shared responsibility in caring duties. The recognition to the needs of teenage sons and daughters for participating in knowledge making and building personhood/autonomy was translated in the teenage sons/daughters' participation in the inquiry as equal partners. We collaborated in designing, delivering, and evaluating services for both formerly abused women and their sons and daughters. Meanwhile, we re-examined the power differences embedded in conventional 'mother-child' relationship that damage filial intimacy. Articulation of mother-son/daughter daily practices and the local construction of different types of parenting enabled the evaluation of the impact of different filial relationships on the teenage participants' perceived well-being. The teenagers' participation also opened up possibilities for negotiation of their identities, partnerships and responsibilities, which supported the development of relational autonomy, and also facilitated the utilization of human resources for the production of relevant knowledge in accomplishing sufficient daily care.

This inquiry permits us to see the potential of CGI in achieving social work professional accountability, specifically that in post-separation domestic violence services. It contributes to the development of post-separation domestic violence services in Hong Kong, which are now virtually absent. Post-separation domestic violence services have to redress the marginalization of the needs and voices of formerly abused women, while, as escalated by the current narrow focus on crisis

intervention, it has to avoid blaming formerly abused women for failing to meet the financial and parenting challenges in the post-separation period. Especially as suggested in the literature, when child protection concerns are raised in cases of domestic violence, mothers are more likely to be blamed and labelled as deficient. Although these 'professional' attitudes are criticized for rendering the abusers invisible in meeting children's needs, and denying the responsibility of abusers in causing the suffering of both women and children, they are still prevalent in child protection services (Hester, 2013).

#### **7.4 Translation in this CGI**

The lives of social scientists would be a lot easier if language were a simple representation of life events or the objective world. Then, Russell's pursuit of a perfect language system could have been the panacea of a lot of apparently unresolvable (if not impossible) conundrums in social inquiries. For example, in ethnographic research the voice of participants has been one of the major measures for the credibility of an inquiry, while language is the commonest tool for capturing the 'voice'. To know how far one's voice is represented in a written manuscript is always an unsettling journey, unless words and language can be the perfect representation of the participants' lived realities. However, social scientists' life is made more complicated by the complexity of language and its nature within the social world.

*'Experience has a definite immediacy which eludes every opinion about its meaning. Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life. Thus, essential to an experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as its meaning'* (Gadamer, 1988:67, cited in Lock & Strong 2010:68).

The relationship between language and experience reveals that translation is not a simple conversion of A to A' and B to B'. Instead, translation involves indefinite loops of interpretation of 'realities' to generate an understanding which could be shared within a community.

Translation in fact happens in various layers of social life. The primary translation happens when we want to capture our experiences. This is also the starting point of phenomenology which intends to tell how knowledge is possible through the development of consciousness. This experience happened also in this inquiry when participants reflected on the lived experiences and problem solving practices we had engaged in. The primary form of translation involves translating lived experiences into presentational forms, including words and language. However, the articulated lived experiences may not be immediately intelligible and communicable to others in a particular community, e.g. collagen parenting generated by Yuen. The lack of common language to capture the unique experiences lived by a particular participant then created the need for another form of translation which is to subject the at-first unintelligible sayings and the experiences captured by those sayings to further interpretation within a community. This form of translation allows personal experiences to become communicable within a particular community. Gadamer called this the fusion of horizon which requires collaborative dialogues and a spirit of 'play' of the participants in the conversation, to include different ways of understanding and valuing experience (Lock & Strong, 2010). New language could emerge in the dialogical process to capture the unintelligible. Given that the two forms of translation take place in the same language system, the representation of ones' lived experiences through language is still deemed to be partial. Instead of objective representation of one's experience, the language used by participants instead shows more about how their experiences are understood, valued and organized in the communities they are living in.

Unfolding the nature of language and translation enables us to see the challenges of doing research in another language. The complete compatibility of languages is first of all unlikely because each language is culture-specific so that it can capture the ways of living, understanding and valuing experiences in that particular cultural and socio-historical context. In this regard, translation of the description of people's lived experiences from one language to another requires understanding the different life practices carried out in the cultures in which the languages are embedded. Good examples of this challenge can be seen in the movie *Lost In Translation*, in which Japanese Karaoke and the entertainment culture shock the character Bob Harris, as no language from his lived experiences could help translate the new practices. This challenge underscored the whole inquiry whenever translation across languages took place, i.e. translating locally generated Cantonese concepts and theories back into English and translating English literature about domestic violence and children participation into Chinese/Cantonese for women participants. Since all the other participants in this inquiry speak Cantonese but not English, the cross-language translation is strongly influenced by the author's understanding and perceived compatibility of the two languages and the life practices they entail.

By examining the Cantonese term, 上樓姐妹 (well-housed sisters), employed by women participants, and the English term, formerly abused women, employed in this thesis in describing 'separated abused women', we would be able to tell how lived experience is authored and re-authored in the process of translation. 'Formerly abused women' is first employed in the 'letter to participants' in the second submission of ethics review of this inquiry. The term emerged to address the reviewers' concern, after the first round of the ethics review (see Appendix 3.4), about the vulnerability of abused women in participating in this inquiry. This term is also an extension of the term, 'former victims of domestic violence', used by the 3<sup>rd</sup> reviewer, so as to state more clearly the 'nature' of participants with whom I was intending to do my research. 'Formerly abused women' carries the meanings of the following:



1. Abused women who have left the abusers and are staying away from the matrimonial homes
2. Separated abused women who are not currently experiencing physical violence against them and their children
3. Separated abused women who are classified as unqualified for domestic violence services because the 'violence against them subsides' (as stated in the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases)

Out of this context, the term 'formerly abused women' was constructed to explicate to the ethics review committee that the target participants' risk of immediate life threats is unlikely, while acknowledging that abused women continue to suffer after separation (they are not former 'victims') as their needs are ignored by the formal services. Certainly, for non-English speaking participants in the inquiry, 'formerly abused women' was never their description of their lived experiences of separation.

Women participants usually used the term, '上樓姐妹 (well-housed sisters)', to describe themselves. This term does not include those who return to the matrimonial homes or those who are still staying in the shelters. Instead, it highlights the group of abused women who are most ignored by the formal services:

1. Abused women who have left the abusers and housed elsewhere relatively permanently from the matrimonial homes
2. Service terminates shortly after they are given an apartment to live in
3. They are given a 'house' but do not necessarily yet have a 'home'<sup>55</sup>. The post-separation needs, particularly the 'home-building' needs, are largely unseen in formal services

---

<sup>55</sup> A 'home' means the family relationships, intimacy, warmth, support and love contained in a 'house'. The term of 'house' is used by women participants to highlight that they are given the hardware for a 'home', but not supported to rebuild the valuable content of it.

Hence, '上樓姐妹(well-housed sisters)' represents women's resentment of the inadequacy of domestic violence service for separated abused women. The term 'house' is emphasized in this description as a contrast to the term 'home' which is something they lose in the separation process but could hardly rebuild without support. Instead of formal services, their home building relies more on their sisterhood with other abused women. By comparing the two terms in describing 'separated abused women', it is not difficult to see how meanings are changed in the process of translation (Shaw & Holland, 2014); meanwhile, the different languages used to describe properties of the 'subject matter' reflect how the author(s) accommodates to the demands of different communities and the problems s/he wants to address at the moment. It is likely that my decision to use the term 'formerly abused women' to appeal to the ethical demand from the ethics review committee might be an instance of the 'resistant door' for making more 'human' our recording of people's lives, as realized by Shaw (Shaw & Holland, 2014:44).

Regarding the translation of English academic literature into understandable 'language' for participants, it is never an A to A', but a prolonged process of understanding, meaning construction and drawing commonalities between close experiences of the participants to the concepts discussed in the literature. More importantly, the literature I found relevant has to be understood as relevant to the participants in order to gain consensus that this stream of literature is worth pursuing to inform further inquiry. In this light, the translation of literature is usually selective to its immediate relevance to the problem emerged in the context of the moment. Lengthy theoretical discussions which were to serve the demands from the University and the academic field would be presented and translated only when they could shed light on the emerging understanding of the issue, in this case 'children's participation', by the women participants. Therefore, the historical development of 'childhood' and sociology of childhood in the document were not translated into Chinese. Instead, Derrida's politics of friendship was articulated in the group as it captured vividly how meanings were generated at the moment an

utterance was responded to. It assisted participants in the group to understand how responses could change the meaning of sayings, doings and responses, and made them aware of the way they responded to their children's utterance. Furthermore, it happened to be very close to participants' experience in interacting with their abusive ex-partners. For example, a woman participant articulated how her ex-husband's violence was interpreted as acceptable when she repeatedly responded to his 'shouting' and violence with 'having my butt stuck on the chair'. Other women participants then started offering their lived experiences of how their responses made the intimidating or even violent acts of their ex-partners look acceptable, and how they might be able to alter their responses in a way that the utterance could be understood differently. Therefore, the translation of outside concepts into understandable and usable ones requires substantiation of those concepts with ones' experiences and languages.

Evidently, this inquiry is characterized by different types of translation. Amongst them all, translating the locally developed Cantonese concepts into English is one of the most tormenting experiences for me in doing this PhD. The lack of vocabulary in describing what I experienced in the inquiry and what I was told by participants were the most daunting. This could be caused by my English literacy, while it could be due to the incompatibility of the two languages. In case of perceived language incompatibility, the Cantonese terms have been retained in order to increase the possibility of bringing participants' 'voices'/ preferred language into the English academic field, such as *Chungsangje* and *Shui Zhai Zhi*. However, the precarious part is when the English terms are perceived as synonymous to the Cantonese terms. As meanings are experience and context dependent, translation across languages is to a certain degree arbitrary. Although I consistently communicated with participants, through the whatsapp chat group (a mobile communication tool), on the fitness of English terms that I found close but not equivalent to the Cantonese terms, the choice of terms (signifiers) were filtered through my understanding of the meanings (signified) that they carry. Nonetheless, as no participants in the group were able to counter suggest alternative options in

English, it became impossible to establish the checks and balances in the cross-language translation carried out by me in the writing up process.

How could checks and balances in translation be possible for writing up the research in another language? This has been my conundrum since I was back in the UK from the fieldwork. The writing up process was like a test of the cultural literacy of the researcher in both the Cantonese-speaking and the English-speaking worlds, and the field competence in both academia and practice. I would imagine engaging in a bilingual community which either has experience or knowledge about intimate partner violence in Hong Kong will be helpful in triangulating the translation across the languages. People who understand and even have experienced the social practices captured by the language used by the women and teenage participants would be arguably more able to judge the compatibility of the English for describing them. The translation experiences also shed light on the importance of reflexivity in doing research in another language as the audience the thesis/manuscript is addressed to could have an impact on their description of the lived experiences of the participants.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

Cooperation is the central concept of this thesis. It is a practical strategy, promoted by CGI, to create synergy for increasing the participation of abused women in Hong Kong domestic violence services. Meanwhile, it helps alleviate the antagonist social work practitioner-user divide which is exacerbated in the rising managerial and consumerist culture of social services. The recorded failures of the domestic violence services to protect abused women and their children have further triggered the public's outcry for social work professional accountability, posing challenges for domestic violence social workers to build workable knowledge that protects the abused and the affected. Ironically, post-separation domestic violence service is virtually absent in Hong Kong even though the post-separation stage is extensively recognized as carrying risks of escalated violence and threats. Hong Kong domestic violence services' focus on crisis-intervention reveals that separation

from abusers is understood as a moment of decision, sharp and clear-cut, that leads to problem-free lives. This service framework also assumes that abused women will meet the expectation of a rational and self-reliant adult carer while coping with all the post-separation stress. Failing to see separation as a stretched process of leaving and returning, and adhering to the Cartesian model of self that underpins capitalist ideology, both strengthens the service focus on crisis-intervention, and renders post-separation support out of the agenda. CGI invented in this research has demonstrated its potential in achieving a fuller version of professional accountability in working with users of domestic violence services. It attests to utilization of practice evidence and pursuit of local ethics in meeting the post-separation needs of both formerly abused women and their teenage children. Moreover, it advocates for more concern over the post-separation needs of abused women and their sons and daughters.

This thesis re-examines the unbalanced emphasis on the demonstrated effectiveness of interventions in the medical model of EBP and reminds us what works is more important than what worked. CGI shows us that effectiveness is gained locally by translating 'propositional knowledge' into practical and experiential knowledge that solves emerging problems, which are not guaranteed by RCTs or research-in-vacuum. Moreover, in this thesis, I have argued for the need to expand the ethical lens. The construction of 3 layers of participation in this inquiry reminds participatory researchers to facilitate participations at all levels, in addition to maximizing the 'degree of participation'. This research advocates the following: involving users equally with social workers in a CofP to solve problems encountered in domestic violence contexts, 'social participation in a CofP', users' participation in making sense of lived experiences and data, 'epistemological participation', and that in revealing diversities, and 'political participation' in a CofP. Cultivating skills for 'epistemological participation' (translating lived experiences, observational data and other forms of data into presentational and propositional knowledge) and acknowledging the necessary 'other-ness' in the construction of

'we-ness' are, hence, given more importance in promoting local democracy and participatory practices.

Carrying on the constructionist spirit, the assumption of atomized, self-reliant and rational individuals (Cartesian model of self) is argued to be insufficient and limiting to develop relational domestic violence services that service the purposes of (re)building 'family', relational autonomy, mother-son/daughter partnership, and a community of practice. In this regard, the cooperation I deliberated in this thesis is intended to enroot itself in the participatory paradigm, which supports an alternative concept of self—the relational self. This marks the basic departure from cooperation that advocates strategic alliance, division of labour, degree of participation, and forms of participation. These understandings commonly assume participants are atomized individuals who come together and coordinate themselves instrumentally to accomplish agreed goals. More importantly, cooperation understood in the above does not see that the practice of cooperation itself may influence the constitution of 'self', rendering 'self' a fixture instead of a being. The relational lens, as hinted in the phenomenological root of Cooperative Inquiry, helps us take on a new understanding of cooperation—displaying of a community of practice. This theorization of cooperation enables us to see how participants work in co-existence with each other and how the cooperation simultaneously transformed participants' selves, partnership, and the shape of the co-existence. In this regard, (trans)forming identities and making partnerships are perceived as the primary constitutive processes of displaying a community of practice.

Furthermore, developing relational autonomy is proposed to be critical for protecting formerly abused women. Nurturing of 'relational autonomy' has paramount importance in alleviating the consequences of long-term subjugation to coercive control, and promotes participation of abused women. The thesis not only contributes to deeper thoughts about relational autonomy, contextualized justice and ethics of care, but also translates these concepts into practical strategies for

developing formerly abused women's personhood and democratizing daily care practices to both their children and other formerly abused women whom they call 'sisters'. Those strategies are ongoing identity construction, partnership negotiation, and we-ness formulation (displaying a community of practice). In practice, they unveiled formerly abused women's need for departing victimhood and recognized diversity and complexity in their victimizing and surviving experiences. We also come to understand '(trans)forming identities' as constitutive and significant to problem solving. Women participants identified 'victim identity' as the major barrier for accessing personal strengths for bettering lives, whereas teenage participants identified 'children' as an unhelpful label for collaborating with their mothers in providing mutual care. Departing from unhelpful identities requires not only re-examination of alternative/outlying lived experiences, but also construction of 'helpful' identities that fit with participants' lived experiences and are practical<sup>56</sup> to their circumstances. In this CGI, women participants constructed 'victim-chungsangje classification' for informing care and service rendering to fit the varied circumstances of participants. Within which, the construction of 'chungsangje-becoming' also challenged the 'victim-survivor dichotomy' that dominates women's advocacy, and suggested the need for venturing into the '-' in post-separation domestic violence services. Next to this, teenage participants challenged the negative connotation carried by the identity of 'children', and demonstrated to 'adult' participants their ability to make judgements, take care of themselves and their mothers, and participate in advocacy for 'children's participation'. It is evident that '(trans)forming identities' simultaneously changes 'partnership making' as well as the shape of the community of practice. The concepts of 'relational self', 'relationality', and 'social practices', meticulously developed and discussed by Gergen & Gergen, Ribbens-McCarthy and Schatzki respectively, are borrowed to enrich the articulation of these interrelations

---

<sup>56</sup> Practicality here means how far the newly constructed identity could inform practical solutions that are suitable for the participants' particular here-and-now circumstances, including the relationship with the abuser, financial stability, existence of threats, and relationship with significant others.

manifested in this inquiry. Examining these interrelations also unmask the linking among socio-relational context, language and actions/interactions/coordination. The linking is also explored in the articulation of the locally constructed grounded theories, “locating victim-chungsangje” and “care and service rendering” and ‘transforming from “being cared” to “equal partners”’. This thesis further addresses the lasting conflict between women protection and child protection in domestic violence services, by proposing relational domestic violence services that focus more on partnership building and nurturing of communities of practice in meeting the protection needs in the post-separation context. Through the theory of ‘displaying family-like community of practice’, I attempt to demonstrate that a community of practice for users and practitioners (abused women, children and practitioners) in post-separation domestic violence services could be an alternative strategy for ensuring appropriate care for both abused women and their children, and may be able to give it a pause before children are taken away from their mothers’ care. This theory draws on Wenger’s scholarship on community of practice and Smart’s concept of displaying family to show how family practices, ‘sisterhood-ing’, ‘brotherhood-ing’ and ‘motherhood-ing’, enabled abused women and their teenage children’s needs for care and support to come through in this CGI. This community of practice helps to alleviate the social isolation caused by migration, language differences, abuse, economic deprivation, and cultural differences, and to assist women’s departure from victimhood. Furthermore, it facilitates reconciliation of the highly stressed filial relationships, deteriorated intimacy, and lack of cooperation between abused mothers and their sons/daughters. A learning and problem solving community was gradually developed in this family-like relational context by solving problems together. CGI also provided tools to facilitate the generation of problem solving practices (practical knowing), which are grounded in experiential, presentational and propositional knowing.

The need for building communities of practice is not simply serving domestic violence service development, but is also a site for building cooperative skills of



both social work practitioners and service users. Sennett (2012) argues that modern society has deskilled us from cooperating with each other by replacing craftsmanship with machines, and engaging us in short-term contracts. We need to re-engage ourselves in the practice of cooperation, in order to re-skill ourselves to make cooperation possible. The techniques we need to enable coordinated co-existence of differences are far underexplored, not just in the literature, but also in social work practices. The conventional practitioner-user and mother-child divisions further inhibit cooperation in cases of domestic violence. Bringing to the foreground the relationships that both practitioners and users need to work with each other, is to resurrect the importance of cooperation, and to advocate the cultivation of skills that build more participatory relationships. Cooperation is apparently not given, and participatory cooperation is necessarily hard earned. Skills in promoting different layers of participatory cooperation deserve far more concern and development in social work practice research, especially in areas where users are highly deskilled by social exclusion, marginalization, coercion, and control. In this regard, domestic violence service users are more likely to benefit from learning cooperation skills through the practice of participatory social work practice research.

## Reference

- Abrahams, H. (2007). *Supporting Women after Domestic Violence : Loss, Trauma and Recovery*. London: Jessica Kingsley .
- Alma, A., George, C., Rendall, K., Yuk-chung, C., Gladys L.T., L., & Sung, P. (2008). A Preliminary Validation of the Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER) in Hong Kong. *Journal of Family Violence, 23*(8), 727-735.
- Appel, A. E., & Holden, G. W. (1998). The co-occurrence of spouse and physical child abuse: A review and appraisal. *Journal of family psychology, 12*(4), 578-599.
- Arieli, D., Friedman, V. J., & Agbaria, K. (2009). The paradox of participation in action research. *Action Research, 7*(3), 263-290.
- AWID Women's Rights. (2008, February 12). *Women's Rights In Hong Kong: How Are Feminist Movements Dealing With The Challenges?* Retrieved March 27, 2014, from AWID Women's Rights: <http://www.awid.org/eng/Library/Women-s-rights-in-Hong-Kong-How-are-feminist-movements-dealing-with-the-challenges>
- Banks, S. (2014). Reclaiming social work ethics: Challenging the new public management. In S. Banks, *Critical And Radical Debates In Social Work: Ethics* (pp. 1-24). UK: Policy Press .
- Banks, S., & Barners, D. (2005). Getting started with a piece of research/evaluation in social work. In R. Adams, L. Dominelli, & M. Payne, *Social Work Futures: Crossing Boundaries, Transforming Practice* (pp. 237-250). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Baskerville, R., & Pries-Heje, J. (1999). Grounded action research: a method for understanding IT in practice. *Accounting, Management and Information Technologies, 9*, 1-23.
- Beeman, S. K., Hagemester, A. K., & Edleson, J. L. (1999). Child protection and battered women's services: From conflict to collaboration. *Child Maltreatment, 4*(2), 116-126.
- Bell, K. (2012). Towards a post-conventional philosophical base for social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 42*, 408-423.

- Ben-Ari, A., Winstok, Z., & Eisikovits, Z. (2003). Choice within entrapment and entrapment within choice: The challenge facing battered women who stay. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 84(4), 539-546.
- Beresford, P. (2000). Service users' knowledges and social work theory: conflict or collaboration? *British Journal of Social Work*, 30(4), 489-503.
- Beresford, P. (2002). User involvement in research and evaluation: Liberation or regulation? *Social Policy and Society*, 1(2), 95-105.
- Beresford, P. (2005). Developing the theoretical basis for service user/survivor-led research and equal involvement in research. *Epidemiologia e Psichiatria Sociale*, 14(1), 4-9.
- Bernstein, R. J. (2011). *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Biehal, N., & Sainsbury, E. (1991). From values of rights in social work: Some issues in practice development and research. *British Journal of Social Work*, 21, 245-257.
- Birch, M., & Miller, T. (2002). Encouraging participation: Ethics and responsibilities. In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop, & T. Miller, *Ethics In Qualitative Research* (pp. 97-106). UK: Sage Publications.
- Blake, M. K. (2007). Formality and friendship: Research ethics review and participatory action research. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(3), 411-421.
- Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Rainbow, B. (2006). Partnership between children and adults?: The experience of the international children's conference on the environment. *Childhood*, 13, 113-126.
- Bograd, M. (1988). Feminist perspectives on wife abuse: An introduction. In K. Yllo, & M. Bograd, *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*. California: SAGE Publication.
- Botes, A. (2000). A comparison between the ethics of justice and the ethics of care. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32(5), 1071-1075.
- Brosi, M. W., & Rolling, E. S. (2010). Narrative journey for intimate partner violence: From victim to survivor. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*(38), 237-250.

- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Penguin.
- Brown, H. (2005). Carrying out research in social work. In R. Adams, L. Dominelli, & M. Payne, *Social Work Futures: Crossing Boundaries, Transforming Practice* (pp. 251-263). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cameron, G., & Freymond, N. (2006). Understanding international comparisons of child protection, family service, and community caring systems of child and family welfare. In G. Cameron, & N. Freymond, *Towards positive systems of child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family service, and community caring systems* (pp. 3-25). University of Toronto Press.
- Chan, K.L. (2005). *Study of Child Abuse and Spouse Battering: Report on Findings of Household Survey*. [A Consultancy Study Commissioned by the SWD of the HKSAR]. Hong Kong: Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The Hong Kong University.
- Chan, K. L. (2011). Co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and child abuse in Hong Kong Chinese families. *Journal of interpersonal violence, 26*(7), 1322-1342.
- Chan, K., & Chan, F. (2003). Inclusion or exclusion? Housing battered women in Hong Kong. *Critical Social Policy, 23*, 526-546.
- Chan, Y., & Lam, G. L. (2005). Unraveling the rationale for a one-stop service under the Family and Child Protection Services Units in Hong Kong. *International Social Work, 48*(4), 419-428.
- Cheung, F. M. (1989). The women's center: A community approach to feminism in Hong Kong. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 17*(1), 99-107.
- Christman, J. (2004). Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves. *Philosophical Studies, 117*, 143-164.
- Churchill, H., & Clarke, K. (2013). Troubled and troublesome teens: Mothers' and professionals' understandings of parenting teenagers and teenage troubles. In J. Ribbens-MaCarthy, C.-A. Hooper, & V. Gilles, *Family Troubles? Exploring Changes*

*and Challenges in the Families Lives of Children and Young People* (pp. 291-304).  
Bristol: The Policy Press.

Cooper, A. (2009). Hearing the grass grow: Emotional and epistemological challenges of practice-near research. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23(4), 429-442.

Coulshed, V., & Orme, J. (2006). *Social Work Practice*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coward, R. (1997). The heaven and hell of mothering: Mothering and ambivalence in the mass media. In W. Hollway, & B. Featherstone, *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 111-118). New York: Routledge.

Croft, S., & Beresford, P. (1996). The politics of participation. In D. Taylor, *Critical Social Policy: A Reader* (pp. 175-198). London: Sage Publications.

Crossley, N. (2007). Researching embodiment by way of 'body techniques'. *Sociological Review*, 80-94.

Davis, R. E. (2002). 'The strongest women': Exploration of the inner resources of abused women. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12, 1248-1263.

Davis, R. L. (2008). *Domestic Violence: Intervention, Prevention, Policies, and Solutions*. CRC Press.

D'Cruz, H., Gillingham, P., & Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its meanings and relevance for social work: A critical review of the literature. *British Journal of Social Work*, 73-90.

Department for Education, the HM Government. (2013, March). Retrieved November 10, 2014, from GOV.UK:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/281368/Working\\_together\\_to\\_safeguard\\_children.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281368/Working_together_to_safeguard_children.pdf)

Derrida, J. (1988 ). The politics of friendship. *The Journal of Philosophy*.

Dobash, R., & Dobash, R. (1992). *Women, Violence and Social Change*. U.S.: The Routledge.

Dominelli, L. (2005). Social work research: Contested knowledge for practice. In R. Adams, L. Dominelli, & M. Payne, *Social Work Futures: Crossing Boundaries, Transforming Practice* (pp. 223-236). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Donovan, C., & Hester, M. (2010). 'I hate the word "victim"': An exploration of recognition of domestic violence in same sex relationships. *Social Policy and Society*, 9(2), 279-289.
- Douglas, H., & Walsh, T. (2010). Mothers, domestic violence, and child protection. *Violence Against Women*, 16(5), 489-508.
- Downes, J., Kelly, L., & Westmarland, N. (2013). Ethics in Violence and Abuse Research - a Positive Empowerment Approach. *Sociological Research*, 19(1).
- Dunn, J. L. (2004). The politics of empathy: Social movements and victim repertoires. *Sociological Focus*, 37(3), 235-250.
- Dunn, J. L. (2005). 'Victims' and 'survivors': Emerging vocabularies of motives for 'battered women who stay'. *Sociological Inquiry*, 75, 1-30.
- Dunne, C. (2011). The place of the literature review in grounded theory research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), 111-124.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992). Think practically and look locally: Language and gender as community-based practice. *Annual review of anthropology*, 461-490.
- Eriksson, M. (2014). Mothers as a vulnerable group of women subjected to violence. *Social Dialogue, Free Magazine of the International Association of Schools of Social Work*, 3(8), 10-15. <http://www.social-dialogue.com/>
- Eriksson, M. (2012). Participation for children exposed to domestic violence? Social workers' approaches and children's strategies, *European Journal of Social Work*, 15 (2), 205-221.
- Eriksson, M. (2008). Revolutionary mothers? Interacting power relations, agency and social change. *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 16 (2), 96-113.
- Evans, T. (2011). Editorial 'special issues: practice research'. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 1-3.

- Featherstone, B. (1997). Introduction: Crisis in the western family. In W. Hollway, & B. Featherstone, *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 1-16). New York: Routledge.
- Featherstone, B. (1999). Taking mothering more seriously: the implications for child protection. *Child and Family Social Work*, 4, 43-53.
- Feldman, R. (2010). Critical infrastructures for social work practice research: Pondering the past, framing the future. In A. Fortune, P. McCallion, & K. Briar-Lawson, *Social Work Practice Research for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 3-22). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Fischer, J. (1978). *Effective casework practice: An eclectic approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fisher, M. (2011). Practice literate research: Turning the tables. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 29-44.
- Flanagan, O., & Jackson, k. (1987). Justice, care and gender: The Kohlberg-Gilligan debate revisited. *Chicago Journal*, 97(3), 622-637.
- Fook, J. (1996). The reflective researcher: Developing a reflective approach to practice. In J. Fook, *The Reflective Researcher: Social Workers' Theories Of Practice Rsearch* (pp. 1-10). Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Fook, J. (2004). What professionals need for research: Beyond evidence based practice. In D. Smith, *Social Work And Evidence-Based Practice* (pp. 29-46). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Fook, J., & Gardner, F. (2007). *Practising Critical Reflection: A Resource Handbook*. London: Open University Press.
- Fook, J., Johannessen, A., Psoinos, M. (2011). Partnership in practice research: A Norwegian experience. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 29-44.
- Fortune, A. (2010). Empirical practice in social work. In A. Fortune, P. McCallion, & K. Briar-Lawson, *Social Work Practice Research for the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 31-48). New York: Columbia University Press.

- Freeman, M. (1992). Taking children's rights more seriously. *International Journal of Law and the Family*, 6, 52-71.
- Freeman, M. (1998). The sociology of childhood and children's rights. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 6, 433-444.
- Frost, N. (2009). Evaluating practice. In R. Adams, L. Dominelli, & M. Payne, *Practising Social Work In A Complex World* (pp. 296-307). China: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fuller, R., & Petch, A. (1995). *Practitioner Research: The Reflexive Social Worker*. Philadelphia : Open University Press.
- Gergen, K. (2001). From identity to relational politics. In K. Gergen, *Social Construction In Context* (pp. 169-183). Sage Publications.
- Gergen, K. (2003). Action research and orders of democracy. *Action Research*, 1(1), 39-56.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (2004). *Social construction: Entering the dialogue*. U.S.A., Ohio: Taos Institute Publications.
- Gilligan, C. (1995). Hearing the difference: Theorizing Connection. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 120-127.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Emergence vs forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. with the assistance of Judith Holton (2004). Remodeling grounded theory. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 5, No. 2).
- Goldstein, E. G. (1994). Self-disclosure in threatment: What therapists do and don't talk about. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 22(4), 417-433.
- Gómez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing real social transformation through research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235-245.



- Gray, M. (2010). Moral sources and emergent ethical theories in social work. *British Journal of Social Work, 40*, 1794-1811.
- Hague, G. (2005). Domestic violence survivors' forums in the UK: Experiments in involving abused women in domestic violence services and policy-making. *Journal of Gender Studies, 14*(3), 191-203.
- Hague, G., & Mullender, A. (2006). Who listens? The voices of domestic violence survivors in service provision in the United Kingdom. *Violence Against Women, 12*(6), 568-587.
- Hague, G., Mullender, A., & Aris, R. (2003). *Is Anyone Listening? Accountability and Women Survivors of Domestic Violence*. U.S.: The Routledge.
- Hanson, S., & Patel, L. (2013). How theory shapes practice: Approaches to women abuse and child abuse in South Africa. *British Journal of Social Work, 1-17*.
- Harmony House. (2007). *突破不同階段的困難及需要: 和諧之家與婦女攜手開創自強路*. Retrieved Oct 15, 2013, from Harmony House: [http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/chi/pressimage/doc/2007/16\\_11\\_2007.htm](http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/chi/pressimage/doc/2007/16_11_2007.htm)
- Hayes, B. E. (2012). Abusive Men's Indirect Control of Their Partner During the Process of Separation. *Journal of Family Violence, 27*(4):333-344.
- Herbert, T. B., Silver, R. C., & Ellard, J. H. (1991). Coping with an abusive relationship: I. How and why do women stay? *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 311-325*.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry, 3*, 274-294.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2001). The practice of co-operative inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' people. In P. Reason, & H. Bradbury, *Handbook of Action Research* (pp. 179-188). London: Sage Publications.
- Hester, M. (2013). The 'Three Planet Model': Towards an understanding of contradictions in approaches to women and children's safety in contexts of domestic violence. In N. Lombard, & L. Mcmillan, *Violence Against Women: Current Theory And Practice In*

*Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence And Exploitation* (pp. 35-52). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hewitt, N. A. (1985). Beyond the search for sisterhood: American women's history in the 1980s. *Social History*, 10(3), 299-321.

Ho, D. C. K (2010). The laws against domestic violence and their reform,. 2010. In Cha, K. L. , *Preventing Family Violence: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (pp. 137-188). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Ho, K. L., & Kong, S. T. (2010). *A Review of The Impacts of The Implementation of Domestic Violence Ordinance (Cap.189, revised 2008) On The Well-Being Of Domestic Violence Victims*. Hong Kong: Office of Cyd Ho Member of Legislative Council.

Ho, K., Ma, J., Chuah, P., & Lee, Y. (2010). Bringing in communicative rationality into design participation: A lesson from inclusive design. *PDC'10*. Sydney, Australia.

Holmes, J., & Meyerhoff, M. (1999). The community of practice: Theories and methodologies in language and gender research. *Language in Society*, 173-183.

Home Office. (2013, March). Information for Local Areas on the Change to the Definition of Domestic Violence and Abuse. United Kingdoms. Retrieved from [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/142701/guide-on-definition-of-dv.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/142701/guide-on-definition-of-dv.pdf)

Hong Kong Christian Service. (2004, July). *Christian Service News: Vigilant Protection on Domestic Violence*. Retrieved June 22, 2014, from Hong Kong Christian Service: <http://www.hkcs.org/enews/e44/e440200.htm>

Hooper, C. A., & Gunn, R. (2012). xRecognition as a framework for ethical participatory research: developing a methodology with looked after young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, (ahead-of-print), 1-14.

Huage, G., Mullender, A., & Aris, R. (2003). *Is Anyone Listening? Accountability and Women Survivors of Domestic Violence*. US: The Routledge.

Humphreys, C. (2000). *Social Work, Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Challenging Practice*. The Policy Press.

- Hunter, S. V. (2010). Evolving narratives about childhood sexual abuse: Challenging the dominance of the victim and survivor paradigm. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 31*, 176–190.
- Hydén, M. (1999). The world of the fearful: Battered women's narratives of leaving abusive husbands. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(4), 449-469.
- Hydén, M. (2005). 'I must have been an idiot to let it go on': Agency and positioning in battered women's narratives of leaving. *Feminism & Psychology, 15*(2), 169-188.
- Jaffe, P.G., Johnston, J.R., Crooks, C.V. and Bala, N. (2008). Custody disputes involving allegations of domestic violence: Toward a differentiated approach to parenting plans. *Family Court Review, 46*(3):500-522.
- Johnson, I. M. (1992). Economics, Situational, and Psychological Correlates of the Decision-Making Process of Battered Women. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 73*(3), 168- 176.
- Johnson, M. P., & Ferraro, K. J. (2000). Research on domestic violence in the 1990s: Making distinctions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*(November), 948-963.
- Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. (2008). Positive Psychological Perspectives on Posttraumatic Stress: An Integrative Psychosocial Framework. In S. Joseph, & P. A. Linley, *Trauma, Recovery, and Growth: Postive Psychological Perspectives on Posttraumatic Stress* (pp. 3-20). New Jersey, U.S.A.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. .
- Kellett, M., Robinson, C., & Burr, R. (2004). Images of Childhood. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson, *Doing Research With Children And Young People* (pp. 27-42). London: Sage Publications.
- Kirkwood, C. (1993). *Leaving Abusive Partners*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Køppe, S. (2012). A moderate eclecticism: ontological and epistemological issues. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science, 46*(1), 1-19.
- Krane, J., & Davies, L. (2002). Sisterhood is not enough: The invisibility of mothering in shelter practice with battered women. *Affilia, 17*(2), 167-190.

- Krane, J., & Davies, L. (2007). Mothering under difficult circumstances: Challenges to working with battered women. *Affilia*, 22, 23-38.
- Kwok, J., & Ku, H. (2011). Making habitable space together with female Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong: An interdisciplinary participatory action research project. *Action Research*, 6(3), 261-283.
- Lapierre, S. (2008). Mothering in the context of domestic violence: the pervasiveness of a deficit model of mothering. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13, 454-463.
- Lapierre, S. (2010). More responsibilities, less control: Understanding the challenges and difficulties involved in mothering in the context of domestic violence. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40, 1434-1451.
- Lau, S. (1981). Chinese familism in an urban-industrialized setting: The case of Hong Kong. *National Council on Family Relations*, 977-992.
- Legislative Council Secretariat. (2013, January 14). *Panel On Welfare Services (Papers)*. Retrieved April 1, 2014, from The Legislative Council of the HKSAR of the People Republic of China: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr12-13/english/panels/ws/papers/ws0114cb2-447-6-e.pdf>
- Leisenring, A. (2006). Confronting 'victim' discourses: The identity work of battered women. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(3), 307-330.
- Leung, J. (2002). The advent of managerialism in social welfare: The case of Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Journal of Social Work*, 36(1), 61-81.
- Leung, L. (1998). *Lone Mothers, Social Security And The Family In Hong Kong*. England: Ashgate.
- Leung, L. C. (2011). Gender Sensitivity Among Social Workers Handling Cases of Domestic Violence A Hong Kong Case. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 26(3), 291-303.
- Littlechild, B. (2000). Children's rights to be heard in child protection processes-Law, policy and practice in England and Wales. *Child Abuse Review*, 9, 403-415.

- Lock, A., & Strong, T. (2010). *Social constructionism: Sources and stirrings in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Loseke, D. R. (2001). Lived realities and formula stories of 'battered women'. In J. F. Gubrium, & J. A. Holstein, *Institutional Selves: Troubled Identities in a Postmodern World* (pp. 107-126). U.S.A.: Oxford University Press.
- Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee. (2008, December). *Review Report on Lump Sum Grant Subvention System*. Retrieved June 25, 2014, from Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR: <http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/ngo/Report-eng.pdf>
- Mama, A. (1996). *Statutory and Voluntary Sector Responses to Violence Against Black Women in the Home*. London: Whiting & Birch Ltd. .
- McLeod, A. (2008). *Listening to Children*. UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Melton, G. B. (2008). Beyond balancing: towards an integrated approach to children's rights. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(4), 903-920.
- Moe, A. M. (2009). Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work. *Battered women, children, and the end of abusive relationship*, 24, 244-256.
- Mouffe, C. (2000). *The Democratic Paradox*. New York: Verso.
- Muehlenhard, C. L., & Kimes, L. A. (1999). The social construction of violence: The case of sexual and domestic violence. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 234-245.
- Mullender, A., & Hague, G. (2005). Giving a voice to women survivors of domestic violence through recognition as a service user group. *British Journal of Social Work*, 35(8), 1321-1341.
- Nissim-Sabat, M. (2009 ). *Neither victim nor survivor: Thinking toward a new humanity*. U.S.A.: Lexington Books.
- Nissim-Sabat, M. (2009). *Neither Victim Nor Survivor: Thinking Toward A New Humanity*. U.S.A.: Lexington Books.

- Oliver, M. (2004). If I had a hammer: The social model in action. *Disabling Barriers—Enabling environments*, 2, 7-12.
- Owens, C. (1997). Parting is such a sweet sorrow: the romantic tragedy of a mother-child relationship. In W. Hollway, & B. Featherstone, *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 136-151). New York: Routledge.
- Padrós, M., Garcia, R., de Mello, R., & Molina, S. (2011). Contrasting scientific knowledge with knowledge from the lifeworld: The dialogical inclusion contract. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 304-312.
- Peace Women Across The Globe. (n.d.). *1000 PeaceWomen*. Retrieved November 10, 2014, from Peace Women Across The Globe:  
<http://www.1000peacewomen.org/en/network/1000-peacewomen/search/ngun-fung-liu-1364-27.html>
- Phillips, A. (1991). *Engendering Democracy*. UK: Polity Press.
- Phillips, C., & Shaw, I. (2011). Innovation and the practice of social work research. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41, 609-624.
- Powell, M., & Smith, A. (2009). Children's participation rights in research. *Childhood*, 16, 123-142.
- Radford, L., & Hester, M. (2006). *Mothering through domestic violence*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Reason, P. (1994). *Participation in human inquiry*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Reason, P. (2003). Pragmatist philosophy and action research readings and conversation with Richard Rorty. *Action Research*, 1(1), 103-123.
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 243-263.
- Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai. (2004, November 22). *Report of Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai*. Retrieved June 24, 2014, from Social Welfare Department: <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr04-05/english/panels/ws/papers/ws1122cb2-262-1e.pdf>

- Ribben-McCarthy, J. (2012). The powerful relational language of 'family': togetherness, belonging and personhood. *The Sociological Review*, 60(1), 68-90.
- Ribbens-McCarthy, J., Hooper, C., & Gillies, V. (2013). Troubling normalities and normal family troubles: diversities, experiences and tensions. In J. Ribbens-McCarthy, C. Hooper, & V. Gillies, *Family Troubles? Exploring Changes and Challenges in the Families Lives of Children and Young People* (pp. 1-22). Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Roche, J. (1999). Children: Rights, participation and citizenship. *Childhood*, 6, 475-493.
- Saso, M. (1999). *Velvet Bonds: The Chinese Family*. USA: New Life Center.
- Schatzki, T. (1996). *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scourfield, J. B. (2001). Constructing women in child protection work. *Child and Family Social Work*, 6, 77-87.
- Sennett, R. (2012). *Together: the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation*. Yale University Press.
- Shaw, I. (1999). *Qualitative Evaluation: Introducing qualitative methods*. London: Sage.
- Shaw, I. (2010). Qualitative social work practice research. In A. E. Fortune, P. McCallion, & K. Briar-Lawson, *Social Work Practice Research for the Twenty-first Century* (pp. 31-48). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shaw, I., & Holland, S. (2014). *Doing Qualitative Research in Social Work*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Shaw, I., & Norton, M. (2007). *The Kinds of Quality of Social Work Research in UK Universities*. UK: Social Care Institute for Excellence.
- Simmons, O., & Gregory, T. (2003). Grounded action: Achieving optimal and sustainable change. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 4(3), art.27.
- Smart, C. (2007). *Personal life*. Polity.
- Smith, B., & Smith, D. W. (2006). Introduction. In B. Smith, & D. W. Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (pp. 1-44). Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

- Smith, D. (2004). Introduction: Some versions of evidence-based practice. In D. Smith, *Social Work and Evidence-Based Practice* (pp. 7-28). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Social Welfare Department of HKSAR. (2007). *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Child Abuse Cases*. Retrieved June 18, 2012, from Social Welfare Department: [http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/fcw/proc\\_guidelines/childabuse/Procedural%20Guide \(Child%20Abuse\)\(Eng\)\(Updated%20Feb2014\).pdf](http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/fcw/proc_guidelines/childabuse/Procedural%20Guide%20(Child%20Abuse)(Eng)(Updated%20Feb2014).pdf)
- Social Welfare Department of HKSAR. (2013, April). *Procedural Guidelines for Handling Intimate Partner Violence Cases (Revised 2011)*. Retrieved March 26, 2014, from Social Welfare Department: [http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site\\_pubsvc/page\\_family/sub\\_fcwprocedure/id\\_1450/](http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_family/sub_fcwprocedure/id_1450/)
- Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR. (2000, September). *Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Mode*. Retrieved June 25, 2014, from Social Welfare Department of the HKSAR: <http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/ngo/LSGSpeechSept2000.pdf>
- Stanko, E. A. (1985). *Intimate intrusions: Women's experience of male violence*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life*. Oxford University Press.
- Stark, E. (2013). Coercive control. In N. Lombard, & L. Mcmillan, *Violence Against Women: Current Theory And Practice In Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence And Exploitation* (pp. 17-34). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Sullivan, M., Bhuyan, R., Senturia, K., Shiu-Thornton, S., & Ciske, S. (2005). Participatory Action Research in Practice: A Case Study in Addressing Domestic Violence in Nine Cultural Communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 20*(8), 977-995.
- The Civic Party. (2006). Submission on Domestic Violence in Hong Kong: In Response to the HKSAR's 2nd Report to the UN on the Implementation of CEDAW in Hong Kong. Hong Kong. Retrieved from



file:///M:/PhD/background%20info\_sw\_dv%20in%20uk%20and%20hk/civic%20society\_Submission\_On\_Domestic\_Violence\_Full\_Report.pdf

The Forthright Caucus, Kwan Fook , & Civic Party. (2009). *暴風過後的孩子家庭暴力對兒童的影響調查簡報*. Hong Kong: The Forthright Caucus, Kwan Fook and Civic Party.

The Harmony House. (2006). *和諧之家尋求庇護婦孺人數廿年上升六成五*. Retrieved March 27, 2014, from The Harmony House:  
[http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/chi/pressimage/doc/2005/24\\_9\\_2005.htm](http://www.harmonyhousehk.org/chi/pressimage/doc/2005/24_9_2005.htm)

The Hong Kong SAR Government. (2013, June 26). *Press Release*. Retrieved April 30, 2014, from <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201306/26/P201306260282.htm>

Tierney, K. J. (1982). The battered women movement and the creation of the wife beating problem. *Social Problems*, 29, 207-220.

Tsang, G. (1995). The women's movement at the crossroads. In V. Pearson, & B. K. Leung, *Women In Hong Kong* (pp. 277-291). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Tutty, L. M. (1996). Post-shelter services: The efficacy of follow-up programs for abused women. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 6, 425-440.

Uggerhøj, L. (2011). What is practice research in social work: Definitions, barriers and possibilities. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 45-59.

Venny-Tiernan, M., Goldband, A., Rackham, L., & Reilly, N. (1994). Creating collaborative relationships in a co-operative inquiry group. In P. Reason, *Participation in Human Inquiry* (pp. 120-137). UK: Sage Publications.

Weiss, T., & Berger, R. (2008). Posttraumatic growth and immigration: Theory, research, and practice implications. In S. Joseph, & P. A. Linley, *Trauma, Recovery and Growth: Positive Psychological Perspectives on Posttraumatic Stress* (pp. 93-104). Canada: John Wiley & Son, Inc.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Wenger, E. C., & Snyder, W. M. (2000, January-February). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 139-145.
- Wenweipo. (2007, November 17). 受虐婦女八成新來港. Retrieved March 31, 2014, from Wenweipo: <http://paper.wenweipo.com/2007/11/17/HK0711170050.htm>
- Wheeler, R. (2006, April 8). Gillick or Fraser? A plea for consistency over competence in children. *BMJ*, 332, 807.
- White, S. (2002). Being, becoming and relationship: conceptual challenges of a child rights approach in development. *Journal of international development*, 14, 1095-1104.
- White, S. (2001). Auto-ethnography as reflexive inquiry: The research act as self-surveillance. In I. Shaw and N. Gould, *Qualitative Research in Practice* (pp. 100-116). London: SAGE Publications.
- Wicks, P., & Reason, P. (2009). Initiating action research: Challenges and paradoxes of opening communicative space. *Action Research*, 7, 243-262.
- Willis, E. (1984). Radical feminism and feminist radicalism. *Social Text*, 91-118.
- Wilson, C. (1998). Are battered women responsible for protection of their children in domestic violence cases? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 13, 289-293.
- Witkin, S. L. (1996). If empirical practice is the answer, then what is the question? *Social Work Research*, 20(2), 69-75.
- Witkin, S.L. (2011). Why do we think practice research is a good idea?. *Social Work & Society*, 9(1), 10-19.
- Wolf, M. E., Ly, U., Hobart, M. A., & Kernic, M. A. (2003). Barriers to seeking police help for intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 18(2), 121-129.
- Wu, R. (2004, May). *Newletters Archives: A Tragic Lesson of Battering*. Retrieved June 22, 2014, from Hong Kong Christian Institute: <http://www.hkci.org.hk/eng/newsletter/188b.html>
- Wuest, J., & Merritt-Gray, M. (1999). Not going back: Sustaining the separation in the process of leaving abusive relationships. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 110-133.

華南研究資料中心. (2000, 10 15). 「香港婦女協會檔案集」簡介. *華南研究資料中心通訊*第二十一期, pp. 12-13.

### **Appendix 3.1 Inquiry timeline, tasks and facts**

Mid December 2012– Obtaining the ethics approval

Jan 2013—Meeting individual potential participants for introductory sessions; working out important considerations that might be involved in collaborating with the Caucus; first inquiry meeting scheduled on 27 Jan

Feb 2013—second inquiry meeting was scheduled after Lunar New Year and the group began to meet at least once a week afterwards. In the second meeting, the group outlined the primary directions of practice research for the 5 months ahead. A child of a participating member overheard the conversations in the second inquiry meeting and submitted to us his idea about the impact of intimate partner violence on children. The child also demonstrated a strong wish to participate in our group and to continue to contribute his ideas. He asked every member to promise that his views would be recognized in our further inquiry. In the following meetings in Feb, we allocated a time slot for discussing about the involvement of children in the inquiry meeting and issues that may arise from such form of involvement. All participants agreed that I should take up the role for taking notes on different views and ideas and reviewing literatures about children participation in research.

A document was prepared (in both English and Chinese) and circulated among members of the group before submitting it to my supervisor, Carol-Ann Hooper, and the chairperson of the ethics review committee. No children were invited to the inquiry group as participant-researchers before official approval was obtained from the University.

Meanwhile, the caucus was invited to speak in a public consultation of the Legislative Council of the HKSAR on domestic violence in Hong Kong; meanwhile members of the group all agreed to support and represent the caucus in the consultation with the aid of findings obtained in the inquiry meeting. The mind map mentioned above became the main tool for illustrating the needs of children

who witness intimate partner violence. The use of the mind map was authorized by the child who prepared the mind map prior to any preparation for the hearing.

At the reception of ethics approval for the participation of children in our inquiry, participants began to involve children in drafting the caucus's manifesto on children's rights in Hong Kong. This action is agreed in the group against the background that adult participants began to realize children's ability to speak for themselves and value of children's views in making positive changes to relevant services. The reactions of the government representatives were also analysed in the inquiry group so as to generate knowledge about the governmental attitudes on the welfare of children. In the due course, children designed a mechanism to ensure their participation in the inquiry group would be entirely voluntary.

March 2013—the inquiry group was invited to share their help-seeking experience with students in a class, on intimate partner violence in Hong Kong, majorly composed of policemen and members of the uniformed groups. This action was supported by all members out of the idea that they wanted to learn about what the police thought and believed in combating domestic violence. As long as most of the members had negative experience in seeking help from the police, they believed that it would be an important step to examine how to improve their attitudes. Members jotted notes on the sharing at the class and analysed them together back in the inquiry group to make sense of the problematic practices that the police carry out. Before this part of analysis was complete, some 'burning' issues in parenting among members became apparent and were prioritized.

The group spent three sessions primarily to review and analyse the parenting practices taking place in their lives. New strategies in parenting were also suggested in the meetings and practised in daily life parenting. The responses from their children and their changes were shared and evaluated in the group, so that members could determine the effectiveness of the suggested strategies and have more understanding on the nature of the problems with the aid of evidence

collected in the problem solving process. Analysis of the data was systematically documented in Chinese for future reference of the group.

April 2013—3 press interviews were done in April.

The first interview was initiated by the inquiry group as to respond to the latest news about the abused woman who was stabbed to death by her ex-husband who had been charged with common assault. The news attracted the attention of group members and motivated them to seek support from the media because of two reasons: (1) Women participants used to be members of a pressure group which regularly monitored the government responses to domestic violence through giving their views in the media; (2) Two women participants in our group had similar experience with the victim and, building on the experience of sharing with the police previously, we found that advocating good practice for the police was more effective than criticizing them for malpractice. Therefore, the first press interview was organized to share two contrasting police practices where one could save life and the other may risk safety of the victim. In the preparation for this interview, we chose PF to be the spokesman for the group and set out rules for making public commentary (any public commentary made on behalf of the group had to be discussed and agreed among members). The name of our inquiry group was the first time publicized in the press.

The second one was in fact not a press interview initiated by the group, but the group would like to support the case, handled by the Office of Legislative Councillor Fernando Cheung, before and after the interview. The group began from then to work as an emotional support group for those who had left the abusers (mainly cases referred by the Caucus and the Office of Fernando Cheung) in need for support from 'sisters'. This also marked the beginning of the inquiry group to outreach for new members.

The inquiry group also played a supportive role in the third press interview although the focus of interview was our group member, KW. KW was suffering from financial difficulties due to the termination of her social assistance by the Social Welfare

Department. She was also a case from the Office of the Legislative Councillor, but she sought emotional support from our group and hoped the group could help her plan in the event that the media didn't work this time. She was always so conscientious in reminding the group the priority of the needs of members.

We observed and jotted notes in the press interviews (data collection), and then analysed the data in the inquiry meeting to understand what practices were more effective in conveying our messages or attaining the purposes as stated beforehand. We came up with some agreements on 'how to deal with the press?' (in Chinese).

May 2013—Mother's Day Event: Planning, Execution and Evaluation;  
Understanding on the concept of survivors/surviving;

The first interview speeded up the 'coming out' process of PF and YY. It was very similar to LGBT communities that Chinese abused women felt ashamed for being battered by their husbands. They thought it was their failure to conserve the traditional form of family and people would perceive them inferior to women who live in marriage. Therefore, PF and YY were counted as 'very brave' for revealing their history of being abused to the public and were dubbed by NF (the former chairperson) as 'the role model for every abused woman'. This immediately stirred up conflicts among members of the group in understanding the concept of 'survivors'. The different perceptions of 'survivors' and 'surviving' lead to different decisions in promoting and proceeding the group, for example, use of group photos in publicizing, setting up of facebook page, the proportion of media work etc. Details of the conflicts were all tape recorded and analysed to help the group to proceed in understanding how many different types of survivors and surviving process could be available as accorded to members' experience. Discussions around 'survivors' and 'surviving' became the prioritized agenda in May.

At the same time, Mother's Day was approaching and emotional support for abused women who had left the abusers had been gradually developed into a mission for the inquiry group. The group planned to take this chance to offer

companionship and to recognize the mothers who stayed strong in childcare despite the tremendous hardships they were experiencing. This marked the second stage of development of the emotional support service offered by the group.

June 2013—Emotional Support Group for abused women who have left the abusers; the fourth press interview; termination stage

After many loops of practice-reflection cycles taken place in the past five months, group members had developed better self-understanding and greater understanding on the capability of the existing combination of members. Given that emotional support services offered in the previous months were all one-time events, members of the group wanted to push this service a bit forward into a continuous service that 'new sisters' could seek support from. However, most of the members were not experienced in providing emotional support to abused women who had just left the abusers, training was agreed to be necessary so to identify effective strategies which they had found helpful in getting through their own tough times. More importantly, the training aimed to allow members to give feedback on each other's practices so to identify problems that arose from practice itself. We designed a training session in which members brought in real cases and took turns to role-play a one-to-one conversation. Members would take turns to feedback on individual practices. Some tentative conclusions were drawn on problematic and good practices in doing emotional support for 'new sisters'.

Members then planned for the first emotional support session and invited a 'new sister' to attend the session. The decision of invitation was made on a range of considerations out of previous experience of the reflection-action-reflection cycles. Details of the planning and evaluation were tape recorded.

The group was later invited to respond to news about a new arrival mother who jumped off a footbridge with her daughter.

Termination stage started from mid-May and continued to the end of June. As YY and PF were nominated to be the spokesmen of the group, they were exceptionally



nervous about my leaving. PF was more anxious about being unable to speak for herself without my presence in the group and YY was worried about lacking skills in analysing group contents. I had additional meetings with them on weekdays, so to train them basic skills in ‘coding’ and listen to their worries and prepared them for those. These additional meetings were also open to other members of the groups.

### **Summary of the inquiry sessions**

1 <sup>st</sup> session	2 <sup>nd</sup> session	3 <sup>rd</sup> session	4 <sup>th</sup> session
27 Jan 2013	2 Feb 2013	12 Mar 2013	15 Mar 2013
Talking about dreams, Negotiation of goals, Sharing of post-separation experiences, Naming the group	Mind-mapping issues/problems encountered in the post-separation lives, Yuen’s participation in mind-mapping problems children may encountered	Discussing community education project strategies	Discussion on the statement about the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
5 <sup>th</sup> session	6 <sup>th</sup> session	7 <sup>th</sup> session	8 <sup>th</sup> session
17 Mar 2013	20 Mar 2013	23 Mar 2013	30 Mar 2013
Discussion on the statement about the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child	Submitting the statement about the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; Discussion about how to involve teenage children in the inquiry	Involving teenage children in ice-breaking games, Received permission from the University on children’s involvement, Parenting session	Parenting session, KW experienced termination of social security (personal problem solving session)

9 <sup>th</sup> session	10 <sup>th</sup> session	11 <sup>th</sup> session	12 <sup>th</sup> session
07 Apr 2013	13 Apr 2013	16 Apr 2013	20 Apr 2013
Parenting session, Dai's anger expressed against KW, KW's problems (cont')	Pressure point learning, Preparation for the 1 <sup>st</sup> press interview	1 <sup>st</sup> press interview (for MM, service user of the collaborating political organization)	2 <sup>nd</sup> press interview (for KW) on marginalization of migrant abused women

13 <sup>th</sup> session	14 <sup>th</sup> session	15 <sup>th</sup> session	16 <sup>th</sup> session
21 Apr 2013	27 Apr 2013	5 May 2013	12 May 2013
Yuen's anger expressed against YY, Parental conflicts between YY and Yuen	Joint Birthday Party, Review of actions taken on KW and YY in the past weeks, Siu and Bui's joined our group	Discussion on media work, planning for Mother's Day event, discussion on launching the group (facebook, media interviews etc.)	Mother's Day Event

17 <sup>th</sup> session	18 <sup>th</sup> session	19 <sup>th</sup> session	20 <sup>th</sup> session
19 May 2013	25 May 2013	1 Jun 2013	9 Jun 2013
Evaluation on the Mother's Day Event	Reexamination and reconstruction of chungsangje identity, The Emergence of chungsangje-becoming	(Cont') examination of survivorhood and the processes of 'becoming' survivors, Review and evaluation of the inquiry (preparing for termination)	Summary of the last two sessions on reconstruction of victim-chungsangje identities, Parenting training led by Yuen and YY through examining their recent experiences, Training on emotional support for formerly abused women

21 <sup>st</sup> session	22 <sup>nd</sup> session (without the physical presence of the practitioner-researcher)	23 <sup>rd</sup> session (without the physical presence of the practitioner-researcher)	
12 Jun 2013	22 Jun 2013	29 Jun 2013	
The first emotional support session for a left abused woman, evaluation of the session, division of labour in follow-up services	Report of the follow-up services, discussion on the promotion of the group	Discussion on further establishment of the group	

### **Summary of participants' demographics**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Origin of Birth</b>
<b>Ah Ting</b>	F	29	Hong Kong
<b>HL</b>	F	38	Mainland China
<b>NF</b>	F	65	Hong Kong
<b>PF</b>	F	44	Mainland China
<b>YY</b>	F	43	Mainland China
<b>KW</b>	F	43	Mainland China
<b>YT</b>	F	39	Mainland China
<b>Yuen</b>	M	12-13	Mainland China
<b>Dai</b>	M	17-18	Mainland China
<b>Bui</b>	F	14	Mainland China
<b>SY</b>	F	12	Mainland China

### Summary of data sets

	<b>Type</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1.	Field notes	40 pages in English, A4 size, font 11
2.	Personal logs	8 books, consisting of 66 pages
3.	Photos	589
4.	Audio recording	60 files from 23 inquiry meetings
5.	Videos	3 files, total 66'25''
6.	Mind-maps	2
7.	Diagrams /Graphs/Pictures	16
8.	Poems	1
9.	Artefacts	7
10.	Other documents produced	4

## The Study of Women Survivors' Participation In Domestic Violence Service

### Consent Form To Take Part In Introductory Session

- I agree to take part in the introductory session of the study of women survivors' participation in domestic violence service, and to take part in activities of the introductory session
- I understand that taking part in this introductory session is entirely voluntary and I can stop taking part in it and refuse to attend its activities at any time
- I give my permission for the initiating researcher to take record of the activities that I have taken part in as long as nobody can identify me and where I live when the data are quoted
- I understand that my actions and conversations in the inquiring group are confidential unless I say something that suggests myself, a child or young person is not safe
- I give permission for my conversations and participation to be quoted in publications arising from this study as long as nobody can identify me and where I live when the data are quoted

Please sign below to show that you have read, understand and agree it.

Sign : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Capital) : \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone : \_\_\_\_\_

Email : \_\_\_\_\_

Address : \_\_\_\_\_

Sign by the initiator : \_\_\_\_\_

Code : \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3.3 Consent form to take part in the research

#### The Study of Women Survivors' Participation In Domestic Violence Service

##### Consent Form To Take Part In Research Actions

- I agree to take part in the study of women survivors' participation in domestic violence service, and to attend activities related to this study
- I understand that taking part in this study is entirely voluntary and I can stop taking part in it and refuse to attend its activities
- I give my permission for all the participants in this group to take record of the research activities that I have taken part in as long as nobody can identify me and where I live
- I give permission for all the participants in this group to look at the record of my personal experience and the records of related activities as long as they cannot identify me and where I live
- I am happy to keep record of my personal experience in participating in the study for the purpose of research analysis, as long as nobody can identify any of the participants and where they live if the record is quoted
- I understand that my actions and conversations in the inquiring group are confidential unless I say something that suggests a child or young person is not safe
- I give permission for my conversations and participation to be quoted in publications arising from this study as long as nobody can identify me and where I live

Please sign below to show that you have read, understand and agree it.

Sign : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Capital) : \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone : \_\_\_\_\_

Email : \_\_\_\_\_

Address : \_\_\_\_\_

Sign by the initiator : \_\_\_\_\_ Code : \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3.4 1<sup>st</sup> round ethics review: Reviewers comments and my responses

### Reviewer 1

This is a complex project undertaken with a vulnerable group. The proposal does not clearly indicate that the ethical concerns for this work have been met.

There are four principal areas where the research may adversely impact on the wellbeing of the respondents. First, the recruitment process is unclear. Although participants are informed by telephone beforehand about the nature of the research, induction through an 'introductory group' meeting before consents have been clearly secured is problematic particularly with regard to the confidentiality of group members. Consent forms and information sheets are jargon-heavy

Second, support remains a key concern for the respondents in the project. The research aims to explore very personal experiences, and the applicant does not demonstrate that they have sufficient counselling training or expertise in handling the expression of complex needs across a small group where the objective is to foster intimacy and disclosure. It is assumed that members of the group will somehow meet each others' support needs, and members with more complex issues would be referred to advice agencies. How can the researcher guarantee that respondents' support needs will be met in an appropriate fashion by the group?

Purpose, means and procedures of recruitment are further detailed in **session 12**.

A separate consent form is prepared for the participants to sign before taking part in the introductory session, in order to make sure that they agree on two things: (1) not disclosing personal details of other participants to people outside the group and (2) giving permission for the documentation of the introductory session for future analysis.

The practitioner-researcher is believed to have sufficient training and experience in addressing the emotional disturbances of abused women and mobilising relevant social resources to meet the various needs of survivor participants arising from the inquiry. She was social work trained and is eligible for registering with the Hong Kong Social Work Registration Board. She has experience in working in an integrated family service centre; and has run a number of education programmes for women from the local communities. She has demonstrated her ability in social work knowledge and practising in her Bachelor and continued to advance her knowledge in domestic violence in her MPhil<sup>57</sup>.

---

<sup>57</sup> The practitioner-researcher obtained the first-honour in her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work; meanwhile, she volunteered more than 2 years in a local survivors' group and completed her MPhil on staying of abused women in 2010.

There is no indication that guarantees of support for group members has been secured from a statutory or private agency, and

referrals do not necessarily mean that possible distress arising from group activity would be dealt with in a timely fashion.

Third, the research draws respondents into a time-intensive process over a six-month period, but for which there is no intention either to recompense participants, or offer funds to offset possible costs of childcare or travel. Respondents would essentially have to pay to participate in the study.

Finally, the research process appears to be altogether too intrusive and personal to justify the stated objectives, which are a little unclear. There is no indication that alternative and less ethically problematic methods have been considered.

A practitioner research is aimed here because it is observed a lack of niche for women survivors to participate in formal social services in Hong Kong. Therefore, it is not likely to have a research that aims at solving this problem to be 'secured' by formal agencies.

If an agency is believed to be more 'secure', collaboration can be sought. However, this form of collaboration deviates from the original form of collaboration discussed in the literature review and methodology.

The possible distress arising from the group activities would be monitored and responded to immediately, through the constant communication between the practitioner-researcher and her supervisor in regard to inquiring group.

Travelling fares will be reimbursed to the survivor participants in order to compensate their travelling costs for taking part in the inquiry. Exact fares for travelling directly from participants' homes to the venue will be reimbursed in the end of each inquiry meeting. Childcare needs, arising from participating in the inquiry meeting, will be met by seeking free/voluntary childcare service close to the venue.

More justifications are provided in section 7<sup>58</sup>. I am not clear about why this endeavour is 'ethically problematic'.

---

<sup>58</sup> Excerpt from section 7 in the ethics approval application form: Participatory research is developed in contradiction to the domination of the so called 'objective' and 'neutral' form of knowledge building. It is argued that the validity of knowledge can no longer rest on the utilization of 'objective and neutral' methods/methodologies, but more on its *usefulness* to the stakeholders in solving problems (Reason, 1994). As long as the traditional form of research (1) is largely devised ONLY by the researcher and it (2) precludes the participation of people who hold on to different forms of



---

knowing, it is found less likely to appreciate local knowledges or produce useful knowledge for stakeholders to solve problems that concern them.

The unchallenged domination of 'linear rationality' and positivistic ways of inquiry is further criticized to oppress the voices of the vulnerable, such as abused women (Beresford, 2000). Beresford argued that social work knowledge is largely generated through methods of inquiry which 'claim to be "objective", "neutral" and "value free" and to produce knowledge which is independent of the persons carrying out the research' (Beresford, 2000: 499). This detached, 'scientific' and mind-based rationality entrenched in academics has been criticized to be failing in representing experience of women (Reason, 1994; Beresford, 2000). It is claimed that knowing of women is more experience and relationship based; hence usually being marginalized in the dominant patriarchal, linear logics of knowledge making. Beresford (2000) argued that service users are better placed to generate critical questions and knowledge claims about received beliefs in social work than outside academics and practitioners for being the receiving end of social work theory and practice. To promote a more encompassing and survivor-oriented form of knowledge building in domestic violence social work, practitioners' localized knowledge as the providing end and that of women survivors as the receiving end should be both incorporated. This endeavour is represented by the need for collaboration between practitioner-researcher and women survivors in social work knowledge building.

Furthermore, outcomes are uncertain: the information sheet indicates that there would be involvement in designing and managing a service for women suffering domestic violence, but the submission for ethical approval makes no mention of this aspect of the study.

In regard to the statement of 'outcomes are uncertain', I would say this is not necessarily unethical.

The myth about 'proof of outcomes' is entrenched in the 'empirical practice model', as argued by Wtkins (1996), which assumes the proof of 'effectiveness' is equal to fulfilment of the quest of accountability. However, accountability of social work also includes the promotion of social inclusion which may require strategies that help people to participate in problem solving activities that concern them, e.g. participatory research.

## Reviewer 2

I started to review this today.

Could you confirm whether or not the student's supervisor has read and is happy with this ethics application?

I'd be happier reviewing an application which had stuck more to what's asked in the question e.g. Qu 8 asks for a brief summary of the method(s) but that is not what's provided.

For details, one can refer to the words; for brief summary, one can refer to the flow chart.

## Reviewer 3

The main problem with this application is that it is difficult to justify as research.

- The aims and purpose are not clear – how exactly will it contribute to service development? On p31 it is stated the results 'may be' disseminated, but the emphasis seems to be more on the content of the intervention – ie the therapeutic process of developing 'co-participative' relationships between former victims of domestic violence and the social workers, rather than establishing new knowledge.

(I am not quite able to understand this point, but I have added in some more items to show that the results will be disseminated in other forms as well)

The methods for evaluating the benefits or otherwise of the intervention as a way of supporting former victims of domestic violence, and modifying the intervention in the light of the evaluation are insufficiently robust (see below).

- No details are given of other 'key collaborators' or members of the research team – these are TBC (section 2). Details are needed of all collaborators who will be involved in the study.
- No details are given of the methods for analysing the study data (section 9).
- The application has not been signed by the applicant or by the supervisor/research director. I would like confirmation that the supervisor has seen and approved a revised application.
- Evaluation of the inquiry (end of section 8). I do not think this provides sufficient detail to justify the intervention; to learn which aspects of the inquiry have proved more or less beneficial; and to enable the learning from the inquiry to provide recommendations either for future interventions with former victims of domestic violence or for service development. What will the researcher do if the inquiry proves not to have been beneficial to the participants? Moreover, presumably the evaluation is not independent – with a small group of participants, it will be easy for the researcher to identify the responses from each participant. The participants will also know the researcher. What thought has been given to the ethical implications of this (let alone the implications for the robustness of the evaluation)?

In cooperative participatory research, all the participants will be the key collaborators in the study. They share both the roles of researcher and the researched. Therefore, the key collaborators cannot be confirmed until the inquiring group is formed.

It is in section 8. It is a relatively more qualitative based research which does not usually involve statistical analysis.

More details about grounded theory analysis have been added to explain how 'data are analysed' and how it fits the learning cycle embedded in the core of cooperative inquiry.

I have added an electronic signature.

(see section 9) The learning cycle proposed in cooperative inquiry is a cycle of planning-action-reflection-evaluation. If it has to be termed in evaluative terms, Shaw (1996) may provide some simpler articulation about what kind of evaluation it is. In addition to 'evidence based evaluation' as proposed by the reviewer. There are at least two form types of evaluation in social work practice. They are empowerment evaluation and reflective evaluation.

Empower evaluation aims at challenging oppressive practices and enabling marginalized participants to be more in research. Moreover, it usually ties to the feminist criticism against the subject/object distinction. Thereby, it emphasizes not only the outcomes but also the process by which the marginalized are continuously involved.

Another form of evaluation is reflective evaluation which rejects the notion that theories and evidence are fixed verities 'waiting to be discovered and then applied for the solution of

Given the extreme sensitivity of the topic and vulnerable nature of the participants, I do not think it is ethical to conduct this intervention without a robust justification for it and a clear plan for conducting an ethically sound and methodologically robust evaluation of it.

### Recruitment

Further details are needed of how the participants in the enquiry group will be recruited. It is implied (section 12) that at least some of the participants are already known to the researcher (there is a reference to a 'personal network'). It is unusual, to say the least, for people known to the researcher to take part in a study; in this instance, given the vulnerable nature of the study group, it is not ethically acceptable:

- Because of the personal relationship between the researcher and members of her 'personal network', the latter may feel under an undue obligation to participate in the intervention/ research, when it might otherwise be in their best interests not to.
- A continuing relationship between the researcher and study participants is likely to compromise the continuing maintenance of confidentiality about all aspects of the study and, in particular, details of the other members of the group which absolutely need to be kept confidential.

personal of social problem' (p.9); whereas, knowledges are produced or constructed through social processes. They arise out of action and are for action; they are tested in live-action contexts to earn their relevance.

A practitioner-researcher who wants to engage in a participatory endeavour could hardly pre-plan 'everything' as it is absolutely a return to the traditional 'expert dominating' form of practice and research. Certainly, the research could suggest what one thinks effective but must cautiously suspend these 'presumptions' in the collaborating process. It is more ethical to listen to the collaborating partners and devise strategies locally than imposing alienating 'expert knowledge' onto the survivors. It is just a form of silencing practice which in this study I will strive hard to challenge.

Any person contacted through 'personal network' is an (formerly) active participant in a local survivors' group. They are potentially more interested in contributing their knowledge in developing domestic violence services. Women survivors are also found to have personal agency to judge what fits and what does fit them. It is not morally sound if their chance to participate is seized before they are informed about the inquiry.

Survivors recruited through personal network will be told at the beginning of the invitation that they are not obligated to take part in the inquiry if they do not find it fits their interest. NO further discussion about the inquiry will be initiated again once the person has refused to take part in it. They will be told to have the rights to quit the study at any time they want as well.

No personal details more than telephone number and email address will be acquired in the inquiring group. Contact details of participants have to be kept confidential to

### Consent issues

- Participants need to be given clear information that they can leave the study at any time. A question needs to be included on the consent form to confirm that participants understand they can leave the study at any time.
- It is not clear at what point consent will be sought. In section 19 reference is made to 'introductory' sessions 'to make sure survivors are well informed....' . Informed consent to participate in the group needs to be sought from all participants before they take part in the first group. The information sheet also refers to an 'introductory session' (will there be one or more than one???) – again it is not clear at what point informed consent will be sought.

### Confidentiality.

The inquiry group will require complete confidentiality between participants as well as between participants and the researcher. It will be vitally important that no details are revealed that could allow former partners to trace participants.

- What safeguards will be put in place to ensure this confidentiality, not just during but for a considerable period after the intervention?
- What safeguards will be put in place to protect other group members if one member (inadvertently or otherwise) reveals information that puts other members at risk?

people outside the group no matter the relationship continues or not.

Dissemination of stories and experiences heard and shared in the study have to be kept anonymous all the time during and after the study.

Consent Form B is revised accordingly.

There will be two consent forms for participants at different stage of the inquiry. Participants who are interested in attending the introductory session will be asked to sign consent from A. For those who want to further participate in the inquiring group will be asked to sign consent form B.

Additional introductory sessions will be held if second round recruitment is needed.

Only telephone number and email address will be needed in this inquiry, for the purpose of communication and exchange of ideas. NO residential address neither office/work place address will be acquired in the inquiring process. Therefore, tracing of former partner will not be possibly caused by this inquiry.

The practitioner-researcher will keep her contact open to the participants, so that any suspect of breach of confidentiality and threats caused by data leakage can come to the knowledge of her even the inquiry has ended. Moreover, the practitioner-researcher will invite an experienced survivor advocate to provide simultaneous assistance when the practitioner-researcher is away from Hong Kong.

Section 25 states that 'emailing/transfer of soft copies has to be avoided as far as possible..' State clearly either that no data will be sent by email, or that any data that

has unavoidably to be sent by email will be encrypted or sent in a password protected file. ( I actually do not expect any need to email data, given that this is a sole researcher, not a research team).

No emailing/transfer of soft copies will be carried out.

Section 26 states that the 'University of York' will have access to the data generated by the study. What does this mean? It is important to specify exactly who in the University of York will have access to the data.

Revised: Only the principal investigator and the participants

### **Distress (section 17)**

Sometimes distress is not triggered immediately but may be experienced sometime later, after the research subject has had time to reflect on her/his experience. How will the researcher deal with distress that inquiry group participants may experience after a group meeting or after the intervention has finished?

The change of emotional disturbances could be tracked through plotting charts that mark changes of certain disturbances against a period of time, such as trends, frequency and magnitude of the disturbances (Fischer, 1978). These are references for the practitioner-researchers to discuss with the participants whether formal assistance should be sought. If the emotional disturbances cause problems in the participants' basic functioning, such as social functioning, parenting, work etc., the participants will be strongly advised to seek help from formal assistance.

Further details are needed of the criteria that will be used to decide whether any 'emotional disturbance' experienced by group member is severe enough for them to be offered information about specialist services.

Available services could refer to the following link:  
<http://www.swd.gov.hk/vs/english/welfare.html>

Further details are needed of the services that will be offered to participants if they become 'severely' distressed. Are these specialist services with experience of supporting survivors of domestic abuse? What assurances can be given that it will be possible for study participants to actually access such services (not just be given information about them)?

### **Consent form**

- Second bullet point – need to add that the participant can stop at any time.

- Third and fourth bullet points – these are not clear. Need to clarify whether these refer to other participants in the groups, or to the researcher. Of course the other participants in the group will be able to identify the participant signing the consent form – they are all members of the group!
- A further point needs to be added, that the participant understands that confidentiality will be maintained unless she says something that indicates that she is at risk/not safe.

Revised accordingly

### Information sheet

This refers for the first time to a ‘collaboration group’ and to ‘a number of women survivors who have been actively engaging in the improvement of the Hong Kong domestic violence service’. Who are the rest of the group? Why are they not identified in the ethics application? What qualifications do they have? What will their roles be and how will they maintain confidentiality?

A couple of former members of a local survivors’ group has shown interest in developing a research with the practitioner-researcher. It is envisioned that they will be involved in earlier work of recruitment as well. They will be treated as co-researcher and the working relationship has to be perceived as collaboration instead of a ‘researcher- subject’ relationship.

Revised accordingly. It is stated more clearly that the target participants are those who have decided to leave the abusive partners.

### Letter to agencies

There is a discrepancy between the letter which refers to women who have already left their abusive partners, and the application form which refers to women who have left a refuge. Please clarify which; also please clarify how long ago potential participants should have left a former partner/the refuge.

As long as the group size is optimal around 6-12 people, the initiating researcher will update with the shelters about the number of vacancies left. Recruitment process will stop when there are more than 10 survivors showing interest in attending the introductory session. This cannot be written in the letter to agency in advance as it depends on the variables in the recruitment process.

Also state how many participants the agency is being asked to contact about the research.

Revised accordingly



### Appendix 3.5 2<sup>nd</sup> round ethics review submission: Reviewers' comments

#### Reviewer 1

I acknowledge that the candidate has made a great deal of effort to address the ethical concerns of the reviewers. This research seeks an alternative methodological framework for meeting its core objectives, and greater collaborative working carries benefits. However, ethical concerns remain. It is not outside ethical considerations to consider the intended outcomes for the research, and in particular what the participants have been promised as being intended outcomes.

Participants have been promised that they will be involved in 'the design, development and improvement of domestic violence service in Hong Kong' and indeed 'run and evaluate the practice/service constructed in this research with all the research participants.' This process is extremely unclear. Research with survivors can define needs, and also define what might be deemed an appropriate service; participation between researcher and 'researched' may be useful here. However, the information sheet indicates that the participants will be involved in running or managing the newly designed service and then also participate in its evaluation. If this is the case, then there are further problems: how can a group devise a service, run it, and then evaluate it without involving other, different, service users? In this case, new ethical concerns arise about securing the consent of new service users to 'test' the proposed service.

This application rests on a well-researched theoretical framework that appears to argue that participation in the process is its own outcome. If that is the case, then the information sheet should clearly state that the research aims to test participatory service development methods, and that no outcome in terms of actual service delivery is being promised.

## Reviewer 2

I'm afraid I continue to have concerns about this application.

The application involves a poorly specified intervention, and an equally poorly specified evaluation, with a group of vulnerable people (women who have left abusive relationships). While the applicant has addressed some of the earlier concerns of the 3 referees, I am not convinced that all potential risks have been addressed; ultimately, I do not feel I could confidently say that everything has been done to minimise risks of harm to the research participants.

## Reviewer 3

Whilst I find the presentation of the ethics form makes for a very 'up-hill' read I recognise that this is not an ethical issue per se. I am sympathetic to the co-produced approach the applicant is taking and should make for an important and original approach. I recognise that recruiting from known or personal contacts is ordinarily frowned upon, but I also realise, from my own work, that sometimes communities are small and that research/practitioner relationships do endure and that potential participants can, as long as care is exercised, be drawn from existing contacts/relationships. The applicant has demonstrated the ways in which she will minimise any coercion and I am persuaded by this. In other aspects of the application there is proper attention paid to participant 'safety' and emotion, transparency around method and the appropriate sharing of data, the protection of data and confidentiality and feedback to participants.

## Appendix 4.1 Information Sheet (Translated Version)

### Women Survivor Participation In Domestic Violence Service Development

#### Initiated by:

Sui-Ting, Kong; NF

#### Who We Are?

We are a collaboration group composed of a social work practitioner-researcher and a number of women survivors. We do not receive any sustainable financial support, but have continuous concern over the participation of abused women in the

design, development and improvement of domestic violence service in Hong Kong.

We believe that a co-operative relationship between social work practitioner-researcher and women survivors could help combining the perspectives and knowledges held by both sides, to contribute to the development of domestic violence service.

#### Our Beliefs

- Women survivors have the rights to participate in stipulating and designing domestic violence service
- A respectful, co-operative and participative relationship between Social work practitioner-researchers

and women survivors is helpful to the development of effective domestic violence service

#### Our Research Is About...

'Women Survivor Participation in Domestic Violence Service Development' is a PhD research project of the University of York's Department of Social Policy and Social Work. The initiating group is composed of a current PhD student of the abovementioned department (the social work practitioner-researcher) and a number of women survivors who have been actively engaging in the improvement of Hong Kong domestic violence service.

This research aims at recruiting women survivors who have left the abusive relationship and are interested in working together for stipulating, designing and improving Hong Kong domestic violence service. Their involvement in this research is to devise a social work practice/service that is effective in responding to their particular needs.

### **Why Is Your Participation Needed?**

Domestic violence service in Hong Kong has its focus on early identification, refuge services and crisis intervention. Abused women who have left the refuges or been safely housed would gradually fade out in domestic violence service. Despite the termination of

domestic violence service, domestic violence-particular problems in women do not cease with leaving the refuge or the abusive relationship. It is evident that left abused women are in face of various difficulties, e.g. being stalked by their ex-husbands, finding it difficult to recover from the traumatic marital experience, parenting problems with children affected by domestic violence etc. Research also suggests that unattended needs of left abused women would increase the likelihood for women survivors to return to the abusive relationship.

Therefore, this research is a timely response to offer a new perspective to the current domestic violence service by including voices of left abused

women in Hong Kong domestic violence service. This research also provides a platform for left abused women to participate in designing, operating, managing and evaluating domestic violence service, so to create knowledge about how their needs could be carefully responded to in domestic violence service.

### **The Aims Of The Research**

This research aims at providing a platform for the co-operation between social work practitioner-researchers and women survivors. On which, both parties could work together to facilitate the design and development of domestic violence service, and its delivery and evaluation.

More specifically, the research attempts to

- Understand the needs of abused women who have left the abusive relationship
- Co-design/Co-construct a social work practice/service that could meet the need(s) of abused women who have left the abusive relationship
- Run and evaluate the practice/service constructed in this research with all the research participants
- Collect and analysis data about the inquiring process and its impact on survivor participants' participation in domestic violence service design and development

### **What Do We Do In The Research?**

In order to create a platform for the co-operation and participation of both social work practitioner-researchers and women survivors, all the participants in this research would be assumed the same dual role—the researched and the researcher. In other words, both social work practitioner-researchers and survivor participants have to continuously assess, collect data of and analyse their own participation in the group and that of the others. Through which, we could regularly examine the co-operative relationship in the inquiry group and therefore could promptly respond to non-participatory procedures, rules and

practices embedded in the inquiring process.

To ensure every participant understands the research purpose, their assumed roles and responsibilities, left abused women who are interested in participating in this research would be invited to partake at least once in the introductory session. It lasts for around 2 hours, in which, we would further explain the research trajectory, expectations on participants and the basic working principles of the social work practitioner-researcher(s). All participating survivors would be invited to confirm with the initiating persons their further participation in the research. Contact details are written

on this leaflet and would be given to each participating individual in the introductory session.

If you are interested, you are more than welcome to contact the initiating persons for more details about the research.

Women survivors who have decided to participate in this research may be expected to attend group meetings, held once per two weeks (TBC), which roughly last for 2-3 hours. Regular meetings would be held continuously for at least half year. Participants would be invited to participate in data analysis or to comment on the compilation of research findings. Summaries of research findings and

analysis would be prepared in Chinese for facilitating the participation of all research participants in the process of report/thesis compilation.

Personal details of participants would be kept confidential. Individual identity of participant would not be revealed in the compilation of research findings even quotations are used.

#### **How Will The Findings Be Publicised?**

The completion date of the research is October 2014. A PhD thesis and a summary of the thesis (Chinese) would be produced. Chinese summary would be distributed to each research

participant, collaborative organizations and domestic violence service agencies.

#### **Contact Details**

**Sui-Ting Kong:**

**(Mobile) xxxxxxxx**

**(Email) [stk505@york.ac.uk](mailto:stk505@york.ac.uk)**

#### **Appendix 4.2 An excerpt of the introductory session with YT**

1. *Could I ask questions that concern my current situation in the inquiry group?*

*Me: Of course yes. Everybody is invited to bring a question/problem that concerns her life right now to the group meeting. Each one will be given an opportunity to talk about her question/problem in the group, so that we could develop an inquiry focus out of these concerns. Your questions would be more than welcome because they were the basics for starting this kind of inquiry.*

2. *Would that be too annoying to other members of the group if they have to spend time solving my problem?*

*YT: Among the sisters, I am the only one who holds a nursing certificate; therefore, the problem of qualification recognition is MY problem, but not that of others. If they spend time to discuss my problem, and sometimes 'work' for my problem, isn't it too annoying to other members?*

*Me: For joining this inquiry group, participants are assumed the responsibility to help others, that to help herself and the rights to be helped. You are not free from the duty to 'help yourself' and 'help others' as well because this is a co-operative relationship through which we find solutions. In return, the others are assumed the responsibility to help you inquire into your problem and find solutions. You still need to bring the problem solving tactics generated in the group into your personal practice, keep a record of your actions, feelings and experiences as data for the group to figure out how solutions could be attained. You will be encouraged to keep a personal log for this purpose.*

3. *Could this inquiry group become a pressure group to force the government to recognize my nursing qualification that was obtained in the mainland China? For example, asking the government to relax their standard.*

*Me: I don't know. It depends on what the problem exactly is. Your problem is not yet sufficiently understood by the group, let alone the solutions.*

*YT: They don't recognize my nursing qualification obtained in the mainland, isn't it 'discrimination'? The discrimination against the new arrivals! We are victims of domestic violence, should we be helped and not scrutinized under the same set of rigours?*

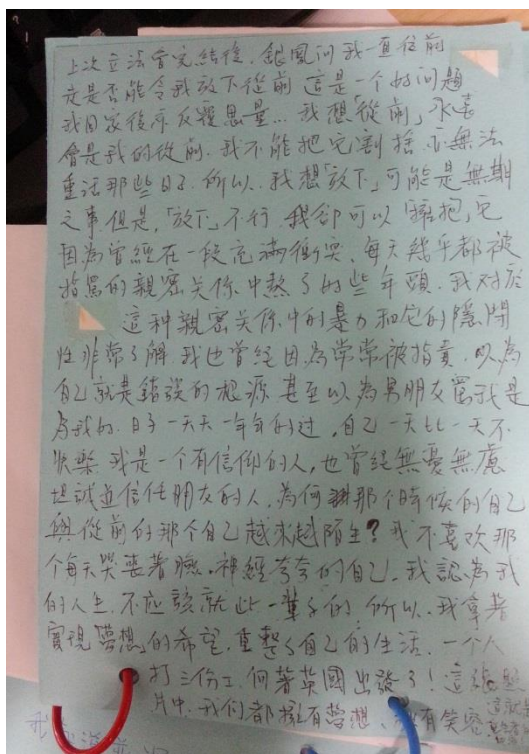
*Me: The incompatibility of qualifications between the two places cannot be equalized with 'discrimination against the new arrivals'. If it is a decision based on discrepancy in professional training, we cannot argue for relaxation of eligibility solely because you are victims of domestic violence. If the qualification issue bothers you, you can raise this in the group and see how we should inquire into the problem and find practical solutions.*

*YT: (head's down) I understand.*

*(Field notes, dated 15 Jan 2013)*



### Appendix 4.3 The practitioner-researcher's photo log



When I decided to bring play-doh to our first group meeting, I felt troubled inside my heart. It was like playing children's toys ...I was unsure if sisters would like to do it. Unexpectedly, sisters were so willing to give it a try and also created colourful dreams with it. Traditionally, abused women are thought to be very sad, always look troubled...in fact, in those days, it's our dreams being buried by the pains in our hearts. I still remember the most painful time in my life, it's my dream that brought me back to life. I upheld the hope for realizing my dream, swallowed the sorrows and began my journey.

After our last meeting at the legislative council, NF asked if being forward looking can leave my history behind. I think it was a good question. I repeatedly asked myself this question on my way home...I think 'my past' will always be mine. I could not cut off myself from it, neither could I relive it. Therefore, leaving it behind is not very possible. However, instead of leaving it behind, we could just embrace it. Since I have been living with a conflicting intimate relationship, and being scolded nearly every day for years, I have more understanding about how subtle intimate partner violence could be. I used to think I was always the wrong doer due to the critical comments made by my boyfriend. I once thought it was all for my own good. As time passed, I was growingly unhappy. I am a person with Christian faith, and once lived without worries and with all the sincerity and trust in making friends...why I was becoming a stranger to myself? I didn't like the 'me' who cried every day. I decided not to carry on this living in the rest of my life. Therefore, I held my dream in my hands, restructured my life and engaged in 3 jobs at the same time—departing for my UK study. In this photo, we all have our dreams in our hands.

#### **Appendix 4.4 The power differential pre-established between the 'role model'/mother-head and the other women participants in the inquiry group**

1. The helping and the helped:

The role model/mother-head had spent lots of time and effort to help women participants in their process of leaving. In Chinese culture, the benefactor deserved the life-time thankfulness from the beneficiaries. This power differential was reproduced by frequent mentioning of the role model/mother-head's contributions to participants' well-being.

2. The resourceful and the deprived:

The role model/mother-head had well-established social networks in Hong Kong due to her history of being a women advocate for 20 years and her local family root. When the role model/mother-head introduced local political forces, such as legislative council member, into group activities, the lack of resources and social network of new arrival women were further highlighted.

3. The experienced and the inexperienced:

Women participants looked up for the 'experienced' to guide their way in developing services for formerly abused women. Given that the no. of 'experienced' participants in the group was highly limited, the successful experiences of the role model/mother-head became the ONLY reference for transforming into 'heroic chungsangje'.

4. The recognized and the unknown:

The role model/mother-head was mediagenic and therefore widely recognized as the representative figure for promoting well-being of abused women in Hong Kong. Other women participants who were less capable of handling media would overgeneralize their incapability in other areas of life.

#### **Appendix 4.5 The practising of mutual accountability, equality and care practices**

1. *Mutual accountability* would be easily swept aside when it came to decisions that led to division of labour, commitment and investment of time and effort. These decisions required participants to be involved in providing services for members and other formerly abused women. Women participants who tended to carry out 'consumerist' approach to services would try to minimize their role in service provision, leading to an imbalanced distribution of workload in service delivery. However, next to consumerist practices, the more frequently expressed hurdle to mutual accountability was clinging to 'victim identity' (see chapter 5).

Victim identity forbade formerly abused women to recognize their strengths which were once prominent resources in their lives. The lack of confidence, psychological fragility, physical traumas, emotional fluctuations and financial instability caused by migration and violence against them undeniably framed women participants in a victim positions. However, these traumas and problems would not fade out of their lives naturally, but require effort to remediate and solve them. Without re-gaining control and strengths, women participants in this inquiry found it hard to engage in mutual accountability because they were worried about failing others. Ironically, we were on one hand striving hard to leave victimhood, while on the other hand lingering to the familial practices and power differentials that repress recognition to personal strengths and distinctiveness. The more we worked on leaving victimhood, the more we recognize the problems caused by 'Yat-Ga-Yan' practices.

2. *Equality* was exceptionally at risk when authority was utilized to restore harmonious togetherness or to flatten differences, and when other women participants submitted to the authorities in response. These initial power differentials began to receive challenges while women participants were

departing from the 'victim identity' and developing recognition on their personal strengths, knowledges and autonomy. The authorities and power differentials initially perceived as unbeatable and the submissiveness originally considered as inevitable were then recognized as unhelpful. At times, they were seen as the problems standing in the way to fuller participation and as threats to sisterhood (see chapter 5). The more voices were silenced in the inquiry meetings, the more out-group private talks took place as niches for expression of personal views.

These private talks particularly annoyed me because they did not appear to facilitate communication, and might further legitimize the power differentials reproduced in the inquiry group. After attempts of convincing women participants to speak for their views openly in the group meeting, their worries about relationship breakdown and being disrespectful were revealed. Explorations in worries and fears also allowed me to devise strategies together with women participants to make their views and lived experiences visible and valid in the group discussions. 'Talking stick' was one of their favourites because it allowed them ample time for fuller articulation of experiences without interruptions from others. Next to it, we also invented our log sharing system for ensuring every participant's group experiences were expressed and responded within the group.

Expression of views was not enough for ensuring equal participation because it did not guarantee different lived experiences and life practices of participants to be articulated and represented in knowledge building. Through reflection-action-reflection cycles and techniques of constant comparative analysis, differences in sayings and doings were made visible for further articulation and discussion in the inquiry group. More importantly, constant comparative analysis unleashed participants' creativity in playing with linguistic stocks learnt in different life practices to

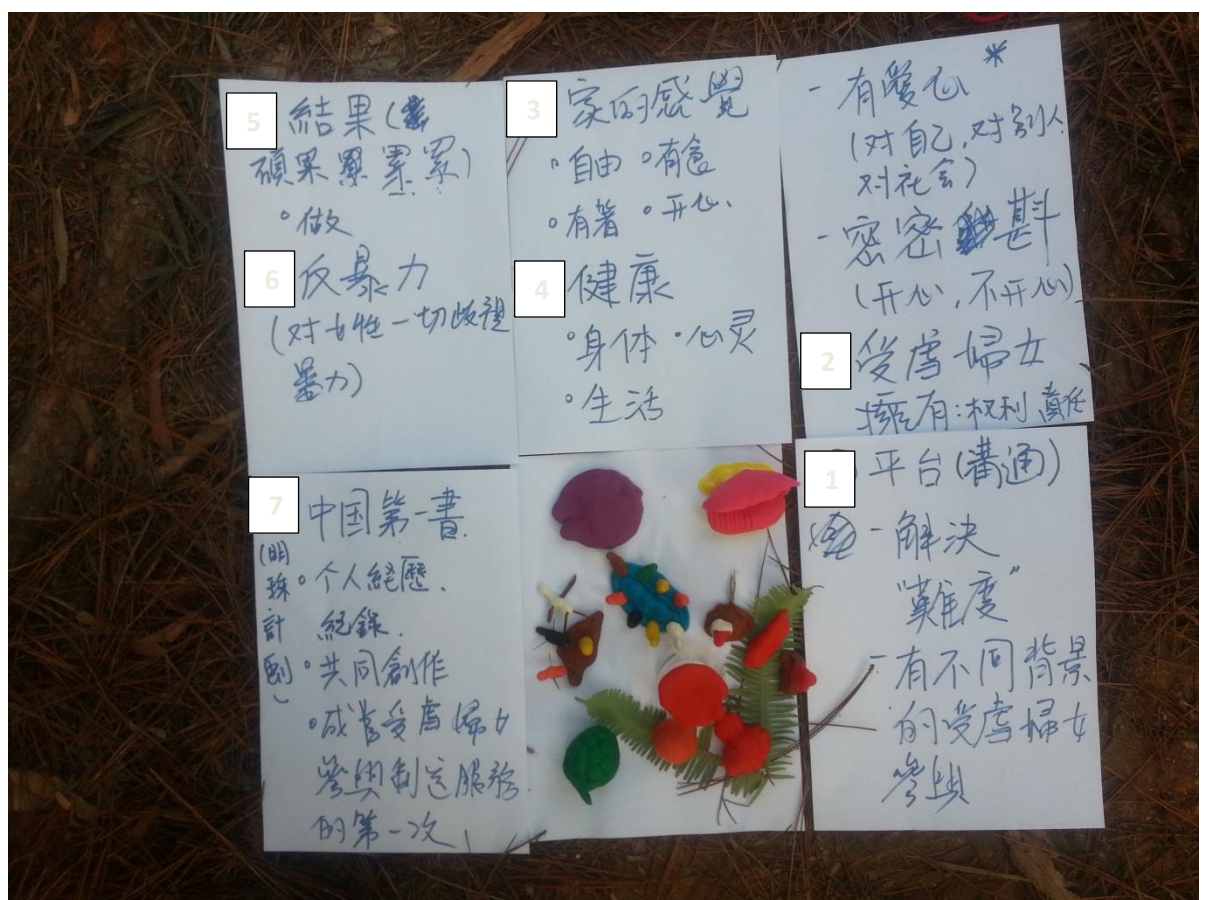
make sense of the lived experiences, sayings and doings carried out and responded to in the inquiry. These techniques were not morally neutral because they sent out a message that voices were equal and would be equally represented in the analysis of our past and in informing our future actions. By responding to power differentials with installation of equal footage for representation in knowledge making, the marginalized lived experiences, knowledges, sayings and doings could be rendered meanings and be included back in the collective sense making. In chapter 5, women's ambiguous experiences in leaving victimhood and entering survivorhood were originally ignored and later mapped back in the collective identity (trans)forming endeavours. In chapter 6, teenage participants' desires on better mother-son/daughter practices were first invisible in understanding the needs for post-violence services; however, they were given an important position through teenage participants' involvement in making sense of their lived experiences with their mothers and other women participants in the inquiry.

3. *Care*, was achieved by 'starting from where the person is', a saying widely celebrated in social work practice. Examining life practices of women participants allowed us to recognize how they were deskilled by the experiences of victimization, historically constructed power differentials and consumerist approach to human services in carrying out and carrying on participatory practices that entailed mutual accountability and equality. According to Wenger's theorization of a community of practice, those who were unfamiliar with a practice might find themselves unable to demonstrate the competence in performing activities of the practice. Therefore, most of the women participants began to participate from the periphery of the community of practice in achieving mutual accountability and equality. By constantly prompting, identifying, carrying out and responding to acts presuming participatory practices, in the aid of

reflection-action-reflection cycles, women participants get more familiar with practising mutual accountability and equality (see chapter 6, sustaining partnership calling and responding). By gaining the participatory competence, participants became more central in the CofP.

The lack of care in carrying out participatory research may therefore risk causing stress on participants, and even unethically coercing them into certain practices they are not yet willing or ready to engage in, e.g. participatory practices. If mutual accountability and equality were forced on women participants, disregarding where they were situated (the practices they had been engaging in, their identities they drew in, the relationship context they were living with and their willingness/readiness to participate), stress and even coercion could be experienced by women participants as a result. For example, survivorhood that allowed women participants to take up responsibility for solving problems together revealed its shortcomings at marginalizing women participants' ambivalence in relating to the abuser (see chapter 5). Moreover, it contradictorily fails to reproduce participatory practices as well as mutual accountability and equality.

Appendix 5.1 Field note on 'making our dreams with play-doh'



Pic. 1 Our expectations on the working group for the coming 6 months.

I brought colourful play-doh to the meeting and asked each of the participants to 'make something' to represent their expectations on the group in the coming 6 months. There were ten different colours, from cold to warm to earthy. Each of us



chose our favourite colours to mould the 'thing' that could objectify our imagery about 'our future'. Each participant had a chance to talk about what the 'thing' was and how it represented her dreamed future about the group. The personal accounts were then transformed into point form, making up a list of expectations in which each participant's view was reflected. The list was immediately prepared, after taking turn to give an account, by me through writing them down on sheets of A4 paper.

The points marked on the sheets of paper lying around the play-doh, in ascending order, are

1. A platform for (a) communication, (b) solving difficulties, (c) allowing abused women from different backgrounds to participate, (d) love to oneself, to others and to the society, € inmate talks on both happy and unhappy happenings.
2. Somewhere owned by abused women and where they belong to—where they share both rights and responsibility
3. A family-like environment where abused women will never lack food, enough clothes, freedom and happiness.
4. Doing something rather than speaking, so to be able to see concrete results.
5. Anti-violence, all forms of violence against women
6. The first book ever in China to document (a) personal experiences of being a formerly abused woman, (b) the co-authoring of the inquiry experiences and

(c) process through which formerly abused women participate in designing domestic violence service

**NF:**

This was originally designed as a heart, however, the tips of





the heart were more like the heads of two people so I pulled them together and formed this heart-like shape. I chose purple because it is an international sign of anti-violence. It represents my dream to end violence everywhere. To accomplish this, we need 'love' which is represented by the 'heart shape'. More importantly, we need people to stay intimate and close to each other, as close as the tips of the heart, to keep the conversations going.

KW: This is a pearl representing the beauty, brightness and preciousness of our project. We are going to write the first book ever in China, talking about our experiences as a formerly abused woman. It is going to be a co-authoring process documenting how formerly abused women participate in designing domestic violence services.



**PF: I chose the snow pea (in Cantonese, the pronunciation is very close to that of 'difficulty') standing in the center of the people because we are a group of people ready to challenge against difficulty. We are here to solve difficult problems. As you can see, our group consists of people with different colours and temperament. They are with one heart to solve problems...difficult problems...together.**

**YY: This is called the 'Green Home'. Green colour represents health, meaning that everyone here in this group has to be healthy. We shall stay with each other as if we are a family. In this 'home', I hope that everyone can have food, clothes and love.**





**YT: This is the fruit of our group. I hope our group to be productive and to have fruitful result. This is not just about talking, but doing things!**



**Me: This is to say people with different colours and body configuration can live peacefully on the same piece of land. They can share their ways of life and everything that can make others happier. Our group is the platform where we can help ourselves to live better despite the diversity of backgrounds**

**we have.**

After taking turn to share their dreams and expectations for running this group, I put all our 'dreams' into words and got them written on sheets of A3 paper. It was like an oath for everyone participating in this group to commit to and bear in mind during the process. All the 'dreams' were put together on the paper and suddenly became so beautiful and stunning that participants started to stare and 'wow' at the collection for quite a while. They used to be indifferent to the dreams of others, but then turned to be so attentive and appreciative to the work of others when the play-dohs were gathered (see pic.1).

‘They are beautiful! Look at them! It is like the blossoming flowers.’

‘They are beautiful... the colours are so attractive.’

‘There laid our dreams, beautiful dreams’

These expressions were heard repeatedly in the group while the participants were taking pictures of and with their ‘dreams’, nearly, from every angle possible.



Every participant at least had one picture of this collection in her cell phone. It was also suggested by the participants that we could use this picture for the cover of our book (if it became reality at last).

Participants also agreed to KY’s suggestion for naming this project as the Pearl’s project. This was to highlight and restate the brightness, preciousness and beauty of women in spite of the destruction of abuse against them.

After a long period of photo taking of and with their work, KY requested to take her work back home as for the memory of today—the first day of the Pearl’s Project.

Participants got more involved and motivated when someone in the group suggested taking photos for and with our work. Participants apparently told from their faces that it was really joyous to ‘photo their dreams’ and ‘photo with their dreams’. Some play-dohs were even taken back home for memorial purpose.

There was a metaphor employed to described what we had done in this session—we had a wish to climb up to the peak of the mountain (pointing to the peak next to



us), but we had to find ways to reach it; now we had the goal, but yet the routes— and finding the routes became the main objective of our next meeting.

For the sake of easier communication, we set up a new email account for sharing news, views and document related to our inquiry.

## Appendix 5.2 Coding of women participants' stories of strengths

PF:

I was the head of an industrial line. Hundreds of staff was working under my supervision. I was highly trusted by my boss as well. I had a chance to complete an accounting course but I just did. I feel regret for it. However, it proves that I am a capable person, but not a crap person. Even though I got married to the *sui-lo* (bad man) who gave nothing to support the family, I was still able to take care of myself and my son. I ran my own business, a beauty salon, in the mainland China. I managed to sell products for Amway in the salon and made quite a good sum of income every month. However, after migrating to Hong Kong, every job requires some level of English literacy. You know it, we were not trained to read, write and speak English. Even though we know how to complete the task, English is always the hurdle that keeps you failing. As you know, I am now working for FCCH as a full time staff. I am still suffering from English literacy problem. They have a whatsapp group among the office staff, chatting about so many things in English or partial English. I just can't understand. For example, they typed 'y' in the whatsapp group and I completely had no clue what it meant. (I said it is 'why' in English, meaning 'dim kai' in Cantonese) Yes, honestly, how can I chat as other local colleagues do? This problem makes me feel insufficient and incompetent at work as well. I encounter a lot of different people from the community at work, and sometimes I just can't understand what they refer to when they use English. I have just learnt a term 'plan'. They kept asking me about my 'plan'... I just don't know what 'plan' is... this causes me lots of stress and makes me feel undeserved for a job. )

- Comment [STK1]: Leading role
- Comment [STK2]: Leading role
- Comment [STK3]: Being trusted
- Comment [STK4]: Being capable
- Comment [STK5]: Being capable
- Comment [STK6]: Being independent
- Comment [STK7]: Having a career
- Comment [STK8]: Being self-sufficient/independent
- Comment [STK9]: Emergence of new qualifying criteria
- Comment [STK10]: Emergence of new qualifying criteria
- Comment [STK11]: Being unable to meet the new standard

YT:

I was a nurse before I came here. I had been practising in public hospitals for years as well. If you asked me what problem concerns me the most, it is the incompatibility of qualifications between Hong Kong and China. Why they just can't give me the licence for practice? (Have you try to prove to them you were a practising nurse?) Yes, of course yes. They asked me to show them my qualification, and I therefore went back to the mainland China and asked the concerned governmental department to write a letter of proof. However, the Hong Kong side said to me that they could not recognize my qualification even though I submitted to them my letter. (Did they tell you why?) They said the year stated on the letter was not right. (Then, it may not be a compatibility problem. Did you try again to apply for one with the 'year' corrected?) No. I didn't. )

- Comment [STK12]: Coping with the new demand
- Comment [STK13]: Being professionally qualified
- Comment [STK14]: Being competent
- Comment [STK15]: Unsmooth transfer of qualification

YY:

I was highly appreciated by the head of the industry. I worked between the management level and the operation level and needed to be very smart in handling different opinions. I have high school education qualification, and it was not recognized here in Hong Kong. The most important is that, every job here requires you to manage basic English writing and speaking. What opportunities left to us are low paid jobs, such as waitress, cleaners, home-making, message etc. These jobs allowed us no room to take care of our children and let alone utilizing our own skills. Our self-confidence is all destructed by moving to Hong Kong.

- Comment [STK16]: Being appreciated
- Comment [STK17]: Being capable
- Comment [STK18]: Highly educated
- Comment [STK19]: Unsmooth transfer of qualification
- Comment [STK20]: Emergence of new qualifying criteria
- Comment [STK21]: Having no chance to utilize one's skills

### **Appendix 5.3 Transcription on the monopoly of limited successful experiences**

#### **The 'authoritative identity defining strategies' (dated 21 April 2013):**

NF and YT engaged in an argument about whether or not exposing faces of members on the facebook page if we were going to set up one.

YT: Why do we need to put photos on the facebook page? Can't we put on a mask in taking those photos? I don't want my face being exposed to the public, like asking everyone to look at me and inviting people to know about my history of being abused. Do I need to do so? I would like to work for the benefits of 'sisters', but I do not want my face go public. That's it.

I: I do not think posting members' faces on facebook is necessary, but it involves certain practical issues that may arise from setting up a facebook page. We may post photos of our meetings and activities as a way to tell people about what we are currently working on. Faces involved in the photos may and may not want to go public, how do we ensure postings of these work for everyone?

NF: Yes. If we post photos, is that you alone putting on a mask? You said you are survivors, and you have no courage to come out as a normal person. How can others who are still suffering from their problem believe that they can regain a normal life? Can I trust you for help? If you cannot move forward, then you are not a survivor. I would say you are just 'cheating'. If you dare not to show your face, and need to hide up yourself, I will definitely go up to the facebook page and challenge you publicly. 'Chungsangje'?

This immediately reminds me of the work carried out by Mullender in 90s, talking about how survivors' group created a strong pressure on the participants who may not want to carry on the name of 'survivors', and how the title of 'survivor' became the tool for 'victim blaming'. Therefore, I was very alert with the response from NF and began to think of alternative descriptions of identity that may avoid the blaming effect. I was pretty shocked when NF expressed this sort of authoritative manner in defining what a survivor should be, and try to force YT either into or away from the title of 'survivor' which she preferred to taking on.

**About the reproduction of references/experiences (dated 21 April 2013):**

(In talking about how facebook platform worked...)

KW: What will you do if someone seek help from you through the facebook platform? They could be fakes, what would you do?

Me: On what ground that we can intake case? We have to refer to relevant department or agencies, such as the councillor's office and the integrated family service centres. (Regarding identity exposure...) the issue is whether or not you would like to put photos on the facebook page if we have organized some actions, such as support the pier workers (as discussed last time)?

YT: can go with a mask on as we had done in XX (another survivors' group).

NF: If then, my participation in this group will be very minimal. I would rather stay together, walking at the same pace.

YY: The setup of this platform implies the flux of work in a soon future.

Me: It does not necessarily lead to dramatic increase of workload I think.

NF and PF: Neither I think. It implies that we have to be exposed to the public.

PF: If you can post photos on facebook, it means you should have already broken through something of yourself.

NF: Yes, it is your only growth.

PF: That's why I always use my real names wherever I go and whatever I do now.

PF continued: I think when I last did the interview with the press, I had already had the readiness to go public. People going up to my facebook page can see a clear picture of me. I won't use pseudonyms. The problem is, in this group, we have only YY and I are ready to face the public, all the work that requires members to go public will definitely rests on just two of us. This simply leads to our old days, putting everything on a couple of 'sisters' shoulders.

NF: I have to clearly denounce my stance in participating in this platform. We have only 6 people now, and Ting (me) is leaving soon for her study. PF and I are having a job and very busy all the time. Honestly, I came here because I think it is a good way for you to grow up. I don't need it. I am creating a platform for you to learn.

Me: I think it is no longer the problem of posting photos, but the readiness for us to face people in the identity of a 'survivor'. It is the readiness that you may have to get in contact with a lot more people in that identity talking about your experiences. Just like, someone from the university contacts you for speaking at the class, are you willing to carry the identity of a survivor in sustaining this relationship? Like meeting them, sharing your experiences, giving your views etc. This needs a readiness. Or ...well... taking the survivor identity as a temporary (representation), and therefore I may not be ready for meeting too many people talking about what this 'title' entails...let alone going public.

#### Appendix 5.4 The Locations of Members in the Victim-Chungsangje Classification

	Victims	Chungsangje- Becoming	Chungsangje
<b>By herself</b>	Those invited to participate in the services provided by the group, e.g. emotional support service, mother's day event etc.	HL, KW, YT, YY, PF	NF, Me
<b>By the group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who have just left the abusers</li> <li>• Those who were still in the shelter</li> <li>• Those who have just housed</li> </ul>	HL, KW, YT	NF, PF, YY, Me



**Appendix 6.1 Our Analysis on Mothering Experiences (Translated from Chinese)**

<b>Mothering categories</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Incidents/speeches</b>	<b>Open codes</b>
Helping children to achieve academically	KW	Our kids should have chance to study at the university, and even study overseas	Expecting children to have academic achievement
	KW	Study well	Expecting children to have academic achievement
	YT	SY is going to secondary school soon. She wants to get into the better ones. Therefore, I just hope to earn some money for getting her tutorial classes.	Seeking for resources/external assistance for helping children with their study
	YT	She once asked me a math problem, and I couldn't solve even though I had been thinking hard to do so. She then told me that she would be asking her classmate...I became so angry.	Solving problems that children encountered in their study
	PF	Miss N said she could write a reference letter for my son, so to ask the school principal to admit him back to school. I immediately asked	Seeking for resources/external assistance for helping children

		my son if he wanted it.	with their study
Time management - study - rest VS others	YY	I don't allow him to play with the computer. He will get out of control once started. He can spend a whole day on it. I have password-locked it already.	Doing time management for children to achieve 'study-play' balance
	YT	I saw her playing with her mobile phone from day to night...This is not good! I just seized it over and locked up her phone.	Doing time management for children to achieve 'work-rest' balance
Making them happy	KW	KW discovered that her son looked very unhappy from a photo, and she then went to her son to show her care.	Being the emotional harbour for children
	KW	I don't want him to sign that paper (「衰仔紙」 a document to declare the breaking off of the mother-son relationship). I feel the same sorrow as he does. I know he doesn't want to sign it as well, but I have no option (in order to resume the welfare support).	Not doing something that will sadden their children

Displaying intimacy	<u>NAME</u> <u>CALLING</u>		
	KW	Calling my son 'babe' (「寶貝」)	Nickname calling
	PF	Calling my son 'piggy' (「豬包」)	Nickname calling
	YT	Calling my daughter 'baby' (「寶寶」)	Nickname calling
	KW	I sometimes put my arms across his waist when I was taking MTR.	Intimate body touch
	<u>CARING</u>		
	KW	I told my son, I will cook you dinners every night/  KW always reserved some food for her son when we were 'dinning together' in the inquiry meetings.	Taking care of children's diet
	KW	We have been eating canned food for months already. This kind of food is not nutritious at all... and Dai is now at his puberty!	Maintaining children's health
	KW	He brought a girl back home and I asked her if she knew how my son's girlfriend looked like. I actually knew she was my son's girlfriend.	Understanding and 'investigating' children's love life
	<u>UNDERST</u>		

	<u>ANDING</u>		
	KW	I always ask him to tell me about what bothers him, but he just says nothing.	Understanding children's views and situations  Being caring to them

## Appendix 6.2 The Mother's Day Event Planning (Translated from Chinese)

### 'Chungsangje the Pearl's Project'—The Mother's Day BBQ

#### Objectives

1. Bring festive happiness to sisters who have left the shelter/lately housed
2. Create opportunities for children to deliver their love to mothers
3. Introduce 'Chungsangje the Pearl's Project' to formerly abused women
4. Allow time for inquiring group members to have deeper understanding on the new comers

Date : 2013/5/12

Time : 10:00-17:00

Venue : *hidden*

PIC : Members of Chungsangje the Pearl's Project

Time	Content	PIC	Materials
<b>Morning</b>	<b>BBQ stove hunting</b>	<b>YY</b> <b>KW</b>	
10:00-11:30	Members arrive, get ready for games and bbq	Game: Shirley+ Moon  BBQ: all	
11:30-12:00	Introducing Chungsangje the Pearl's Project	Shirley	Our dream-making photo

	<b>Game 1: Who's the leader?</b>	Shirley+ Moon	Candies
12:00- 13:15	BBQ		
13:15- 14:00	<p><b>Game 2: Chicken Wings Competition</b></p> <p>Every child will be distributed 2 chicken wings and 1 paper plate underneath which each child participant writes down his/her name.</p> <p>Children participants will be given 20 mins within which they have to try their best to BBQ the most delicious chicken wings for the competition.</p> <p>When all the chicken wings are ready, mothers will vote for the chicken wings with the best 'colour, fragrance and taste' by putting their labels next to the plate.</p> <p>The chicken wings that receive the most label stickers are the winning ones. The child of the</p>	Shirley + Moon	<p>Chicken wings (two for each children participant)</p> <p>Paper plates, plastic knives, forks, tooth picks and label stickers</p> <p>(one for each women participant)</p> <p>Gift (stationaryX1)</p>

	winning dish will be given a special gift.		
14:00-14:30	<p><b>Game 3: Mother-child seek and hide</b></p> <p>Children have to hide within the appointed area, and their mothers have to find them out. Children aged below 6/scared to hide up alone will be accompanied by our teenage members.</p> <p>Time limit is 20 min. The quickest three who find their sons/daughters will be given a special gift.</p>	Shirley, Moon, Siu and Dai	Gifts (shopping bags X3)
14:30-15:30	<p><b>Relaxing hike for mothers</b></p> <p>Tidying up BBQ venues</p> <p><b>Card Making Workshop for</b></p>	<p>KW+</p> <p>YY</p> <p>NF+</p> <p>Shirley</p>	

	<b>children</b>	SY +Dai	Scissors, glue, cardboard, colour pencils, BLINGBLING powder etc.
15:30-16:30	<p>Presenting the handmade cards to mothers</p> <p>Members presenting gifts to mothers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Massage oil</li> <li>- Massage manual</li> </ul> <p><b>Mother-son/daughter massage</b></p>	<p>All children</p> <p>All</p> <p>YY+</p> <p>MM</p>	<p>Massage Oil</p>
16:30-17:00	<p>Tidy-up</p> <p>Sharing/Evaluation</p>	All	



## Appendix 7.1 Translation of the literature about children participation for women participants

### Involving Children in Research Report of Facts and Progress

After the first group inquiry held on 26 Jan, we had already come up with some 'dreams' for the group. We would like to put this further before the long holiday of the Chinese Luna New Year. Therefore, on 2 Feb, we had the second group meeting. In this meeting, we were prepared to talk about concrete directions for developing services for formerly abused women. As we had already got some agreement on expectations on the inquiry group, we thought it was time to proceed to another level, by proposing what we as a group could do. One of the participants took her son with her.

The son of YY, Yuen, was aged 12. In the last meeting, I spent considerable time with him talking about his care plan when his mother was out for meeting. He was capable of making decisions that fitted himself and his mother. Last time, he refused to come along as by his mother's request. However, for this time, he wanted to come with his mother. To YY, this is the safest way to keep her child within visible distance. Therefore, when we were having a meeting, Yuen was playing with pens and paper at the table next to us.

We employed 'mind map' as the technique for brainstorming possible services that could meet the needs of formerly abused women. Each participant, made use of their experiences and knowledge about this community, developed branches of service suggestions

### 兒童參與研究 (中文撮要)

#### 情況與現時進展

一月廿六日的研究小組已經開始為未來數月定下了一些「夢想」。我們希望在農曆年前可以進一步把夢想談得更仔細，所以便於二月二日進行了第二次小組聚會。我們希望在聚會裡談談建立為家暴重新者而設的服務方向。由於我們對研究小組的期望已有共識，我們均認為要把期望變作行動。在第二次小組聚會中，YY把她12歲的兒子也帶上。

阿原，十二歲，是YY的兒子。在上一次聚會時，我曾花了相當時間與他一起討論他在媽媽聚會時的「照顧計劃」。他很有法子制訂既適合自己又適合媽媽的計劃。上次，阿原拒絕媽媽請他參與小組的邀請。但今次，他卻願意與媽媽一同出席。我相信，對YY來說，把孩子置於視線範圍應是最安全的照顧方法。所以，當我們聚會時，阿原也在我們身旁把玩著紙和筆。

我們用「腦震盪圖」作為工具，幫助我們思考甚麼樣的服務才可以滿足家暴重新者的需要。每一位參加者都以個人經歷及對社區的知識，在海報紙上建立出不同類型的服務建議。同時，阿原亦在旁聽著聽著，也準備了他自己的「腦震盪圖」，展示了在家暴環境中成長的孩子的需要。

on the same sheet of poster-sized paper (see pic.1). In the meantime, Yuen overheard our talks and prepared his own mind map on the needs of children who live in family with domestic violence. He then came over to us and urged us to read his work. He gave that to his mother and asked her to circulate within our group when she finished reading it. The mind-map prepared by him was attached here as well (see pic.2).

We seriously looked at the work prepared by Yuen and thanked him for contributing to our plan. He then ran away and continued with his play. Every participant agreed that the opinions of Yuen reflected his views and experiences as a child living in domestic violence. The group found it important and relevant to their inquiry. KW said, 'Though we talk about the interest of formerly abused women, we could never put children's concerns and interests out of the agenda. If they are not happy, we can never be happy.' This statement brought a period of silence among the group, particularly to YY. She told us, 'In fact, I know all these (pointing to Yuen's mind map). He once told me about this and I understood that I should not hesitate to do something with it.' NF asked YY to take initiative to address these problems because leaving it unattended would result in disappointment. As we found that Yuen demonstrated an urge to get his mother known about his views, I suggested YY to write a response to her son, showing her concern and sincerity in making change. YY agreed and would report back to us about the progress of this. More

阿原走向我們並要求我們讀他的作品。他先把圖交予母親，並叫她給小組成員傳閱。圖(二)是他的「腦震盪圖」。

我們認真地閱讀阿原的作品，也對他的付出和貢獻表示感謝。他於是便走到一旁，繼續他的遊戲。每位小組成員都同意阿原的意見，是反映他自己作為身處家暴家庭中孩子的看法和經驗。小組認為這是對我們的研究來說，是既重要又關係密切的發現。KW說：「雖然我哋話要為姐妹好，但係小朋友都係好緊要架。如果佢哋唔開心，我哋永遠都唔會開心既。」這說話帶來了一段時間的沉默，尤其是YY。她對我們說：「其實，呢啲嘢我都係知既。他以前都話過比我知...我都明白，我係要做啲嘢。」NF請YY要主動去處理這些問題，因為對問題不聞不問會令孩子感到非常失望。由於我們發現阿原已經向YY表現了他希望被聆聽的必要，我也提議YY給兒子寫封信，去回應兒子今天的說話，以表達她的關心和改變的誠意。YY答應在下次聚會時向我們報告一下這方面的進展。

importantly, Yuen later came to us and expressed that he was willing to be involved in our next meeting for contributing more ideas about what we could do.

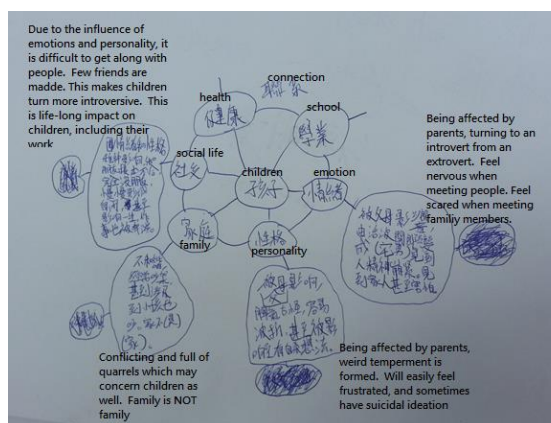
### Arising issues

This meeting unexpectedly got children 'involved'. The presence of children was originally planned as the 'best care plan' as negotiated between the mother and the child. However, this allowed the chance for the child to overhear the conversations we had. Although we did not refer to any details of personal traumatic experiences, but only ideas and opinions about how to improve services for formerly abused women, the discussion itself did arouse the child's concern over existing services in relation to his background of witnessing abuse.

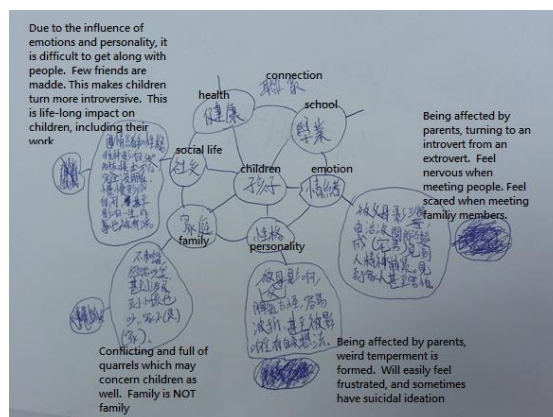
更重要的是，阿原後來再走到我們那邊，表示願意在我們下次聚會時參與表達更多意見。

### 事項

這次聚會無意中讓小朋友「牽涉」在其中。小朋友的出現，本來是孩子與母親商討後，最適合的「照顧計劃」。不過，這也令小朋友有幾會旁聽到小組成員的對話。雖然我們並沒有把傷痛經驗'鉅'細無遺地一一道出，但我們對改善家暴重新者服務的構思和意見，已足夠引起孩子與現存服務的關注，且把之與個人的目睹家暴的背境連繫起來。



Pic. 1: Mind-map prepared by Yuen regarding needs of children of formerly abused women



圖二: 阿原的「腦震盪圖」,關於家暴重新者的孩子的需要

He requested all of us to read the materials he prepared and we all found that the mind-map spoke of his own views and feelings about his experience for staying in a family with domestic violence. We read the content and found that the issues have immediacy to be dealt with, particularly when issues were actively raised by the child to the adults. We interpreted this as a gesture of invitation to listen to him and to help him out of the disturbances. It is not appropriate to leave the child unattended. Therefore, YY took initiative to tell Yuen that she had listened into it; meanwhile, we invited Yuen to contribute ideas on how to meet the needs of children who previously lived with domestic violence. He said that he would like to join our next meeting for reporting some of his ideas. After Yuen leaving the group for some play, NF and I conveyed a strong message to YY about the seriousness of the problem and invited her to respond to Yuen's expressions or it would leave him an impression that his needs would never be heard.

This experience convinced me that recalling of traumatic experience is NOT the only way for recalling children's memory of witnessing abuse/familial conflicts. Children's unresolved disturbances could come up in different forms (e.g. written, verbal or behavioural) in different manners (e.g. calm, casual, emotional etc.) on unexpected occasions. Therefore, participants of the inquiring group must pay extra caution to the

這次經驗令我明白回顧傷痛經驗並不是唯一一種會令孩子回想起目睹家暴/家庭糾紛的途徑。孩子仍未平伏的困擾會以不同的形式出現，如書寫、說話及行為；亦會以不同的脾性表達，如平靜、若無其事及情緒化；亦會在難以估計的場合發生。所以，小組成員必須對因小朋友在研究聚會出現，而帶來的不可知的結果格外留神。雖然，結果並不一定是壞處，但我們必須花點功夫了解孩子在出席成人的研究聚會後的反應。

possible unintended outcomes in the condition that children were brought close to the inquiry meeting. Though the consequences might not be necessarily bad, efforts must be appropriated to find this out. In this case, Yuen has trust over the adult participants whom he had known for quite a period of time. He believed that his ideas could contribute to our discussion and were able to reveal his views. Provided with the contribution by Yuen, we came to know that elder minors (aged 10 or above) were

1. Able to understand and give views on multi-faceted problems
2. Able to articulate their own experiences
3. Able to communicate their ideas about complex problems with the help of graphs, diagrams and verbal expressions

This view is also supported by literature about involving children in research (Alderson, 2000).

In spite of the positive consequence of having Yuen sitting near the inquiry meeting, we could not assume that every child would articulate and reveal his/her own view as openly as Yuen did. Children could also be triggered and then keep the words to themselves. This experience reminded all of us in the inquiring group that children who decided to come to the meeting with their parents should be listened to. The adult group should take initiative to invite them to explicate their feelings and views on their participation even though they were not 'formally' participating in the discussion.

這次，阿原由於已認識小組成員一段時間，並對她們相當信任。起碼，他相信自己的想法可以對我們的討論有所貢獻，並且可以藉此反映他的立場。因為阿原的努力，我們發現年齡較大的孩子(10歲或以上)...

1. 能夠明白並對複雜多面的問題給予意見
2. 能夠把個人經驗說明清楚
3. 能夠以表、圖及說話向別人說明他們對複雜的問題的想法

這種看法其實在文獻中亦有足夠的支持 (Alderson, 2000)。

雖然阿原在小組聚會的出現為我們的研究帶來正面的結果，但我們不能假設所有孩子都能夠如阿原一樣說明及反映自己的立場。孩子有可能在受到小組內容刺激後，把想法收藏起來。這經驗令我們知道若小孩希望與母親一同出席研究聚會，我們亦必須有聆聽他們的準備。而成人研究小組更需要主動邀請他們表達他們對參與其中的感受和意見。就算他們並不是「正式」參與時，我們也該如此。

Certainly, this direction of research constitutes what we call 'children involvement in research'. Despite the fact that all parents applauded for the participation of their children in the inquiry group while parental consent for voluntary children's involvement in the research was obtained prior to the first group meeting, I believe thorough considerations are needed in order to get every adult participant and children informed about their rights and responsibilities. There are several issues arising:

1. How to ensure children's participation is entirely voluntary?
2. To what extent children are involved in research? Can they fully exercise 'self-determination' about their participation?
3. It is 'children participation' in 'the cooperative inquiry of formerly abused women'? Or it is 'the cooperative inquiry of formerly abused women and their children'?
4. Are parents prepared for the collaboration with their children by addressing the power differential entrenched in the parental relationship? How the dual role of 'parents' and 'research partner' carried out by adult participants in their live? Shall we have rules to follow?

Furthermore, I have started reading literatures about children involvement in research and different issues that may arise. The positive sides, negative sides, concerns and methods of involving children will be brought back to the adult group for consideration, aiming at solving those concerns together.

雖然研究小組各人都對小朋友參與研究表示歡迎，並已在同意書上答允讓自己的孩子自願的情況下參與研究活動，我相信在我們正式邀請小朋友參與前，我們必須有更充份的準備，讓每個成年與未成年的參加者了解其權利和責任。

尤其於以下事項上：

1. 如何確定小朋友的參與是完全自願？
2. 小朋友在研究的參與程度是多少？他們是否可以在參與過程中「完全自決」？
3. 這是「兒童參與」在「受虐婦女重生者的參與研究」之中？還是「受虐婦女重生者與其子女共同進行的參與研究」？
4. 小組組員作為母親，是否已經準備好處理自己與孩子之間的權力關係(是拍檔還是家長)？組員如何同時肩負「家長」和「研究拍檔」兩個角色？我們是否先訂下一些原則？

### Background of children who may be involved

- Roughly 3-4 children
- All aged at least 12 and at most 17+
- A combination of girls and boys
- All are children of current participants
- 2 have understanding about our inquiry group and members of our inquiry group

### Doing research with children

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 lays the background for numerous trends of children involvement in research to thrive (Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). The recognition of children's rights to participate in decision making is argued on the basis of new understanding of childhood which is traditionally 'looked down' and 'undermined'. Our endorsement to children's rights for participation indeed gets us held in a dilemma because such rights are exercised in the current legal framework that assumes children as dependents and carers' full responsibility for making decisions that represent the best interest of children. Therefore, craving a place for children to participate in practice research is like wire walking which entails much of balancing.

Woodhead and Faulkner (2000) contrast 'behaviourism' and 'constructivism' to set out the context for understanding how

### 可能參與的兒童的背境資料

- 約有3-4位兒童
- 年齡在12歲以上
- 有男有女
- 他們都是現時參加者的子女
- 其中2人對這個研究小組有一定的認知

### 兒童參與研究

聯合國兒童權利公約1989為不同的兒童參與研究的項目提供了基礎 (Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000)。兒童參與決定的權利是因為我們對「童年」的理解與傳統的「瞧不起」及「輕視」兒童的看法不再一樣。我們對兒童參與的權利的認同，當然難免令我們走進一個困局。由於「兒童參與」是在現行法律的框架下進行，而法律框架視兒童為「依賴的被照顧者」，而照顧者(家長)則須代表兒童的利益作出負責任的決定。因此，為「兒童參與研究」尋找空間，就如踏鋼絲一樣，需要非常出色的平衡。

Woodhead and Faulkner (2000)把...

children are constructed as persons 'to be managed' and persons to 'develop'. The behaviourist view supports that people could make use of psychological conditioning to stop 'undesirable' behaviours and promote 'desirable' behaviours of children, so to make them fit into the routine of adults. The desirability of behaviours is not measured against the preference of the child, but the adult world. Obviously, this view of children development is not directed to 'the best interest of children', but the best interest of adults; rendering learning as a social control instrument to shape children in a way not deviating too much from the norm. On the contrary, Piaget as the representative of the constructivist paradigm promotes research methods that encourage 'children to talk freely, thus allowing their thinking to unfold and reveal itself to an attentive researcher' (p.23). This approach of understanding childhood rejects the environmentalist notion that 'children develop more mature ways of thinking by virtue of direct instruction and knowledge transmission' (p.22). Instead, children's understanding of the social reality is constructed by their action on the environment, so to allow them to discover some rules, properties and logics about how things work. In this regard, children are continuous learners and will be ones throughout the lifespan. They are not to be managed, but facilitated to develop their own understanding through interacting with the world objects. Riding on the constructivist view of developmental psychology, children are increasingly perceived as able learners and even participants in complex learning process, e.g. surviving within complex family relationships.



Another stream of arguments for supporting children participation is from the expanding sociology of childhood (Alderson, 2000). The re-examination of the conceptualization of childhood in different periods of history sheds light on how childhood has been constructed in particular society and at particular time. Children as 'becoming' versus adults as 'being' was, with more consensus, constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for religious reason. Infants were born with 'original sins' so that in the becoming of adults, there should be a process of purification through 'education, discipline and control' (Kellett, Robinson, & Burr, 2004, p. 28). Children as 'becoming' adults continuous reshaped by the changes of cultures in the society at different period of time, giving rise to conceptualizations such as 'blank slate', 'evil' and 'angelic innocents' etc. Modern conceptualization of childhood carries on the image of childhood as 'becoming adults' and 'economically worthless' but 'emotionally priceless' (p.29). With the rise of welfare state, children are thought to be protected by the state at all cost and yield in expansion of children services and children clinics. The social construction of childhood as 'becoming' renders children being perceived as incompetent, immature and insufficient to accomplish tasks in the adult world. This taken-for-grantedness is vigorously challenged because it suppresses the possibility that children are social actors who are competent and able to participate in social life and tasks related to them. With the growing support from research, children are found to be much more competent in decision making, understanding complex problems, devising elegant research design and taking

actions to make changes (McLeod, 2008; Alderson, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

### **Research ethics for ensuring consent and maintaining confidentiality**

Acknowledging the competence of children is yet a well-argued foundation for involving children in research unless measures against possible harms are implemented as same as in research carried out with adult participants. The ethical considerations are generally tied around issues of consent and confidentiality which are advised by institutional ethics review framework (Khanlou & Peter, E., 2005). However, research ethics in participatory action research usually go beyond the standard rule-following ethical consideration, but to negotiate ethical choices with participants in the on-going process of research according to general principles of ethics, including on issues of consent and confidentiality. Legal framework is one of the frameworks outlying the ethical boundary for research, while some ethical decisions are fostered by traditional ethics review framework which may require careful reformation in order to suit participatory action research in meeting ethical challenges (Blake M. , 2007).

Masson (2004) set out the legal context for doing research with children by saying that not everything that was legal was ethical. However, legal context depicts the minimum acceptable standards for research practices. Some legal issues will be highlighted here as the essential criteria in considering research ethics and design;

Masson (2004) 說明，與兒童共同參與研究就算是合法，也不一定合符道德。法律只是為研究的操作提供最低程度的要求。在此，我會指出考慮研究操守及設計時的數個重點。... ..

then I continue on the discussion about research ethics in the academic field, and those in participatory action research in particular. Children are subject to control and management of the parent who are with the rights and responsibilities entitled by guardianship/the grant of custody. In this regard, parents are legally responsible for providing information to a researcher and to consent to participation by children who are not eligible to consent for themselves. Therefore, the custody issue has to be sorted out in order to see if the one who signs the consent for the participating child is the valid legal guardian. For the issue of liability, confidentiality can be breached in case of revelation of harms or ill-treatment to children because the researcher is liable for the potential risks to minors. Details of conversations and observations could be reported to the court in case of proceedings. This possible breach of confidentiality has to be told prior to any data collection.

Although children's consent is not required by legislation, this is crucial to academic research ethics because children's right to participate is protected under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child

兒童在監護人條例或撫養權的分配下，須要由被法律賦與權利和責任的家長來「控制」和「管理」。因此，一般情況下家長在法律上有責任向研究員提供資料並代兒童簽署參與研究同意書。

所以，在簽署參與研究同意書時，研究員必須確保簽署的家長是獲得撫養權的一方。

基於責任問題，在有顯示指兒童被侵害或不當對待時，研究員有需要打破保密原則，以減少對兒童潛在的傷害。在需要聆訊的情況下，對話及觀察的詳細內容有可能會成為呈堂證供。這情況必須在開始搜集資料前清楚闡明。

雖然兒童的書面同意並不是法律所要求，但對於學術研究的操守而言是必需的。因為兒童參與的權利是由聯合國兒童公約所保護的。

1989. Children are no longer 'looked down' and 'talked down' by adults as the 'making of', but active social actors whose capacity of exercising self-determination is formally recognized (McLeod, 2008). Children's consent to participate will be sorted to ensure they are entirely voluntary to participate in the inquiry; meanwhile, they will be clearly informed about the purposes and process of the inquiry, and explained to them their rights to drop out the inquiry at any point without causing threats or harms to their lives, schooling and services provision. Children's consent will be obtained without the presence of the parent(s). It is because parents are now participating in the inquiry group and have strong wish for having their children included in the group, so that their presence in obtaining consent may constitute pressure on children in deciding their participation. This point must be made very clear to the parents so that they can understand the importance of non-coercive participation of their children. This is also to prevent them from pressurizing their children who refuse to consent. Regarding the details of the inquiry, a leaflet containing all the relevant details could be prepared by the adult inquiry group in the next meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb. This is on one hand to get every participant a place to initiate an inquiry with children, while on the other hand to start the journey of practical and experiential knowing in the group. However, consent to participate in participatory action research, including co-operative inquiry in the participatory paradigm, could not satisfy with one-go consent because it differs from traditional

兒童不再是被成人「瞧不起」或「輕視」，而又「未成熟」的一群；相反，他們是活躍的社會的一份子，且有能力作正式的「自決」(McLeod,2008)。

兒童的書面同意會在研究開始前獲得，以確保他們的參與是完全自願。同時，成人研究員會清楚向兒童參與者清楚解釋研究的目的和過程，並向他們說明他們可隨時中止參與研究的權利，而不會對他們的生活、學習及所接受的社會服務構成顯響。

兒童的同意會在他們的家長不在場的情況下進行，以確保兒童並非因家長的強烈意願而因壓力參與研究。這點必須讓每位家長都了解，以致兒童的參與研究同意都是「非強逼性」的。

這樣亦可避免在兒童拒絕參與後，向其施壓。

至於各種研究詳情，我們在2月23日的會議中商討，以為兒童準備一份清楚易明的宣傳單張。

這會是我們小組成員第一輪透過實務—反思來學習的循環。

research which has far more static research design throughout the inquiry process. In doing participatory action research, research design could be developed, altered and redesigned by participants in the inquiring group depending on the emerging action-research interests, available resources and appropriateness of methods. The cyclical processes of negotiation and actions with participants, rendering 'methods are often not known before the research begins' (Khanlou & Peter, E., 2005, p. 2337). Therefore, the consent given at the beginning of the research could, at the most, a signifier of one's willingness to develop 'something' together and the commitment to strictly comply with the rules of confidentiality.

Khanlou and Peter (2005) found incompatibility and challenges for assessing PAR through the traditional ethics review guidelines as well. They realized that the traditional ethics review requires the researchers to justify scientific validity of research in the proposals whereas PAR targets for social validity and may engage with variations of methods due to the emerging inquiry process; the former fosters assurance of outweighed risk-benefit ratio to the participants whereas participants of PAR may opt in and opt out in the middle of the research process, rendering the calculation of risk-benefit on individual basis impossible. Therefore, the risk-benefit balance in PAR should not rest on individual calculation, but the potential contribution of the inquiry to the community as perceived by the potential participants who are part of the community themselves. It is to say, PAR project has to be able to reflect the interest of the community

where the potential participants belong to. On top of this, it should consist of rigorous processes of devising protective measures *together with* the participants and demonstrated on-going commitment of all participants in complying with the measures, so to minimize the risks to the participating individuals and hence maximizing the risk-benefit ratio to both the participants and their community. The employment of methods have to be decided with the participants as well because it directly affects their participation and involvement in the inquiring process, i.e. question formulation, data collection, data analysis and dissemination of findings. Participation of stakeholders is although an intention to remediate the ethical dearth of 'atomized', 'expert-led' and 'a priori' knowing, it is to the contrary marginalized by the institutional ethics review boards. Malone, Verger, McGruder and Froelicher (2006) further argued that the institutional ethics review board tends to welcome 'studies that fit neatly into the biomedical ethics model ...because they do not require so much additional deliberation'. PAR could remediate the long-standing ethical problem of traditional expert-dominating culture in academics only when the research ethics review is ready for the cyclical process of inquiry characterizing PAR. *Research ethics in PAR has to be achieved through continuous consent over the understanding, plans and actions devised within the inquiring group.* This consent to participation should be obtained regularly through anonymised methods e.g. feedback card etc.

「合作參與研究」要持續向參與者獲得他們對參與研究的同意，包括在對問題的理解、計劃以及行動上。

The commitment to maintaining confidentiality has to be sustained by the initiating researchers, in this case the adult participants in the cooperative inquiry group, prior to any formal research engagement with children and throughout the process of inquiry. Every potential participant has to know that confidentiality is the key to participative collaboration. Any breach of confidentiality may be perceived as betrayal by children and will also risk trust, mutuality and intimacy built with and among children. The adult participants have to be cautious not to talk about the conversations and observations they have in the children-parent group with non-members. Children also have to comply with the rules that they will not discuss details of the inquiry meetings outside the group. Any discovery of breach of confidentiality will be investigated and may also lead to suspension of the inquiry until the problem is solved. Breach of confidentiality could only be acceptable when any child or adult is suggested to be threatened or harmed.

Investigation should not be a means for punishment, but for protection. It is to find out how the inquiry details are leaked and to help participants to understand the devastation that breach of confidentiality can lead to both the group and the individual. The process will be documented if it, though not very likely, happens. Data collected in this process

保密協議必須嚴密遵守，而發起兒童參與研究的成人研究員要致力確保這原則操作順利。

每個參與研究的兒童都要清楚明白保密是合作參與的金鑰。任何違反保密協議的行動，對兒童來說都可能是背叛的表現，亦會令彼此無法互信、交流及危及彼此的親密關係。

成人研究員要小心，不要與非小組成員談及兒童在研究小組中分享的東西、對話或對他們的觀察。兒童參加者亦要緊守以上原則。

當發現有違保密原則的情況發生，成人研究員有責任對此進行調查，並在有需要時暫停小組運作。

除非有事作反映成人或兒童被侵害和恐嚇，才可接受打破保密原則。

上述調查並非用作懲罰的工具，而是希望保障參與者。這樣做是希望了解研究內容如何被洩，從而幫助參與者了解違反保密原則可能為個人及小組帶來的危害。

這個調查過程亦會被紀錄下來，作為我們認識如何在「受虐婦女及其子女的合作參與研究」中確保保密原則的資料。

will shed light on how confidentiality can be kept in PAR with formerly abused women and their children. In case there is a breach of confidentiality, the affected individuals will be firstly attended to, including their safety, emotional disturbances and concerns for re-joining social life. Extra concerns will be paid to children who are affected because they may not be able to speak up when they are frustrated and disappointed by having their secrets leaked out. Parents of children have to be aware of emotional and behavioural changes of their children and see if the breach of confidentiality has negative influence on children. Assistance from relevant public services will be sought if the parent and/or the affected children find it helpful.

#### **Extra caution to be paid to protect children from further victimization**

Consent and confidentiality are the least for protection of children involved in research whereas the more is about not to induce harms and threats during the inquiry process. The inquiry initiated by the adult participants involves children not for the purpose to trigger neither examine into any traumatic experience they had in the past. As inspired by the involvement of Yuen, children are capable of giving opinions and advices on how to work with children who have once exposed to domestic violence. Despite the fact that the traumatic experience is not intentionally triggered, no one can guarantee that their negative experience will not come up during the inquiring process. Children may still recall memories of those experiences when, for

如有違保密原則的情況出現，我們必須留意有關參與者的安全、情緒困擾及對重投社交生活的憂慮。我們會對兒童於上述的需要尤其關心，因為他們對自己的秘密被洩露並感困擾或失望時，未必會主動發聲。成人參與者作為家長，須對其子女的情緒及行為變化加倍留神，以判斷子女有否因秘密外洩而產生負面影響。

如有需要，我們要向相關社會服務機構求助。

我們邀請兒童參與研究並不是要探討或引起兒童回顧自己的傷痛經驗。阿原的參與啟發我們成人小組，令我們知道目睹家暴的兒童有能力就與他們相關的服務給予意見。



example, discussing what services are the most suitable for children of formerly abused women. Therefore, children's emotions and needs should be well ventilated and expressed in each inquiry session, so to ensure negative experience recalled could be contained and resolved in the group, or at least made known to the initiating participants. Mothers of children will be strongly advised to attend to, listen to and seek help if emotional disturbances last. As long as mothers are also participant researchers in the group, their problems in solving children's disturbances will be discussed in the group as part of their action inquiry, so that the action-reflective cycle can be started off to facilitate learning in handling children's emotional disturbances. On the other hand, this practice allows the initiating researchers to keep track on the needs of children and to contribute ideas to handle the needs properly. Services for children will be sought if mothers and children find it helpful.

Initiating participants have to recognize the possibility that their children may talk about issues that they may not be ready to hear, for example, their love towards fathers, their angers, their sorrows, sometimes blames against them etc. Therefore, preparing sessions for initiating participants have to be held before formal engagement of children in the inquiry. This will prepare adult participants to handle sadness, anger and sometimes disappointment; more importantly, it is to help adult participants to understand that children being open to talk about their

但由於在不刻意引發兒童回顧傷痛經歷的情況下，兒童仍有可能憶起相關經驗，我們必須在研究聚會中設有幫助兒童疏導情緒的空間，以確保若兒童憶及負面經驗後的情緒可以被照顧及舒緩。

強烈建議參與兒童的母親，若發現兒童的情緒困擾持續，要聆聽子女及向成人小組及社會服務求助。成人研究小組亦有責任與母親協助受困擾的兒童妥善處理情緒及其他需要。

成人研究小組成員必須有充份的心理準備，其孩子在參與研究的過程中或會提出一些她們「未準備好」聆聽的事情，如他們對父親的愛、他們的憤怒、哀傷或對她們的指責。所以，我們必須在邀請孩子參與前準備自己，讓自己可以處理可能在過程中產生的哀傷、憤怒或失望。更重要的是，成人小組成員要明白，孩子願意開放地談論自己的感受及想法有助母子溝通和了解。

feelings and views can facilitate communication and understanding in the parent-child relationship. Adult participants whose children will be involved should be ready to prioritize children's interests, properly address children's needs, carefully listen to children's views and seriously consider children's opinions. For the adult inquiring group, it has to make itself ready and available to work with the parent participants and their children if they encounter problems in solving disputes and easing emotional hardships. All the sharing in the adult group should maintain the rule of confidentiality as proposed in the initial research proposal and the ethics review application.

The rights to withdraw at any point of the inquiry of both parents and children will be deliberated before they sign the consent. The child will not be involved in the inquiry if either the child or the parent does not want to participate because the participation in the inquiry has to be entirely voluntary. If children want to withdraw from the inquiry, s/he will be invited to a meeting with whom s/he feels free to talk to, in order to understand the reason for withdrawal. This procedure is to ensure that children are not withdrawing the group with negative feelings and experience without being carefully handled.

Data collected in the inquiry will be protected by fingerprint/password encryption. For hard copies, they are stored in a box file which will be locked in a drawer either at home or at the campus office. The keys of the drawers are kept

子女會參與在研究中的成人參與者，須以孩子的利益為前題，正確處理孩子的需要並仔細聆聽他們的想法及考慮他們的意見。

若母親或子女任何一方拒絕兒童參與研究，我們都不會對兒童作出進一步邀請，以確保兒童的參與是完全自願的。

若兒童想在中途停止參與研究，我們應安排一位他/她信任的人向他/她了解原因，以確定他/她的離開不是因為在研究過程中引起的困擾所致。

only by the principle investigator so that no one could access to the data without authorization. Soft copies will be stored in a password-locked computer and a USB stick as a backup. Emailing/transfer of soft copies is not needed. Use of data in the research report has to be anonymised with pseudonyms or symbols. Information that may reveal the identity of the participant(s) has to be removed. All the soft copies will be destroyed upon the finalization of the thesis, and only hard copies will be stored and destroyed within 3 years after the completion of the PhD.

Child protection issues arising in the inquiry process will be handled with care and strictly according to formal procedures. Both my PhD supervisor and my local advisor will be informed about the latest development to ensure the safety of children and mothers. Formal services will be involved in case of child maltreatment and/or relapse of intimate partner abuse. This is to guarantee that appropriate services and resources could be allocated to the affected participants. The adult inquiry group should follow up the case to ensure they are intensively cared for.

## Reference

- Alderson, P. (2000). Children as researchers: The effects of participation rights on research methodology. In P. Christensen, & A. James, *Research With Children: Perspectives And Practices* (pp. 241-257). London: Falmer Press.
- Blake, M. (2007). Formality and friendship: Research ethics review and participatory action research. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6(3), 411-421.
- Kellett, M., Robinson, C., & Burr, R. (2004). Images of Childhood. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson, *Doing Research With Children And Young People* (pp. 27-42). London: Sage Publications.
- Khanlou, N., & Peter, E. (2005). Participatory research: Considerations for ethical review. *Social Science & Medicine*, 60, 2333-2340.
- Masson, J. (2004). The legal context. In S. Fraser, V. Lewis, S. Ding, M. Kellett, & C. Robinson, *Doing Research With Children And Young People* (pp. 43-58). London: Sage Publications.
- McLeod, A. (2008). *Listening to Children*. UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Woodhead, M., & Faulkner, D. (2000). Subjects, objects or participants? Dilemmas of psychological research with children. In P. Christensen, & A. James, *Research With Children: Perspectives And Practices* (pp. 9-35). London: Falmer Press.

