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THE 'GAME' IN HONG KONG: HOOKUPS OR DATES OR...?

In recent decades, Hong Kong has experienced large changes in gender and intimate relations. The question explored within this project is whether this resulted in a decoupling of sex and committed relationships among youth. In the previous chapter, we looked at the dating culture of a college campus in Hong Kong. Students were familiar with the hookup script, but only a few had ever enacted it. For most students, hooking up was a symbolic resource with which they reflected on their intimate doings and demarcated cultural boundaries between themselves and 'foreign' students. In this chapter, I investigate sexual norms within another domain of youth: the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong, comprising bars, clubs, restaurant, cafes and high streets. The focus will once again be on practitioners of the 'game'.

Players of the 'game' are an extreme case. Within the competitive profession-alism of the 'game', a player displaying 'pickup skills' in the field accrues status among peers. One marker of skills is a limited timespan between first contact and sexual activity, as is the case in a hookup script. 'Game' practitioners, especially those deeply emerged in its competitive dynamic, were primed towards forging casual sexual relations with women. If anything like a heterosexual hookup culture existed within the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong, I would expect to find it among these men.

The 'game' was allegedly brought to Hong Kong in the early 2000s by a British expat. Inspired by American 'pickup' coaches who were active online and the numerous news groups that had emerged in the US in which users in a particular locality shared the ins and outs of heterosexual competences, he started an English language Yahoo group for men interested in 'pickup' in East Asia. Initially, a small group of expat men learned about the news group via word of mouth and participated in it. These men used the forum to exchange theories on and strategies for forging sexual relations with Chinese women. Much of this material was bootlegged from American 'pickup' coaches, but some was creatively reworked and adapted to the

local context. The group also had an offline component. A group of active users met regularly within the nightlife of Hong Kong to play the 'game' together.

Membership grew after the publication of the international best seller *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (2005), by Neil Strauss, but remained limited to around fifty active users and two-hundred participants in total. Since then the membership has changed; some members have left, others have come, but the total number of active users has remained roughly the same over the years. Not all of these users resided in Hong Kong. The news group was directed to men all over East Asia who were proficient in English. This mainly attracted two kinds of men: expats, predominantly White men in their late twenties and early thirties who had moved to the region for career opportunities, from Europe, America and Australia and overseas educated Chinese in the same age group. I prefer the term 'overseas educated Chinese' instead of the popular 'ABCs' –American born Chinese-, 'BBCs' –British born Chinese- and 'CBCs' –Canadian born Chinese-, because it more accurately denotes the life-circumstances of these men. Not all were officially born 'overseas', but nearly all were partially educated in an Anglo-Saxon country and had recently returned to China for career opportunities.

In 2007, the news group was transformed into an online forum by its founder, and three years later Herald, who came to be one of my key informants, took over its moderation. Access to the forum was restricted to members only. Neophytes had to write the administrator an email and explain why they wanted to participate on the forum. Then they received a phone call by the administrator to explicate their motives. This screening by phone was mainly to ensure that the forum attracted men who had the ambition to become active participants in the local community and also to keep potentially disruptive users away from the forum. For instance, it screened out critics of the 'game' and, more importantly, people working for the Chinese Public Security Bureau who might put the forum behind the Great Firewall. I do not know whether these fears were founded, but it did inspire the administrators to adopt the aforementioned screening protocol.

The 'East Asia Seduction Forum' –this is a pseudonym- was not the only online platform on heterosexual competences directed at English-speaking men living in East Asia. Numerous other forums existed, and most of these were run by 'pickup' coaches. These forums had a commercial component, although in most cases membership was free. Coaches used these forums to advertise and sell commercial products such as 'pickup' boot camps and self-help manuals. The 'East Asia Seduction Forum' was an outlier in this regard, since it was run by volunteers. Besides these English language platforms, Cantone and Chinese online groups on the 'game' also existed. One such a group was 'The Hong Kong Game' –this is a pseudonym- a very

active and reasonably sized Cantonese 'pickup' community of a few hundred active participants, affiliated with a commercial 'pickup' coaching program.

Although I visited a number of boot camps hosted by the 'Hong Kong Game' group and got acquainted with some of its members, my research focused on the 'East Asia Seduction Forum'. At the time of writing my research proposal, I did not know about the existence of this Cantonese group of 'game' practitioners, and I only learned about them at the end of my first round of fieldwork. At that point, I fully immersed myself in the group of players of the 'East Asia Seduction Forum' and decided to maintain my focus on this group. From the numerous visits I made to this group of Cantonese players of the 'game', I infer that I would have come to similar conclusions if I had focused on the Anglo community of practitioners. Both communities were extreme cases: in both groups men were primed to casual sex, and these groups had comparable hookup rates. They did have different tactics and theories of 'game', so some research results would have been different.

Postcolonial structures of power shaped the sexual relations of the men of the 'East Asia Seduction Forum'. Orientalist discourses informed the meaning that my interviewees gave to sexual dynamics between them and their interlocutors within the Hong Kongese urban nightlife and supplied them with a vocabulary of motives for why they the primarily engaged with Hong Kong Chinese women. 'Orientalism' is an Anglo-Saxon and European discourse of othering and distancing that construes the Orient -and more generally Asia- in conventional stereotypes, where the 'east' is what the 'west' is not. This body of knowledge is a product of political power structures that aim to establish dominance over Asia (Said, 1995[1978]). Asian bodies have often been eroticized within this discourse of othering, which concomitantly entails a de-erotization of White bodies. At the same time, post-colonialism informs the discursive framing of White men in Asia, at times construing them as 'emissaries of the modern', which can be a source of both admiration and moral denunciation (Henry, 2013; Hirakawa, 2004; Kelsky, 1999; Moskowitz, 2008).

Social scientists have developed quite an extensive body of research on the intersections between orientalism, and post-colonialism more generally, and sexual relations. Some have looked at how post-colonial discourses inform the longing for Asian female and male bodies by White men and vice versa (Hirakawa, 20004; Kelsky, 1999; Kong, 2002). Others have looked at how post-colonial power relations structure interracial sexual contact (Kong, 2002; Ho and Tsang, 2000). The latter approach has predominantly been taken in research on male same-sex contact. Fung (2005), for instance, argues that within interracial gay pornography, Asian men always play the submissive role as bottoms or servants. In research on same-

sex contact between Hong Kong and White men in London, Kong (2002) found considerable structural inequalities in these affairs. Hong Kong men nearly always abided by the lifestyle and language preferences of their White partners, who were often older, bigger and more conventionally masculine (2002:33). Others argue that the reconfiguration of political power due to decolonialization translated into a declining status position of White men in Hong Kong and, coincidently, increasing power of Hong Kong men in negotiating diverse sexual roles in interracial contact (Ho and Tsang, 2000). A question to consider from this research is whether postcolonial power structures tilted the power balance within the erotic encounters of my interviewees. How did postcolonial discourses of othering inform the sexual and relational desires of my research subjects? And, to what extent did these discourses affect the bargaining power of them within intimate encounters?

In addition to postcolonial discourses, gender was another structure of inequality affecting the power balance within intimate encounters of my interviewees. Despite impressive inroads to improve the position of women in society, gender relations in Hong Kong remain unequal. In the domain of sexuality and gender roles within intimate relations, this inequality is obvious. The data discussed in chapter five pinpoints that women's sexuality is more restricted than men's, and gender roles within intimate relations tie women to the domain of caring and nurturing. These gendered structures of behavior and concomitant discourses also affected the power balance within intimate relations of my interviewees and their Hong Kongese partners. The question is how this impacted the enacted sexual scripts of my respondents.

Within the array of sexual scripts that 'game' practitioners were knowledgeable of, a hookup was a prioritized format. They, however, perceived a tension between the blueprint for the sexual encounter that they preferred and what their female interlocutors favored. According to 'pickup' practitioners, their flirts favored a sexual script in which a romantic liaison espoused from a friendship and a gradual progression of physical and emotional intimacy coincided. This discrepancy in expectations of the intimate encounter gave rise to tensions within interactions that will be delineated in depth in a following section.

Despite the fact that 'game' practitioners perceived contrasting aspirations between them and their Hong Kong Chinese female interlocutors, they were primarily interested in Asian women and not other ethnic/racial groups within the urban erotic contact zone. Orientalist imaginaries colored their desires for Hong Kong Chinese women and Asian femininity. Within this narrative, Asian female bodies were sexualized and portrayed as hyper-feminine and contrasted with White female bodies, who were concomitantly desexualized and masculinized. Many of the Hong Kong Chinese women who players of the 'game' interacted with had little

interest in a sexual relation with them. This resulted in countless rejections. To make sense of these 'failed' opportunities, 'game' practitioners drew on another gender discourse, that of material and pragmatic Hong Kongese women. Gender discourses also tainted the ways that players approached 'pickup'. Discourses on Asian women's essence informed how they thought about their own manhood. What comprised an attractive masculinity with the field? And, how should they behave as men in order to forge sexual relations with Hong Kong Chinese women? These gender discourses shaped and informed the 'pickup' strategies that practitioners enacted within the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong. The second section of this chapter will delineate these gender discourses that 'game' practitioners drew upon.

Next, I explore the 'pickup' rituals and strategies of players of the 'game' in Hong Kong. Practitioners perceived a tension between dominant sexual mores within the urban nightlife and a hookup script. They, however, were primed towards casual sex. To forge casual sexual relations in a context where 'serious' dating was the norm, players of the 'game' enacted numerous 'pickup' rites and strategies. The last section of this chapter addresses these rituals and tactics and how practitioners dealt with violations of dominant sexual mores. After these three empirical sections, I reflect on the main question addressed in this chapter. What sexual scripts were enacted by players of the 'game' in Hong Kong. Did they hookup, date or enact other sexual scripts?

CASE AND METHODS

During fieldwork, which comprised three visits to Hong Kong and a total of seven months of fieldwork, I got to know twenty-three 'game' players from the 'East Asia Seduction Forum' who resided, at least partially, in Hong Kong. I conducted scheduled interviews with fifteen of these men, and I interviewed eight men multiple times, ranging from two to three. I asked my interviewees whether they preferred that I record the conversations or take notes. With six respondents, I recorded the interviews, while I took notes with the nine other. All names in the chapter are anonymized. I also accompanied players of the 'game' in their attempts to meet Hong Kong Chinese women in the urban nightlife. Every Friday evening in Hong Kong, members of the 'East Asia Seduction Forum' met in a nightlife district and 'played the field' together. I attended most of these meetings during fieldwork. I also accompanied key informants in other routines of their everyday life. I shared an office with one of my informants and visited others at work. During their time off work, we spent numerous leisure hours together. For example, I accompanied informants on

hikes, boat trips and travels. This intimate hanging out resulted in a large number of informal conversations with informants that I documented in notes.

Most of my informants were active participants on the 'East Asia Seduction Forum'. They contributed their insight about various relevant topics for the forum. Some wrote field reports of their experiences with the 'game' in the Hong Kong nightlife; others wrote about heterosexual competences, such as 'pickup' strategies and grooming and styling; some contributed reviews of nightlife establishments, discussing which bars, clubs and restaurants were suitable locations to 'play the field'; many others commented on these posts. These writings were a valuable resource and an additional source of data in this research.

My informants were a diverse group of men. Of the twenty-three men I met in total, four worked or had worked as professional 'pickup' coaches, and nine other men were long-term practitioners (between one and three years). Most of the data in this chapter comes from these informants. The ten other practitioners were neophytes of the 'game' who had been involved with this community for less than a year. Ten of my twenty-three informants identified as White and were born and raised in Continental Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. Eight informants identified as ethnically Chinese and were raised and educated within Australia, America or the United Kingdom. One informant identified as half White and half Chinese and was born and raised in America. Another man identified as African-American, and two men were non-Chinese Asians who were born and raised in Hong Kong. Additionally, one man had spent his whole life in Hong Kong and identified as Chinese. For all but one of these men, English was the main language they used in their everyday interactions, and five spoke Cantonese fluently.

The paragraph above illustrates the ethnic diversity of this group of players of the 'game', and this diversity, albeit to a lesser extent, was also apparent in their class backgrounds. Two men came from upper-middle-class backgrounds, nineteen from middle-class families and two from working-class families. This classification is based on the professions of my interviewees' parents and their own educational and professional careers. My respondents' ages ranged from twenty-four to thirty-six. All of my informants had professional careers within the city and –aside from those who worked commercially as 'pickup' coaches- were employed in industries such as finance, consulting, sales, law, and education. None of these men had migrated to Hong Kong for the 'game'. Some had been involved in 'pickup' communities in Europe, Australia or America, while others had taken an interest in the 'game' in Hong Kong. Even the men who worked as 'pickup' coaches had initially moved to East Asia for their professional careers at the time.

A PERCEIVED TENSION IN ORDERINGS OF SEXUAL SCRIPTS

A discourse on sexual morality within the urban erotic contact zone in Hong Kong existed among my interviewees. This discourse implicitly elaborated on the dominant script of intimate coupling within the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong, as it was perceived by players of the 'game'. This does not mean, however, that only one sexual script existed within this realm nor that players of the 'game' thought that the Hong Kong Chinese women they interacted with only knew about one sexual script or were all primed for 'serious' dating. They were aware that multiple sexual scripts within the urban nightlife of Hong Kong existed, and that the women they interacted with were also aware of the variety of scripts, and some might even be primed towards casual sex. In the following section, I elaborate on this discourse of sexual morality in the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong, according to my interviewees. I also describe the sexual scripts prioritized by my informants. I argue that the latter did not always correspond with their discourse on sexual mores within the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong, and this resulted in challenges.

Their discourse on sexual mores in Hong Kong emphasized that partners would meet via an established social connection. 'Asians don't talk to strangers, so when girls are approached they might actually freak out a little and don't really know how to react', explained 'pickup' coach Martin. Most of my interviewees did not have an extensive network of Hong Kong Chinese acquaintances. They looked for sexual partners in the urban nightlife, and this became a challenge.

In the eyes of 'game' practitioners, light sexual activity enacted in public was inappropriate in Hong Kong. Chinese-American player Jack, for instance, thought that 'grinding' was acceptable in America but not in Hong Kong. Most players also considered other forms of explicit sexual touching in public, for instance kissing, to be inappropriate. Practitioners also believed that some sexual acts carried different meaning within the city-state. Herald, for instance, reflected on his effort to kiss in public:

> I'm starting to re-assess the role of kiss closing in game in Asia. Historically, I always saw the kiss close as part of a sequence of events in the sarge. It is a way to show that you are getting where you want to go. In London, for example, I would quite often kiss close a target the first time I met her. In Asia, I think this mindset is damaging me. […] It feels that often an on-the-lips k-close is a big deal for a target here, and she doesn't want to do it with someone she has only recently met, and definitely not in front of her friends or other people.

Much 'pickup' advice emphasized a relatively quick escalation of sexual acts. In the contexts where most 'game' practitioners had their first heterosexual experiences, in Europe and America, enacting such acts in public would not attract much attention. Players thought that this was different in Hong Kong, and this was another potential source of strife.

'Game' practitioners did not see a decoupling of sex and committed relationships in Hong Kong. On the contrary, they believed that sex remained confined to a relationship context.

> They [Chinese men and women] have this idea that you are supposed to make a confession of love before sex happens. Yeah, it's violated all the time, but it's sort of like the three-day rule in the 'west'. It's violated all the time, but there is still this belief that it is the right thing to do (Martin).

The flipside of this norm was that casual sex conflicted with dominant sexual mores. 'Pickup' coach Martin, for instance, mentioned that within Hong Kong –and this applied to most of continental East Asia- '[…] it is more difficult to get *SNLs* [*same night lays*] than in the "west", here the game is more long term'. Same night lays in players' argot comprised a sexual encounter with a person who was a perfect stranger the day prior to the encounter. 'Long-term game' implied a relatively long period between first contact and sex, which lasted at least multiple days but was more likely to be weeks, months or even years. Within this time, there was a gradual buildup of emotional intimacy and a slow progression of sexual activity. Most of my interviewees did not want to play by these rules, and this was another challenge for their 'game'.

According to my interviewees, most women in Hong Kong construed courtship as a phase that would culminate in a committed relationship and eventually marriage. This contrasted with how dating was historically perceived in the US, where it was first and foremost a fun, leisure activity of youth (Bailey, 1988:25). In contrast, in Hong Kong, a citywide representative survey of youths reported that dating was primarily a means to build an intimate relationship, preferably leading to marriage, and was secondly a leisure activity undertaken for its own merit (TFPAHK, 2011:70). This was also understood by my interviewees.

> In other countries girls often regard dating as a fun activity. But in China I have found that girls regard dating that will not at least possibly lead to marriage as essentially a total waste of their time. They have low or no appreciation of other benefits such as it gives them new experiences, can be fun in itself and so forth. On

this basis, they often presumptively define the relationship themselves in default and essentially challenge you to disagree. This can be as little as a couple of weeks into regularly seeing each other (Herald).

Game 'practitioners' perceived dating in Hong Kong as a serious activity that should escalate to a stable, committed relationship that could potentially evolve into a marriage. As Herald mentioned, many of his partners rightly felt that their understanding of the intimate encounter differed from his.

My interviewees' discourse on sexual norms in Hong Kong revealed a particular ordering of sexual scripts in the city-state. The players of the 'game' perceived the dominant script to foreground a slow progression of emotional and physical intimacy between friends and culminate in a committed relationship and eventually marriage. Many players in Hong Kong adhered to a different ordering of sexual scripts. In particular, practitioners who were heavily involved in the competitive field of the 'game' prioritized an ordering of sexual scripts that in many ways was the inverse of the dominant ordering of scripts in the urban erotic contact zone of the city. The players' ordering of sexual scripts was mediated by a 'logic of professionalism', and this was also the case in Hong Kong. Players competed for status, honor and money in their specialized universe, and hierarchies between them arose on the basis of ostentatious displays of heterosexual competences in the 'field'. This meant that players had an incentive to enact sexual scripts that were uncommon within the local context. 'Pickup' coach Matthew, for instance, reflected on his position within the field:

> *Being put in a position where I am supposed to be good, it has been quite good for my 'game' because it pushes me to do stuff that I previously would not have even tried, so for example my quickest pull ever is seven minutes. And that was like walking into a club. My opener was like, eye-contact and then make out with a girl, and dance and grind for about two minutes, and then I just grab her arm and pull her out. We barely talked, my hotel was less than five minutes from the club, which helped.*

'Pushing oneself to do stuff that one previously would not have even tried' implied demonstrating a stark control over the social environment through strategic manipulation of self and others. Through this control of the environment, one consciously and ostentatiously engineered a sexual encounter. This principle of the 'game' often resulted in a discursive erasing of female agency. In the stories of players, women were often construed as subjects with little control over the encounter; they were played by the skillful practitioner. This was usually an

unrealistic representation of the actual dynamics of the encounter, but this strategy and how it was described reflected players' intentions. It portrayed them as the almighty puppeteers of the interaction order and as men with the heterosexual competences to skillfully 'play the field'. Within their interactions, this principle of the 'game' had a different effect. It meant that players often sought 'flashy' sexual encounters that markedly differed from the dominant sexual script within the urban erotic contact zone in Hong Kong.

This orientation to the game, however, was not shared by all players I encountered. The 'logic of professionalism' was especially prevalent among players immersed in the competitive dynamic of the field. Neophytes of the 'game' often had a different orientation to sex and relationships. Jack, for instance, like most neophytes, hardly ever pushed for one-night-stands but instead preferred to initially propose a date for a later time and slowly progress through layers of emotional and physical intimacy. Similarly, Giorgio, in spite of having a string of sexual partners in Hong Kong, hardly ever pushed for a hookup. Instead, his standard blueprint was to meet girls in the nightlife, flirt and take numbers, instigate a text conversation and schedule a date that might end in a sexual encounter. However, the more players became immersed in the 'game', the more the logic of professionalism structured their actions within the field.

The logic of professionalism, the imperative to demonstrate a stark control over the sexual field, led players to push the flirtatious interactions with women towards a sexual script that opposed dominant sexual norms. This would often be a hookup script. For professional players like Matthew, the logic of professionalism became a leading imperative in their interactions with women within the 'field'. For men like him, having sex with women shortly after meeting was a powerful rhetoric of expertise in the 'game', especially in a context where sex within committed relationships was the norm. Hence, in a context where dating was the norm, such as Hong Kong, hookups were an especially desired sexual script among (semi-) professional players of the 'game'.

This latter groups of practitioners often experienced a tension between their preferred sexual script and that of the Hong Kong Chinese women they interacted with. Their 'seduction' strategies often aimed to win women over to make them acquiesce to a sexual script that violated dominant sexual norms. These strategies, however, were not only informed by a perceived tension between what they wanted and what the women they interacted with wanted in the urban erotic contact zone. Gender discourses about the roles of men and women in intimate affairs also informed these strategies. These discourses need to be delineated in order to understand the 'seduction' strategies of players of the 'game' in Hong Kong.

GENDER DISCOURSES

The strategies through which my interviewees aimed to 'pickup' women and enact sexual scripts that conflicted with dominant sexual mores in Hong Kong were informed by gender discourses of their specialized universe. Four gender discourses existed among my informants, two of masculinity and two of femininity. The first discourse of masculinity of the in-group was referred to as *alpha* manhood. This was the cherished ideal of manhood that my informants aspired to. The discourse on *alpha* manhood had many similarities to the discourse of 'game' practitioners in the Bay Area, described in chapter four, but there were also important differences. To do justice to these differences, I describe the alpa manhood discourse of my interviewees in Hong Kong in detail later in this section. The other discourse of masculinity was of *beta* manhood, which directly contrasted with the *alpha* ideal.

There were also two discourses of femininity that were often drawn upon by my informants. There was a discourse on East Asian womanhood and another on 'western' or 'White' femininity. The terms 'western' and 'White' were used interchangeably by my respondents and referred to women who were culturally different from 'local' East Asian womanhood. This was not necessarily tied to phenotypes or place of birth. These terms were used to denote White American and European women, American-Chinese women, British-Chinese women, Australian-Chinese women, or Hong Kong Chinese women who had been educated in Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. An orientalist imaginary informed these gender discourses, drawing on longstanding stereotypes of passive, submissive and hyper-feminine Asian womanhood and emasculated Asian manhood, which contrasted dominant, hegemonic 'western' manhood.

Alpha manhood was a 'hegemonic masculinity' within the specialized universe of the 'game'. It was dominant vis-à-vis subordinated beta masculinity and vis-à-vis femininities (Connell, 1995). According to my interviewees, being *alpha* was what made a man attractive to women, and nearly all players' practices in the field were informed by this discourse of masculinity.

First and foremost, being *alpha* meant to control and maintain dominance over one's inner-world of thoughts and emotions and the outer world of social interactions. This obsession with control and dominance over the inner world showed, for instance, in a few players' interest in NLP, Neuro Linguistic Programming. NLP is a behaviorist paradigm, of dubious scientific standing, in which practitioners seek control over the emotions of the self and others through enacted rituals. Being *alpha* also entailed a constant striving to dominate and control women and other men in the interaction order. This is illustrated, for instance, in how 'pickup' coach Matthew responded to a breakup with his Chinese girlfriend at the time.

She accidentally left her phone with me one day and messages pop up. And I look at it and then I talked to her about it. And I found out she lied about it, and I said 'look you got twenty-four hours to make up your mind, him or me'. And she came back twenty-four hours later and she said 'Look, I am very sorry. I just think I should be with him. I mean my grandparents know him. We have been together for a long time. It's like three years and yet I just think I should be with him. I do really like you, but I still love him'. And in my brain something really weird happened, where I thought, 'Wait a minute. I am not leading the situation. I am not taking control. I am basically making my responses on her. This is fucking stupid'. And I totally changed. I said, 'Look. No! I have made up my mind. You are going to break up with him and you are going to be with me. That is how things are. There is no question, this is just how it is'. And this is when I started really to develop frame control, really start to have a basic understanding of what it is, right? So, she was like 'okay' and she did (Matthew).

Masculinity has always revolved around the dominance and control of women and other men, but within 'seduction communities' this was magnified tenfold. This was particularly the case among players of the 'game' in Hong Kong. They construed Asian womanhood as being inherently 'docile' and 'submissive' to men. Hence, for these men, being 'dominant' was particularly relevant in their discourse on *alpha* masculinity.

Dominance also showed in the aggressive heterosexuality that players of the 'game' exhibited. *Alpha* men would allegedly have a carnivorous appetite for sex and should feel no shame and remorse in assertively, and at times aggressively, pursuing women. 'Pickup' training often taught shy men to leave their anxiety behind and to ostentatiously show their heterosexual desires. 'Pickup' coach Matthew, for instance, described an exercise he frequently gave his students.

I gave my students an example. I said 'just walk up to the girls and tell them you want to fuck them'. And they were like 'I cannot do that. Girls get angry, girls will tell you to fuck off. It will never happen'. And I am like 'No! She probably won't fuck you, but she will kiss you if you try'. And they were like 'It is not possible'. And I said 'Just watch'. So, I did this with three or four girls and the fourth girl, she was like 'haha'. And then she said something bad about my bandana and she was like 'No girl would do anything with you when you got that bandana. It is ugly'. And I am like 'You are full of shit. I bet that you want me to fuck you when I wear that'. And I pulled her in and made out with her. And I am like 'This is easier than I thought'. And then all the students were 'Oh, it is magic and shit'. I didn't think the girl was

going to slap me and get angry, I thought mainly I get a lot of rejections and this was a good response and it happened a lot more frequent than I thought (Matthew).

While aggressive heterosexuality demanded a conspicuous interference in the world, another marker of *alphaness*, stoicism, implied an emotional withdrawal. This was particularly relevant in situations in which 'game' practitioners were rejected harshly or received criticism from women or other men for their predatory behavior. An *alpha* male would allegedly be emotionally unaffected in these situations, and players of the 'game' put in a lot of 'emotion work' to achieve this goal (Hochschild, 1979). American player Nick, for instance, while reflecting on his own learning curve within the 'game', insisted that his stoicism towards rejections was one of his main achievements. Practitioners who showed emotional insecurity and dependence on woman were the counter example. This was supposedly the behavior of *beta* males and something players of the 'game' tried to avoid at all costs.

Play and adventure were important elements in the discourse of alpa masculinity, concomitant to American ideals of manhood (Kimmel, 1996; Rotundo, 1993). In contrast, Hong Kong femininities and masculinities, according to 'game' practitioners, were unexciting and dull. Most Hong Kong Chinese men and women allegedly lived routine lives of work, shopping, school and family. 'All women I meet seem to have little going on in their lives', Herald mentioned. Martin agreed: 'Asian girls tend to have very boring lives'. According to 'game' practitioners, their seemingly adventurous and playful lifestyles made them attractive to Hong Kong Chinese women.

An *alpha* masculinity incorporated many markers of conventional European and American manhood ideals, however some signifiers distinguished this particular discourse from more orthodox predecessors. One example was the eminence of emotional expressiveness for players of the 'game', albeit formulated within restricted and highly functional terms. An *alpha* male was a skillful conversationalist, who could entertain people, emote and relate to them, with the purpose of 'playing the field'. Other signifiers of a player's *alpha* masculinity drew on contemporary metrosexual manhood ideals, such as the importance of grooming and fashion and a trained and tanned physique. The discourse of masculinity among players in Hong Kong thus drew on conventional constructions of manhood, while incorporating more contemporary ideals.

The discourse on *alpha* manhood among players in Hong Kong differed in certain aspects to that of 'game' practitioners in the Bay Area. In the latter, humor and the ability to banter flirtatiously were much more valued as markers of manhood than in Hong Kong. This had to do with language issues. A large portion of the

Hong Kong Chinese women with whom players of the 'game' interacted were not proficient in English, and few of my interviewees had mastered Cantonese. Even those who did often spoke English while they played the 'game'. Because of these language difficulties, the 'game' in Hong Kong was less focused on the capacity to make women laugh. Being dominant and controlling the interaction, however, were more important markers of manhood in Hong Kong than in the Bay Area. This related to corresponding discourses on Asian womanhood, which centered on 'submissiveness'.

For my interviewees, *beta* masculinity was the opposite of *alphaness*. This was linked to men who were allegedly incapable of ostentatious dominance and control, were shy and introverted and showed no sign of aggressive heterosexuality. This discourse of masculinity was often used to refer to Hong Kong Chinese men. This narrative of effeminate Asian men is nothing new and has often been a part of orientalist discourse. By construing Asian men as effeminate, as half man, half women, American and European men have always felt superior and legitimated to dominate and rule over them. It was striking that even ethnically Chinese players of 'western' upbringing equated 'local' Hong Kong Chinese men with *beta* manhood, drawing on a discourse whose origin lay in European and American imperialism.

East Asian femininity, in this Orientalizing discourse of 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong, was portrayed as hyper-feminine, sensuous, shy, warm, caring and empathetic, and this construct of hyper-femininity informed the intimate longings of players of the 'game'. Herald talked about his perception of the ideal role of women in an intimate partnership. '[…] Listening to you as a man, […] or calm you down, or simply make you feel supported and cared for'. Within his vision, concomitant with many other 'game' practitioners, men should take on the role of the traditional patriarch. 'I think that [homemaking] is really something women can do and they can only do it as part of a two-parent family […] the homemaking function can only exist properly where it works in synergy with some sort of security-providing function which is the role of the male'. According to Herald, and most other 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong, East Asian women were better suited to play this role than 'western' women.

Nearly all players in Hong Kong were solely interested in East Asian women, and for most men, this interest was fueled by a desire to be dominant within a sexual relationship.

For most of the guys that I met, or my friends, or other people, being recognized as a man, or more like the man role, where you are, you know, the leader. You set the framework and then the woman, the lady, will bring a lot into it, right? I'm not

talking about issuing commands and the other partner executing what you are saying. It's not like that at all. It's like what you bring in the picture that is totally different. […] She will bring emotions, cuteness. She will bring her persona, she will bring her style. […] It's a lot of things that she will bring in, but still you will set the framework, right? And she will not be debating whether your framework is good or not (Giorgio).

Hong Kong Chinese women were attractive for players of the 'game' because of their supposed hyper-femininity. These men, without exception, longed for a hyper-masculine role of dominance and control, and Asian women would supposedly acquiesce to this arrangement. 'Pickup' coach Matthew, for instance, boasted about his current relationship with a Chinese woman. 'She is very feminine […], she is very willing to please me and do what I want, so if I tell her don't do this but instead do this, she is willing to do it. She understands gender roles really well'. This longing for Asian women was enmeshed in hegemonic masculinity 'as the pattern of practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:832). For these men, Asian women were attractive because they supposedly accepted a hyper-masculine presentation of self and, more importantly, perceived them as hyper-masculine in ways that would not be acknowledged in Europe, America and Australia.

Changing gender relations in the 'western' hemisphere fueled 'game' practitioners' longings for hyper-feminine Asian womanhood. They lamented about the lost privileges of men in the 'western' part of the world. In the feminist revolution, women in America, Europe and Australia had stood up against traditional patriarchal intimate and sexual relations and demanded equal treatment. Some men resisted and some still refuse to grant them this equality, and 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong were part of that group. They repudiated 'White' femininity, and most women in America and Europe would probably reject them, so they directed their efforts towards Asian women.

In terms of the differences between American women and Asian women, it seems that Americans highly value 'freedom', which leads to things like the feminist revolution where women wanted more power, freedom and independence. So, I guess it's no wonder why you get a lot of 'western' women who respond like rude bitches, who are overly opinionated and fussy and who want to act like 'one of the boys'. Not that it is right or wrong, but it's just a big contrast compared with Asian girls in general. […] 'Western' women [have] gained a lot of masculine strength, due to feminism […], which fucks up the true roles of men and women. Also, with a lot of media claiming that men are monsters and sickos makes us men suppress our true masculinity. Not

allowing to beat up women, to shut them up etc. Which I don't claim is a good thing,
but it was a tool that was used in the past until it was taken away. Then, we didn't
know what to do anymore (Thomas).

This 'men as victim' rhetoric has been part of men's movements for a long time (Carrigan et al., 1985:567), with complaints about feminist critiques of masculinity that supposedly portray men unfairly as 'sickos' and 'monsters'. This feminist critique supposedly leaves men confused and insecure with their role as men, who are the 'real' victims of changing gender relations. This reasoning was a reoccurring theme within 'seductions communities' and among 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong. It gave meaning to their residency in the city-state and their interest in intimate affairs with Hong Kong Chinese women.

For players of the 'game' in Hong Kong, 'western' womanhood was the daunting other. It was associated with women who had challenged and changed patriarchy in Europe and America and who, in the process, had taken on conventional markers of masculinity, such as independence and assertiveness. My interviewees almost unanimously despised 'western' women and emancipated Asian women. One reoccurring comment about overseas-born Chinese women was that they were 'bitches', 'because they have spent too much time in the "west"' (Herald). 'Western' femininity, for 'game' practitioners, was a contagious identity, which could corrupt and defile an allegedly pristine hyper-feminine Asian womanhood. In the eyes of my interviewees, this corruption occurred through prolonged contact with emancipated woman, for instance, in schools, at work or during an extended stay in places like America or Europe.

A dominant trope in the city-state, and one that is often reflected in mainstream media, is that of 'Hong Kong girl' *gong nui* (港女), a demanding, pragmatic and materialistic girl who is exceptionally vain (Chu, 2014, 139; Ho, 2014:166). 'Game' practitioners drew on this trope to explain the motivations of Hong Kong Chinese women in intimate relationships. 'The materialism in Hong Kong is absurd', said Herald. More players of the 'game' shared in the complaint against demanding Hong Kongese women who were obsessed with material goods. Nearly all players had stories about Hong Kong female partners demanding goods or money at some stage in the relationship. Herald, for instance, mentioned receiving an email from a partner in which she asked for a contribution to her holiday. Others had similar stories of female partners asking for phones, bags, jewelry and designer clothes. This trope of materialistic Hong Kongese women informed the meaning players gave to experiences with intimate relationships in the city.

'Game' practitioners saw the sexual field in Hong Kong as a marketplace, where women traded their sexuality for money, in line with classical sociological theories on 'western' marriage dynamics (Becker 1973; 1974). Appearance would allegedly determine women's value, and this asset depreciated with age, as 'pickup' coach Martin explained:

> *Girls tend to have the highest value at 23, like it's still okay for them not to be married. They will just wait what comes by and try to get the best prospect. So, when the girls are at their highest value, they tend to be the most difficult. Like, why waste their time with people of little value, when they can get a rich Chinese guy who will provide for them the rest of their lives?*

There is a saying in China that asks: 'who wants Christmas cakes after the 25th?' This suggests that no man would want to marry a woman above the age of twenty-five. Women in China are under enormous social pressure to marry at a young age, and men tend to seek marriage partners who are in their early twenties (Fincher, 2014). There is much less of this pressure in Hong Kong, but 'game' practitioners nonetheless thought that women in the city-state were primed to marry, and women's bargaining power within the sexual field was directly tied to their appearance and their age.

Martin, like other players, thought that women who were perceived as beautiful had more power in defining the terms of the relationship than other women and vis-à-vis men. Their power was due to the variety of options they could choose from, and as a result, they would set a high price on their beauty and sexuality. Herald, for instance, commented about a Chinese girl he pursued and who worked as a television host for a Chinese broadcaster: 'These are the types of girls I like', he said. 'She will take a lot of time because every guy wants to sleep with her'. According to players of the 'game', women, by default, wanted a long-term relationship, not a casual hookup, –in line with a battle of the sexes reasoning as described in the introduction– and women perceived as beautiful were supposedly in a powerful position to define the terms of the intimate encounter.

According to players of the 'game', Hong Kong Chinese women would supposedly sell their bodies to the highest bidder. Even in a long-term intimate relationship, commitment only lasted until there was a better offer. Matthew reflected upon a previous breakup. '[…] Eventually things broke down with this one girl and I found out later that was because she started a new job, and she was surrounded by like millionaires, and millionaires were a better option than me in terms of getting married […], so that is why she lost interest'. Marriage was allegedly the relationship par

excellence to secure financial resources for women, and hence Hong Kong Chinese women ultimately sought rich husbands that were willing to provide for them.

Despite the negative terms that 'game' practitioners used to describe the alleged materialism of Hong Kong Chinese women, they almost exclusively sought out these materialistic women as sexual partners. An irony of the 'game' was that practitioners bemoaned the materialism and the concomitant material demands of Hong Kong Chinese women in intimate relationships, while at the same time lamenting women's independence in America, Europe or Australia. Players neglected the fact that the financial independence of women meant that they no longer needed a partner for financial security, and that material aspirations became less prominent within intimate relationships for women. Nonetheless, for 'game' practitioners, women's emancipation was more daunting than materially exploitive relationships.

'Game' practitioners drew on this trope of materialistic Hong Kongese women, in particular, to explain 'failures' within their intimate affairs. The trope was often used to explain why many women were not interested in them, or why some women broke off their relationship, and why some women left them for other men. The trope of 'materialism' could account for situations when Hong Kong Chinese women acted in dissonance with their alleged hyper-femininity.

SEXUAL STRATEGIES OF 'GAME' PRACTITIONERS IN HONG KONG

My interviewees unanimously thought that hooking up ranked low in the dominant ordering of sexual scripts in Hong Kong. They, however, often aimed for casual sex instead of 'serious' dates, perceived as courtship primed towards committed relationships. 'Game' practitioners had numerous interactional strategies to reconcile this perceived tension in the prioritized sexual scripts between them and their Hong Kong Chinese female partners. These strategies would allegedly win women over and make them acquiesce to a casual sexual relation. These strategies confronted four challenges: (1) Hong Kong Chinese lovers met one another through friends; (2) overt displays of affection and light sensuous touching happened in private; (3) sex should happen within a relationship context; (4) dating was 'serious'.

(1) Meeting partners via friends
My interviewees assumed that Hong Kong Chinese women met their sexual and romantic partners via friends. However, most of these men did not have an ex-

tensive network of Hong Kong Chinese acquaintances from which to draw their sexual partners. This meant that they had to meet women who were unconnected to them, and the targeted meeting ground was the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong. These meetings happened in bars, restaurants and clubs, while waiting in lines in shops, or on the street. 'Game' practitioners had two common interactional strategies for meeting potential sexual partners in Hong Kong: One was to be direct, coercive and persistent in one's approach; the other was to forge friendly relations with different social groups through which they could connect to potential sexual partners.

Herald was a proponent of the former. He often disregarded etiquettes, walked straight up to a targeted woman, complimented her on her looks and initiated a light-hearted conversation. At times, this was accompanied by physical coercion, for instance by groping her arm or blocking her route. I made the following observations while accompanying Herald and Steward in the urban nightlife:

Herald, Steward and I sauntered through a bustling nightlife strip. The aim of the night was clear: they were there to meet women. Two young women walked behind us. Steward winked at Herald, in a gesture of collegial understanding and turned around excitedly.

'Do you girls know what the best club in the city is?' He asked rapturously. Herald immediately moved over to the youngest of the two women.

'I really love your dress', he said and promptly took her hand and lifted it above her shoulder. The young woman wore a see-through fishnet dress with a yellow neon bikini underneath. She smiled provocatively.

'What is your name?' Herald asked.

'Angie', she said, 'what is your name?'

'Herald', he said and introduced Steward and me to her.

'You look very sexy in this dress', Herald continued, 'Where are you going dressed like this?' The young woman explained that they were going to a summer theme party.

'Aha, that's why you're wearing so little', Herald commented ironically. 'Let me look', and he lifted her arm up again. 'So, what is this?' He plucked at her dress. 'It's a fishnet, and you wear some very kinky underwear'.

'It's a bikini', the young woman corrected him. Then Herald pointed towards a small tattoo on her arm.

'Have you been to Thailand? That's a Thai tattoo that you have there'. She had not been to Thailand.

'And where else do you have tattoos?' The young woman looked over at her friend and said a few frolic words in Cantonese. They both laughed. Herald insisted he wanted

to see the hidden tattoo. She obviously did not want to show him. Herald then asked the other young woman if she could take a look and describe it to him. This caused some more hilarity. Then the young women had to leave. They were going to a club nearby and might join us a later that evening.

This dominant and assertive behavior often triggered a hostile reaction from the social group of the targeted recipient. Sometimes they would try to pull her away or to stand between the player and the targeted woman. Either way, Herald, and a few others like him, marginally acknowledged the protective friends and continued the interaction until either the woman freed herself from his grip and walked away, or the protective friends gave up and left.

This protectiveness of social groups in the nightlife in Hong Kong was a re-occurring theme in conversations among players of the 'game'. Practitioners often exchanged advice on how to deal with protective groups of friends. At times, this was done in semi-formal organized meetings, in which a group of practitioners came together, often in a bar, and discussed tips and tricks of the 'game'. These meetings were also opportunities for 'pickup' coaches to promote their courses by giving free advice as previews of their teachings. During such a seminar, I jotted down the following notes:

> *Barry rose his arm.*
> *'Yesterday I went really well with a girl in front of the 7-11', he said. 'Do you remember!' addressing the men who the previous night were in his company. 'Like I was kinoing hard, but then one of her girlfriends came in and literally pulled her away from me', Barry said in anguish.*
> *'Well', Matthew responded, 'the way I would have handled that is, before the girl is actually coming in and ruining your set, when you see her coming, I just step towards her, and say "you're racist".'*

Calling interfering bystanders out on their supposedly judgmental and close-minded attitude was at times effective. Some individuals ceased their attempt to end the interaction. By framing the other as the closed-minded bigot, players publically shamed the interfering other in an attempt to silence them.

Another interactional technique that 'game' practitioners used to gain the acceptance of the targeted woman's social group was to ostentatiously construct the 'definition of the situation' in such a manner that it would be impolite to decline their advances (Goffman, 1990[1959]:21). Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is applicable to players, which is indicated by the many dramaturgical

terms in their argot. Furthermore, they construed their actions in the 'field' as a theatrical performance and themselves as rationale agents, strategically managing and influencing the impressions of their interlocutors. Game 'practitioners' often introduced themselves amicably to a group within the urban nightlife. For instance, they might initiate contact with a friendly pat on the back or a high-five, followed by proclamations that one 'was pleased to make new friends today' and compliments that their interlocutors had such an 'open-minded and cosmopolitan attitude'. According to players, for a successful hookup, it was necessary to win over the acceptance of the targeted woman's social group. Thus, most practitioners made an effort to establish trust with and gain the approval of the woman's social group.

By and large, the main admonishment on how to deal with interrupting by-standers was to be persistent. Players should not give up until the woman they accosted walked away and ignored them completely, which is illustrated by the following observations:

Outside of the club two young women leaned against a wall. Steward addressed them. 'Hey!' he said, 'Do you two know any place where we can eat?' The young women deliberately looked the other way.

'Like, a good place where we can get street food? You know street food? Do you like food?' Street food?' Steward said, noticeably getting anxious by the lack of response. A young man, who stood nearby and who presumably was an acquaintance of the young women interrupted the address and positioned himself between Steward and the women. Steward started talking to him, asking if he maybe knew any good street food stands. The young man, who had his back towards Steward, did not respond. Steward leaned to the side and tried to make eye-contact with the women. He kept gibbering about street food, but neither the women nor the young man responded. Steward, who by now had lost heart, stopped his attempt. Herald stepped forward and encouraged him to 'just keep on pushing'. Steward complied; with refreshed courage, he commenced on a monologue about street food. The young man, who still stood in between Steward and the women, turned around and raised his voice now. 'Why don't you just go away?' he exclaimed angrily.

'Hey man', Steward responded defensively, 'I'm just talking to your friends here. Maybe you know a good place to get some food now?' The young man, who was obviously fed up with the situation, put his arms around the two young women and escorted them a few strides away. Steward turned around and joined Herald and me. Herald complemented him on his performance. Steward had been 'holding his ground', and, so Herald emphasized, this was how one should deal with interrupting bystanders.

Sociologist David Grazian (2007) argues that the young men's collective pursuit of women in the urban nightlife is a ritual of impression management to signal a masculine identity to other men. This is obvious in the description above; the 'game' was 'collective pedagogy' to perform 'hegemonic masculinity' within interactions with men and women (Wacquant, 2004:99-127). In collective pedagogy, individuals learn by way of direct mimesis of fellow practitioners. In the context of the 'game', groups of practitioners are hierarchically structured on the basis of 'pickup' skills. Senior members instruct juniors on the proper execution of a performance, and juniors, in return, accept this pedagogical advice without question. Herald, by his seniority in the 'game', takes on the role of mentor and teaches practitioners lower in the hierarchy how to enact a domineering, persistent, masculine performance. In this sense, the 'game' teaches men how to perform 'hegemonic masculinity' within interactions in the urban erotic contact zone.

'Game' practitioners in Hong Kong formulated and enacted other interactional tactics to meet women. They would align with a social group of high standing in a particular setting and try to introduce this group to others. Within the 'game', the most popular group in a setting was the most vivacious and joyful collective. This was the group that others wanted to join and interact with. This understanding of social dynamics reveals a surprising parallel with micro-sociological theories of 'emotional energy' and 'collective effervescence' as formulated by Collins (2004). Players tried to align with the groups generating the most collective effervescence in a place and to utilize this energy to connect to others. Alternatively, individuals tried to perform a vibrant and elated persona that would give the impression that one was the 'sociability star' of the evening (Collins, 2004:252-254), the person that others allegedly wanted to interact with. Giorgio, for instance, often went to business networking events. He did not intend to meet potential business partners but to meet women to hook up with. In these gatherings, he would talk to anyone, particularly to other outgoing and joyful characters. He would make eye-contact with new arrivals, greet them merrily and exchange a few warm words. He would join the bubbliest collective and introduce them to other groups, especially those with attractive women. 'Game' practitioners utilized the emotional energy of group dynamics to evade etiquettes and meet new women, who could potentially become bed partners.

Other players also used the principles of collective effervescence and emotional energy to formulate similar strategies. Australian-Chinese player Paul described his strategy as '*social circle game*', meaning that he would meet women via his network, through indirect introductions. He had befriended two wealthy Hong Kong Chinese gentlemen through a club promoter in Hong Kong. Paul often accompanied these

two gentlemen, who would spend money like water, to high-end clubs in the city. They bought expensive tables and enough drinks to quench the thirst of a large flow of other socialites. Floor managers within these establishments often took on roles as social connectors, introducing other groups, particularly those with women perceived as beautiful, to the big spenders. Mears (2015) describes this practice as a trade in 'girl capital'. Through his place in the entourage of these two big spenders, Paul often met women who he would occasionally hook up with.

Many players of the 'game' met women through indirect introductions in their social network. Having a social connector as a friend who could introduce you to a variety of other social groups was an asset, and most players had the ambition to meet people that could fill this role. Giorgio, for instance, had a number of female friends who worked as flight attendants. He did not intend to hook up with these women but befriended them in the hope that they would be able to connect him to their colleagues, for instance, in the nightlife or at private parties. Similarly, Herald had befriended a female make-up artist who gave him access to fashion shows. Through this association, Herald hoped to meet the women that ventured to these gatherings.

(2) Sexual modesty in public
Intimate contact in dating and hooking up on college campuses in the US has, and has always had, a public character. Renowned were the 'petting parties' in the mid-20th century America (Bailey, 1988:80; Fass, 1977:265), and in the time of hookup culture, grinding on the dancefloor has become a norm at college parties (Ronen, 2010; Wade, 2017:31-38). The 'game' also has an incentive to enact sexual acts in public. The particular context of the 'game' is a competitive field where hierarchies among players are based on displays of heterosexual competences. Enacting sexual acts in public, in front of other players, signals expertise in the 'game'. Most practitioners in Hong Kong, however, thought that such public displays of sexual contact conflicted with dominant sexual mores in the urban erotic contact zone. This translated into two main approaches: the first approach, to which most players adhered, was to restrict the amount of sexual contact in public; the second approach was to break social conventions.

In most 'pickup' self-help literature, men are advised to be physical from the start of the interaction and to gradually build up intimate touching from then onwards. From the get-go, players are told to touch frequently, so that there is no dramatic intensification of intimate touching. They should proceed to kiss and progressively build up the sexual intensity of this physicality thereafter, so that physical arousal is stimulated from the start (Elise, 2005:59; Krauzer, 2014:320-322; Mystery, 2005:143). Most

of this advice has been written for American audiences in which at least some light sexual activity is acceptable in public. Some practitioners followed this advice in Hong Kong and realized that quite a few women became uncomfortable with this behavior. One way players tried to sooth this situation was to feign ignorance. As 'pickup' coach Matthew advised, 'you can always play the culture card, say "look in my culture we are very physical with each other. It means that we like each other a lot". Practitioners invoked the trope of cultural difference in the hope that it would allow them a safe passage through restrictions on public sexual acts in Hong Kong.

Other practitioners were more sensitive to local sexual mores and would not initiate overly sexual touching in public. Giorgio, for instance, thought that 'making-out in public can work against you'. It could potentially disrupt the interaction, as a physical cue that did not fit in the context-specific sequence of acts that comprise a sexual script, and could potentially dissolve the sexual tension between partners (Gagnon and Simon, 1973:20-21) 'Making out in public puts too much pressure on the girl', Giorgio said, showing his awareness that many women felt uncomfortable about breaking this sexual norm. Instead, Giorgio, and other players like him, would restrict the amount of physical intimacy enacted in public to some light sensuous touching of the arms and legs.

A common strategy that players used to intensify the sexual touching without breaching etiquettes of public sexual acts was to retreat to a more private area, referred to as '*going for isolation*' in the argot of the 'game'. This could be any spot with a certain degree of privacy, such as a location out of public view, a secluded area within a bar, a hidden spot on the streets, or a private room. A common interaction strategy of 'game' practitioners was to lead their partner to such a secluded area without being clear about their intentions. As 'pickup' coach Martin described, 'to baby-step them through the isolation process'. He explained:

> '*Let's go outside, you know. It's hot! It's loud! Or whatever! Let's go down the streets to the community store! Let's just go for a walk this way!' 'How far?' 'Just a couple of blocks.' Five blocks later, 'I thought you said it was a couple of blocks'. 'O, yeah, it is just another couple of blocks'.*

Eventually, a player would lead his partner to a private location to have sex, which was often his house or a hotel. One main concern for players was what they called '*logistics*' or the steps needed to move from a public to a private location. When they could afford it, practitioners preferred to live in a centrally located place, close to urban erotic contact zones, so that they could easily walk home from the bustling nightlife scene.

(3) Sex is grounded in long-term monogamous relationships

Arguably, the largest disjuncture between the hookup script and the dominant sexual script among the Hong Kongese partners of my interviewees was the relationship context in which sexual activity occurred. In the hookup script, sex happened in a casual relationship, without expectations of sexual exclusivity, emotional intimacy or commitment. In Hong Kong, however, sex within a long-term committed relationship was the norm. This disjuncture in the context of the relationship in which sex occurred was often a source of strife between players and their Hong Kong Chinese partners. The players frequently aimed for sex in a casual relationship within hours or, at the most, days after meeting; however, they presumed that their partners often expected an exclusive and committed relationship first, which would slowly develop into a sexual affair thereafter.

By and large, being dominant and persistent in their interactions was the most advocated interaction strategy for 'game' practitioners to use to have sex shortly after becoming acquainted with their partners. This was often spoken about as '*leading*'. The adage of most players was to keep the interaction going and to push for sex until their partner would acquiesce or walk away. Players shared stories amongst each other to emphasize the importance of this mantra within the 'game' and to show what persistence meant within a 'pickup'. During fieldwork, I made notes about the following story that Herald shared to illustrate these points.

In a nightclub, Herald addressed a young woman, who was celebrating a birthday with a large group of friends. The young woman and Herald had some intimate moments of kissing and fondling in the club. Herald, however, quickly ran through these details. The most important events happened later that evening, an experience that taught him 'a valuable lesson about persistence and about feeling awkward'. The young woman and Herald had joined the birthday group. None of these individuals had acknowledged him, no introductions, no conversations, and not even a glance. They had not told him to go either but just completely ignored him. While his partner was facing the group, Herald stood behind her holding her hand, whispering in her ear. This lasted for about fifteen minutes, a period in which he felt 'extremely awkward'. Afterwards, they had danced and kissed and caroused some more, but the events that Herald wanted to emphasize happened at the end of the night, when the music had stopped and the patrons were leaving. Upon exiting the club, Herald and his flirt had run into her friends again. Again, this resulted in a long conversation between her and her friends in which Herald stood by aimlessly for a period that 'felt like hours'. At some stage, Herald hailed a cab and suggested that they would leave. She concurred.

In these epic tales of sexual conquest, 'game' practitioners often emphasized the strenuous hard work that went into a sexual encounter, the sly tactics they had used, the challenges that they had to overcome, and what persistence meant within the interaction.

'Game' practitioners also used strategies that aimed to attenuate their partners' potential apprehensions about casual sex. One way that players tried to achieve this was through what they called *framing*. This is a discursive technique in which they aimed to awaken and invoke particular character traits in their partners, which were conducive to rebelling against social conventions. In one of the informal seminars hosted by 'pickup' coaches in Hong Kong, which I briefly referred to earlier, I made the following notes:

> *'If you want the girl to go home with you she needs to have the right frame,' Steward said. 'Like, she needs to feel adventurous, or open-minded. These are the frames you have to install in her'. Steward gave an example, 'When I open a set of girls, I usually say to the cutest one: 'I bet you're the bad girl'. Some girls will try to deny this, or might act quite offended. You can neutralize this by saying: 'It's okay to be the bad girl'. Usually, I make her pinky swear. 'I know you're the bad girl, but let's keep it a secret'. Or you can qualify her for being open-minded, for example, when she tells you about the places she has travelled to. You can say 'with all that travelling you must be open-minded'.*

Players of the 'game' in Hong Kong had numerous other *framing* rituals, some addressed their Hong Kong Chinese interlocutors, others their fellow players, and/or their partners. One ritual that was directed towards other players and their partners was to tell them that they looked like a 'married couple', even when they had just met. This *framing* ritual would allegedly facilitate familiarity and trust among the targeted conversationalists and would spur them to think of their relationship as a sexual one.

Players had difficulty conceiving that women might be interested in casual sex. Denying the sexual agency of their partners placed an emphasis on their virile prowess. Through their competent heterosexual performances, women's sexual desires were awakened and inhibitions attenuated; women's sexual desires were not immanent and 'natural'. The behaviorist paradigm, which suggests that one can invoke character traits through the performance of certain magical mantras, aided one's discursive positioning as competent heterosexual. Similarly, the engineer vocabulary of 'installing' frames emphasized the sexual agency of 'game' practitioners.

Players of the 'game' believed that engaging in casual sex could negatively

affect the reputation of both men and women in Hong Kong. My respondents unanimously thought that a 'player' was a repudiated identity within Hong Kong, whereas it could be a high-status identity among young men and women in Europe and America. 'Game' practitioners in Hong Kong thus aimed to shield themselves from the 'player' label through 'impression management'; they tried to foster the impression that they were primed towards 'serious' dating and not casual sex. During fieldwork, I made note of a story by Giorgio. He had gone on a date with a young woman who he had met at a networking event. During the date, Giorgio engaged in numerous acts of 'impression management'.

> During the date, she asked 'do you go out often?' According to Giorgio, you had to be careful in answering this question, since she was implicitly asking how many times he went to LKF, Lan Kwai Fong, an urban erotic contact zone. LKF had a reputation for sexual licentiousness. She also commented on a picture he had posted on Facebook. It was a picture of a boat trip with Giorgio in swimsuit sitting between twenty young women. She wanted to know who these women were. According to Giorgio, this again was a 'test'. She fished for clues about his sexual history. He answered by saying that they were 'just friends'. Then she asked him what his longest relationship was. According to Giorgio, she wanted to know if he was boyfriend material. He purposefully exaggerated the length of his longest intimate affair. At home, in his apartment, the strife continued. At the moment Giorgio tried to kiss her, she said: 'I do not kiss guys unless they are my boyfriend'. According to Giorgio, this was probably not true. All she wanted to do, however, was give the impression that she was not an 'easy girl'. 'I like you for not being easy', Giorgio responded, 'it is nice that you do not kiss random guys. I respect that, you are a good girl'. That night the two kissed and fondled, although they did not have penetrative sex.

Giorgio tried to foster the impression that he was an 'average' guy, primed to serious relationships and was definitely not a player. His aim was to play along with the 'definition of the situation' that his female interlocutor had of their encounter (Goffman, 1990[1959]:21), which constructed the sexual script they followed as one of serious dating rather than a casual sex encounter.

Alleged struggles between women and 'game' practitioners often continued in the bedroom. Many stories were shared about encounters in which women resisted intercourse initially but eventually acquiesced in response to players' adamant persuasion and mood-changing tactics. In the argot of the 'game', resistance in the bedroom was called *LMR*, or *Last-Minute Resistance*, and players were of the opinion that this phenomenon was 'particularly severe' in East Asia. A number of discur-

sive strategies were enacted to attenuate this alleged resistance of women, some of which entailed *framing*, telling certain stories that could allegedly change a woman's perspective on the meaning of sex and, subsequently, her willingness to hook up. 'Pickup' coach Martin, for instance, described the efficacy of a particular story. He would tell his partner that his mother would often say that 'sex was like having a hamburger. If you feel like it you should have one'. According to Martin, this discursive framing of sex like a snack established:

> [that] it is normal for me to have sex, sex is supposed to be something enjoyable, sex is not really a big deal, […] it is an important part of human life, and it is something that is supposed to be fun. It is not serious in the sense of 'oh, you know, we got to have a commitment to someone'. And the last element is the fact that I can talk about my mom's sex life. It means that I would not consider you being bad for having sex, because even my own mother enjoys it.

Through these stories of alleged struggles for casual sex and tactics to overcome them, practitioners signaled a competent masculine identity. By overcoming supposed challenges, they signaled mastery, agency and control over the environment and in particular over women.

Stories about *LMR* and how to overcome this were the most frequently shared narratives among 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong. Some of these stories comprised *framing* rituals, while others elaborated on different tactics, for instance on ways to progressively overcome a woman's sexual inhibitions. These stories were shared in face-to-face meetings and also online, on the 'East Asia Seduction Forum'. On the latter, Ryan wrote about a sexual adventure he had had, of which the following is a fragment in which he elaborated on his way of dealing with his partner's resistance:

> You basically tell the girl that you want her to trust you and feel comfortable with you. You say that if she ever says, 'Stop', that you will indeed do just that. At this point, I had one arm around her shoulder and another one wrapped around her perky ass. I then said, 'Here, try it out. Say, "stop".' And then I reached under her shirt and started feeling her ample breasts.
> She said, 'Stop', but it was too weak. She was laughing and calling me sneaky.
> So I said, 'No, not like that. Like you mean it'.
> She finally said, 'STOP'.
> 'Okay', I said, and completely detached myself from her and rolled away. […] This was the first time I ever did it, but it worked like a charm. There were countless times when she'd say, 'No, no'. But I knew I could keep on going because the magic word

was 'Stop'. She did say stop a few times, and I did freeze-outs, like I said I would. But it was awesome because she could live out her domination fantasies, and I could pro ceed aggressively knowing that she was all right with it.

Freeze Outs, in the argot of the 'game', were instances when a player momentarily stopped his advances and feigned disinterest. These were retributions for her unwillingness to acquiesce to his advances, and according to players, they make women feel encumbered and as a consequence set aside their initial inhibitions to have sex. Practitioners of the 'game' had an incentive to position themselves as the demiurge of the interaction order. Hierarchies among peers were made on the basis of an ostentatious display of heterosexual competences. Their cunning strategies allegedly influenced women's will. The thought that their flirts were strategizing agents too was inconceivable. This ritual allowed men to position themselves as competent heterosexuals, while it allowed women to foster the impression of sexual respectability, since they maintained sexual boundaries and were not easily 'seduced'.

(4) Dating is 'serious'
While before sex, most 'game' practitioners framed the encounter as a date that would potentially lead to a committed relationship, after sex, impression management took a different form, and the norm was to frame the affair as 'casual'. This 'asshole strategy' becomes salient in a story of Giorgio. In a previous passage on framing rituals, I referred to his attempts to rebuff the 'player' label and foster the impression that he was potentially interested in a long-term, committed affair. After that evening with light sexual activity, Giorgio contacted the young woman again, in an effort to reframe their encounter. He sent her a text in which he made it clear that he was not interested in a committed relationship and that all he could offer was friendship. Giorgio's intent was to make her acquiesce to an arrangement of serial hookups: an on-demand sexual relation devoid of expectations of commitment. His strategy was to purposefully frame their relationship in opposition to her preferences to get her to accept second best, a casual arrangement.

Giorgio, like most players, continuously juggled numerous hookup arrangements with different women, called *regulars* in the argot of the 'game'. Nearly all practitioners believed that these affairs were exclusive on their partners' side, while they had a variety of different *regulars*. Most of my respondents went to great lengths to hide these other *regulars* from their partners because it was generally assumed that Hong Kong Chinese women would not tolerate a non-monogamous liaison. At times, these assumptions were correct. A number of young women ended contact
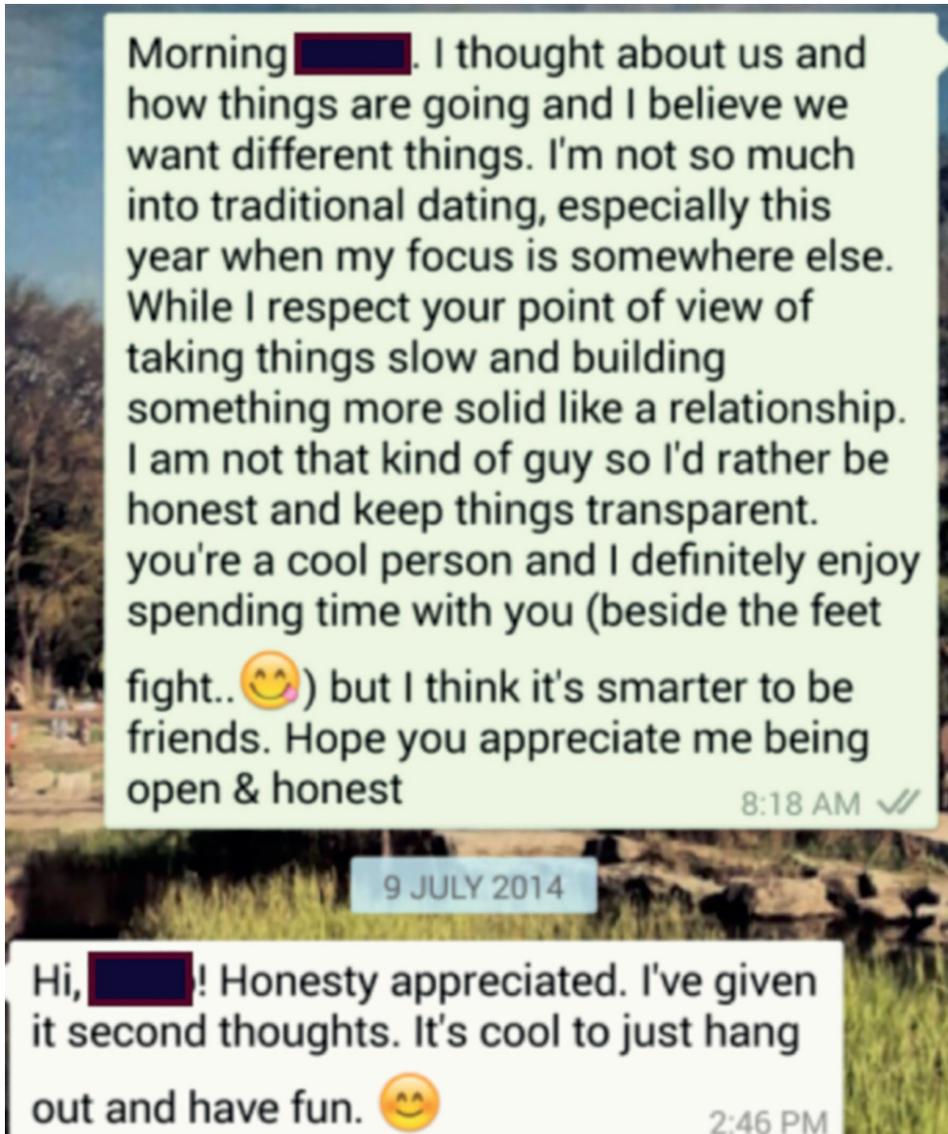
Figure 2: Screenshot from Giorgio's smartphone text exchange (2014).

after hearing about the existence of other sexual partners, but most of the time these assumptions remained assumptions. It seemed that 'game' practitioners could not conceive of a world in which young Chinese women did not care about monogamy and might also prefer different synchronous casual sex partners.

Many tales circulated about *regulars* who at some time demanded commitment. Players were of the opinion that Hong Kong Chinese women were primed towards marriage, and that they would expect a proposal at some stage, even when their relationship was initially framed as casual. By leaving the option of a potential marriage open, for instance by saying 'I can see us marrying sometime in the future (Herald)', and at the same time postponing the actual proposal to an indefinite future, players aimed to stretch the duration of a casual arrangement, even though they usually believed that these affairs would not last. It was true that most *regular* arrangements did not last longer than a few months, or at the most a few years. 'Game' practitioners presumed that they broke up because their partners longed for commitment and marriage. They rarely thought of other reasons why their partners would end the affair.

ENACTED SEXUAL SCRIPTS AND WOMEN'S AGENCY

Hong Kong Chinese women were not passive dupes of the deceptive and coercive tactics of 'game' practitioners, despite the latter's tendency to deny women's agency in their narratives of intimate encounters. At times, the intimate encounters between Hong Kong Chinese women and my interviewees followed a hookup script, and from the stories I heard, some women seemed to take the initiative. Despite the dominant sexual mores in the city-state, at least some Hong Kong Chinese women subverted restrictions on their sexuality and lived out their own fantasies of casual sex.

While I expected that postcolonial power structures and patriarchal gender relations would noticeably tilt the power balance within the intimate encounters of my informants and their partners in the former's favor, the reality was much more complex, and the power discrepancy was not always that clear. In the vast majority of 'pickup' attempts, Hong Kong Chinese women resisted and brushed off 'game' practitioners, and in other instances women flirted enthusiastically and often negotiated a definition of the situation that differed from players' intentions. This is illustrated by the numerous sexual scripts of Hong Kong Chinese women and practitioners that paralleled contemporary dating in America. The couple would, for instance, meet in the nightlife, flirt and exchange contact details, but nothing sexual would happen that evening. At a later stage, they would meet again and follow an interaction blueprint that bore close resemblance to a conventional first date, going for drinks and dinner, visiting a music club and maybe going for a dance.

Concomitant with contemporary dating in America, heavier sexual activity, such as intercourse, oral sex and at times anal sex, happened within the dating relationship, often on the first date. The stories of my interviewees showed other resemblances between contemporary dating in Hong Kong and in America. The arrangements were seen as vestibules to an exclusive relationship; in many tales, claims to sexual exclusivity arose, and these were nearly always made by women. Many 'game' practitioners expected sexual exclusivity from their *regulars* too, but beliefs about men's promiscuous and women's monogamous natures were so ingrained that they hardly ever questioned the alleged monogamy of their partners. Stories about the dating arrangements of players also indicated a parallel to contemporary dating in the US, whereby the dating arrangements in Hong Kong were construed as portals for marriage. They were considered a phase in which partners explored their suitability as a marriage match. In many tales, Hong Kong Chinese women inquired about a potential marriage at some stage in the dating relation.

Most of the intimate encounters of 'game' practitioners and the Hong Kong Chinese partners followed a contemporary dating script. Other sexual scripts, however, were at times enacted, for instance hookups, but this was an exception rather than the rule. The dominant sexual norms in the urban erotic contact zone of Hong Kong precluded casual sex. Sex remained rooted in relationships. Although Hong Kong has seen many similar changes in gender and intimate relations as America, hooking up has not become a common and acceptable practice among youth in Hong Kong.

CONCLUSION

Changed gender relations in continental Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world fueled 'game' practitioners' orientalist longings for Asian women in Hong Kong. The accomplishments of second-wave feminism brought about large changes in gender relations in many European and Anglo-Saxon countries, beyond the domains of education and work, into the realm of intimate relationships. Many American and European women no longer accept inequality in intimate liaisons, demanding equal treatment, equal opportunities and an equal division of labor at home. This has led to a 'rebellion' among some groups of the male population, including 'game' practitioners, who lament about the loss of male privileges that has resulted from the accomplishments of feminism. This discourse on 'men's lost privileges' informed the intimate longings of players of the 'game' in Hong Kong. A sexual longing for Asian women was not the main motivation for moving to East Asia for

my interviewees, as they all moved to East Asia for career opportunities. However, once they had settled in the region, the discourse on 'men's lost privileges' gave them a vocabulary of motives for why they looked towards Asian women and not towards expats from continental Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. The irony of 'game' practitioners in Hong Kong was that they longed for casual sex and cherished and applauded hookup culture, while they simultaneously repudiated the changes in gender relations that made hooking up possible for young women.

'Game' practitioners' disapproval of shifts in the power balance between men and women in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world fueled orientalist imaginaries about a supposedly pristine hyper-feminine Asian womanhood that was unencumbered by gender change. In this orientalist discourse, East Asian women were what 'western' women were not: sensual, submissive, tender, petite, warm and caring, and primed to the family instead of careers. This supposedly hyper-feminine other created opportunities for performing a hyper-masculine identity, signaled by dominance, control and virile prowess, which reflected a self-image that 'game' practitioners cherished. These orientalist conceptions of self and other also informed my interviewees' behavior within intimate encounters with Hong Kong Chinese women and their expectations of these affairs. It resulted in an imperative to be dominant, persistent and coercive in their intimate encounters with Hong Kong Chinese women, in an effort to define the terms of sex and their attempts to control the meaning of the sexual act. While I have limited data on the postcolonial discourses informing Hong Kong Chinese women's longings, expectations and behavior in their intimate encounters with 'game' practitioners, I tentatively postulate that these discourses also shaped their practices and subjectivities in the intimate encounters. Some research on interracial sexual contact shows that East-Asian women draw on post-colonial discourses in their intimate encounters with White men (Kelsky, 1999; Moskowitz, 2008), and this was apparent in Hong Kong.

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