Tween girls’ sexuality and media scandal in Hong Kong

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Background

• Adolescents moved from viewing sex as forbidden to viewing sex as accessible, interesting, yet terrifying (Rice and Dolgin, 2005)
• The society is more open to sexual topics
• Young people learn from media about sexuality, identities, and moral standards
Objectives

• To understand the psychographics of the tween girls segment

• Tween: be-tween childhood and teenagers

• The salience of sexuality for the girls, as well as for the adults who impose disciplinary practices on them
Sexuality in HK

- Chinese traditional values put emphasis on pre-marital chastity and martial fidelity
- youths are more receptive to premarital sex and cohabitation
- 13% males and 9% females in secondary forms 3-7 (15-19) were sexually active
Method

• Qualitative study of 16 girls aged 10-12
• Please take 7-10 photos a day for 7 days about “what girls or women should or should not be; and what girls or women should or should not do”
• From the media that you use (newspapers, mag, TV, internet, books)
Interviewees and procedure

• 10 studying at local schools, 6 at international schools
• 3 are Caucasians, others Chinese
• Lower to middle class
• 5 has Christianity background
• Interviews conducted in March 2009
• Face to face interview
Questions asked

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

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

- Attitudes toward sexy clothes
- Attitudes toward intimate relationship and pre-marital pregnancy
- Comments on the media figures involved in a sex media scandal
Attitudes toward sexy clothes

- They should not wear sexy clothes that exposing bodies
- Sexy clothes are clothes that exposed too much of your body
- These clothes are inappropriate, not courteous, and not serving the functional need
Examples of sexy clothes
Examples of sexy clothes
Examples of sexy clothes
“She should not wear so little clothes (Figure 3). Look at her, she doesn’t even wear the pants and she has only strips of clothes on top. She allows others to take this photo of her simply because she wants to get paid. … she should use her own ability to gain others’ appreciation.” (age 12, a local school student)
Attitudes toward intimate relationship and pre-marital pregnancy

• Should not be too open-minded about sexual relationship
• Should not get pregnant before marriage
• Having a baby means a lot of responsibility. If she goes for abortion, she will be hurt
“If she’s gonna give birth to kids, she should be ready. She should be older than 18. If you are like 14, you are still in the middle school and you cannot look after the kid. The kid is not going to have a good life. The kid may need to be sent to the foster home and you don't know what may happen to the kid.” (age 12, an international school student)
Attitudes toward intimate relationship

• Homosexuality is not acceptable
Attitudes toward intimate relationship

- No compensated dating
- No prostitution
- Two interviewees capture sexually explicit materials
A media sex scandal, Feb. 2008
What they learn from a sex media scandal

• Seven interviewees comments on the media figures in a scandal
• girls should not allow their boy friends to take nude pictures of them
• you should never put 100 percent trust in your boyfriend
• Tend to identify the female media figures as victims
• Regret; loss; too casual
“Girls should not take such kind of photos with him. Originally they didn’t think others would see these photos and they took them just for fun. But in the end, a lot of people can see these photos. Because of this, Gillian Chung had to step down from the show business. She admitted that she was stupid to had loved Edison Chan. She regretted a lot and she scolded him. I think she should have thought it through early on.” (age 12, a local school student)
Summary of findings

• a conservative attitudes toward sex and sexual behaviors
• A wide range of standards toward sexiness
• Access to a variety of sexy or even indecent images of females (advertisements and entertainment news)
• Intimate relationship with the opposite sex is risk
• Media figures are made reference to in defining moral standards
Novelty in research method

- Combination of visual method and qualitative interviews in the study of media effects
- Use of interviewees as data collectors
- Able to ask contextually relevant questions and meaning of images
Thank you!

• If you have questions, please email me at karachan@hkbu.edu.hk