

Chapter 2

Sex and Freedom in the Chatroom: The Hong Kong Golden Forum as Method

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2.1 Introduction: The Culture of Internet Chatting in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the discussion of youth internet chatting is largely framed as part and parcel of the broader emergence of internet “idling culture.” Surprisingly, there has been little news reports and columns that focus on the discussion of internet chatting in Hong Kong. When it does appear, most of them focus on internet crime, slander and sexual harassment; in other words, local news rarely provide any in-depth insights into the activities conducted in chat culture. In this chapter, I aim to provide a discussion of the problematisation of sexual discourse in a fairly vast (albeit somewhat underground) segment of Hong Kong society, and related questions of gender, misogyny, and sexual freedom. I want to use internet sex-chat culture as a springboard for theorizing the conception of contemporary sexual values through an ethnographic analysis of sex chatting. Internet-based “sex chat” refers to the casual exchange of vernacular views about sexual beliefs, rumours and behavior, conducted either synchronously or asynchronously within a monitored or unmonitored environment. The chatting can arise from any initiation made by the chatters themselves, or it can be driven by social controversies and moral panics about sex. The chatting often involves written text and visual icons that are generated by the users, often forming its own universe of linguistic and visual slangs, metaphors, tones and registers.

Little is known about the sexual values that mediate “sex chat,” nor the particularities of the chat space, the nature of the modes of masculinity constructed through the chatting practice, and the broader social milieu out of which the sex chat discourse emerges. A theorization of the conception of sexual values through

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investigating internet sex chatting is necessary as a response to rapidly changing forms, norms, and values of sex as a result of the digitalization of everyday life. Yet this digitalization of virtually all walks of life, especially in human communication, is itself a result of the changing contour of the consumer society that emphasizes creative interaction, social efficiency, instant gratification, and so on. At the same time, this digital life, as well as the consumerist ideology that underlines it, have not gone unnoticed by the regulators of culture. The intense social and legal scrutiny of the dynamic space where sex and the internet mix, is by now commonplace.

This project grounds the theoretical examination of contemporary sexual values in the electronic age in a detailed empirical study of a highly popular internet chat site in Hong Kong known as the *Hong Kong Golden Forum* (hereafter “GF”) (香港高登討論區).¹ Ranked as a top site in Hong Kong by Alexa (2009), GF is a chat site well-known to be visited mainly by male youth (and older adults). I will also make reference to other popular forums, such as Hong Kong Discuss and the “3boys2girls” forum, since these sites have seen active (self-proclaimed) females to initiate and participate in sex chats. In the “3boys2girls” forum, for instance, there is a specific channel allocated to chatting about female sex known as “Sex issues—female physiology” (性事—女性生理). Most of the conversation in this channel involve female participation with topics centering on curiosity about sex and the body.

However, in GF, as in many other similar chat sites, female participation tends to be marginal. In fact, research in sociology and social psychology tells us that social chatting about sex is an informal social practice—on the internet or not—pursued mainly by men (the gender of the chatter is at least self-identified as such).² Critical popular culture studies regards this lack of formality as socially significant, because it affords the particular practice of “sex chat” in the first place, while actually constituting the very cultural character of the content of the chatting.³ Meanwhile, gender studies regards the “maleness” of sex chatting as something originating from a general cultural permissiveness that often positions men to be more outspoken than women in the public pursuit of explicit sexual conversation.⁴ At any rate, the chat room or forum where sex chatting takes place is a predominantly male space. To be more precise, it is a space for the ongoing construction of particular modes of masculinity.

To date, there has been no ethnographic research of cyber-masculinity in Hong Kong. The handful of existing work that looks at the construction of Chinese

¹A portion of this chapter is drawn from a related essay of mine entitled “Internet sex chatting and ‘vernacular masculinity’ among Hong Kong youth,” which will appear in Julia Coffey et al.’s book, *Learning Bodies*. Parts of this other essay have been substantially rewritten and elaborated in this present chapter.

²See Adamse and Motta (1996), Bowring (2005), Gill “The sexualisation” (Gill 2012), Greenfield and Subrahmanyam “Online discourse” (2003), Wolak et al. “Online ‘Predators’” (2008).

³See Kammeyer (2008), Ray (2007), Waskul (2003, 2004).

⁴See Del-Teso-Craviotto “Gender” (2008), O’Riordan and Phillips (2007), Ringrose et al. “Teen girls” (2013), Soukup “The Gendered Interactional Patterns” (1999).

masculinity appears in cinema studies⁵ and media consumption studies.⁶ This study is first of its kind to take an in-depth look at the specific forms of local masculinity articulated through a popular and seemingly enduring pastime. What I am interested in finding out include the main recurring themes in the sex chatting, and the specificity of the language used by the chatters, including written and visual slangs, metaphors, tones, and registers, that seek to reconstitute the meaning of sex (e.g. terminologies, behavior, relations of sex) *as* a function of the chatting (as opposed to the normative conceptions of sex in society). Through looking at the themes and language of sex chat, I examine how they may be contributing to the emergence of a “vernacular masculine culture” specific to Hong Kong and unique to its internet chatting culture. I define vernacular masculinity as a casual “lad culture” characterized by a continuing curiosity toward all things bodily and sexual, a non-contemplative, even unrefined sensibility, and a “social cool” built not on class distinctions or educational attainment, but on street knowledge and popular taste. Like a colloquial language, this masculinity speaks the idiom of the curious, the obscene, and even the vulgar.

Contextually, it might be useful to say something about the ways in which the so-called internet idling culture is generally perceived. Most netizens in Hong Kong claim that people should be responsible for their comments and statements. News of police report on the rise of sexual harrasment and even rape cases connected to internet “friends making,” continues to fascinate the public (see “Problematic social networking,” 2010; “30% of secondary schools,” 2010). Many related reporting condemns irresponsible behavior on the internet. In 2010, a story of a teenager claiming that he will set a bomb in the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government, and one in which a netizen claimed that he wanted to rape a femaler Legislative Council member (“Threat of rape,” 2010), prompted some chat forums to employ social workers and counsellors to help promote responsible chatting. It was also suggested that the government should implement new laws to regulate the discussion and chatting on the Internet (Lui “Building,” 2010).

With respect to cyber language use by local youth, the media generally claim that cyber language is negatively affecting the proper language skills of teenagers. But some journalists regard the development of cyber language as an inevitable social process of language evolution. Many teachers complain that their students use “the language from Mars” in their written work (“Strange homonyms,” 2009). Examples of “the language from Mars” include using numbers to represent the words of similar sound (e.g. using “5” to represent “not” in Cantonese), and English spelling in place of Cantonese writing (e.g. using “ng” to refer to the word “唔” meaning “don’t know” in Cantonese). Also, since most teenagers use Chinese input methods, such as Cangjie and Pinyin, while chatting on the internet, they develop the habit of inputting by the keys and the pronunciation of words instead of the actual writing of the characters. Further, reliance on the provision of related

⁵See Enns “The spectacle” (2000), Lo “Muscles” (1996), Shu “Reading the Kung Fu Film” (2003).

⁶See Lin and Tong “Crossing Boundaries” (2007), Young and Chan “Advertising appeals” (2005).

characters by the input software encourage the users to forget how to write those characters in the absence of the computer. Local media call this a phenomenon of “neo-illiteracy” (Lau “New illiteracy,” 2010). The *Hong Kong Daily News* regarded the creation of “non-mainstream” language as irreverent to the Chinese language (“Popular slangs,” 2009). Increasingly, the education and media sectors encourage parents to learn their children’s cyber language in order to combat linguistic generation gap (Leung 2010; Ha et al. 2009; “Using internet slangs,” 2009).⁷

Meanwhile, other columnists and journalist have defended the development of cyber language as a process of local language evolution. They argue that clearly, informal “bad language” has been an effective communication tool on the internet among teenagers; it would be replaced once it loses its utility (Ling “Internet slangs,” 2009). Besides, creativity abounds, such as the combination of both English and Chinese in an expression. For example, the phrase “升呢” combines the Chinese character of “升” to signify “raise” and “呢”, which is a Cantonese phonetic adaptation from the English word “level.” Together, the phrase signifies “raising of levels” commonly used in video game playing, as well as signifying “let’s improve ourselves” more generally. As such, cyber language adequately represents the local Hong Kong culture, by showing that Cantonese is a living language (“Chinese territories,” 2009).

With respect to gender and sex, internet chatting in Hong Kong helps proliferate a number of popular expressions. Some of them are misogynistic and homophobic, while others carry meanings of gender and sexuality that are deliberately vague. In the last few years, internet criticisms of “Kong girls” (港女) flourished, a phrase used to complain about materialistic and self-centered women and girlfriends. Netizens have also used “Gongju Byeong,” which is a Korean term to describe women who want to be treated like a princess. A demanding and overbearing person, the “princess” is said to suffer from a disease (公主病) of fantasizing their lovers to be like the prince in the story books, satisfying their every demand of expensive goods and devoted attention (Tung “Princess Sickness,” 2010).

As a reaction to the criticism, young women joined the retort on the attack of the “geeky” men. Using the term “duk lam” (毒男), which originates from the Japanese language, the counter-attack aims to criticize men and boys who lack basic social skills and who typically hide in their own apartment indulged in lonely activities of video game playing and porn consumption. The character “毒” (meaning “toxic”) is a homonym to the character “獨” (meaning alone or lonely). It is in this terrain where internet sex chatting flourishes, for it is said that the geeky “toxic males” form their own cyber community to chat about sexual fantasies (“Hong Kong poisonous males,” 2009).

In sum, like in many other contexts, Hong Kong local culture expresses its concern about the proliferation of negative trends arising from the indulgence of internet chatting. Yet many of the criticisms lack a clear empirical grounding that

⁷See Leung “Unfriendly” (2010), Ha et al. “Youngsters’ ‘Mars language’” (2009), “Using internet slangs” (2009).

goes deep into the cyberworld. Chat forums, such as GF, offer a particularly rich ground for the investigation of how the learning bodies of “sex” are negotiated and reconfigured, from within the general atmosphere imbued with continuous doses of social apprehensions, if not mild moral panic.

2.2 Netnography: A Brief Methodological Note

This study adopts netnographic methods for a critical qualitative study of sex chatting. Six university male research helpers were employed and trained to perform participant observation in the GF site. The period of observation and participating in the chatting lasted for six months in 2013. The average amount of time for engaging with the chat sites was about 10 h per week.

While there exists a huge body of research on the internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC), only some of this work is qualitative research, and of this, an even smaller portion is ethnographic research.⁸ Traditional ethnographic studies are firmly situated in the offline social world. Yet drawing on the tools adopted by cultural studies in conducting ethnography, with a commitment to what Paula Saukko calls a practice and a mode of cultural analysis “to be truer to lived realities of people” (Saukko 56 2003; see also Gray *Research Practice for Cultural Studies* 2003), netnography has become an increasingly influential qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that emerge through CMC (Kozinets 2002; Langer and Beckman 2005).^{9,10}

It is important to note the specific considerations necessary in adjusting traditional ethnography to netnography. They include:

1. *Researcher's access to and co-presence with the research subjects*: Since online ethnographers are not physically co-present with the targeted subjects, they must develop a strategy for accessing the online community with minimal disturbance made to their discourse, and for managing their identity and presentation of self in the textual and visual media. Much of this has to do with the researcher's ability to display cultural competence of the norms of the group they are studying. This requires an appropriate shift from an initial period of conventional participant observation to a more formal period of what Walstrom

⁸See Garcia et al. “Ethnographic Approaches” (2009).

⁹See Kozinets “The Field Behind the Screen” (2002); Langer and Beckman “Sensitive research topics” (2005).

¹⁰In this project, I forgo the idea of recruiting the chatters for face-to-face interview, because that would have significantly lengthened the project. Besides, this project's precepts rest in examining sexual speech and a masculine culture that *arise* from the modalities of chatting, and not from offline follow-up reflections.

Table 2.1 Initial Themes for Investigation

1. General
1.1 Sexual values and motivations
1.2 Sexual behaviour and relationships
1.3 Sexual preference and concepts
2. Sex and Health
2.1 Pregnancy
2.2 Body zones and Genital-related queries
2.3 Sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS
3. Sexual Practices
3.1 Intercourse
3.2 Masturbation
3.3 Touching, caressing, kissing
3.4 Oral sex
3.5 Virginity
3.6 Pornography
3.7 Other sexual habits and preferences

- usefully suggests as “participant experiencing.”¹¹ According to Walstrom, the participant experienter “entails the role of active contributor to the group being studied. This role specifically refers to a researcher who has personal experience with the central problem being discussed by group participants” (175). This means an active and ongoing reading and posting of messages to the group, after making an initial effort (known as “lurking”), so as to discern the online chatting environment, including a patient observation of the kind of conversation that is happening, the clues to pick up on, and the extent to which participants may become reluctant to speak about a certain subject.¹²
2. *Management of textual and visual data:* The more popular the targeting chat site is, the more active and spirited discussion is assumed to be present. In this way, conversational threads would generate a huge data pool. This must be carefully sorted, formatted, and categorized. In this study, I developed an initial set of thematic categories as a rough guide with which to sort and categorize thematic clusters (see Table 2.1).
 3. *Confidentiality of chatters:* The same protection given to research subjects in a conventional ethnography should be extended to the online chatters. The

¹¹See Walstrom “Ethics and Engagement” (2004).

¹²The practice of silent observation, or “lurking,” complies with the existing practices endorsed by other netnographers. For instance, in “The Field Behind the Screen” (2002), Kozinets advocated beginning a participation observation study of online phenomena by “lurking” first. The researcher used lurking to gain information about consumer’s boycotting behavior. The initial period of observation, in fact, gave him information that he then used to create interview questions. In the same vein, in Shoham’s ethnographic study, of Israeli chat rooms in “Flow experiences” (2004), he first lurked then gain the chatters’ trust, then introduced himself as a newcomer to the community engaged in netnographic research.

advantage of working with the internet chatrooms is that most participants are known to use pseudonyms. But some researchers have warned that there is still the possibility that some participants may be using their real names, or if they use the same identification across different chat sites, they may be identifiable after all. Therefore, an added layer of protection will be crucial. To protect the anonymity of the chatters, in this study, we assigned them new codes to distinguish from the onscreen names they use. Although many of the onscreen names the chatters use may already have been pseudonyms, we offer an additional layer of protection by assigning them only the codes used in this particular study.

From this brief discussion about the methodological and ethical concerns for research in the internet environment, it can be said that although there are many problems and dilemmas that researchers face in this fast changing virtual space, we are far from reaching consent on a universal set of guidelines, precautions, and remedies. With the internet occupying so many aspects of our daily lives, the online community has advanced into a terrain where researchers cannot afford to overlook. This is why, with the fluidity of the internet, it remains difficult for researchers to uphold and follow fixed guidelines. For instance, how can a researcher obtain consent from an online discussion forum where the participants appear and vanish in an unforeseeable pattern? How could researcher confidently identify individuals who change their pseudonym frequently? There are many similar challenges, it would therefore be up to the researchers to chart a creative and ethical balance between their research interests and the protection of their research subjects in a dynamic and changing environment.

2.3 Internet Studies Meets Gender and Sexuality Studies

Before delving into the gendered world of GF, it might be instructive to review the academic terrain relevant to gender-related concerns in internet culture. Sociological and communication studies of the internet that began in the late 1990s have strongly shaped the agenda of internet research around a few touchstone concerns, including the dialectics of the real and the virtual, the boundary between the public and the private, the relation between cyberspace and social and political order, social support on the internet, government regulation of cyberspace, and of course sex and the internet (see e.g. Behar *Mapping Cyberspace* 1997). On the conceptual front, philosophical inquiries of computer-mediated communication have come from semioticians (e.g. studying the internet as a “semiotic highway”), ethicists (e.g. studying privacy, respect, risk, and intellectual property), feminists (e.g. studying gender performativity and violence on the net), and liberal thinkers (e.g. studying the democratic potentials of cyberspace) (see, e.g. Ess *Philosophical Perspectives* 1999).

Needless to say, the intersection of sex and the internet has been of great interest to academic researchers, and of course to policy and legal analysts. On the one hand, positivistic and causality-oriented researchers have focused on the potential harmful effects of the sex/internet dyad. Terms such as “cyberaddiction,” “deviant sex-on-the-net,” “online predators,” and “cyber-pedophilia” have come to frame many of the ongoing debates of the so-called dark side of the internet.¹³ But on the other hand, liberal and postmodern writers see creative freedom, the autonomy of voice, and identity struggle and revitalization as the liberating potentials offered through the conjoinment of sex with the internet. Sex-positive researchers draw the linkage between the “eroticization of everyday life” and the democratization of (gender and sexual) culture, resulting in new potentials for “sexual citizenship”.¹⁴ Sociologist Plummer (2003) coins the term “intimate citizenship” to emphasize the pluralistic and participatory character of sexual lives in late modern times. More broadly, **David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl designate the term “post-subcultural studies” in *The Post-Subcultures Reader* to refer to popular oppositional practices, including those of internet subcultural practices (2003).**

But let us review briefly the contour of the more classical research on computer mediated communication (CMC). An important aspect of research on the language practices of CMC is in the area of speech-writing comparison.¹⁵ CMC, which includes instant messaging (e.g. ICQ and MSN messenger in the 2000s, Whatsapp and Line in more recent times, and of course online chatrooms and forums), arises in one extreme as the ephemeral and synchronous form of speech involving face-to-face interaction, and in the other as the permanent and asynchronous form of linguistic expression. These tendencies carry different patterns, rules and registers.¹⁶

Another feature of “internet relay chat” (or IRC) is its visual nature, so much so that Greenfield and Subrahmanyam in their study of teenagers’ online discourse describe it as “inherently visual” (714). The usage and combination of written and iconic languages, attachments of pictures, photographs and video clips, or URL linkages from other websites or sources, all trespass conventional language practices. With the use of visual cues, the combination of written and spoken practices, together with many other online features such as anonymity and cross-geographical participation, online chat has become a dominant communicative environment for many youth and adults alike. In this space, participants adapt and create

¹³See Taylor and Quayle (2003), Wolak et al. “Online ‘Predators’” (2008).

¹⁴See e.g. Berlant (2008), Gillis (2004), Lumby (1997), McNair (2002), Warner (1999, 2002).

¹⁵See Merchant “Teenagers in cyberspace” (2001).

¹⁶In “New varieties” (2007), Fung and Carter show a conceptual representation of CMC language by a graphical representation in terms of the acoustic-graphical medium and the interactive-edited continuum. They suggest that online chats lie along the interactive-edited continuum, where the chatting take place synchronously with one other or multiple participants, but less synchronously than spoken discourse in that every message has to be composed by typing before it could be sent or posted, and the sequencing of the messaging is governed by hardware regulations and constraints (Greenfield and Subrahmanyam). IRC (Internet Relay Chat) is like a transcription of spoken communication and a hybrid of the speech and written mediums.

corresponsive and creative registers which would bring upon cultural innovation, especially among youth.

Closer to a cultural approach to conceptualizing the online chat discourse are the works done by sociolinguists, who examine linguistic practices as something embedded in specific socio-cultural contexts. Subrahmanyam et al., for instance, explore identity presentation and sexual exploration in online teen chatrooms, and found that the teens' self-sexualization (through sexual themes and the use of obscene language) was shaped by the specificities of the degree of monitoring in the chat environment.¹⁷ Krolokke studies gender performance in IRC language, arguing that the loose and fragmented nature of communication in IRC appeals to its users and invites participants to engage in interesting *language* play while simultaneously perpetuating binary gender constructions.¹⁸ In the same vein that emphasizes users' agency, Miner reviews Mark Caldwell's work on "rudeness" to point out that online chatters, while mostly attempting to be polite, do employ what is known as "flaming" to protect themselves when agitated by other participants ("flaming" is performed when one person attacks another with insulting and obscene language).¹⁹ Further, McArthur examines the subcultural discourse style performed by "geeks" who affiliate in self-assigned chatrooms to demonstrate an expansive repertoire of subcultural reconceptualization of the internet world.²⁰ These studies point to the necessity to read chatroom language as socially molded and embodied, therefore linking the online and offline social milieux in the process of meaning-making.

2.4 Feminist and Queer Studies of the Internet

There is no shortage of feminist theorizing as well as empirical work on how the internet culture reshapes gendered language practices, experiences, and politics. Here, three aspects of feminist internet research are noteworthy. First, the emergence of the internet in the 1990s drew a remnant of feminist debate inherited from the ideological divide of the 1970s and 1980s over the social control of women. In other words, the early response to cyberculture rehashed much of the contour of debate conducted between "anti-porn" and "pro-sex" feminists. Signs of this rehashing can be found in the continuing focus on the harmful effects of pornography, harassment, pedophilia, and other bodily-objectifying practices.²¹ Second, from the late 1990s to the present, feminist scholarship in communication and cultural studies has embarked on ever more complex inquiries on how the internet revolution has profoundly changed the construction of embodiment, eroticism,

¹⁷See Subrahmanyam et al. "Connecting Developmental Constructions" (2006).

¹⁸See Krolokke "Impossible Speech?" (2003).

¹⁹See Miner "The Rise" (2000).

²⁰See McArthur "Digital Subculture" (2009).

²¹See e.g. Bowring (2005), Jenkins (2001), Russell (1993).

identity performativity, and cyberactivism for girls and women. Here, researchers chart a political framework that tends to celebrate diversity and difference on the internet as a precondition for (Third Wave) female empowerment (e.g. Blair et al. 2009; Chandler 2002; Hawthorne and Klein 1999).²² Among other works, Karen Ross's book, *Gendered Media: Women, Men, and Identity Politics* (2010), **contains a critical review of feminist internet research to date.** Third, feminist research of the internet has expanded to include the problem of racial and ethnic difference²³ and transnational feminist intervention.²⁴

At the same time, drawing on sex-positive feminist philosophy, queer theorists have thematized gay, lesbian, and other non-normative sexual modes of online interaction as constituting new erotic possibilities for a minoritarian sexual discourse.²⁵ A subset of them focuses specifically on internet-based empowerment and other politically enabling practices of and for those affected by HIV/AIDS.²⁶ These feminist and queer studies briefly have laid a useful groundwork for a critical cultural study of cyber-sexuality. Yet more empirical work needs to be done to reveal the intricacies of sex configured by actual practices of cyber-communication.

2.5 Discussion: Sexed Linguistic Innovations

Like other kinds of CMC such as emails and instant messaging, chatting on discussion forums is often mediated by the input of texts, images, web links, and attachments of various kinds of digital files. One of the features of language use in these discussion forums is the extensive use of icons, short phrases, and idioms that form the web culture of a particular discussion forum. The usage of visual icons in the *Hong Kong Golden Forum* (GF) shows the most originality and creativity. Conversations in GF epitomize the distinctive language usage in all local online forums.

2.5.1 Visual Icons: Sex and Mockery

Many of the visual icons seen in the chat threads are a direct substitution for a certain commonly used expression, such as the inputting of [👉😂👉] to mean “fuck

²²See e.g. Blair et al. (2009), Chandler “Chick Clicks and Politics” (2002), Hawthorne and Klein (1999).


²³See Gajjala “South Asian digital diasporas” (2003), Lee and Wong (2003), Springer “Black to the future” (1993).


²⁴See e.g. Desai (2009), Hunt “Getting Connected?” (2003).

²⁵See e.g. Berry et al. (2003), Campbell (2004), Lumby and Probyn (2003), O’Riordan and Phillips (2007).

²⁶See Carballo-Dieguez et al. “Cybercartography” (2006), Gerstner (2006).

you” and of this bouncing icon [] to mean a big bouncy female breast. Not

all icons are crudely referential, though. Some of them express hidden meanings and are distinctive to the culture of GF. One of the core icons of the forum is the icon of the “Clown God” [].²⁷ Its Chinese expression “膠神” (pronounced as “gao sun” in Cantonese) is comprised of the Chinese characters 膠 gao and 神 sun. Gao is a phonetic approximation to the word “鳩” (pronounced as “gao”) in Cantonese, which refers to the male genital (and more broadly anything stupid), while “神” (pronounced as “sun”) means god. “Gao Sun/Gao Sun” is therefore a playful linguistic construct to mean the god of the penis or the god of stupidity. And as the icon looks like the face of a clown it is also called the 小丑神 or the “Clown God.” This icon is used very frequently in GF as a shorthand to respond to something stupid or lame in chatting. The icon has been so much embraced by the chatters of GF that they will venerate it as god and recreate it on t-shirts, mugs, and other objects to be adorned among chatters for easy recognition in offline contexts.

Another visual icon that is unique to GF is the hand-waving icon []. This icon has multiple meanings beyond a simple hello. It can signify agreement to or acknowledgement of a certain viewpoint in the conversation. It is also frequently used in the so-called “留名” (leaving name) culture on GF. When someone replies to a particular discussion thread in GF, this thread will be saved automatically by the forum operational program into the personal archive of the respondent. Therefore if someone is interested in a particular post but do not have time to engage at a particular moment, or if they would like to archive a particular post for later reference, they can simply respond to a conversation by inputting an icon, a word, or any way that is the fastest and most convenient so it can be archived into their personal account. This procedure is called “leaving name.” In this case the icons are always used to archive a particular conversation and the hand-waving icon is one of the most frequently used icons for this purpose. However, the hand-waving icon also carries another specific usage distinctive to the sexual contents among chatters in GF. As it is a criminal offence in Hong Kong to directly post nude pictures on discussion forums revealing private body parts (such as the nipples or genitals of a female), chatters who would like to share such materials would only post a web link that leads to the actual sources with explicit sexual contents. But when some chatters who are unaware or ignorant of this offense post a violating material directly on the forums, or accidentally post a nude photo instead of the web link, other chatters would mock him by threatening to hand him into the

²⁷This icon is originally used in the Snitz Forum 2000 developed by an American company Snitz Communications. The Golden Forum at that period used the same forum operational program so the icon could also be used by Golden users. Those who did not know about this history would think that this icon was created by the Golden Forum. Nevertheless the icon has since been widely used by Golden users and it is now recognized as the representing icon of the forum. See the explanations (in Chinese) on the *Encyclopedia of Virtual Communities in Hong Kong* (<http://evchk.wikia.com/wiki/%E5%B0%8F%E4%B8%91icon>).













police through the forum administration. At that time, posting the hand-waving icon issues a mocking expression of saying “bye bye.” Yet, since this gesture is a sheer sardonic expression, those who post it do not really intend to report such violation to the authorities. It is not even a good-willed reminder of the law-breaking nature of the action. All of this conforms to the bragging, teasing, and bullying culture of GF, even as they faithfully practice the use and re-use of those icons. (See Table 2.2 for more discussion of the icons used in GF).

2.5.2 *Language Play*

Alongside the inventive use of visual icons, GF chatters also adopt their own set of idioms that are distinctive to the chatting of sex. Generally, these idioms can be distinguished into two groups: one group draws from original Cantonese phrases with innovative changes (phonetically or semantically), while the other are phrases that are crystallized from layers of transformation and sequences of development within the GF chatting culture. Take the term “J” as an example, it is not only the most often used term within the forum, it is frequently a term used in combination with other words to form phrases for easy codification of meaning. The original meaning of “J” refers male masturbation. It comes from another frequently used Cantonese slang to depict male masturbation—“da fay gay” (打飛機), or “da jj” (打JJ). From “j” arises a whole range of related terms, such as “J-ing” (masturbating while chatting); “J photo” (J圖) (photos that can be used for masturbation); “J post” (posts that are related to sex and often include sexual materials); “sucking j” (含J), and so on. The term “J” and its associated phrases proliferated not only in GF; it became widely accepted and used in Hong Kong Discuss and 3boys2girls. Its reach has become so wide that it is now frequently used among youth in Hong Kong in their everyday interaction.

Another popular set of terms is “filial son” (孝子) and “un-filial son” (不孝子). There are a lot of posts in GF that are commentaries on different sexual materials, including sexual experiences and pornography. Chatters would expect the post master—the person who started the post—to paste the link to the source from which to retrieve the sexual materials under discussion, or else they would curse him for not doing so. The curse most often used in Cantonese is “fuck your mother” (屌你老母). So a chatter who starts a sex related post along with a link for easy downloading would be hailed a “filial son”; he is “filial” because he avoids his mother from “being fucked.” As such, the “un-filial son” is a curse hurled at those who forget to or fail to provide the convenience to fellow chatters. From this practice springs a whole range of related idioms in GF, such as the phrases “There are three un-filial acts and the most un-filial act of all is to not provide a seed [for downloading]” (不孝有三, 無 seed 爲大) and “Please lend your mother to us for a

Table 2.2 Frequently used Visual Icons in the *Hong Kong Golden Forum*

	Icon	General meaning	Meaning associated with the sex posts
1		The establishing icon of the forum. It is called the 膠神 or 小丑神 “The Clown God.” It is also used to mock people who is doing something stupid (reflecting the Cantonese phrase “on 鳩”—a stupid act or personhood)	
2		An expression of fondness	Fondness of the sexual materials seen in the post by others
3		Another expression of fondness	Fondness of the posted female sexual materials
4		A bomb which is about to go off	To express the difficulty to endure much longer, implying that a certain post is highly sexually arousing
5		An icon of anger	Another expression of high sexual arousal by associating the shooting gun and male ejection
6		“Well done!”	Expressing brotherly appreciation for the posting of good sexual materials
7		A moving icon with a bouncing motion	A shorthand for “big breast.”
8		A dislike of a particular post	To express disgust of what the chatters may deem grotesque sexual materials
9		“Fuck you!”	“Fuck you!”
10		A kneeling icon	To ask for more of the posted sexual materials; or to ask for the source from which to download the posted sexual materials
11		An angry face	To express anger toward someone who refuses to post the source of the sexual materials
12		Hand-waving	Used as a “waving goodbye” to a particular chatter who posted prohibited materials, mockingly suggesting that he will face prosecution

while” (借你老母一用).²⁸ All are crude and misogynistic idioms that extend from a community of chatters tied together by a sense of brotherhood built upon a shared interest in sex.

A conversation in the discussion forum is typically structured by the combination of all the different creative elements illustrated above.²⁹ The meaning of the idioms used within the conversations take so many turns that it is difficult for




²⁸The phrase “不孝有三，無後為大” is a modification from the old saying of Mencius: “不孝有三，無後為大” (“There are three infilial acts and the most infilial act is not to have an off-spring.”), a creative connection of the act of sharing sexual materials with traditional Chinese ethics of filial piety. The phrase “借你老母一用” (“Please let me borrow your mother for a while.”) is another way of saying “fuck you,” since in Cantonese the expression “fuck you” is the same as saying “fuck your mother.” In this way, to say “let me borrow your mother for a while [so I can fuck her]” is just a playful way of saying “fuck your mother.”




²⁹A typical conversation string is extracted below from GF. It shows both the vulgarity and misogyny typically found in the forum, but it also shows male bravado since it is doubtful that the exchanged contents are derived from real life experience. The English translation here mimics the linguistic style in Cantonese.

Topic: [A virgin boy asking] what is the most perverted thing you did to your girl during sex?




- A: anal, eject without condom 4 times . .
- B: does anal really feel that good? Will the girl look very uncomfortable? 🤔
- A: very tight and will eject very fast, but I think fucking vagina feels better, maybe my girl is tight enough 🤔
- C: ANAL, then eject insider her mouth . .
- A: tried ejecting in her mouth then she passes to me orally then I passed back to her and then she swallowed it 🤔🤔
- D: During anal sex I put a condom on a banana and use it to fuck her in the front 🤔 she got so high that she wetted like a fountain 🤔🤔
- E: every fucking one of you says anal, I doubt if it is really that easy
- F: sometimes when fucking her till she nearly cums, use your finger to penetrate inside slowly (if don't have KY, at least use condom and trim your fingernails) she will come much more easily and will want another one 🤔 Remember, is not good to do it in a hurry
- G: eat shit
- H: you eat or she eats??
- I: I don't know why but I laughed out loud after seeing you ask like this 🤔🤔
- J: x2 🤔🤔🤔🤔
- K: she bends over with her ass up high, I licked her vagina then suck her anus, and got a little brown thingy sucked out
- L: oh fuck 🤔
- M: you even suck her shit out, what more can we ask from you 🤔

outsiders to follow or comprehend. Take, for instance, this sentence from a conversation under the topic of “sex with under-aged girls” in GF:

“報警向左走向右走召喚   

Direct translation: “call the police to the left to the right summoning   

For readers who are not familiar with the culture of GF, this sentence would be incomprehensible. The components include:

- a. 報警 (“call the police”): arises from the bragging culture in GF in which whenever somebody brags about something against the law, such as having sexual intercourse with under-aged girls, other chatters would mock and frighten the (fake) offender by referring him to the police.
- b. 向左走向右走 (“to the left to the right”): recognized by the community of chatters as a linguistic equivalent to the “dick” or “fuck” (encapsulated in the common Cantonese slang of “撚”). More generally, the phrase is used to call someone a “dickhead.” The meaning behind this term comes from a time around 2003–2005, when the site administration of GF filtered to block the showing of “dirty language” on its forum site. Thus, whenever someone input dirty words, the filter would cognize in accordance with the repertoire of dirty words pre-set into it. Upon detection, the filter would automatically change the offensive words/phases into another text shown on the webpage. This automatic change on GF—from the inputting of “dick” in a conversation into “to the left to the right”—occurred so frequently that chatters who came later simply input “to the left to the right” and proceeded on the shared understanding of its intended meaning among their fellow chatters.
- c. 召喚 (“summoning”): refers to the association with a large population of male-nerd netizens who are fond of computer games and Japanese animation, in which the “summoning” of magic powers and sexy goddesses are common.
- d. The sentence is accompanied by an icon    which is an expression similar to “Yeah!” or “High-five!”

All taken together, the sentence reads: “Let’s find those police-calling dickheads [to report this to the authority], YEAH!”. As mentioned before, the chatters do not really call the police; after the mockery fades, nothing would follow. This constitutes a practice of hollowed bravado typical of the GF chatting culture. What remains remarkable, however, is the continuous sense of linguistic creativity and communal bonding, eventually allowing for a different, problematic, if not subterranean, sense of masculinity to emerge.

2.6 Vernacular Masculinity

In GF chatting culture, an unrefined but realistic sense of male bravado persists. We need to develop a critical understanding of the emergence (or reformulation) of chatroom-specific masculine culture framing and framed by sexual discourse. This perhaps requires a temporary suspension of value-judgment to either become indifferent to the taken-for-grantedness of male “sexual nature” (the “boys-will-be-boys” thesis), or to condemn this whole segment of popular masculine culture as none other than a hotbed for sexual objectification and misogyny. I suspect that in the end, this kind of vernacular masculinity—unrefined, cavalier, hollow, informal—exhibits both tendencies. The question remains though: how is this masculine sensibility, crude as it may be, distributed and operationalized across the vast sexual terrain opened up by the chatroom culture, and what does it tell us about the nature of meaning of “sex” as something being constantly reformulated in virtual space?

Indeed, it is the case that most of the active participants (either the initiators of the sex-related thread or the chatters converging around it) are (self-proclaimed) males, with some (self-identified) females taking part mainly as passive participants who only respond sporadically and rarely initiate sex-related topics of their own. Whether they are faking their gender identity does not change the fact that the conversations are dominated by male oriented subjects. One of the most salient topics among the chatters that demonstrate a predatory masculine culture is the one related to the female body and appearance. Many of the posts open up conversation threads that share, comment on, and fantasize the female body (with these posts mostly attached with sexual images and sometimes videos). Here are a few examples extracted from GF, Hong Kong Discuss, and 3boys2girls:

- a. update!!EP III – 8 妹與果醬先生 – 第六回- BLACK(#6有圖)
(update!! Episode III – 8 sisters with Mr. Jam – Round 6 (photos on page 6))
- b. 我的偏好是熟婦!! 更新 P.3, P.6 (相), P.9(相)
(My special interest is in mature women!! Update p.3, p.6 (photo), p.9 (photo))
- c. (一人一張)靚女j 圖/醜女嘔圖
((one photo per person) Pretty girls J photos/Ugly girls photos for vomiting)
- d. [J time] 打造史上最強 j 圖 post
([J time] creating the best J photo post in the history)
- e. 法拉女神對咪咪真係好圓潤!!
(Goddess Fala’s boobs are so round and sleek!)
- f. 您地覺得邊類型嘅女爲之”索” ?_?
(Which type of girls do you think is the hottest ?_?)
- g. 鍾唔鍾意欣賞女仔嘅陰部? (唔計陰毛)
(Are you fond of the female private parts? (excluding pubic hair))

We can identify from these examples a few types of sex chats that center on the female body. The first type are posts that share sexual materials, such as examples (a) and (b). These posts contain images of pornographic materials and are in most

cases accompanied by videos or links to the relevant websites and downloading sources. These posts can easily generate conversations of over tens of pages and over 100 responses. These responses are mostly from male participants in short and spontaneous style with contents ranging from thanking the post master in sharing such material, commentaries and criticism of the material, and responses that reflect the chatters' own sex preferences and desires. The pornographic materials are mainly of Japanese sources; images from the Japanese AV (adult video) industry are hugely popular among Hong Kong male consumers. Other sources come from the U.S., Taiwan, Korea, and Mainland China.

A rather sophisticated sharing network among the male chatters for pornographic materials has been developed. The types of AV materials being circulated, for instance, consist of amateur videos which were intentionally or accidentally circulated, and professionally produced video which the chatters share online without legal permission.³⁰ The posts that share the professionally produced videos are attached with the original product cover complete with product details, snapshots of the shared video, the sources from which to retrieve the material, and often a description of the main AV actress(es). This sharing culture is sophisticated, as it comes with a large variety of choices and most of all, easy accessibility like an organized archive. The chatters' vast knowledge of and familiarity with the variety of AV materials renders the chatroom a space of productivity as well as a space of sharing and "community building."

The second category of circulated materials is similar to the first type, in that they are posts for sharing, discussing and commenting on female bodily and sexual materials. But the chats are over the images of female celebrities and public figures. Most of them capture accidental exposure of the breasts, underwear, private parts, "upskirt" images, legs, toes, stockings, and so on. There are also images that reveal the body figure of women in swimsuit or tight clothing.

Example (e) above is a typical post that surrounds the discussion of the body of a famous female television actress in Hong Kong: Fala Chen. Chen is a Chinese-American beauty pageant queen who became a popular leading actress in one of the dominant television broadcasting studios in Hong Kong. She is among a group of other female celebrities in Hong Kong to be adored as the "Goddesses" among many Hong Kong young males. These "Goddesses" are frequent subjects of sex-related discussion.³¹ In example (e), the conversation was initiated by a

³⁰In many occasions, the non-professionally made amateur videos were intended for self consumption only. The private sex footages were captured by personal phones with cameras and other portable recording devices. Once these phones or devices were lost the videos in them might be obtained by others and often they would be posted and circulated on the internet. As these videos are portraits of "real" sexual images, they garner a heightened attention among the forum chatters.

³¹Although there are no set criteria for the actresses to be identified as "Goddesses" among young males in Hong Kong, most of them would attain such status if they are fantasized to be "girlfriend-able" as well as enjoyable sexually. Therefore they would have attributes that can be desirable both as a girlfriend and a sex partner such as having a pretty but not too exotic face, nice personality, a bit of innocence; attractive but not over-exaggerating body figure with long legs, white skin and medium-sized breasts. Nevertheless it is difficult to define how a female celebrity

Fig. 2.1 An image of Fala Chen extracted from a TV drama. Since it is rare for actresses to reveal their body to this degree in Hong Kong television, this image has raised much interest to the male online chatters and many of them would save it to their own collections



discussion of Fala's breasts, springing into dialogues that assess her body and fantasies of intimate and sexual relationship with her. In this example many of Chen's on-screen television images wearing a bikini and underwear that were capture by the chatters, would be repeatedly posted and commented upon (e.g. see Figs. 2.1, 2.3, and 2.4).

Furthermore, in GF the female celebrity images are not only posted for discussion, but are often digitally modified—a notorious “prank culture” of GF. Successfully modified images, which means they are of high modification standard, creativity, and humor, would became very popular and would be circulated and consumed throughout the internet. In some cases they would even reach the general public through being captured by tabloid magazines. It can be seen in Hong Kong today that there is a growing interest among these popular publications towards materials originated from different online discussion forums, in particular GF for its well-known creativity in digital modifications of public figures (e.g. Fig. 2.2). Some modified images with entertaining values would be further “spilled over” to the public with the aid of smartphones and other internet accessible portable devices.

The point about the power of these images being able to reverberate beyond the chatroom is an important one. Occasional episodes of moral panic can break out from the circulation of re-posted materials. An important incident of such a moral panic in Hong Kong occurred in 2008, known as the celebrity sex scandal of Edison Chen.

In January 2008, the media and the police revealed that there were different suspected sexually revealing photographs of a local male celebrity Edison Chen and other female celebrities circulating among various popular online forums in Hong

(Footnote 31 continued)

would be turned into a Goddess and they could be in very different types of women catering to different tastes of these male chatters. In this way, Fala Chen matches many of these qualities, and became wildly popular on GF and other chatsites. Other widely acknowledged Goddesses include Suki Chui (TV actress), Kay Tse (pop singer), Karena Lam (movie star), etc.

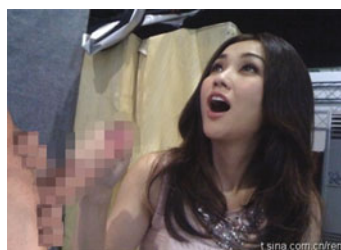
Fig. 2.2 A digitally modified image mocking a local politician Henry Tong who built an illegal structure in his multimillion home. This image originated from GF and subsequently became widely circulated in the Hong Kong public



Fig. 2.3 A digitally modified image depicting Fala Chen on the cover of a Japanese AV movie



Fig. 2.4 A digitally modified image of Kay Tse, a famous Hong Kong singer which is also identified as a Goddess among some males, showing her in a position to perform fellatio



Kong, including GF. The chatters found, and circulated, more and more photographs in subsequent weeks; they later found out that the photographs were actually authentic images stolen by a technician who repaired Edison Chen's malfunctioning computer containing those images. After being reported by mainstream news, the circulation of those images became more and more intense, offering chatters in forums free-for-all downloading for discussion and criticism. As Edison Chen's images involved many local female celebrity engaging in a variety of sexual posture or real sexual intercourse with him, a moral panic broke out concerning immoral behavior in the entertainment industry, as well as the immorality of those who turned these images into questionable consumption and circulation. Eventually, the police authority were involved in an investigation of alleged "sex crimes" as revealed in the photographs, and an investigation of illegal downloading and circulation of them. None of the celebrities was arrested since they all directly or indirectly admitted that the images were taken under their consent. Edison Chen, along with many of the female stars involved in the scandal, have never been able to reach the kind of stardom as before the incident. This story also shows a public awareness of the "subterranean" world of the internet chatrooms, as a site of questionable morality, especially sexual morality associated with a problematic masculine culture.

Finally, in our findings, an issue in popular chatting that might also raise questions about moral values is the chatters' fondness for sharing their experiences in visiting sex workers. In Hong Kong, the vernacular saying for visiting a sex worker is "calling the chicken" (叫雞). There is typically an interesting interaction between those who are (claim to be) experienced in playing with "the chicken" and those who are curious but (claim to) have never had such an experience. While the latter would often post discussions that query about prostitution, the former will initiate posts that share, and often brag, about their chicken calling stories. The exchange often goes into different polarities, with some expressing a longing for developing good skills when playing, while others condemn the behavior by often teasing the participants for falling victim to AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases.

An intriguing phenomenon of these "chicken posts" is that many would share their personal experiences written up as extended "reports." These so-called reports would contain a detailed description of the whole occurrence of the incident, from the place of the brothel, the description of the female sex workers, and the whole engaging process. Sometimes these reports are presented as novellas, in which the post masters would even add additional details into the whole story, complete with a story line, narratives of conversations, and descriptions of feelings. An example of a topic line for these sex novellas goes something like this: "[史詩式叫雞報告] – 東莞的森林" (*[Epic Chicken Calling Report]—Dongguan Woods*). The Dongguan Woods novella was divided into chapters, and only a part of the story was posted, until enough chatters have gained an interest and made inquiries for further exposure of the rest of the story. Attracting attention, gain reading hits, therefore increasing the popularity of the post, are all parts of the phenomenon in shoring up a unique chatroom masculine culture. In fact, the Dongguan Woods story turned out to be based on the writer's real life "chicken calling" experience.

Because it was of such enormous popularity and because of its writing quality akin to a popular romance novel, it was made into a commercial film entitled *Due West* which was released in mid-2012.³²

2.7 Coda

Cultural studies has long been attentive to the complex interrelation of agency, power, and the social imaginary. The cultural study of sex in cyberspace is important as a way of unpacking a certain sexo-cultural crisis whereby “despite sexual overload, there is considerable uncertainty about what we mean by sex or sexuality” (Attwood 79). “Sex chat” offers a useful site of investigation of a series of cultural contradictions that seem to reign in the cyberworld: ideas and speech that are communicated publicly among strangers, yet experienced as something intimately related to our bodies and private sexual subjectivity; an act of presentation and representation that is produced as quickly as it is consumed; a way of constructing and deconstructing identity in the flowing time-space of the internet; an encounter that is afforded by the conjoinment of bodily and technological imaginations, yet flesh, speech, and technology seem autonomous from one another. These are the conditions for the creation of a strange but fascinating gender performance, especially the performance of “vernacular masculinity.” Thus, reading cyber-speech, gender, and “diverse eroticisms” as inter-implicated entities is a complex interpretive task.³³ This study attempts to open up such a model of analysis through grounded internet-based ethnography of a highly popular chat site, where a rarely studied form of masculinity may be emerging in Hong Kong. In turn, this GF study might serve as a “method” for understanding the vast, even subterranean, space of gender, sex, misogyny, curiosity, creativity, and freedom in Hong Kong culture today.

Central to this present study is the investigation of “vernacular masculinity” as something unique to sex chat culture on the internet. After Connell’s important discussion of “hegemonic masculinity” in *Masculinities* (2005) which has been extremely influential in the field of gender studies for more than a decade, research on masculinity seems to have reached a point of saturation. More and more work have shifted the focus to uncover diverse forms of *counter-hegemonic* masculinity, without abandoning the power relations still inherited in the male-dominated social world.³⁴ This study takes the cue from these more recent studies to interrogate

³²See the media coverage (in Chinese) of the transformation of Dongguan Woods from a GF post into a popular film: “Due West’s Guide to Look for Sex Workers: Internet hit novella Dongguan Woods now in Theaters” (向西村上春樹帶路尋歡《東莞的森林》紅爆網登銀幕) *Apple Daily* (3 March 2013) (http://www1.hk.apple.nextmedia.com/template/apple/art_main.php?iss_id=20120313&sec_id=462&art_id=16150337).

³³See Attwood “Sexed up” (2006).

³⁴See Beasley “Rethinking” (2008), Demetriou “Connell’s concept” (2001), Moller “Exploiting Patterns” (2007), Sheff “Poly-hegemonic” (2006).

online masculine expressions that are unscripted and unpredictable, while still likely reproducing traces of conventional masculinity. In “Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub” (2002), Lori Kendall calls the online forum that she studied a “virtual pub,” ostensibly a space of leisure and revelry. Its participants are mostly male computer professionals and students who fit their mudding in between periods of studying or debugging. Cultural research, however, adds that this maleness, while dominant, is often subjected to playful experimentation, especially by *both* teenage boys and girls. Still many researchers remind us that despite the potentiality for reappropriating gender and sexuality on the internet, the prevailing hegemonic gender discourse of normative masculinity and femininity is still rather firmly embedded within the online world. For instance, Del-Teso-Craviotto confirms that “gendered and (hetero)sexist conduct in CMC... seems to reproduce offline behaviours such as male interactional domination, sexual harassment, and even virtual rape” (253).³⁵ Others suggest that teenage boys’ construction and defense of their hegemonic masculinity tends to stem from homophobia, in which “fag talk and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships” (Pascoe 330 2005).³⁶

Once again, the aim of this study is to reframe our theoretical understanding of sexual values shaped by a profoundly quotidian source of meaning-making. It is suggested here that the practice of “sex chat” among (self-identified) adult men and teenage boys variously labeled as “poisonous males,” “geeky boys,” or “lonely boys,” offers a window into Hong Kong’s changing gender culture. The increasingly varied internet experiences—as a result of commercial innovations as well as government regulations—are remaking our sexual discourse. Ultimately, it is hoped that the study of “vernacular masculine culture” can reshape the direction of gender studies in Hong Kong, placing less emphasis on well-worn ideological modes of construction of maleness (e.g. through the family, schools, sports, business environment and the media) and more on the fluid flow and interaction of sexual speech constituted out of freely unscripted lines of imagination.

³⁵See also Cherny “Gender Differences” (1994), Clerc “Estrogen Brigades” (1996), Herring “Politeness” (1994, 2000), Soukup “The Gendered Interactional Patterns” (1999).

³⁶Other important studies of cyber-masculinity include: sociological studies of masculinity among men who pay for sex in cyberspace of the self-conscious construction of masculinity found in internet personal ads [Aoun “**The Mate Market**” (2008)]; of the performance of masculinity online as avatars that often diverge from the conventional muscular physique [e.g. Christensen “**Is that how you look**” (2002)], and so on. Moreover, a significant body of work has focused on the construction of gay masculinity in virtual spaces. Campbell’s study in “**Getting it on Online**” (2004) looks at three specific gay male online communities—“gaychub” (a community celebrating male obesity), “gaymuscle” (a community formulated around images of the muscular male body), and “gaymusclebears” (a space representing the erotic convergence of the obese and muscular male bodies emerging out of the gay male “bear” subculture) in an effort to unsettle models of male beauty and erotics as depicted in mainstream media. Both Chris Berry et al. [“Mobile Cultures” (2003)] and Lin [“Sissies online” (2006)] analyze collisions of sexual commodity, cyber technology, identity, and practice among gays and lesbians in Asia. In “**Passing rhetorics**” (2003), Surkan focuses on the practice of “passing” (very much afforded in the cyberworld) performed by the transgender community in their management of subjectivity, self-representation, and resistance.

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