

Xiaodong Lin • Chris Haywood • Mairtin Mac an Ghail
Editors

East Asian Men

Masculinity, Sexuality and Desire

palgrave
macmillan

14

Pathways Toward Progressive Gender Consciousness for Young Men in Taiwan

Herng-Dar Bih

Introduction

The 1960s saw burgeoning women's movements in the global North, but Taiwanese society was not quite affected by feminism at that time. The more influential women's movement started in the 1980s with the repeal of martial law, which was followed by the establishment of many women's organizations (such as the Awakening Foundation, the Modern Women's Foundation, and the Garden of Hope Foundation, etc.) to serve various needs specific to women. In addition, most activities promoting gender equality (e.g., courses, speeches and demonstrations) were organized by women for women, with men rarely playing a prominent role. However, boys' and men's participation must play a key role in the establishment of gender equity (Levtov et al. 2014). Schacht and Ewing (1997: 169) believed that a true male feminist could educate and mobilize other men. Such a man could also spread feminist concepts in fields that women find

H.-D. Bih (✉)

National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017

X. Lin et al. (eds.), *East Asian Men*,

DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-55634-9_14

hard to enter, promote feminist reform within these fields, bring feminist issues into the existing male power structure, and serve as a communication bridge between female feminists and men. This paper aims to understand how some young men have come to care about gender issues in a patriarchal society, form a progressive gender consciousness, negotiate different reactions from fellow males, and evaluate political/relational/personal interests to take further actions.

Literature Review

The second wave women's movement in the 1960s had a great impact on many social spheres in the global North. Many men felt threatened by it and responded by constructing discourses and taking actions (Brod 2013: 50). However, men's gender consciousness was not necessarily pro-gender equity. Messner (1997) undertook a sociological analysis of ten men's movements (e.g., the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, Socialist Feminist Men, the Gay Liberation Movement) in the US. He produced a less either-or and less of a continuum analysis (Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn 2009: 405), and positioned these movements in a triangular-shaped diagram called "the terrain of the politics of masculinities" in which the three apexes were represented as men's institutionalized privileges, costs of masculinity, and differences and inequalities among men. Through his lens we can learn of American men's reactions to feminism, as well as the strengths, weaknesses, and negotiations among these movements.

In addition to the concerns with men's movements, the construction of multiple masculinities in daily lives constituted another significant research area in Men's Studies. Connell (1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and her colleagues departed from the sex role approach and proposed a model of multiple masculinities and power relations. They assumed that masculinities came to existence in specific social and historical circumstances, and were relational, hierarchical and subject to change. The above literature is helpful in looking at men's responses to feminism; however, they focus more on the social and political than the personal (Levtov et al. 2014). In addition, the literature focused on how

traditional constructions of masculinity have been problematic rather than inform new, healthier alternatives for being male (Cornish 1999).

Most literature on the personal experiences of being anti-sexist or pro-feminist men is from self-reflective narratives. Starting out from her own personal experience, Connell (1987: xii) summed up five reasons why heterosexual men would not defend patriarchy: (1) they can still notice the oppressiveness of patriarchy; (2) they have special relationships with women and wish that they had better lives; (3) hierarchy exists among men, so that some men might suffer more than others; (4) gender relations are constantly evolving, and men largely change with them; and (5) they still have a conscience and empathy, which means that they are waiting to be awakened.

Answering the question of "How did you become a feminist?", Digby (1998) admitted that it was difficult to answer. He referred to the following factors: exposure to feminist discourse, a caring and empathetic mother, being an outsider in athletic activities and the breakup of his first marriage. Brod (2013: 50) mentioned two important factors: (1) As a child of Holocaust survivors, "the importance of social justice issues is bred in the bone". (2) As a child of the 1960s, he felt threatened by the empowerment of women and had to do something to react. On the other hand, Schacht (Schacht and Ewing 1997: 161) developed an interest in feminism through learning of difficulties experienced by most women. As he continued to adopt a pro-feminist stance, he felt betrayed and rejected by other men. Only the company and support of feminist women, he insisted, "can be midwives in the birth of any sort of feminist consciousness". Johnson II (2010) added another dimension on race. He grew up with traditional gender values, and only ceased to react defensively to feminism after taking a course on domestic violence and reading more feminist literature. Then he became willing to admit that he could be the sexist subject and the victim of racism at the same time. To sum up, these feminist men propose the following personal experiences that aid the formation of gender consciousness: as a child of Holocaust survivors, as the victim of racism, being an outsider of a male peer group, exposure to feminism, and emotional support from other women or men.

Christian (1994) and Cornish (1999) are among a handful of scholars who have studied the process of the formation of male gender

consciousness. Based on in-depth interviews, Christian (1994) researched the life histories of 30 anti-sexist men, the majority of whom had been influenced by two mutually reinforcing factors. The first was early life experiences that departed from conventional gender expectations, including identification with nurturing fathers, parents who did not replicate the traditional gender division of housework, sibling influence, good relations with girls, and living in a situation that did not particularly emphasize gender. The second factor was exposure to feminist influences in adulthood, which reinforced their early non-traditional gender experiences.

Cornish (1999) used unstructured interviews to study eight pro-feminist men and one father's rights activist in order to understand how they became involved in gender issue discussions and activities. He found that the participants shared similar underlying factors in their family of origin and challenges from feminism. When facing challenges from feminism, men born into families with a rigid hegemonic male role need to learn how to deal with this type of conflict. If without sufficient support (e.g., psychological consulting and therapy, support from men's groups), such men might turn into anti-feminist activists. If receiving sufficient support, however, they will be better able to handle interpersonal relations and emotional autonomy, and will be able to establish a new non-patriarchal community. In other words, men born into alternative, democratic, highly tolerant families that encourage critical thinking would keep learning during the life process to better handle tension and conflict in a non-defensive, constructive manner.

To sum up, both Christian and Cornish indicated the critical role of feminist influences. However, Christian emphasized the importance of unconventional gender experiences early in life. In contrast, Cornish proposed that gender consciousness could be developed with enough psychological and community support, even for men who grew up in non-traditional gender roles. These two studies provide a useful initial theoretical framework, but they need to be adapted in order to understand young Taiwanese men in a different gender structural context. Taiwan's women's movement became active after the repeal of martial law and has not been so prominent as to force a reaction from men. Thus, Taiwan does not have men's groups which support feminism, nor are there any organized anti-feminist groups (e.g., fathers' rights groups, New

Men). Thus, it would be interesting to know the trajectory of how the individual man develops a concern for gender equity in a non-Western social context.

Research Methods

Egeberg Holmgren and Hearn (2009) indicated that "men's gender-consciousness certainly is not necessarily pro-gender equality.....[W]e can recognize a form of continuum from those men actively supportive of gender equality...onto those actively hostile" (p. 405). This study planned to include only radical young men who engage with feminism and actively pursue gender equity. In other words, I focus on men's positions at the top of Messner's (1997) triangular framework, which emphasizes the recognition and opposition of men's privileges. One reason is that because of constraints resulting from the short history of the women's movement, it is difficult to find older men who are committed to feminism. The other is that I like to show more positive role models for other young men to emulate.

Seventeen young men in the age of 19–28 were interviewed. The group included six gay men and eleven heterosexuals, all of whom had university education. Since I had been teaching and writing newspaper columns on gender issues for many years, I had much opportunity to know men who were interested in gender issues. Most of the interviewees were not strangers to me. I had known and interacted with them in gender-related courses or activities. Two men were introduced by other feminist co-workers. As mentioned by Egeberg Holmgren (2008), it is not unusual that Swedish men describe themselves as feminist. In contrast, there are hardly any men who identify themselves as a male feminist in Taiwan. Men usually say that they are not qualified to be so but are heading to become a feminist. The claim of being a feminist would bring about much pressure. People would examine their every daily behavior through a feminist lens. When I contacted the potential interviewees, I did not mention the words pro-feminist or male feminist. Instead, I expressed to them that I was interested in men who participated in gender-related activities. No one refused to be interviewed. Most of the interviews took

place in my office at the university. The interviews included questions regarding childhood experiences and critical incidents related to gender, education, friends and intimate relations, the impacts of feminist discourse on daily life, self identity and social relations. Most interviews lasted around two hours. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Although women's movements started to grow in the 1980s in Taiwan, there were hardly any pro-feminist men's groups or male role models. Those men who were concerned with gender equity often felt lonely for lack of support. In university, male students who sat in on a course of Women's Studies would be ridiculed as having some problem of gender characteristics. This background explained that these young men were willing to participate in this research and were expected to talk about their experiences with a relatively older and more established male researcher. In addition to their growing process on the issues of family, gender and education, they had much to say about their confusion on gender issues. For instance, for a man to talk about gender was considered a problem. When a man reflected on existing gender relations (e.g., the unequal power relation between husband and wife, the bondage of romantic love or marriage), traditional men and women would both challenge and criticize him. Because some women might enjoy their marriage and family life, they wondered why a man would do harm to their happiness (in a marriage). When a man admitted his privileged position, other men would question why he was standing on the women's side. On the other hand, if a man spoke as a victim (in a gender structure), women would question him: "to gain a favor and yet call it a disfavor." How to find a comfortable position for a man to speak about gender equity was constantly an issue in the interviewing process.

There was one more thing worth mentioning. Since being gay was still a stigma, gay men would come out only to the person whom they trusted. Among the interviewees, two were only known to me as gay men at the interviewing process. I met Kid in a course on gender. In the interview, he talked about the fact that he might not get married, he intended to go back to his parents' home less frequently, he wore a red ribbon on World AIDS Day; however, he never mentioned that he was gay. Although I had a hunch, I did not ask him if he was gay. I thought that putting him in a

difficult position was unethical. When the interview was almost finished, we had the following conversation:

Bib: According to my former interviews, young men who are interested in gender issues can be classified into several types. You may tell me which one you belong to if there is one. The first kind: Go trendy.

Kid: No.

Bib: The second: For finding a girlfriend?

Kid: No. That's not important for me. You know! Please continue.

Bib: The third: Whose girlfriend is a feminist.

Kid: No.

.....

Bib: The last kind is gay. These are all the types I know so far.

(He paused for a few seconds.)

Kid: I belong to the seventh. (Then, he gave me a "ha, ha" facial expression as if, "now you know the real answer.")

Tim was another story. I met Tim in the Gender Studies Center in the University. In the interview, I first introduced the concern and purpose of my research. He responded to me that "I had two versions of a story; one was a public version, and the other was a gay version. Which one would you like to hear?" I said: "You can tell me your experiences the way you feel most comfortable." Actually, I was shocked by his naturalness in revealing his sexual orientation. Comparatively, Eric talked a lot about his negative experiences as being an effeminate man during the interview. He revealed that he was gay long after, when we got closer.

Research Findings and Discussion

The research found that having a subjective experience of gender discrimination in society or seeing women suffering gender oppression does not necessarily lead a man to develop progressive gender consciousness. He might only view gender phenomena in society as natural occurrences or think that men and women are simply born this way, instead of analyzing them from the perspective of socio-cultural construction or seeing the possibility of changing these phenomena. Through the help of feminist

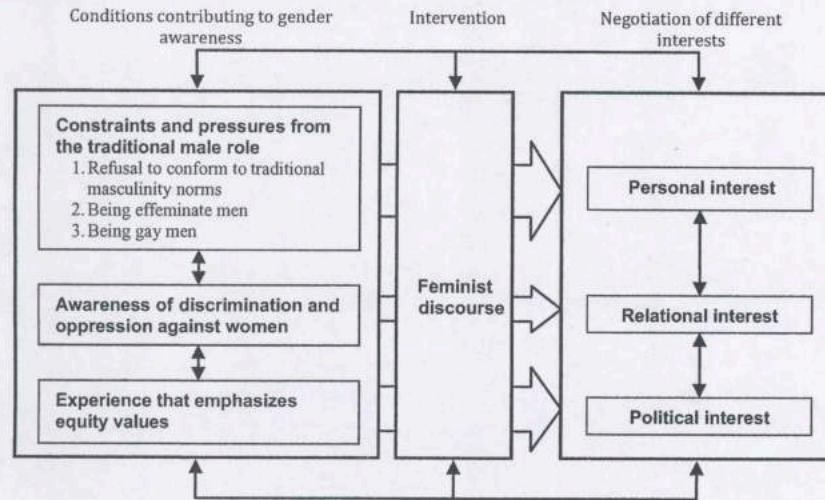


Fig. 14.1 A framework of the formation of progressive gender consciousness

discourse, a person develops an awareness of the existence of sexism and patriarchy. However, gender consciousness is an ongoing process; how they make choices to support or resist gender equity depends on the negotiation of personal, relational and political interests (Fig. 14.1).

Interview data revealed three kinds of conditions that contribute to young men being willing to study feminism and reflect on their own gender experiences from a feminist perspective: (1) constraints and pressures from the traditional male role; (2) awareness of experiences of women suffering discrimination and oppression; (3) life experiences that attach importance to the values of equity and justice.

Constraints and Pressures from the Traditional Male Role

As many women are victims of gender discrimination in society, they very easily develop gender consciousness after being enlightened by consciousness-raising groups or discourse. Couldn't the same reasoning be used to infer that men are also conscious of being restricted by their

gender? Based on the interviewees' narratives, three kinds of intertwined constraints and pressures from the traditional male role were identified: refusal to conform to traditional masculinity norms, being effeminate men or sissies, and being gay men.

Refusal to Conform to Traditional Masculinity Norms

Masculinity refers to "the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine...given what it means to be a man...in society" (Stets and Burke 2000: 997). In contemporary Taiwan, hegemonic masculinity refers to physical strength, enthusiasm for sports, being resolute, suppressing vulnerable emotions, being rich, being exclusively heterosexual, having a son to carry on the family name, and having authority over women and other men (Wang 1998). However, most men have great difficulty fulfilling the culturally "idealized" form of masculine character, leaving them the option of conforming to, admiring, resenting, or challenging hegemonic masculinity.

In a patriarchal society, families still subscribe to the view that boys are more important than girls, and fewer expectations are made about a girl's future. Paradoxically, the excessive expectations parents have towards their sons put them under great pressure, with men having to shoulder the heavy burden of providing for the family, producing a son to continue the family line, as well as bring glory and honor to the family. Such expectations from his parents and/or extended family might make it impossible for a man to live the life that he truly wants to live. He cannot consider his own preferences when deciding whether to marry and have children, or choosing a profession. Interviewee Michael, the eldest son in his family, said: "My family put a lot of expectations on me, which gave me heavy pressure when I was little. During my fresh year in senior high school, I decided to take the social sciences track. As a result, my father was mad at me for a month."

In addition to being subject to constraints on career development, a man can be ridiculed by his peers for not participating in popular male activities such as sports, social drinking after work, or commenting on women's bodies. Steve worked in an industrial company and complained

that his male co-workers frequently got together to “light cigarettes for one another, and exchange men’s talk or information about their work.” He felt his career advancement would suffer if he were not a part of this social group. Moreover, one time, when he refused the offer of an alcohol drink by his elder, he was subsequently ridiculed by the elder as being not like a man. The elder said: “You are such a fussy and rubbish guy. I once wanted to introduce my daughter to you, now I give up.” Many interviewees also mentioned that they were often advised “to act like a man,” specifically to be tough and aggressive and hide their vulnerabilities, such as being told: “You should be good at basketball since you are a tall guy” or “It’s a shame for a guy to be indecisive.” From career development to daily activities, they personally experienced constraints on expressing themselves and started to question what constituted a real man.

Being Effeminate Men or Sissies

Society tends to value masculinity more than femininity and a man who behaves like a “sissy” betrays the male role. A sissy here means a boy or man who does not meet the standard male role or displays effeminate behavior, such as a lack of strength or courage, or crying a lot. Society detests sissies because they resemble “women” too much and not because of their temperament as such. In a male-dominated society men are above women, and a man who is perceived as having relinquished his superior position of birth is seen as a legitimate target for discrimination. Discrimination against sissies is a manifestation of disdain for women, and societal attitudes towards sissies can only be meaningfully discussed in conjunction with misogyny (Bergling 2001).

Interviewee Eric said: “I’m too tender or too sissy, which is why some people would taunt me, call me names or attack me.” He recalled how one time his Chinese teacher told him to stand up and read out loud from the textbook. After he finished reading, the teacher did not say that he made a mistake, but that his voice was “not right”, since his voice was too delicate. “While he said that in front of my classmates, the whole class laughed. It was really unbearable.” In his first year at university, he participated in a debate competition, but was replaced by the team

leader in the finals, because his voice lacked aggressiveness. A consistent pattern of such incidents indicated to Eric that his abilities were being questioned because he had a female temperament. Reflecting on his differences with others and their treatment of him made him sympathetic to women’s experiences. “This was one reason why I easily accepted feminism; it made me empathize with various predicaments women found themselves in.”

Being Gay Men

In our heterosexually-dominated society, gay men suffer explicit discrimination and unequal treatment, which manifests itself in various spheres of life, including law, work, education and space. Alex said, “I think that this feeling of being oppressed contributed to my sympathizing with the feelings that women had due to inequality.” Tim said, “Because I myself came from a gay perspective, I would pay more attention to things that were unfair and oppressive. After coming into contact with feminism, I better understood where these things came from.”

The gay men interviewed found it somewhat easier to establish equal friendships with women, who did not need to worry that their gay male friends would sexually harass them, thus leaving them more open to sharing their experiences. For instance, a female friend of Edward’s not only shared her experience of menstruation, but asked him to accompany her to see a gynaecologist.

In fact, the traditional gender role boundaries that feminism criticizes are precisely the same sources of oppression for gay men. Furthermore, for gay men unwilling or unable to come out, both women’s groups and the women’s movement provide a safe environment that allows them to express themselves. Therefore, their alliance with feminists might be stronger than their ties with other gay groups. Tim also mentioned that the experiences of Taiwanese women, struggling to develop a strong voice from a marginalized and disadvantaged social position, could be a good model for gay men.

In general, men are in a privileged position. However, the power or resources are not distributed equally across different male groups. Sissies

and gay men are vested interest groups because of their biological sex; in the meantime, they are discriminated against due to their marginal masculinity or sexual orientation. For other men, precisely because of higher anticipation from their family members, they can't choose their career from free will. These personal uncomfortable experiences may not directly promise the gender consciousness to support gender equity, but may lead them to think about gender differences and how gender ideology permeates our daily lives.

Awareness of Discrimination and Oppression Against Women

The second condition for contributing to the young men's engagement with feminist issues that the research identified was the awareness of discrimination and oppression against women. Although men are the privileged gender group in Taiwanese society, they have much opportunity to witness the victimization of women in both public and domestic spheres and begin to reflect on it.

While working as a radio journalist, the interviewee Michael was shocked by a famous trial. A woman, Ju-Wen Teng, who was married to a man who once raped her, could not endure the violence from her abusive husband and finally killed him. She was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Michael could not understand why a woman would stay in such an abusive situation to the point where killing seemed the only and reasonable option. He started to read feminist literature and "began to look at domestic violence from within the entire social structure instead of simply thinking that it was an isolated incident. I think that was the beginning!"

Interviewee Kevin became concerned with gender issues in his sophomore year of university. At the time, nude photos of a female undergraduate were circulated on the internet by her ex-boyfriend, and Kevin was surprised at why many commentators blamed the woman and suggested that she deserved the humiliation. Being raised with the belief of social justice, he felt disgusted by the chauvinistic public opinions but was unsure of how to respond, even though he had studied sociology for

more than one year. He began to read feminist literature and immerse himself in the gender domain.

Despite the passage of some gender equity legislation, Taiwan is still highly patriarchal in the domains of religion, folk customs and sex. Interviewee Ted touched on the death of his maternal grandmother as a critical incident that enhanced his belief in feminism. According to Taiwanese folklore, "a married daughter is like spilled water," in that she can't be taken back and no longer belongs to her parents. Ted said: "Grandma was closer to my mom, but she could not live with a daughter. After my grandma died, my mother did not have a say on where to keep my grandma's name tablet and do the worship." Ted not only observed the negation of his mother's opinions, but also, as the son of a daughter, found himself marginalized at his grandmother's funeral. Although he had been very close to his grandmother, he was assigned a role equivalent to that of a son-in-law in the ceremony. Edward also observed that all the tasks and responsibilities in connection with worshipping the family's ancestors on his father's side fell on his mother's shoulders. Seeing a woman prevented from adequately expressing her grief for her own mother, while held responsible for rituals for her husband's parents, struck Ted as deeply unfair.

Some other interviewees had witnessed domestic violence. Faced with this violence against one's mother, a man, as he developed his gender identity, might hope to protect the mother while rejecting his father as a role model. Thus, witnessing oppression or violence against women in the private or public domain is more likely to encourage men to question social gender norms.

Experience that Emphasizes Equity Values

Fairness and justice, as well as ethical appeals, were also mentioned as reasons why they participated in gender movements. Feminist bell hooks (1992) once pointed out that a person does not necessarily have to experience suffering to rebel against structures of dominance, but that ethical and political understandings might also cause people to reject dominance. A man who has adopted ethical principles not only cares about his female partner, but also about women in general.

From childhood, Jahan “attached a lot of importance to fairness. I feel that this was a beginning. I cannot tolerate the existence of unjustness and sometimes I get quite a bit cynical. Frankly speaking, when I studied feminism in the past, it had an air of tragic heroism: I wanted to speak for the weak and defend them against injustice.” For his part, Howard thought that the equity values that he believed in made it impossible for him to skirt gender problems: “My concern with gender issues is something that evolved slowly from my experience with the student movement. Deep inside, I cherish the value of equity.” Due to their advantaged status, men have more difficulty in being conscious of gender inequality. However, some young men who started out in the labor, environmental, or student movements later came to realize that gender is also an important sphere of dealing with social justice and equity. A man who truly believes in equity should be reflexive about men’s privileges too.

The three abovementioned conditions (refusal to embrace traditional masculinity norms, being effeminate men or gay men, emphasizing equity values) are not mutually exclusive, and an individual’s experience may reflect more than one. As a result, a sissy gay man, who has witnessed domestic violence and believes in justice, may possibly have strong motivation to learn and engage with feminism.

The Impacts of Feminist Discourse

As mentioned earlier, introspection alone does not lead to awareness of sexism or patriarchy. Kahane (1998) pointed out that “from the standpoint of the powerful and absent a structured critical analysis, the status quo tends to appear natural and just” (p. 222). All interviewees mentioned being enlightened or influenced by feminist discourses, such as exposure to feminist books, lectures or movies, or direct interaction with feminists.

According to my interview data, feminist discourse can play an important role in solving doubts, opening one’s eyes or giving a new perspective. While learning painting, interviewee Ian was particularly curious about the sketches that his teacher collected. The different ways that male and female models were presented in the sketches left a deep impression on

him. Women in the paintings would often be naked and looking toward a contemplator outside the frame, while male models for their part would be neatly dressed or looking into the distance. At the time he did not understand the difference, but was later introduced to the concept of the “male gaze” through engagement with feminist thought.

Interviewees continually discovered new connections between social phenomena and gender, including language conventions (e.g., the use of the male in “chairman”, “X-men”), the misinterpretation of the role of the male lion in the movie “*Lion King*”, different sitting postures for men and women, the near exclusive use of male voices used for movie trailers, and the different design of shavers for women and men. Reading feminism opened their eyes to the ubiquitous manifestation of gender. Feminist discourse is a sort of interpretational framework that redefines the unethical plight of women that in earlier times had been thought of as a type of misfortune or an injustice to be endured. It shows that the problem is political and not personal, situational and not individual.

Personal Politics

The formation of gender consciousness is not a single event, nor is it a linear process with an ending point. Rather, it is a never-ending, reciprocal process (Griffin 1989; Stanley and Wise 1993). Then, what kind of forces can lead men to continue to care about gender equity issues and apply gender consciousness in their everyday lives? This involves men’s interests, whether from doing something to make one feel better, or that not doing it may diminish one’s integrity as an ethical being (Pease 2002). In addition, one has to distinguish different interests and assess their relative importance to different men (Pease 2002). According to the interviews, a man’s ability and propensity to reflect on and practice gender equity is determined by his balancing of personal, relational, and political interest relations. Each man will weigh his own interest relations differently and they will be either mutually reinforcing or conflicting. Flood (2011: 360) provided a similar observation, arguing that men could be motivated to play an important role in stopping violence against women through appealing to the following interests:

personal well-being (freedom from the costs of dominant masculinity), relational interests, collective and community interests and principles (ethical or political commitments).

Personal Interest

Learning feminism leads to a new understanding of life experiences related to gender. It can liberate a man from traditional roles and also cause constraints on daily actions. Exposure to feminism allows men to see the causes behind the creation of gender role stereotypes and thus possibly ease one's own burden as a traditional man. It is therefore possible for a man to apply his own experiences to sympathetically understand the oppressions that gender structures impose on women, while simultaneously liberating him from stereotype roles. A few interviewees mentioned that they no longer felt obliged to be tough, get married, make a lot of money, drive a car or raise children. They felt freer and happier. Another interesting instance is that the interviewee Michael had previously depended on and enjoyed letting his girlfriend cook and clean for him, but he later began to see this as a sign of disability.

Engaging with feminist thought also raised some dilemmas for these interviewees. As Kahane (1998) noted, men "have little practically to gain from feminist practice.... [However, t]here are immediate costs to challenging sexism" (p. 224). For instance, how much privilege should a man give up if he adopts feminism? How much should he sacrifice to meet his partner's needs? Does not directly challenging the discriminatory or violent behavior of his peers make him an accomplice to their behavior? To what extent does he need to challenge them? Several interviewees indicated that they are wrestling with these issues.

Although some interviewees could gain academic status by displaying knowledge of feminism, I was more interested in those who regarded feminism less as objective knowledge and more as a means of reflecting on their own practice. As mentioned before, Ted complained that his mother did not have a say in his grandmother's funeral. He also expected that he and his sister should equally share any future inheritance and would also share the responsibility to care for their parents. But in fact,

his mother expected him to take sole responsibility to care for her, and he was concerned that his career development would be limited by assuming this responsibility. This had been a continuing issue for him to deal with.

Studying and practicing feminist ideas do not necessarily lead to a happy life. A young man told me that after he studied feminism, his male peers began to dislike him and accused him of not being aggressive or tough enough, i.e., not man enough. Even his girlfriend complained that she needed a strong shoulder to lean on, not a sissy man. He was left feeling lonely and longing to find a feminist men's group to support him. In short, a cost-benefit calculation would influence a man's next steps in feminist practice, and it's uncertain how long this interviewee could persist in feminist practice without outside support.

Relational Interest

In their everyday life situations, men are bound to have close relationships with many women, such as their female relatives, friends and colleagues. A man might wish that his mother need not devote herself to housework, that his wife not suffer gender-related discrimination at the workplace and that his daughter is not sexually assaulted. These concerns contribute to a man developing an opposition to sexism.

Many interviewees admitted that without studying feminism they would have had considerably fewer opportunities to learn about women's life experiences. In addition to sharing experiences in feminism classes, female friends or family members were also more willing to reveal their feelings and experiences to a man who was more empathetic to women. Tim's younger sister's plan to study natural sciences was rejected by their parents, because of the belief that natural sciences are for boys and social sciences are for girls. Tim used his knowledge of feminism to support his sister and persuade his parents. Peter supported his sister in conflicts with her highly-controlling husband. However, these kinds of actions also raised some conflicts among different personal relations. When Alex realized the problem between his own brother and his brother's girlfriend, he assumed that breaking up would be a better solution for their relationship. His feminist knowledge suggested that he should stand by his

brother's girlfriend's side, but it was unfair to his own brother. This was a very difficult choice for Alex.

Feminist knowledge also raised other dilemmas for the interviewees. Jahan was still troubled when his girlfriend would go out alone late at night. Protecting women is unquestionably an important traditional value for men, but feminism led him to question whether his insistence on accompanying his girlfriend at night indicated a lack of trust in her ability to take care of herself. On the other hand, if he didn't accompany her, she might think he was indifferent about her safety. He dealt with the dilemma by explaining his thoughts to his girlfriend and let her decide.

Relational interest in most existing literature refers to men's concerns with their female partners or friends. In this research, one interviewee, Jason, told a different story. He studied feminism out of the concern for his male classmates' well-being. He majored in engineering in university. Most of his classmates were male students who graduated from single sex high schools, and thus had little experience of interacting with girls. Outside of school, they occupied themselves with sports, computer games, online pornography and parties. They judged girls by their looks and defined the ideal girlfriend as being pretty, obedient, and able to play the piano. When his classmates broke up with a girlfriend, they did not learn or grow out of this relationship. Rather, they would talk to him, not for his advice, but through the expectation of him introducing a new girl to date with. Jason considered his male classmates to be clever, but wondered why they had such a poor life quality and poor relations with women. He studied feminism out of the hope that he could help his male classmates improve their life quality.

Political Interest

Most interviewees stressed that feminism was not just about women—rather it dealt with resistance to all kinds of domination and oppression, a kind of irresistible political correctness. Given his longtime involvement with the student movement and various social movements, the interviewee Howard felt compelled to become involved with gender equity issues. When Jahan began to read feminism, he was filled with a sense of

heroism and a desire to defend the weak against injustice. Max believed feminism was nothing but "a fight for fairness and justice. Any normal person should be able to perceive this patriarchal system and criticize it."

Ironically, respect and humanity were also raised as reasons to make a person get away with feminism. Regarding sexual violence, Vincent revealed that the saying of "This is not a gender issue; it is a humane issue," actually did not deal with the real problem of gender inequality. A problem can only be solved by clearly naming and identifying the cause.

Conclusion

This research proposes a framework for the formation of progressive gender consciousness for Taiwanese young men. I emphasize the importance of formative experiences that contribute to their encounter with feminism, the impacts of feminist thought, as well as negotiation between personal, relational, and political interests to help these men continue to participate in gender transformation. For instance, some men participate in the women's movement, but were questioned and ridiculed by female activists for their real intentions. One man rejected the traditional male role and refused to be a doctor. However, this was just for the reason that his girlfriend's parents refused their marriage proposal. On the other hand, one man could say loudly and proudly: "I am gay" for the first time in his life when he joined the anti-sexual harassment parade organized by women. Another man cultivated his gay identity from feminism, but later was angry and depressed because of some women's organizations' refusal to stand with the gay movement. As Griffin (1989) and Stanley and Wise (1993) indicated, gender consciousness is not a linear process, rather it is cyclic and spiral without a specific ending point. It is a continuous and never-ending process.

While this paper is inspired by Christian's (1994) and Cornish's (1999) work on anti-sexist and pro-feminist men, the findings indicate that the experiences of Taiwanese young men are colored by their different cultural and historical context. Christian (1994) discovered the importance of the role model provided by a nurturing father for the formation of

anti-sexist values. However, some of the interviewees in my research saw their fathers as negative role models, and the behavior and attitude of these fathers was a key motivator to initially become involved in feminism. The interviewees not only empathize with women's experiences of patriarchal oppression, but are frequently deeply harmed by patriarchy themselves. Feminist discourse provides an explanation of their unfortunate experiences and promises a different future. Feelings of alienation or bitterness between father and son give them a strong incentive to participate in the women's movement and to jointly attack patriarchy.

Christian (1994) also emphasized the importance of unconventional gender experiences in early life. However, my interviewees focused more on reflection on and reacting against the constraints and pressures of the traditional male role. As indicated in Christian (1994), most of the anti-sexist men had previously participated in a men's group. However, Taiwan lacked pro-feminist men's groups or prominent male feminists, so the interviewees focused on the inspiration derived from feminist theory, without mentioning men's groups or male role models.

Compared to the existing literature, the framework proposed in this research is more comprehensive and focused on the dynamic process. When one man makes a change in the attitude and practice on gender issues, his surrounding others and social policies do not necessarily move at the same speed. This discrepancy may bring him some challenges. To make a decision for the next step, he might weigh and negotiate the different levels of interests. The personal, relational, and political interests sometimes support one another; sometimes they create a dilemma for the person. Thus, he is always making a choice. At the same time, the process of engaging with feminism is never-ending.

In Taiwan, according to Bih (2003, 2004), breaking down the myths of male superiority and "the good wife and good mother" is critical to the acquisition of gender awareness for women. However, men can only become feminists by facing "the rapist within" (Pease 2000: 43) and their "unearned privilege" (Johnson 2005). Men should always remind themselves of not wanting to be a hunter to rescue Little Red Riding Hood (neglecting awareness of being the accomplice of the patriarchy) on the one hand, and not recommitting the same error of Western men's rights groups (only caring for men's trauma, but neglecting women's suffering)

on the other hand. If men felt discriminated against because of their gender, they should target their enemy—the patriarchal system—instead of feminism. Moreover, gender problems involve not only people's attitudes or beliefs but also a material and structural system. In addition to the abolishment of gender stereotypes, we need to propose more actions in the public domain in order to promote gender equity.

Acknowledgements The author would like to express his gratitude to the young men who participated in this research, to Chang-Ling and Shu-Yuan for their help for data collection, to Prof. Raewyn Connell and Ying-Chao Kao for their critical comments on an earlier draft, and to the National Science Council (NSC87-2413-H002-003) for financial support.

References

- Bergling, T. (2001). *Sissyphobia: Gay men and effeminate behavior*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Bih, H. D. (2003). The formation of men's gender consciousness. *Research in Applied Psychology*, 17, 51–84 (in Chinese).
- Bih, H. D. (2004). The formation of women's gender consciousness in Taiwan. *Journal of General Education*, 11(1/2), 117–146 (in Chinese).
- Brod, H. (2013). Men's studies: A retrospective view. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 21(1), 49–61.
- Christian, H. (1994). *The making of anti-sexist men*. New York: Routledge.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859.
- Cornish, P. A. (1999). Men engaging feminism: A model of personal change and social transformation. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 7(2), 173–199.
- Digby, T. (1998). Introduction. In T. Digby (Ed.), *Men doing feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Flood, M. (2011). Involving men in efforts to end violence against women. *Men and Masculinities*, 14(3), 358–377.
- Griffin, C. (1989). "I'm not a women's libber, but...": Feminism, consciousness and identity. In S. Skevington & D. Baker (Eds.), *The social identity of women*. London: Sage.

- Holmgren, L. E. (2008). Performing feminist affinity: Interviewing feminist men in Sweden. *Atenea: A Bilingual Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 28(2), 107–120.
- Holmgren, L. E., & Hearn, J. (2009). Framing “men in feminism”: Theoretical locations, local contexts and practical passings in men’s gender-conscious positionings on gender equality and feminism. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(4), 403–418.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Boston: South End.
- Johnson, A. G. (2005). *The gender knot: Unraveling our patriarchal legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Johnson II, B. (2010). Toward an anti-sexist black American male identity. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 11(3), 182–194.
- Kahane, D. J. (1998). Male feminism as Oxymoron. In T. Digby (Ed.), *Men doing feminism*. New York: Routledge.
- Levtov, R. G., Barker, G., Contreras-Urbina, M., Heilman, B., & Verma, R. (2014). Pathways to gender equitable men: Findings from the international men and gender equality survey in eight countries. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(5), 467–501.
- Messner, M. A. (1997). *Politics of masculinities: Men in movements*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pease, B. (2000). *Recreating men: Postmodern masculinity politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pease, B. (2002). (Re)constructing men’s interests. *Men and Masculinities*, 5(2), 165–177.
- Schacht, S. P., & Ewing, D. (1997). The many paths of feminism: Can men travel any of them? *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6(2), 159–176.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking out again: Feminist ontology and epistemology* (new ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Femininity/masculinity. In E. F. Borgatta & R. J. V. Montgomery (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of sociology* (rev. ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Wang, H. W. (1998). *Taiwanese men*. Taipei: Unitas (in Chinese).