

## MASTER'S THESIS

# Gender and marriage: network integration and network restructuring of the newlyweds in Hong Kong

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**Gender and Marriage -  
Network Integration and Network Restructuring  
of the Newlyweds in Hong Kong**

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## ABSTRACT

Marriage brings together two families and two previously minimally-related or unrelated personal networks, resulting in a network of different structure and composition. In fact, the network restructuring process is gradually maintained when two individuals meet and engage in a romantic relationship. However, this network aspect of marital life receives relatively less research attention. It is unclear how the processes of network change take place and how couples realign their changing social relations. In this study, 15 pairs of Hong Kong recently married heterosexual couple are interviewed to examine the integration and restructuring of the two partners' personal networks. Taking the gendered meanings of marriage into consideration, this study adopts the gender perspective to guide the understanding of the network processes in the course of marital coupling. Findings of this study suggest that the integration of two networks tends to be superficial and segmented. Despite the fact that the two networks are structurally linked, the affective bonding is rather weak. Further, social networks serve as the social control system for the enforcement of gender norms as well as the platform on which men and women actively affirm and negotiate their gender. Network processes are found to be related to the presentation of a new set of highly gendered identities acquired through marriage. Influenced by these gendered identities, men and women report different experiences with the structural and relational changes of their networks, and display different network behaviors. Gender norms, nevertheless, are not simply passed down to the individuals. Men and women would resist, negotiate, and redefine the gendered scripts attached to their identities. Since women's identities and roles are under closer social surveillance, women encounter greater demands and restrictions for the presentation of gender than their spouses, and are also engaged in greater resistance vis-à-vis their network members. The presentation and negotiation of gendered identities in social interactions make the reproduction of gender routine and seemingly natural.

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