Abstract

This is a study of Hong Kong Chinese working class women’s active involvement in managing their economic life under the constraints from the normalization of their ‘gendered self’. This normalization comes from the women’s common-sense knowledge of motherhood. This thesis attempts to correct the negative views on the practice of motherhood and inappropriate considerations of the situation of working women in a trans-historical and universal sense. It challenges the biased view that undervalues the agency of working women and demonstrates the ignorance of the importance of domestic work. Twenty Hong Kong Chinese working class women have been interviewed. The views of seventeen of them are discussed and nine detailed working histories are represented in this thesis. In-depth interviews were carried out in this study through convenience and snowball sampling in order to gather detailed personal information. By exploring the constraints of motherhood using a social constructionist approach, it was found that working women in this study were active participants in creating their own social and economic life rather than passive recipients. These women created their own personal understandings of the meaning of motherhood. They also developed ways and means of arranging and managing their domestic and paid work. Through this process, existing meanings of motherhood have been modified and re-articulated for new generations of mothers. Through their actions, these working women continuously endorse the common-sense knowledge of motherhood that sustains their contemporaries and will influence their successors.
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