

Unpacking Gender Identity: Money And Sexuality In Conjugal Relationship Among Malaysian Middle Class Couples

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the dynamics of conjugal relationship in the daily lives of urban Malaysian middle-class couples. It is based on a data of a qualitative study conducted in Klang Valley, 1997, together with some empirical observations after the study. Utilizing the “dualistic theory of patriarchy and capitalism” by Sylvia Walby, this paper examines how the ideologies of both, patriarchy and capitalism affect the public and private domains of gender relationships. The research was an exploratory attempt using a purposive sample of thirty male and female, Malay and Chinese informants. This paper focuses on two major themes, i.e. ‘money’ and ‘sexuality’ within each conjugal relationship. Some of the findings were the overlapping of public and private domains in conjugal relationship; neither modernization nor capitalism has completely eradicated the sexual hierarchy and ideology of patriarchy; patriarchy ideology manifests itself in new and complex form while reclaiming its root and enhancing its dominant role in conjugal relationship.

Introduction

Tapping into the daily life experiences, activities, interactions, perception, belief and values in the conjugal relationships of husband and wife, enable us to uncover the subtle socio-cultural, economic realities of the gender identity among Malaysian middle class couples. This approach is similar to Rosemary Firth (1966, British Anthropologist) in her quest to deepen the understanding of ‘economic wealth’ of the Malay fishermen community in Kelantan, Malaysia. In her research, she went beyond the conventional macro approach of the ‘system and structural’ focus and ‘Malay male’ analysis; she, on the other hands, unpacked the detailed social processes on how the ‘Malay women’ managed the division of labor in housekeeping and the household expenditure in daily life experiences. As a result, it added nuances of meaning with variety of realities to enhance the macro economic system of fishermen in Kelantan and it also discovered the significance roles and contributions of Malay women to the general ‘economic wealth’ in Kelantan.

Following the similar approach, this paper attempts to go beyond the conventional approach of analyzing 'gender identity' in terms of biological roles and functions of male and female in a society, which is the mainstream approach based mainly on males' 'experiences' and 'values'. In contrast, it attempts to unpack the 'gender identity' by looking into the issues on 'money' and 'sexuality' in the daily personal (private domain) interaction level and how these issues reflects and/ or affect the societal level (public domain) of conjugal identities and relationships in general as a whole. By applying a sociological imagination perspective, to understand gender identity, one has to connect the relationships between the private domain and the public domain of human life experiences.

Literature Review

Public Domain and Private Domain

Definition of 'public' and 'private' domains in 'Collins Dictionary of Sociology' (Jary & Jary 1991: 498) is as follows:

A dichotomous model of social relations which posit the separation between the domestic sphere of the family and that of socialized labor (wage work) and political activity. It has been common practice for historians and social scientists to argue that industrialization and urbanization effected a separation between home and work, the personal and the political. This separation was gendered – the domestic sphere being associated with women and children, the public sphere with adult males.

The above 'dichotomous' approach can be explained further. The classic approach, Marxist approach in 'public domain' to understand social relations and gender identity is limited to the economy relations in production (macro viewpoint on system and structure of infrastructure). It pays less attention to the essence of 'differences' between men and women, the social reality and identity of men and women in this sense is reduced to a superficial understanding of them as an 'economy product' only or their relations to economy forces.

This is one of the critics from the discipline of Anthropology and feminists to Marxist in the early 1960-70's, to name a few, Shulamith Firestone, Michelle Rosaldo, Juliet Mitchell, Sherry Ortner etc. In their debates, they highlight the essence of understanding 'nature' and 'culture' in the 'differences' between men and women. In other words, the social reality and identities of men and women are governed by the law or forces of superstructure (socio-cultural, belief and value system of a society). It is also important to analyze how these laws of superstructure generate subjective meanings in social action and relations under a complex process of interpretation (private/micro domain).

However, both the above debates further analyze by socialist feminists like Zilla R. Eisenstein (1979) and Sylvia Walby (1986, 1993). According to them, both approaches look at 'one' aspect of lives in men and women; either from the class

conflict or the patriarchy ideology to understand the social reality and identities of human life (the forming of the dichotomous approach). Thus, Eisenstein and Walby ventured beyond the 'dichotomous' approach to explore the social identities of men and women via the 'sociological imagination' approach. To them, the 'public' and 'private' domains should not be separated as 'one' analysis on its own, the relationships between the two domains is considered crucial for one domain to affect another. As noted by Eisenstein (1979: 11-13) in her critics towards Marxist approach:

Yet he (Marx) ultimately spoke of the conflict between man and woman as class conflict; the man represents the bourgeoisie within the family, the wife represents the proletariat... woman is perceived as just another victim, undistinguished from the proletariat in general, of the pernicious class division of labor...by categorizing men and women as classes, the relations of reproduction are subsumed under the relations of production or the sexual division of labor as the sexual definition of roles, purposes, activities, etc., had no unique existence for Marx. He had little or no sense of woman's biological reproduction or maternal functions as critical in creating a division of labor within the family.

In the effort to analyze the relation between public and private domains, Eisenstein's socialist feminist synthesis' framework, the 'capitalist patriarchy' built on the thesis of Marxist 'class conflict' and the anti-thesis of radical feminist on 'patriarchy system' as noted (Eisenstein, 1979: 5 & 23):

Capitalist patriarchy, to emphasize the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring; it breaks through the dichotomies of class and sex, private and public spheres, domestic and wage labor, family and economy, personal and political, and ideology and material conditions.

In addition, the relation between 'public' and 'private' domains is seen as an 'oppressive' social relation, where women are perceived as 'mother' and 'worker'; or as 'reproducer' and 'producer'. The notion on 'oppression' is far beyond the notion of 'exploitation' in Marxist class conflict, again to quote Eisenstein (1979: 23):

Oppression is inclusive of exploitation but reflects a more complex reality. Power—or the converse, oppression—derives from sex, race, and class, and this is manifested through both the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism. Oppression reflects the hierarchical relations of the sexual and racial division of labor and society.

Nonetheless, in Sylvia Walby's (1986) theory of 'dualistic system', she deepens the analysis of inter-relations between 'public' and 'private' domains; where she sees the relations of 'public domain' and 'private domain' not only at the extent of analyzing the interrelation of the capitalist and patriarchy system, but also

evaluating the uniqueness of the two systems to retain its own individualistic characteristics in the midst of the process, a two-level of analysis between 'public domain' and 'private domain'.

In short, it reviews two types of inter-relation between public and private domains. Former is where the 'public domain' (capitalist system) has great impact towards the 'private domain' (patriarchy system), the inter-relation between the two systems inter-twine and assimilate to one another, to become the 'capitalist patriarchy' system. Latter, though not denying the inter-relation of the capitalist and patriarchy systems, Walby (1986: 33, 46, 47) looks into the 'bases' of inter-relation between the public and private domains. First, she questions which domain influences which? The public domain influences the private domain or vice-versa? Second, the characteristic of 'bases' as a factor of determination is not limited to material form or individual base, but a system of 'social relation' which exists in all level of social construction. Third, the system of 'social relation' between the public domain and private domain takes into consideration of other factors too, such as, 'race' and 'ethnicity' to give a broader analysis on the conflict relations between the two domains.

Objective

1. Is there a clear separation of 'public domain' (men's domain) and 'private domain' (women's domain)?
2. Are 'paid income' working mother still trapped in the sexual hierarchy of patriarchy ideology?
3. Is the 'sexuality' of men and women in the conjugal relationships among middle class couples still trapped in the sexual hierarchy of patriarchy ideology?

Problem Statement

1. Will a working mother's 'paid income' liberate her from the traditional identity/role of a wife and mother compare to man?
2. How does the 'house keeping' money review the dynamic of working mother's identity in the debate between public and private domains?
3. Is a woman's sexual identity determined by her relation to the man's sexuality and society?

Methodology

It is mainly a qualitative research (in-depth interviews) with snow-ball sampling, complemented by quantitative method (questionnaire) to obtain the general profile and socio-economic background of the informants. The findings are based on a research conducted in 1997 with a sample of thirty men and women. The

informants are Malays and Chinese from the Klang Valley. They are selected based on their education background (at least a secondary school qualification, form five level and above), married couples with children for five years and above and live in Klang Valley. In-depth interviews were conducted with informants by using an interview schedule as well as with open and free-ranging conversations which took place in at least three or four meetings with each informant. Questionnaire is used in the first meeting with informants not only to gain their socio-economic backgrounds, but also to establish a trust and rapport relationship with informants.

Based on the theory of 'Dualistic System' by Sylvia Walby (1986), the capitalist system and patriarchy system, the informants are categorized into three groups. This research studies the working parents' economic power in relation to the forming of their identity. It is with the assumption that the 'ability to earn income' determines the negotiation and power relationships between working father and mother and liberates the conventional identity of women as 'housewife' and 'mother'.

The 'paid work' (earning power) of men and women informants is used to represent the capitalist system. Thirty informants are arranged according to three types of family based of their respective 'ability to earn'. Out of the thirty informants, all the fifteen men informants are full time 'income' earner, however, not the case for all the women informants. As a result, the three categories are the "Dual Earning Family", the "Semi-dual Earning Family" and the "Single Earning Family". First, both the men and women are full-time 'income' earner (19 informants); Second, five women are 'part-time' income earner (5 informants); and lastly, six women do not earn any income (6 informants).

Production: Public Domain

Outcome Of Findings

Public Domain: Issue on 'Money'

In this paper, the assumption on 'working mother's 'paid income' liberates her from the traditional identity/role as a wife and mother are being analyzed by looking at the issue on 'house keeping money'. By analyzing further how the 'house keeping money' is managed and the socio-cultural norms and values attached to it, it reviews subtle identity of the working mother, part-time working mother and non- working mother.

House Keeping Money

Single Earning Family/ (Non- working mother)

In the Single Earning Family where the man as the sole income earner, the significance of 'house keeping money' enhances the separation of 'public' and

'private' domains of man and woman; which is, the traditional role of man as a 'breadwinner' and 'head of the household' versus woman as a 'housewife' and 'mother'.

'House keeping money' is a sum of money allocated by the working fathers to their spouses (working or non-working mothers) for the household expenditure. From the interviews of the 6 informants, the amount of house keeping money ranges from a quarter, one-fourth, and half, for which it depends on the working father's salary. The house keeping money is meant for 'small' or 'light' expenditure, for example, daily market money, small household items expenses, children's pocket money, emergency money, money for in-laws. However, the 'large' and 'fix' expenses is borne by the working father, such as, household bills, car insurance, furniture and kitchen's utensils. With these categories, it reviews that there are two types of expenses in the working father's salary, first, it is for 'big' expenditures and second, the 'house keeping money' is for the 'small' expenses. The working fathers make decision on the 'big' expenditures, whereas the house keeping money lies on the discretion of the non-working mother.

Further probing into the issue of 'pocket money' for non-working mothers to meet their own individual needs and expenses, the working fathers expect the non-working mothers to have a stringent way of managing the house keeping money, so that they could save up some 'pocket money' for themselves (if they can) at the end of the month. Quote Sandi (one of the informants), "*he (her spouse) knows that it is for the house, marketing and children and he knows that I know my limit and my priorities*".

In short, there is no separate amount of money allocated for the non-working mothers besides the house keeping money. The above perception is also used as a mean to justify why no extra money is allocated for the non-working mother's well-being from the interview of Chinese men informants too. In these situations, the non-working mother depends more on the spouses' house keeping money and the decision on household matters, their needs and expenses have been restricted to the ability to save a portion of the money from the house keeping money.

In another words, it is enhancing the separation of 'public' and 'private' domains of man and woman, and the strengthening of the patriarchy ideology by the capitalist factor (paid income) because the economy power is in the hand of the working father. The embedded patriarchy ideology in this aspect is the expectation on the non-working mother's life and identity to be devoted fully to family and children in the name of 'sacrifices'.

Dual Earning Family

In contrast, the Dual Earning Family (19 informants) is where both husband and wife are the income earners. The analysis on 'house keeping money' in this category review the present of other factors besides 'paid income' and 'patriarchy ideology' in determining the social relations and identity of the couples, i.e. the

'difference between lower middle-class and upper middle class'. It also reflects that there is no clear separation of the 'public domain' and 'private domain', however, the forces of the patriarchy ideology is still very strong in influencing and constructing the identity of working father and mother.

In Nariah's household (Malay informant with SPM qualification), she has to work in order to support the household's expenditure, as the husband's paid income was not sufficient. In this case, Nariah's husband allocates half of his 'paid income' for 'house keeping', supported by the full amount of 'paid income' from Nariah. And the 'house keeping' allowance is used for both the 'large' and 'small' expenses in the family.

In this case, the assumption that 'a working mother's 'paid income' liberate her from the traditional identity/role as a wife and mother cannot be supported, in contrast, the 'paid income' add on to the 'sacrifices' of the working mother. Though she is working and contributing to the household expenditure and has no pocket money (whereas her husband keeps half of his income for pocket money), but, her financial contribution was not recognized; she is still a mother and wife to her spouse.

In Walby's 'dualistic system', she was questioning the 'bases' of inter-relation between the capitalist and patriarchy ideology; the above case shows that the two forces of capitalist and patriarchy ideology are overlapping with one another, where the patriarchy ideology is more dominant in determining the social relations and identity of the couple.

Most household that being interviewed does believe in the concept of house keeping money, except for Siew Tin's household, a Chinese informant. She has a tertiary education and earning about RM7,000 to RM8,000 monthly. According to Siew Tin, she does not request monthly house keeping money from her spouse, because her income is sufficiently cater for both the huge and small expenditures of the household, and the pocket money for herself in a carefree manner. She is financially independent, in a joking manner, she said, *"If there is any allowance, it will be for my son. We make sure that both of us contribute a fixed amount of RM1,000 each monthly for our son's piggy bank!"*

Ironically, the spouse's income is spent for himself, car expenses and the son's piggy bank. She admits that she is the breadwinner of the household and it does not threaten the identity of her spouse, who supposes to be the breadwinner! Quote Siew Tin, *"Fine, I am just as happy as he is because we are all part of the recipients. It is based on trust and respect of each other."*

There is also no clear distinction between the couple of who should be responsible for the huge and small household expenditure, she said, *"No, not really, but I suppose we ask each other like, 'Eh! Can you afford it this month?', then he says, 'Yes!' he pays. Our monetary arrangement is very carefree. I never draw a line to say that, you must pay this so much and that. We have known*

each other for ten years plus and officially married for five years, we never ever mentioned something like that, even today.”

However, though Siew Tin admits that she is the ‘breadwinner’ in the private domain, she, on the other hand, still prefers the husband to be seen as the ‘head of the household’ in the public domain; especially in their outings where she prefers her husband to pay, though she could afford it.

Definitely, in Siew Tin’s case, she is quite an autonomous lady with her education background. Her handsome amount of monthly income enables her to admit proudly her identity as the ‘breadwinner’, but she is still trapped in the patriarchy ideology on the notion of ‘head of the household’.

Semi-dual Earning Family

In this category, five informants were interviewed. It has both the issues discussed on the house keeping money in the ‘Single Earning Family’ and ‘Dual-Earning Family’. The former depicts the ‘house keeping money’ enhance the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ domains of man and woman, the latter reviews also the present of other factors besides ‘paid income’ and ‘patriarchy ideology’ in determining the social relations and identity of the couples, i.e. the ‘difference between lower middle-class and upper middle class’ and other additional factors, such as, informants’ background, education level, working experiences, personality, couples’ goal in life, value of money and the woman’s own perception about herself, the spouse’s support and ‘secret money’.

The experiences of a Chinese woman informant and Malay man informant explained the above. Sow Fang is a part-time working mother where she works and takes care of her children at home. She used to be a successful career lady with a professional degree and earns about RM4,000 – RM6,000 monthly. She has to quit her full-time job due to the responsibilities of a mother and wife. At the time of interview, she was undergoing the ‘transitional period’ of letting go her professional working life (public life), where she enjoys it most and adjusting to her private and domestic life.

Sow Fang is given quite a huge amount of house keeping money similar to what she used to earn in this upper middle-class couple. Her spouse is also a professional graduate from overseas. According to her, the huge amount of house keeping money acts as a ‘compensation’ to her career, intellectual and financial sacrifices. Her spouse understands and respects the decision she made and yet feels ‘guilty’ at the same time. In this case, the spouse (man) understand the value of money where he interprets Sow Fang sacrifices as a kind of ‘gift’, rather than the functional role of a mother and wife in previous examples.

However, Sow Fang faces some psychological dilemma from the ‘withdrawal syndrome’. This syndrome shows a strong embedded patriarchy system playing with her conscience. The huge amount of compensated house keeping money could not resolve the internal struggles she has in the period of transition. She

is still not sure the decision she made is 'correct', in the midst of adjusting to the domestic activity and life-style, the most difficult challenge to her is the withdrawal from the intellectual stimulation and social interaction she used to enjoy in her public life.

In the case of lower-middle class, the Malay man informant, Dahlan is the example. Dahlan, a form five technician, he gives all his salary (RM600) to his spouse as house keeping allowance; but, he takes RM40 for his own pocket money. Being aware that RM600 is not sufficient for the household expenditure, he requested his spouse to work part-time at home as a seamstress; hence, his wife supports him financially and able to take care of their children. Ironically, Dahlan takes up some part-time work at the night market to earn some extra pocket money, in which, he conceals it from the knowledge of his wife (secret money).

Reproduction: Domestic Domain

LITERATURE REVIEW

Private Domain: Sexuality

The traditional and general definition of 'sexuality' is about the physical attraction between sexes or concerned with the reproduction of offspring (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: 1161), which is a biological deterministic definition. Differ from this definition, from the sociological definition; it goes beyond the physical and individualistic definition, according to a feminist and social scientist, Norani Othman (1998:2),

Sexuality is never a simple or a uniform phenomenon in society. It embraces many aspects of human existence, such as the economic, social, political, psychological, emotional, religious or spiritual, physical, genetic and so on... the concept of "sexuality" in all societies is seen as heavily loaded with attitudes, beliefs, norms and taboos about how the male and female are to conduct themselves in their intimate and social relations. Sexuality is also about the market and moral values of the body, e.g. the values of female virginity in some societies: and an individual's choice about sexual needs, the body and his/her knowledge and practice relating to sexual techniques, excitement, desires and experiences.

In short, it is a social construction of sexuality embedded with social forces. This means the underlying social forces have to be unpacked layer by layer to understand 'sexuality'.

It cannot be taken in a simplistic approach, quote Nicholson (1994), 'the reason why women take on a second position or role in the public domain, even they are as competent as men, is due to the fact that they have been conditioned and accustom to it outside the working hours'. The question whether there is a

double-standard in sexuality regarding women's choice to choose her love, rights on sexual knowledge, rights on her feelings and body, rights to achieve orgasm and etc., have been questioned by Bauer (1971: 70):

When we come to examine how it is with woman today in this matter of love's choice and the power to demand satisfaction from individual love conditions, we find that, although from a superficial outlook, equality between women and men appears to exist, this equality of woman is in reality fictitious. The responsibility laid upon women for all the happenings and consequences of love is so much more arduous than the responsibility imposed upon men, that woman's freedom in the domain of the life of feelings is greatly restricted ... notwithstanding the great development of woman's alleged freedom in action and thought, her freedom in matters of love is really very much restricted than that of man.

In relation to this, hitherto, the definition of sexuality has been based on male's experiences and values of patriarchy structure and ideology in society. The famous research on women's sexuality, *The Hite Report*, Shere Hite (1981) questioned the assumptions which based on male's experiences. Also, it can be traced back to the 'politic of sex', the sex revolution by Wilhelm Reich who critically questioned some of the basic assumptions of women sexuality by Sigmund Freud.

The main issue in the debate of 'sexual revolution' is the rights of women to know, to feel, to self-own her body and to orgasm (Mitchell, 1974: 199). This is because based on male's definition and experiences, they assume that 'woman achieves orgasm slower than man', which is also a biological deterministic approach. However, according to Wilhelm Reich, the issue on orgasm is very much engrossed in cultural and social attitude of the society; the lop-sided social attitude creates the significance differences in the behavior and perception on sexuality between men and women (Mitchell 1974).

OUTCOME OF FINDINGS

Sexuality: A 'sensitive' issue/ 'private'

The analysis on the factors influencing 'differences' of sexuality identity in the conjugal relationships of couples, it is to discover that 'paid income' is not the main factor, but other important variables to be considered such as gender and ethnic, education and religion.

In the context of Malaysian society, 'sexuality' is a 'sensitive' topic to discuss in public, embedded with myths and taboos. As shown from the reactions of the informants, Tanya, a Chinese woman informant, posed this question to me, "*how are you going to ask this kind of question to a man? It makes me wonder! To me, even to a woman, we would be embarrassed! A lot of women would be too shy to tell you!*"

A Malay man informant also commented that, "*it is not a norm for Malay to talk about this with anybody, even among family members and siblings*". Another Malay man informant even complained that he tried to talk about it with his spouse, but she feels shy and not very proper to do that; whereas a Chinese man informant was curious to know, but too shy to talk about it.

From all these reactions and the observation on the informants' facial expression and body language, generally, it manifested a kind of 'tense conflict and dilemma' for the informants to talk about 'sexuality'.

Sexuality: Virginity (before marriage)

Virginity, in patriarchy ideology, women are expected to be 'pure' by keeping their virginity for husband especially in the first night of marriage. In this concept, women are socially conditioned in their thinking, attitude and action with subtle embedded 'socio-cultural baggage' to uphold the 'morality' of the society. In the traditional society, it goes to the extent that if a woman loses her virginity before marriage, she is not only bringing shame to herself and family, but she is also to be labeled as the 'second-hand' shoes (Chinese tradition).

The responses from the Malay women informants are different from the men informants to answer the question of 'sex before marriage'. From the facial expression of Malay women informants, they would feel 'unease' and hesitating in the way they answer, saying, "*no comment*" and "*It is against the religion*". Compare to the men informants, they directly answer "*yes, no and no comment*" without any hesitation (Chinese and Malay men). However, though the Chinese women informants have no hesitation in answering the question, but the reasons given varied too from the men informants. According to Siew Tin, "*I must have loved him (husband) so much; otherwise I won't allow that to happen*". Compare to the men informants, reason given such as 'sexual impulse' at young age. A Malay man informant even used the reason that her girl friend asked him to wait until the day of marriage to have sex, and he has chosen her to be his wife because of this reason.

The interviews clearly indicate that the ideology of patriarchy is still impinging on the women informants' life, and the socio-cultural baggage is still expected to be heavily lied on the shoulder of the women informants to uphold the 'morality' of the society.

Sexuality: Who makes the decision or who starts the initiative to have sex?

This question is asked in order to find out whether the women informants are 'autonomous' in decision making on sexual relationships. Basically the response is still in the hand of the men informants (Malay and Chinese men). However, there are changes in some of the responses based on ethnicity. The Chinese informants would not concern much on this issue as compare to Malay informants, where the Malay husband's decision is still very dominant. Some of the comments as quoted from the Chinese informants, "*no such thing as who makes decision, it depends on both partners!*", "*my husband will initiate, if I agree, then we just do*

it", "sometimes I feel obligated to fulfill my wife's need even though I don't feel like it at that moment".

Sexuality: Rejection

In relation to women's authority in making decision on her sexuality, women's saying "No" in sexual relationship is also another indicator of women's 'right' on their body and to what extent the patriarchy ideology treats women as a 'sex object'. One Malay woman informant commented, "*It is not nice to always reject your husband's wish as this is the cause for extra marital affair*". And a Malay man informant said, "*according to Islam, the spouse cannot reject the husband sexual needs unless she is 'uzur' (menstruation)*".

However, this is different from the Chinese's (men and women) sexual attitude and perception. When a spouse is rejected, it is by saying "No" explicitly and they expect their partners to understand and be patient. They would not relate it to 'religion' and 'extra-marital affair'.

Sexuality: Myth on 'orgasm'

There are two myths about orgasm in the patriarchy ideology. First, women achieve orgasm slower than men; second, the position of 'men on top' makes women reach orgasm.

From the responses of the Chinese informants (men and women), they adopt a flexible approach in the 'position' of sexual intercourse. They do not restrict themselves to a particular 'position' such as 'men on top', quote from a man informant, "*Oh! As many as you can find in Kamasutra, I enjoy them*". And most of the Chinese women informants prefer the positions of 'woman on top' and 'face to face' as more satisfactory.

According to a Chinese woman informant, her spouse is 'sensitive' to her need. They have the position of 'woman on top' first, for her to reach orgasm before they switch to the opposite position. Most of the Chinese men informants agree that 'women on top' gives their spouse more satisfaction and some of them prefer this position. Verbal communication and body language are also part of the process for the couples to derive satisfaction from each other.

From the above interviews, on the whole, the Chinese informants (men and women) are open, knowledgeable and sensitive towards the sexual needs of their spouses; they seem to 'give and take' in their sexual relationships. However, it does not mean the patriarchy myth does not exist! Both the Chinese men and women informants believe in their perception that '*women reach orgasm slower than men*'. Quote a women informant, "*...about 40% to 50% of women cannot reach orgasm*" or "*women can reach orgasm, but less than the men*".

On the other hand, differ from the Chinese informants, the Malay informants (men and women) aware that it is prohibited to share their ideas on sexuality with others in Islam. This is the main reason why the data obtained is less compare to

the Chinese informant. However, some of the Malay informants do answer some questions to assist in the 'academic research'.

According to a Malay woman informant, the position she likes is 'face to face' and 'woman on top', but, she still prefers 'man on top' as this is the 'Islamic way' to her. Most of the Malay men informants (those who answer) prefer the position, 'man on top' too. Some of the responses collected are, "*I am not a sexual person*" (Malay woman informant), "*a woman normally feels she is obligated to have sex, but not a man*", "*Malaysian women are a bit reserve!*" (Malay men informants) and some Malay women informants do not aware of ways of orgasm and how to relate it to the position.

This shows that 'sexuality' should not be taken for granted and dismiss it as the 'personal' and 'individual issue', it reflects the working of the social, cultural and religion forces, which are so great that the issue on 'sexuality' is a topic of taboo, even at the 'private and personal' level of the sexual relationship of couples.

Conclusion

Tapping into the daily life experiences, activities, interactions, perception, belief and values in the conjugal relationships of husband and wife, enable us to uncover the subtle socio-cultural, economic realities of the gender identity among Malaysian middle class couples. In this paper, it reviews that there is no one way of analyzing the formation of gender identity in society. From the lance of 'house keeping' money and 'sexuality', and unpacking the analysis of the debate between 'public' and 'private' domains using the Dualistic System of Sylvia Walby, it indicates that the formation of gender identity among middle class couples in Malaysia is not simple. From the findings, it review that there is an overlapping of 'public domain' & 'private domain' especially in the Dual Earning and Semi-dual Earning families; 'paid income' liberates working mother to a new identity and yet enhances the traditional identity of a 'mother' and 'wife'; patriarchy forces is still strong in influencing both the 'public' & 'private' domains, disguising itself in a new form; 'house keeping' money reviews different meanings and identity of the working and non-working mothers and fathers; the Malay women informants' sexual identity is still related to the man's sexuality and society; the Chinese women informants to a certain extend are the owner of her body; there are other additional factors to be considered in analyzing the identity of men and women in society, i.e., ethnic and class.

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