A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING HONG KONG MILLENNIAL STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENTS IN THEIR ACADEMIC TRAJECTORIES

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Josephine Wai Yee Chan

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Abstract

Academic achievement in Hong Kong is highly valued. In Hong Kong’s examination-dominated culture, children are raised in an atmosphere of drilling, preparing, and practicing for tests and examinations that determine their future academic opportunities. Many parents of Hong Kong youth are highly involved in every aspect of their children’s lives. Scholars and practitioners have speculated that this high level of parental involvement and focus on academic achievement often comes at the expense of a child’s social and psychological development (Klein & Pierce, 2009; Tam & Chan, 2010), resulting in low capacity for self-care, low emotional intelligence, and low adversity quotient (Wong, 2009). This study aims to understand the educational journeys of Hong Kong youth and how they make sense of the roles their parents have played in shaping those journeys both positively and negatively, with the goal of identifying how to better support these youth and their caregivers. In this context, using Baumrind’s Parenting Styles Theory (1967) and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979), the study seeks to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students during their educational journeys, and how do they make sense of how their parents have shaped their academic, social, and psychological development? The research findings suggested that the participants felt the pressure to study oriented from their parents was intense, which often included tutorials and extra-curricular activities. Although most of them achieved high academic results and entered top-notch universities, because of tremendous pressures to study since childhood, they expressed that they were deprived of free time to play and freedom to choose. Each of the participant shared his/her view of education and cited in a similar fashion: freedom to explore, opportunities for creativity, and pursuit of one’s interest were more fulfilling than remarkable academic achievement.
Keywords: Hong Kong educational system, Hong Kong millennials, parental involvement, academic achievement, social and emotional development.
Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved parents who rested well in peace with God and manifested the virtues of unconditional love, kindness and generosity on earth. Their nurture and nourishment shaped my developmental path and parental role.
Acknowledgement

“Children are a heritage from the Lord, ....a reward from Him.” Psalm 127:3-5

The topic of this research work was inspired by my parental role and the joy and challenges of rearing a child. I sincerely thank God for the precious opportunity of entering the parent-child world and the privilege of walking with my daughter during her developmental stages. I would not have known the struggles of educating a child in Hong Kong if I had not placed her in studying under the local educational system.

I sincerely wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kelly Conn, for her guidance and support throughout the research journey and the dissertation committee Dr. Corliss Thompson and Dr. Yuk Lan Leung for their challenges, comments and suggestions.

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At last, this research study would not have been completed without the keen volunteer participants who arrived punctually in each meeting and delightfully shared their lived experiences throughout their growing stages. I cherished every story unfolded.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

**Topic.** Hong Kong is notoriously known for its examination-dominated education culture (Fok & Yu, 2014). Starting as early as 1½ years of age, Hong Kong children compete for placement into sought-after kindergartens where children are educated with the goal of entering elite primary schools. Children receive primary education usually from the age of 6 to 12. During the six years of childhood life, they are required to take numerous tests and exams to satisfy the academic requirements of their particular school and stay competitive in obtaining admission to the elite secondary schools.

Parents play an indispensable role in influencing their child’s academic, social, and psychological development. Scholars have explored a variety of aspects of this influence in the educational environment of Hong Kong including parenting stress (Ma et al., 2011), parenting styles (Chen, 2014), and parents’ perceptions of their children’s development (Shek & Chan, 1999). For example, mothers in the Hong Kong contexts have sometimes been referred to as “tiger moms” (Chua, 2011) who are characterized as having a high degree of control and involvement in their children’s lives. The term “monster parents,” which originated in Japan to describe the behaviors of overprotectiveness and authoritarianism, has also gained widespread usage in describing the authoritarian parenting style of Hong Kong parents (Psychology, 2016).

While a high degree of parental involvement may have many positive effects in a child’s overall development (Jeynes, 2007; Eccles & Harold, 1993), some scholars and practitioners have suggested that some types of parental involvement can lead to three low’s: low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence, and low adversity quotient. Indeed, children in Hong Kong exhibiting these characteristics have been described as “Kong Kids” (Wong, 2009). It is argued
that millennial Hong Kong children are more vulnerable today to this than those in previous generations; their coping and resilience skills are weak and not trained; and that they need to learn to recover from hardship and be prepared for future challenges. Many Hong Kong parents, however, neglect the importance of these softer skills and emphasize almost exclusively the significance of academic achievement, which is only one measure of “success” for children and youth. Many Hong Kong parents expect their children to not only excel at school, but also in multiple extra-curricular activities, and even in social activities. Those parents who can afford the additional costs often provide their children with tutorials and after-class activities to make these youngsters more competitive for placement in secondary and post-secondary educational settings (Luthar, 2013).

Excessive parental influence and protection can also hinder the holistic growth of a child (Gaymon, 2013; Klein & Pierce, 2009). Children’s learning experiences are multi-faceted. On their educational pathways, they face multiple challenges, such as adaptation to new environments, interaction with peers and teachers, development of interests and hobbies, preparation for tertiary education, and the establishment of career goals. Unless their coping and survival skills are well developed, these challenges in the maturation stages can overwhelm them. Indeed, through adolescence and even to some extent into young adulthood, many of these young people still rely on the spoon-feeding of their parents who have earned the title of “helicopters” (Somers, et al., 2010) or “stealth fighter parents” (Wartman, et al., 2008).

**Research problem.** Every parent wants their child to receive the best education, and many parents believe that having a good education leads to future success. Parents and children face tremendous challenges during their educational journeys in Hong Kong; this often burdens the parent-child relationship and causes emotional stress to the family. In addition, parents’
micromanagement of millennials in the 21st Century may contribute to the growth of “Kong Kids” with low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence, and a low adversity quotient (Wong, 2009). “Monster parents” intensely involve themselves in their children’s life in all aspects, and as a result, the children tend to be over reliant on their parents, and a term describing them as having “prince/princess sickness” is widely used in Hong Kong (Global Voices, 2016). These children lack resilience when facing challenges.

Understanding how parental involvement has shaped children’s academic, social, and emotional development, and understanding the benefits and drawbacks associated with parental involvement for Hong Kong millennials, can be beneficial in formulating effective strategies to alleviate the combating force in the family due to the overbearing role of parents, thus improving the parent-child relationship. Bringing more balance to these relationships may indeed help students in Hong Kong develop other requisite skills beyond academic performance that are necessary for success long term, professionally and personally. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the experiences with parental involvement of university students from Hong Kong through in-depth narrative interviews, towards the end of informing educators and parents how the students could best be nurtured and supported during their entire educational journey.

**Justification for the research problem.** Research has shown that parental involvement has an effect on children’s academic development (Chen, 2005; Fingerman et al., 2016; Philipson & Philipson, 2010), students’ self-esteem (Ho, 2003), and their cognitive abilities (Philipson & Philipson, 2012). Studies on the experiences of students in regards to the extent of parental involvement in their educational process are lacking, however, and how students make sense of the ways in which their parents’ involvement has shaped their overall educational life is underexplored. Indeed, research has revealed that parents in Hong Kong overwhelmingly shift
the focus of their contributions to their children’s development primarily—and sometimes almost exclusively—to rigorous academic achievement at an early age, and they often ignore the implication this has for their children’s general emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Levine, 2012). Thus, examining the benefits and drawbacks of parental involvement from the perspectives of young students is critical.

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** While there are numerous studies on parental influences in elementary schools, secondary schools, and first year college students in relation to academic achievement, specific subjects or special needs, limited researchers have explored the experiences of more advanced undergraduate students (seniors particularly) in Hong Kong and their perceptions of how their parents have affected their academic development and overall personal development throughout their entire trajectory. This study will address that gap by interviewing graduating students to compile their feedback regarding their studies since childhood; this research will also provide important insights into parent-child differences regarding educational performance expectations and academic achievement (Hao & Bruns, 1998), the social and psychological impact of parental attachment (Maureen, K.E., & Gail, D.A., 1991), and student integration (Walker et al, 2005) in a broader spectrum.

**Relating the discussion to the audiences.** The goal of this research study was to gain a deeper insight into the influence of parental behavior on the academic, social, and emotional development of Hong Kong students. By examining Hong Kong students’ voices while they are studying in universities locally or overseas, scholars and practitioners can better understand the challenges they have overcome, the accomplishments they have made, and provide feedback for parents and prospective students. The Hong Kong Educational Bureau and educators would benefit from hearing the voices of the students and recognizing the significance of the issues of
persistent pressures from both schools and parents to not only excel academically but to perform in exceptional ways. Exploring home-school collaboration could help educators and parents alike to create strategies to help children grow—not only academically, but psychologically, socially and emotionally as well and in balance—so they may become confident and well-rounded adults and citizens. Understanding this conjoint relationship could have a significant, positive impact on children’s education and benefit them in the development of their behavioral, intellectual, and social skills. In parallel, the deans, faculty and administrators from overseas institutes can learn about the study paths of Hong Kong students in order to prepare and facilitate their studies and to enhance their chances to study and live positively, safely, and constructively in a foreign country during their adulthood.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Parental involvement in the education of millennials is far different from the generation of the Baby Boomers (born between 1945-1964) and Generation X (born between 1961-1984). The millennial children have parents who from both the Baby Boomers era and Generation X (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennial parents take the role of close monitors, are price and value oriented, and are top schools seekers. They expect high grades from their children as a way of validating their achievement (DeBard, 2004). They both push and micro-manage their children’s educational experience. This push can create stress on the children and on themselves. The degree of parental involvement has a direct impact on the child’s development and the perception parents hold of the “success” of their child. As Levine (2012) described, when parents are discussing their children, their conceptualization of success often revolves around academics, and “success at all costs” in this area profoundly shapes the frame of mind of the parents.
This phenomenon combines with social norms shaping the meaning of what constitutes success culturally and socially in Hong Kong, where long working hours and industrious attitudes are seen to be essential to the foundation of economic growth and prosperity and to the success of the nation. While parents thrive for success in their workplaces, they simultaneously exert strict academic demands on their children. Recent years have witnessed the intensity of these demands alongside an increase of suicides among school-age individuals and widespread prescribing of psychiatric medicine to youth for depression, anxiety, and other maladies. Attempted suicides by young people are higher than ever, coupled with the growth of substance abuse and mental and physical illnesses attributed to academic “failure” pressures from schools and parents, and family conflicts (Barrios et al., 2000; Furr et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2006; Mak, 2011; Robotham & Julian, 2006). These trends point to the broader significance of the study, which explores the impacts of parental involvement and academic development as perceived and self-articulated by students who have completed or nearly completed their tertiary education. Comprehensively, information from this study may be used to analyze and transform the ways in which parents shape the academic climate, bringing emphasis to factors that promote healthy mental and physical well-being. It may help health practitioners and parents in the community more deeply understand the importance for youth of holistic development, urging educators to pay attention to the need for transforming an educational system which has often been characterized by and criticized for an isolating focus on academic achievement only, with a lack of the development of creativity and critical thinking (Chan, 2007; Stapleton, 2011).
Research Questions

What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial university students during their educational journey and how do they make sense of how their parents shaped their academic, social and psychological development?

Positionality Statement

My area of research interest is in the learning experiences of Hong Kong millennials in relation to parental involvement. This study delves into my personal experience in child-rearing under the stringent educational system in Hong Kong, which stresses achievement and success. Parents play an important role in their children’s growth in Hong Kong and shape many aspects of their personalities, such as self-esteem and attitudes. However, I believe that parental involvement should take a more holistic approach that also attends to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and moral development of children. Parents’ perception of their children’s ability should not be determined only by their performances at school, which is often attributed to future success or failures. Parents are responsible for nourishing and nurturing the whole child; hence, my goal as a scholar-practitioner is to be an effective change agent who validates positive parental involvement in its holistic form and who mediates the relationship between parent and child.

Personal background. I was born and raised in Hong Kong. My generation is considered Generation X (Howe & Strauss, 2000), whereas my own child is of the millennial generation. I have gone through all the struggles and challenges of raising my child while she was studying in a local school in Hong Kong. In the last decade, her primary school was a near-to-elite school, and students were not stretched to attain the highest scores. Although they were not at the highest ranking, their academic and extracurricular performances were still of a high
standard. Parents and teachers made every endeavor to help students perform the best in all subjects, including sports and music, which in a way helped the school climb up the ranking ladder. After years of studious work and excellent performances, the school has now gained the fame of holding a high record of academic achievement and has a very low acceptance rate, making it very competitive. In retrospect, parents from this school paid huge attention to and put tremendous effort into assisting their children to achieve success in every aspect of their lives. Students in primary one were required to submit projects that were too complicated to complete on their own; thus, parents came to rescue and supported them to produce a high quality masterpiece. It was obvious that the master work was the collaborative effort of the parents and the children, which created a “competition” among students who were actually not the contestants, but the parents. This vicious cycle caused stress to both parents and children because the children’s assignments were multi-faceted, and the children had insufficient skills to learn. Sadly, because of the strong parental involvement, the students became less competent in carrying out tasks independently.

During the years of my education, I remembered my parents’ involvement was no more than paying my school fees and attending annual parent-teacher days. My father was a businessman, my mother was a home-maker. In those years, the variety of extra-curricular activities were not as abundant as today, and parents would never fill up their child’s schedules with the goal of increasing their capacity for learning. We were independent in managing our own schedules and study projects. Tutorials were available, but receiving tutoring was not a norm in the realm of education at that time. Parents’ expectations of their children were more realistic, and usually the students who aimed high and strived for excellence were self-driven instead of being pushed by the collective aspiration of parents. Parenting had never been an
issue in the society over the course of time that Generation X was attending school as it is for Millennials today.

**Professional background.** In my profession, I am an ex-banker turned counselor after my child was born. I see clients with emotional concerns from all walks of life. I have clients who are parents with parenting concerns and who feel stressed out because of their roles in the education of their children. They integrate their schedule with their child’s homework mandates and learning activities; their worries are multi-faceted and compound during different growth stages of their children. In terms of academic performance, they are reluctant to see their children’s scores below 90, some even aim at 100 in most subjects. Their children are usually studying at elite schools or top-ranking schools where the benchmarks are high, and if they are not performing satisfactorily, they are summoned by the principal and given a warning.

Hong Kong students have the habit of seeking out tutoring; consequently, tutoring centers and private tutors are in high demand. Once a child embarks on the study pilgrimage, their “learning” activities never end. Gradually, this has evolved into a norm where tutoring of Hong Kong students endures until they have finished secondary schools. The sought-after kindergartens take pride in training children capable of reading and writing when they are as young as two, and parents and society alike measure success by the placement of students in elite schools. Parents’ expectations of academic success in their children intensifies in early education, and many ways they become involved exert unnecessary pressures. Conversely, parents are content to sacrifice their children’s play time with drilling exercises and with helping them manage their assignments, with the goal of seeing their young children capable of reading and writing at early age. My parent clients often neglect the importance of other aspects of their children’s development such as social, emotional, and moral aspects while emphasizing
academic performance, which has burdened the relationship among the family members. They see their children successful only when they have performed the best in academics. As a result, they encounter emotional stress when their children rank low in the class and receive pressure from school.

Beliefs, biases, and opinions. I am a parent and served on the board of the Parent-Teacher Association during my daughter’s six years of primary school. I have hosted numerous educational talks and seminars for parents, and I have organized workshops and recreational activities for families to foster and improve parent-child relationships. I believe that there are positive ways to resolve the parent-child relationship under this highly pressurized educational situation in Hong Kong. However, I must be aware of my positionality as being a parent of a child who is only half-way educated under the local educational system. I cannot represent those parents who have placed their child under the local system from primary to tertiary education and who have struggled all the way up. Those who exit the local system have placements offered in either international schools or boarding schools overseas that provide an alternative educational system, which is highly sought-after by parents in order to alleviate the pressure from local schools, and to provide a more all-rounded education for their child.

I may also have bias regarding the belief of those parents who have successfully groomed their children through the pipeline to top colleges; they may have found the process promising albeit overwhelming. Briscoe (2005) suggested that we must not bias the interpretation of “others” as ideological positioning may be occurring. In this sphere, I must be aware of my interpretation of students’ perception of their parents’ involvement, which may be a positive attribute to their success in the area of academic achievement. As Takacs (2002) suggested, only by listing to “others” can we become aware of the constraints imposed by our identity and
experience. Therefore, I have adopted a narrative approach in my research to hear the authentic voices of the students, which will help unveil the impact of parental involvements on their academic, social and emotional developments, and which will allow me to explore and understand their stress management skills.

Theoretical Framework

There is consistent evidence of the educational benefits of involving parents in their child’s learning (Barnard, 2004; Christenson, 2004), and there are substantial research demonstrating that a relationship exists between parental involvement and achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004). While strong parental connection is necessary to help children build their identity and self-efficacy (Jeynes, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993), extensive parental attachment to the students can hinder children’s growth to maturity, independence and self-reliance (Gaymon, 2013; Klein & Pierce, 2009). Parental involvement can impact college student integration into the spheres of academic performance, social adjustment and emotional stability (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000), and parenting styles can exert significant influence on children’s adaptation to university life (Schwanz et al., 2014).

To enhance the understanding of parental involvements and make sense of the narratives of university students raised by Hong Kong parents living in the densely populated and competitive environment, this study will be informed by a combination of Baumrind’s parenting style theory and Brofenbrenner’s ecological system theory. These two approaches and their intersections will help the researcher to examine the problem of practice across levels of analysis, which are specific to the role of parenting and the influence this has on the academic, social, psychological and emotional environments supporting the development of children, adolescents and young adults in Hong Kong.
Baumrind’s Parenting Styles Theory (1967). According to Baumrind’s parenting styles model, she categorized three parenting styles based on two dimensions of parenting behavior: demandingness and responsiveness (Figure 1). Demandingness refers to the degree of control that parents exercise on their children’s behavior and the demand of level of submission; responsiveness refers to the extent of parents’ responses and attention to their children’s needs. Baumrind (1967) describes authoritative style as a rational approach of parenting and an ideal balance between responsiveness and demandingness while authoritarian parenting style is one in which the parent attempts to control, shape, and appraise the behavior and attitudes of the child according to their absolute standard. A solid relationship to parents and a healthy level of separation are predicative of positive academic and social adjustment to college (Mattanah, et al., 2004). Positive parental support promotes higher grade point averages, cognitive engagement, and academic persistent (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Kibaara & Ndirangu, 2014) while excessive parental involvements can have negative impact and be indicative of poor communication and relationship, which have been identified a higher risk factor for students’ poor academic outcome and emotional balance (Bell, et al in Fass 2002; Tam & Chan, 2010). Furthermore, parenting style is an influential factor that contributes to student’s academic achievement, social development and self-worth (Turner et al., 2009; Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Some consider authoritative parenting style to be the most positive and effective way to nurture the child (Merlin et. al., 2013; Larzelere et. al., 2013). A supportive and respective attitude that contains certain degree of authority can help a child to grow with independence and autonomy. There is an appropriate power and shared control so that a two-way stream of communication and close-knit relationship are enhanced. On the contrary, an authoritarian
parenting style does not allow room for autonomy, which inhibits the development of the child’s social skills and increases delinquent activity over the course of time (Allen, et al., 2002).

The permissive parenting style is nonetheless non-demanding and allowing the child to take the controlling role. They are in the high responsive realm, however, very low in demandingness, which means they do not set rules and are reluctant to enforce standards of conduct. These types of parents can be good friends of their children but lack the parental role of disciplinary enforcement. They are tolerant in accepting their child’s misbehavior and follow-through the demands of their child (Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). For the neglectful parenting style, which is also named as uninvolved parents, they are neither demanding nor responsive. They simply do not involve in their children’s lives. It is found that neglectful parents tend to have mental issues such as depression, physical abuse or experienced child abuse themselves (Kim, 2009).
Baumrind’s Three Parenting Styles Model

Figure 1. Baumrind’s Three Parenting Style Model

Source: http://www.positive-parenting-ally.com/3-parenting-styles.html
**Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979).** The environment and the society’s value have direct influence to parents who are recognized as the prime educators of their child (Buscemi et al., 1996), and they remain a strong influence throughout their child’s education journey. Parental involvements bridge two key contexts in children's development, the home and school settings. Within an ecological framework, the home and school contexts are characterized as autonomous microsystems; parent involvement is conceptualized as a mesosystem, which is made up of interactions between key microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), and the societal culture has the dominating influence to steer the education and family system towards the targeted direction.

Ecological Systems Theory explains the inherent qualities of a child and the influence of their development from the interaction of the environment and the people. The multiple environments, which is the ecological systems, depict the understanding of an individual’s development in the society. The theory comprises five levels of environmental systems that show how and who an individual interacts with, which buttresses the study of the relationship between the individual’s development within the community and the wider society. The five systems are classified as follows (Figure 2):

- **Microsystems** refers to institution that includes those immediately and directly related to the child’s development such as the family, school, religious institutions, neighborhood and peers.

- **Mesosystem** refers to the interconnections between the parties in the microsystems such as interactions between parents and teachers, and the relationship between the parents and the child’s peers.
- **Exosystem** refers to a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role with the individual's immediate contacts. For example, a child's experience at home may be influenced by his/her parent's job relocation, which might change the interactive behavior between the parents, and the parent and the child.

- **Macrosystem** refers to the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include the country’s political system, socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity. The macrosystem can bring a desirable or miserable life to the individual’s development such as living in the developed country versus a war-stricken country.

- **Chronosystem** refers to the environmental events and the transitions, and the social-historical circumstances over the course of life. Examples of transition is divorce that can bring in much negative effects on a child, and an example of socio-historical circumstances is the increase in opportunities for women to pursue a career in a patriarchal society since decades ago.
Figure 2. Bronfrenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Model.
Contemporary scholars and applications of the two theories. Baumrind (1960) conducted her famous childcare research by applying the two analytical measuring instruments of responsiveness and demandingness to formulate the three parenting styles. Many research studies have been conducted using her parenting styles models in which positive effects of authoritative parenting and relationship on school performance is studied (Chao, 2001). Parenting style and its correlates (Darling, 1999) of which understanding of immigrant Chinese and European Americans (Chao, 2000), Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training (Chao, 1994), conceptions of parental authority during adolescence (Smetana, 1995), and nurturance and discipline for optimal child development (Larzelere et al., 2013) are being examined. These empirical research studies focus on Baumrind’s parenting dimensions, and her theory has been widely employed on the study of child development and parenting.

The Ecological System Theory, published in 1979, has influenced many psychologists and researchers in analyzing human development and the changes related to different environments that an individual experience is enmeshed. This interconnected system gives rise to large body of research on the impact of the quality of early child care on children’s development, and the deeper understanding of the interplaying roles among care givers, parents, schools, and society (Marshall, 2004; Ashiabi, 2015; Chen & Agbenyega, 2012). It addresses the special needs group (Kirkbride, 2012; Algood et al., 2013), and how social issues like poverty impact on children’s emotional development (Eamon, 2001). It has also laid the foundation of current research on parental monitoring and knowledge – the effort to gain knowledge of the child’s behavior (Darling, 2007), and enhanced our understanding of the families and the stress experience that parents face in childhood development. Swick & Williams (2006) synthesized scholars’ recommendations on various ways to tackle stressors and improve family relationship
such as to develop a caring and loving relationship in the microsystems, to response to specific stressors in the mesosystems, and to advocate stronger family support strategies and policies in the macrosystem.

**Application of the tenet of the theories.** The aim of Baumrind’s study on parental behavior was to formulate and evaluate the effect of the Western parenting styles in the 1960’s, however, it is found to be still applicable in the postmodern era (Larzelere et al., 2013; Levin, 2011). The authoritarian parenting style manifests the forceful measures that parents impose on their child, being an important definitive of demanding parenting and reflective of societal norms and mindset of Hong Kong parents. This parenting style formulates into practices that many Hong Kong parents employ in keeping their child in place. In restricting the child’s autonomy, the high respect for parents and preservation of order are highly valued in Chinese culture.

The Ecological System Theory has explicitly cited the essential elements that influence the development of an individual from childhood through adulthood, and from the micro to macro ecological view of human development. The ecological framework facilitates the understanding of the interconnection of an individual and his/her environment, the transitional periods that the child move through, and the coping skills that he/she needs to acquire during different growing stages. The theory explores the notion of parental involvement with the child in the *microsystem*, for instance, parenting styles and practices, social support from schools and affiliations; reflects the relationship between the people in the *mesosystem*, such as parents and teachers; and illustrates the political, economical and cultural values of the society that have impacted the growth of the child in the *macrosystem*. These three systems play an intertwined role to the development of the child, and the elements of each system are necessary to develop my study of parental involvement in student’s education in Hong Kong.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Hong Kong is a dynamic city where the primary focus, whether in the workforce or in schools, is results-oriented. In the realm of education, Hong Kong is famous for its examination-dominated culture (Fok & Yu, 2014). Children are raised in the atmosphere of drilling, preparing and practicing for tests and examinations. The age when children are interviewed for entrance into school can be as young as 1½-years, especially if parents want their child to be accepted by the sought-after kindergartens where children are educated to attain the highest level of entering the elite primary schools. The children can start school as early as age 2 and graduate at age 21-22.

In about 20 years of education journeys, parents have played an indispensable role in raising their child at various growing stages, and our society has exerted far-reaching effect in shaping the values, beliefs and behavior of the children (Chen & French, 2008). The paradigm shift of parental involvement in the millennial generation has made a significant impact to the children and inherently to society’s future (Taub, 2008).

Wong (2009) has described children in Hong Kong as “Kong Kids”, in references to those born after 1990 who are challenged by the characteristics of three low’s: low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence, and low adversity quotient. He claims that parents are mostly the cause of the development of Kong Kids, in reaction to the declining birth rate over the past 30 years (HKSAR, 2017) and because parents treat them as princes and princesses of the family. Middle-class parents in Hong Kong are prone to providing their kids with material items and they ardently expect superior performance with homework and social activities. Moreover, they prioritize the importance of academic success more than social, emotional and moral development. Consequently, Kong Kids are deprived of the opportunities to develop coping
skills to deal with multitude of challenges and social competencies characteristic of the transition to adulthood.

Hong Kong youth are much more vulnerable today than in previous generations, and Hong Kong parents expect their children to excel at school as well as in multiple extracurricular activities. “The evidence all points to one cause underlying the different disturbances documented: pressure for high-octane achievement” (Luthar, 2013). Whether the involvement of parents constitutes an added value or a detriment to the developmental growth of Hong Kong children has been debated and, in part, academic success is pertinent to different parenting styles. Chinese parenting has often been described as “controlling” or “authoritarian” (Chao, 1994). The “drilling” concept leads to the total immersion of parental involvement in every aspect of their children’s life, including their education and overall development.

Hong Kong parents push and micromanage their child’s educational experience to the extent of often exerting excessive pressure and stress on the child as they strive to meet their parents’ expectations of high academic standards; and according to Wong (2009), these youth then become dependent young adults with low-problem solving abilities, less resilience, and low productivity, which affects the competitiveness of society. Therefore, it is important to understand what students today experience in their study journeys and the impact of the influence of their parents. Children are the foundation of our future society, and their character and behavior are nourished and shaped by their learning environments and by their parents.

This research focuses on the study of Hong Kong millennials who are undergraduates at a local university and some who have studied overseas; it examines how they perceive their parents’ involvements in their educational life journeys. It is important to listen to the authentic voices of the students who have gone through the hardship of struggling and striving for
placement in top notch schools since the earliest school age years who have sacrificed some aspects of their social and emotional development to meet exemplary academic requirements of their parents and the social standards for “success.” Understanding more deeply the advantages and disadvantages of parental involvement in children’s education could help identify ways to better support these students academically, socially and emotionally. In addition, it may assist in the development of coping strategies to reduce pressure from the demanding academic system in Hong Kong, the maintenance of good physical and mental health of the students and strengthening of bonding within the family relationships.

Following, an overview of parental involvement by exploring four areas will be provided: the impact of the pressing Hong Kong educational system on parent-child relationships; child development; parental involvement; and the millennial generation. Finally, the summation of the review in this study including the analysis and implications for future research will be presented.

**Hong Kong Educational System**

There is an interesting phenomenon in Hong Kong educational system that almost all schools, primary and secondary, would be classified as Band 1, Band 2, and Band 3. There used to be 5 Bands in the 80’s (Education Bureau, 2016). Although the banding system is not an official ranking categorized by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, the banding label has become an essential guideline to measure students’ academic performances. The Band 1 schools are the most prestigious schools where students and graduates would be the stardom as they have received the “best” education to be the top students in Hong Kong. Schools with long history and past record of high performances are regarded as Band 1 schools. Other schools start to build up their reputation and hope to climb up to a higher banding. As a result, the society forms a stereotypical image on the banding label of the school, which opens up opportunity for
educational organizations to publish reports on rankings, books about tips to enter Band 1 schools, classes or workshops to train students of kindergarten and primary schools the interviewing techniques and textbook knowledge. These have become the survival guide for the parents who target to enter Band 1 primary and secondary schools. Parents would quickly fill up their child’s schedules with all kind of tutorials and learning activities in order to equip them to be all rounded with multiple talents so that they have a higher chance of placement in Band 1 schools (HKPEP, 2016).

**Highly competitive education system.** There is a curriculum reform just few years old that requires every student to take only one public examination and the result determines if they can enter one of the eight universities in Hong Kong. The new system, Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) indicates that all students fight for the limited seats available in Universities whereas the old system allow students to take examinations in two consecutive years, and only those who have met the required standard are permitted to write the examination in the second year. Those who have failed in the first year’s examination could either sit for the examination again next year or leave school. Although the new system gives the opportunity for students to finish the entire six secondary years as the old one would be five if they fail the first year examination, students receive more pressure as there is only one chance to sit for the public examination and compete with more students. Therefore, their chance of getting a placement in universities is less than that of the old system. Students and parents may get overstrained or even be mentally or physically affected because if students do not get a good result, they may lose their chance to get into universities in Hong Kong. This system drives the parents to “train” their child to do exceptionally well academically in order to be accepted by the Band 1 schools, which almost have warranted the “passport to success” in entering universities
or top colleges overseas. However, and if their child cannot get in, they feel the sense of failure and even invalidate their child’s ability and talent. Studies show that parental involvement is positively related to their child’s academic achievement, and the types of involvement matter the most (Phillipson & Phillipson, 2010).

**Criticism of the education curriculum.** Hong Kong’s educational curriculum is often criticized for the lack of development of critical thinking, creativity and language proficiency (Chan, 2010). Critical thinking has been identified as one of the core generic skills in the curriculum reform of the Hong Kong educational system for the new millennium. It has also been stipulated as the essential constituent for the core subject Liberal Studies in the HKDSE curriculum (Tsang, 2010). However, as of today, the pedagogy still focuses vastly on memorization of facts and information or the model answers to particular issues without pushing students to think from a wider perspective and at a deeper level (Au, 2012). Teachers also need to receive proper and systematical training to develop critical thinking because they were raised in the rote learning educational system during the British colonization era. To shift from this type of critical thinking and analysis requires extensive training because it is a “self-regulatory judgment that results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanations of the considerations on which that judgment is based” (Abrame et al., 2008). In this context, local teachers are not well-trained themselves in teaching critical thinking skills. They learned in an educational system that did not focus on critical thinking development, and they pass this deficiency onto their students. Moreover, the density of the curriculum and tight schedule to finish the core subjects within the stipulated number of teaching hours forces teachers to focus primarily on delivering content knowledge without the time for cultivating critical thinking skills (Au, 2012). Hence, Hong Kong’s educational system is not providing a
dynamic, diversified, and creative environment for children’s learning. In this scenario, middle class parents would seek better educational opportunities, such as international schools, boarding schools or universities overseas.

**Emphasis of English proficiency.** Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city where East meets West. English is the second language and is taught even at nursery schools. English is emphasized in Hong Kong and all parents want their child to be able to speak good English, which represents an attainment of a high standard of education level. However, the English proficiency level of the students of age 17 and 18 has dropped to the fourth from the last place amongst the non-English speaking countries according to the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) results in 2012 (Au Young, 2013). Local schools do not put emphasis on reading and appreciation of reading of different genres, which affect students’ sensitivity to the usage of English language (Au Young, 2013). What many Hong Kong students lack is not so much communicative competence but rather communicative confidence because schools undermine confidence by focusing mainly on errors (Sewell, 2015). The current English curriculum places excessive emphasis on the linguistics of the language, encouraging students to drill for examination questions rather than working on the practical components of listening, writing, and reading. A sociolinguistics survey showed that only 6 percent of respondents speak English well and 1.5 percent have a native-like command of the language (Shone, Bolton and Luke, 2015). The report recommends that the government consider ways to improve oral English proficiency through the education system. Parents emphasize the importance of speaking good English in Hong Kong and have no hesitations in reserving resources to support their children in bringing their English to a high standard, particularly because they observe that not many local schools aim for this level of proficiency in English. Thus, parents habitually load their children
with extra English tutorials in the subjects of reading, writing, and listening, along with regular participation in publicly held debates and speech contests. In a sense, they are attempting to fill in the gaps left out of the Hong Kong educational model, which focuses more on formulaic learning and less on application.

The outstanding students who usually gain admission to the elite schools are provided rich resources and excellent teachers’ qualifications, and often achieve a much higher English standard. On the contrary, students who are studying at the schools which follow the mother-tongue (Cantonese) teaching policy have a big room for improvement. Practically, the family background also plays a key role. Middle class families are usually able to provide financial support for their children to learn English. However, children from less fortunate, grassroots families do not have this advantage and most schools, particularly those ranking Band 2 and 3, do not have the extra support to help improve the English skills of the students. Since elite schools are not the majority stakeholders in the society, the majority of Hong Kong students are studying in local schools where overall English language proficiency is below average (Li, 2011). Parents are consequently extremely concerned about the English competency of their children and willfully enroll them in rigorous English tutorials as a top priority on their schedule of learning programs. These extra tutorials have financially burdened the lower-income family households (Li, 2011). Parents who cannot afford to provide extra tutorials to raise their children’s English level may feel inferior thus creating another kind of stress in the family, and likely affecting their effectiveness in parenting in general. In this vein, children are stressed to achieve high academic performance at school; simultaneously, the constant and intense pressure from parents and extra tutorials leave them little room for other forms of social, intellectual, and emotional development (Bray, 2013).
The keen competition for placement in elite schools and universities have driven both parents and children in Hong Kong to aim at making academic achievement their primary life goal. Dissatisfaction of education system and recognition of the significance of English proficiency and confidence causes parents to supplement their children’s education with many other resources (Bray, 2013). Competitions begin even at pre-school level as the curriculum is designed to teach children early literacy and showcase their intelligence and talents in order to secure a place in the sought-after elite primary schools. Students who are perceived as low achievers in schools may create a greater stress level and sense of inferiority among the high achieving students, and our education system often give much appreciation and attention to the best students in classroom (Salili, Lai, & Leung, 2004). Psychologists in recent local news from South China Morning Post (SCMP, 2018) stated that parents need to encourage their children rather than simply blame them or force them to fulfill unrealistically high expectations and be vigilant to the rising mental pressure on young students that they cannot cope. In this circumstance, scholars and practitioners remain concerned about the stifling effects of the Hong Kong education system and parental involvements that have affected the wellbeing of the students, not to mention the lack of nurturing the creative and visionary mindset to the success and competencies of a global citizen of the 21st century (Karakas, 2009; Lee, 2012). Thus, it is worth exploring how parental involvement has contributed as crucial factor to child development at different stages of growth and different ages, particularly within the climate of the highly competitive and stressful educational system. The following section discusses child development and parental involvement more in depth.
Child Development

There are many factors impacting how parents are involved in their child’s educational life. Parents are the prime educators before their children attend schools (Buscemi et al., 1996). Parents exert strong influences throughout their children’s developmental stages. Research has established that promoting child development through parental training will optimize the development of a child (Sanders, 2008), and responsive parenting in each stage of child’s development can strengthen a child’s life and promote healthy development (Landry et al., 2001). Thus, it is essential to understand different stages of child development in the social, cognitive, emotional, and educational realms, and how parents play a major role in each stage of development.

Theories and strategies that seek to describe the notion of stages of human development include the entire lifespan. Erik Erikson (1959) proposed a theory of psychosocial development comprising eight stages from infancy to adulthood. He claimed that development occurs throughout the lifespan and emphasized the social and emotional aspects of growth. He put considerable emphasis on the adolescent stage as he believed it was a crucial stage for developing one’s identity. His stages of development involve the psychological needs of an individual (psycho) as well as the needs of the society (social). According to his theory, successful completion of each stage will result in the development of a healthy personality and the acquisition of basic virtues; failure to successfully complete a stage, meanwhile, may result in an unhealthy personality and deprivation of a sense of self. Erikson (1963) further assumed that a crisis occurs at each stage of development. The chart below depicts the psychosocial nature of the crises and the basic virtues that correspond to them.
The crisis that occurs at each stage of development needs to be resolved before the individual can ascend to the next stage. The individual’s maturity and needs of society help in the resolution of these crises. In light of this, parents and teachers play a powerful role in recognizing and responding to each stage (Need, 2008). Erikson’s theory stresses that the first four stages occur during early childhood, and during this time, an individual needs strong support from caregivers. The fifth and sixth stages relate to the period between adolescence and young adulthood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Psychosocial Crisis</th>
<th>Basic Virtue</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trust vs Mistrust</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Infancy (0-1 ½)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Autonomy vs Shame</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Early Childhood (1 ½-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Initiative vs Guilt</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Play Age (3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Industry vs Inferiority</td>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>School Age (5-12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ego Identity vs Role Confusion</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Adolescence (12-18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Intimacy vs Isolation</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Young Adult (19-40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Generativity vs Stagnation</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Adulthood (40-65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ego Integrity vs Despair</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Maturity (65+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development

Source: https://www.simplypsychology.org/Erik-Erikson.html

**Psychosocial stages.** According to Erikson (1963), success in these stages will lead to the development of the virtues of hope, will, purpose, competency, fidelity, love, care and wisdom. By developing the sense of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, and intimacy, caretakers of the child ascertain that they are a significant source of support. Failure to acquire the basic virtues will lead to the development of fear, anxiety, guilt, and loss of self-esteem (McLeod & Erikson, 2008).

Erikson claimed that in the infancy stage, if parents provide harsh or inconsistent care, the child will develop a sense of mistrust and will not have confidence in the world around him/her. Parents who provide reliability, care and affection in the infant stage will build the
virtue of trust in the child. In the early childhood stage, autonomy and independence are the core
caracters that a child will develop. Erikson stated that, in this stage, it is critical for parents to
allow their children to explore the limits of their abilities within an encouraging environment and
to experience failure instead of overprotecting them to avoid failure. A delicate balance is
required from the parent who must not criticize the child for failures, but rather nurture the child
to acquire self-control without a loss of self-esteem (Gross & Humphreys, 1992). In the play
stage, Erickson emphasizes that children will develop a sense of initiative and feel secure in their
abilities to lead if opportunity is given to them for planning activities and making decisions. On
the contrary, children may develop a sense of guilt if parents or teachers try to stop or overtake
their initiative, criticize or even punish them (McLeod & Erikson, 2008). During the school age
period, when children are encouraged and reinforced for their initiatives, they then begin to feel
industrious and confident in their abilities to achieve goals. Henceforth, the sense of pride in
children’s accomplishments can be developed (Stipek, 1983), and success in this stage will lead
to the virtue of competence. During the adolescence stage, teenagers will explore who they are as
individuals and seek to establish a sense of self through personal values, beliefs and goals.
Erikson (1963) suggests that failure to establish the sense of identity within the society will lead
to role confusion. It is salient for parents/educators to seek the importance of forming a strong
identity of the teenagers and help them develop a sense of efficacy and sense of direction in life
(Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Ryff, 1989). When teenagers transit to the intimacy stage, they have
grown to be young adults who explore relationships leading toward longer-term commitments
with someone other than a family member. And parents’ roles are to lead the young adults to
develop a sense of commitment, safety, and care within the relationship (McLeod & Erikson,
The way parents, caregivers, teachers, friends and neighbors who respond to children affects their future development. Parents who are prime educators of their children (Buscemi et al., 1996) can relate to Erikson’s theory about various stages of the life cycle and can tie together important psychosocial development across the lifespan. By failing to achieve the objective in each stage, imbalance and conflicts occur within the family. Children can become frustrated and lose confidence when they are given too much criticism, discouragement and demandingness. Feelings of incompetence and insecurity, and emotions of despair and shame will emerge (Need, H., 2008). Hong Kong parents tend to pay too much attention to children’s academic performance and often criticize their children for not getting high enough scores. The overemphasis on completion of homework and doing them correctly, and the lack of encouragement and appreciation may interrupt the healthy development of the children. Erikson’s developmental stages describe the importance of developing the child’s virtues in each stage, which provides a good framework for parents to get involved in their child’s growing trajectory.

Other prominent researchers, Eccles et al (1993) drew in more factors of influences of student’s learning from school environment. They developed the Stage Environmental Fit (SEF) theory that discusses what happens when there is a mismatch between the environment of learning and personal characteristic and competency, and what processes can contribute to continued motivation, interest and engagement. In the school context, the fit between student’s psychological needs, which make up personal characteristics, and the school environment plays a crucial role in student’s motivation for learning. They emphasize that it is important for educators to have the alertness and be flexible to change the system based on the needs of the students to ensure continued motivation, interest, and engagement (Eccles, 2004). They propose
that students are motivated and engaged when their psychological needs are satisfied within an academic organization. The constructs of the psychological needs are autonomy, competence and relatedness, and all three are interrelated and must be satisfied for optimal achievement (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015).

The SEF theory is a well-thought model for parents to apprehend that student’s motivation and engagement in learning are affected by the constructs of autonomy (freedom of choice), competency (the access of resources for high self-efficacy level), and relatedness (the individual’s relationship with others), of which they are all interrelated and facilitate academic achievement (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). Therefore, student’s learning capacity is affected by the match that develops between individual needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and school fit. This model forms the guideline for Hong Kong parents who seek success of their children by largely devoting time and attention to gaining knowledge of academic subjects but lack the in-depth understanding of the individual needs that SEF theorists posit, which navigate learning behaviors with the match of educational environment.

**Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement in children’s education can take on many forms, including playing and reading to a younger child at home, assisting with homework, and participating in school events, etc. There is consistent evidence of the educational benefits of involving parents in their child’s learning, and there is substantial research to demonstrate that a relationship exists between parental involvement and achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). While strong parental connection is necessary to help children to build their identity and self-efficacy, extensive parental attachment to the students can hinder their growth to maturity, independence and self-reliance (Gaymon, 2013).
Parental involvement is impacted by parents’ values and attitudes regarding education and the aspirations they hold for their children (Catsambis, 2001; Englund et al., 2004). Parents’ education background, parenting styles and attitudes are influential components in parental involvements.

**Parents’ aspirations.** There is evidence that parents’ aspirations for their children’s educational attainment has a strong relation to parental beliefs and social address variables (Wentzel, 1998; Spera et al., 2009). Parental beliefs refer to parents’ confidence in their children’s academic abilities, beliefs about their own ability to teach their children, beliefs about the nature of children’s intelligence, and values related to childrearing achievement. The social address variables are related to race, community, and child’s gender and age. It is likely that parental beliefs in their child’s academic abilities and their own ability to nurture them leads to higher expectations of children’s achievement. Parents’ sense of academic efficacy and aspirations for their children were linked to “their children’s scholastic achievement through their perceived academic capabilities and aspirations” (Bandura et al., 1996). And it is most predictive of non-Caucasian parents to have higher aspirations for their children’s educational achievement (Spera, et al., 2009).

In Hong Kong, research reveals that parents’ aspirations are one of the major sources of pressure to students. The Hong Kong Health Association of Hong Kong conducted a survey in late 2013 interviewing around 1500 secondary school students with more than half of the students stated that they were disturbed by their parents’ high expectation. And over 68% students admitted that their stress was from their parents’ scolding and complaining of their unsatisfactory result of test and examination (Oriental Daily, 2014). Yan (1999) suggests that families play a key role in students’ school success in four dimensions: parent-teen interactions,
parent-school interactions, parent-parent interactions and family norms. Parents should provide a warm, supportive home environment that supports exploration, self-directed, autonomous behavior that will greatly increase the chances of having an academically successful child (Sclafani 2004). Parents need to re-examine the notion of academic excellence as being the only measure of success, and to nurture their children through a broader and consistent way, adjusting for change, throughout their developmental stages.

**Educational background of parents.** Why do this generation of parents value so much on their children’s academic performance? One of the reasons is that these parents were born between 1960’s to 1970’s (Generation X) who went to secondary school in mid-1970s to mid-1980s, and many of them continued to pursue their education in universities. People growing up in 60’s and 70’s had less pressure on studying comparing with students nowadays. It was still light industry developing in Hong Kong during 1960-70, and the transformation to the knowledge-based economy (HKSAR, 2015) in part led to parents’ emphasis on academic achievement. During this time, in response to these trends, governmental and multi-national institutions were moving to embrace the concept of knowledge-based economic development with the purpose of bringing the production, creation, distribution, and application of knowledge and information into new arenas (HKSAR, 2017). The changing environment with this focus on emerging knowledge- based development and innovation further impacted parents and strengthened their desire and the intensity with which they worked to position their youth in a knowledge-based society; hence, the emphasis to equip their children well to achieve with proficiency and excellence academically was further intensified.

Most of the Generation X’s parents have gone to universities and obtained higher education degrees, their earning power is strong. They are regarded as middle-class parents who
rank education as top priority and would pay a high cost in the investment in their child’s education. They would mobilize their wealth and income to secure the best education for their children with a view to increase the chance of academic success (Devine, 2004). Bourdieu (2006) states that advanced groups use their education, linguistic competencies, dispositions and values to help their children do well in the school and beyond. Parents with high education expect their children to have great achievement in schools and promising future career. If they are in the professional field, they would assert that their children should also aim at being a professional in their future career. In this sphere, they enroll their child endlessly into all kinds of interests courses so that their profiles look outstanding. The idiomatic expression “win at the beginning of the race” is predominantly well versed in the education sphere of Hong Kong parents’ aspiration to their child.

However, this “winning” syndrome has affected the youth suicidal rate in Hong Kong. Between 2013 to 2016, 71 students took their lives; however, education officials refused to admit a direct link between education system and the suicides (SCMP, 2017). In October, 2017, there were 3 students with the youngest one at age 11 committed suicide within an hour leaving the notes of immense study pressure was the major contributing factor. Most secondary students spend the majority of their time in schools studying, and their life goal is to achieve a satisfactory school performance, and entering good university, which has become the norm of general expectation from their parents, school teachers, and society as a whole. Their self-worth and self-esteem are mainly affected by their academic performance. They are always being labeled as “useless” by their parents if they do not study hard enough to score high grades in examinations. Parents’ disappointment in their academic performance and examination anxiety are positively associated with depression and suicidal ideation (Mak, 2011).
**Parenting styles.** Baumrind (1991) defines parenting style as a consistent pattern between the interaction of a parent and their children in the notion of demandingness and responsiveness. Demandingness refers to parents’ efforts in supervision and discipline. Responsiveness refers to supportive parent that intentionally cultivates individuality, self-regulation and self-assertion.

In 2014, Hong Kong Playground Association organized a research on “Cultivation on Adolescents’ Characteristics”, the parenting styles are classified into four categories:

- High Affectionate, High Control
- Low Affectionate, High Control
- High Affectionate, Low Control
- Low Affectionate, Low Control

**Table 2. Fathers’ Parenting Attitude:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Affectionate &amp; High Control</th>
<th>Low Affectionate &amp; High Control</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Affectionate &amp; Low Control</th>
<th>Low Affectionate &amp; Low Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Mothers’ Parenting Attitude:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Affectionate &amp; High Control</th>
<th>Low Affectionate &amp; High Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Affectionate &amp; Low Control</th>
<th>Low Affectionate &amp; Low Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As indicated in the Table 2 and Table 3, Hong Kong parents (both fathers and mothers) are prone to adopt Low Affectionate & High Control parenting attitude to their children, which indicates that they have higher expectation and have more control on their children, but the degree of affection to their children is small. The study reveals that the character virtue of children being raised by this parenting style will have a poorer overall performance and lower sense of belongings to the community. The research also suggests that parents should nurture children’s character strength in order to minimize their chances of developing anxiety symptoms in the future as parenting styles would affect children’s anxiety levels.

Chinese parents embrace the belief of disciplines, “guan” and value filial piety. The concept of “guan”, which is sometimes referred to as behavioural and psychological control and is considered as less preferable parenting style in Western terms, would have a positive connotation in Chinese parenting because this would mean love, care, concern, and good discipline in Chinese (Ho, 2014). In other words, parental strictness, which has long been viewed as parental hostility, aggression, mistrust, dominance, or sometimes authoritarian parenting in the West, could be interpreted as parental involvement, concern, and care for Chinese culture because parents in this culture are expected to train their children to meet societal and familial expectations of success. (Ho, 2014)

The relationships between parental goals, parental beliefs, and parenting styles has received a great deal of attention in the literature examining Hong Kong Chinese parental involvement in child development. Results indicate that the Hong Kong Chinese parents, especially mothers who embraced guan and filial piety reported either an authoritarian or a psychologically controlling parenting style. The devoted mother forms an enmeshed relationship with the child and expects the filial child to ‘repay’ by following her views and wishes.
Naturally, the enmeshed relationships enable the mother to control the child by psychological means such as induction of guilt and withdrawal of love.” (Chan et al., 2009). However, children under the rearing of this authoritarian parenting styles would likely to have lower self-esteem, weaker social skills and higher chance of depression, albeit good academic performance (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993).

Parents have become more involved in child’s education nowadays than before. The paradigm shift of parenting rests on the ideas of controlling, demanding, power and hierarchy. There are literatures suggesting a relationship exists between parenting and academic achievement (Turner et al., 2009), and all parenting styles, whether authoritarian or authoritative, controlling or affectionate, impact college student integration through academic achievement, social performance and emotional adjustment (Winter & Yaffe, 2000). In this regard, the scope of the millennial generation will be examined in the following session.

The Millennials

The shift in parental involvement is highly correlated to the growth of the millennials’ generation. This generation is overprotected by their “monster” parents, the Chinese term of “helicopter” parents. The parent-child relationship in millennium is not the same as that of the Baby Boomer and Generation X. The older millennials may have become parents, and the younger millennials are at universities or graduating from colleges. They face different challenges as the paradigm shifts, and their attitudes and behaviors regarding education have significant implications particularly in Hong Kong context. They have choices of receiving education in Hong Kong as well as overseas, thus facing diversified challenges. Parents of millennials would also be confronted by complex societal challenges and the redefinition of
traditional norms and values (Nganga, 2014). Hence, by understanding the paradigm shifts, millennials’ life changes and needs, parental frame of reference would need to be re-examined.

Evolution from baby boomer, generation X, Y, Z to millennials. Millennials (born between 1980-2000) is usually referred to those who were born or growing up during the era of millennium, Generation Y (born between 1970-1990), and Z (born after 1990) come after Generation X (born between 1960-1980). Baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1964) were the generation born just after World War II. The millennial children have parents of both the Baby boomers and Generation X (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Each generation has its differences, personalities and beliefs. The millennials who were born after 1990s grew up in a world imbued with constantly changing technological advances and an extremely high level of the use of technology both personally, academically, and in employment situations. They are named as digital natives by the education consultant, Prensky (2001) who refers to the young generation as native speakers of the digital language of computer, videos, social media, web sites, etc. They are the generations to use computers in school, at home, mobile phones, music and movie downloads, instant photographs, and hundreds and thousands of instant text messages roaming 24/7. These tools have been shaping millennial’s daily living and learning behaviors. The Chief Investment Officer, Maisonneuve (2013) of Eastspring Investments (Singapore) Limited claimed that the incredible revolution of access of information, sharing of information and globalization of intelligence is one of the most remarkable developments in the past 30 years. It is a robust combination of bringing millennials and artificial intelligence together that have profound implications on generations to come. In the context of Hong Kong, millennials grow up with a packed and structured daily activities, namely, play-groups, language classes, and all sort of interest and recreational activities that can
fill up their weekend schedules tightly. They lack time and space for creativity or self-reliance.

As for the Boomers and Generation X’ers who are called the digital immigrants, their childhood and teenage development was not ever packed with the ideology of constant knowledge-seeking and skills-acquiring. In the 60’s of Hong Kong, the economy started to boom, and the living standard was rising steadily. Half of the population was under the age of 25, and the group of cohort became Hong Kong’s baby boom generation; primary and secondary education was not free, however, the school-age children attending primary school was almost 99.8% (Eh.Net, 2007). With regard to entertainment, the arrival of broadcast television was prevalent and became the most economical and primary family entertainment. In this era, cinema houses were scarce, thus, watching movie with parents was the family’s special occasion. Parents would award their children’s satisfactory examination results by taking them to watch a movie or drama in the theatre. The millennials todays have had the opportunities of traveling during their school breaks, and their award system nowadays was much of a luxury to the baby boomer generation.

In the western world, Baby Boomer Generation grew up in the era of Vietnam War/Cold War period (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Social injustice, radical protest, inner city riots were in the epidemic. The Boomers treasured education and sought to transform pressing social issues. While the Generation X’ers were perceived as the slacker generation compared to the Boomers (Howe & Strauss, 2000), they were exposed to high divorce rates, the rampant of AIDS, and the rise of mass media. In this connection, they were more critical and less tolerant to institution. In the last decade, they have been described as the helicopter parents. The parents who are always hovering, ultra-protective and unwilling to let go. If they feel that their children are not getting the best from schools, they will complain and fight for the benefit of their children. As such, a newer term has risen which is the stealth fighter parents. They are “even more protective,
digitally keyed-in for constant surveillance, sharp eyes on the target, and ready to strike at a moment’s notice to defend their children’s interests.” (Howe & Strauss, 2003).

The ongoing generational progression forms the characteristics of this new breed of parents. While Boomers advocate for change if not satisfied with the educational institutions, Generation X’ers would more likely to ask their children to change studying in other institutions that will meet up their expectation and aspiration (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Generation X’ers stress on fairness and good value, their perception of education of their children is an investment with expectation to receive the yield of return (Cox, 2016). From 2008 up to the present, the majority of parents of children in College are the Generation X’ers. Their behavior of parenting has a marked a significant effect on the children’s life in colleges/universities.

**Value and behavior of Hong Kong millennials.** The millennial generation (born between 1982 to 2003) is characterized by the social historians, Strauss & Howe (1991) as being protected by both parents and society, because they are driven to improve the world around them, by their virtue. They are educated to be global citizens who endeavor to make changes for a better world. The millennial generation has “seven distinguishing traits: special, sheltered, confident, team oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional” (Keeling, 2003). The development of these traits has intersected with shifting parental expectations and involvements in many aspects of the lives of millennials. Primarily, they are all under pressure to achieve good results at schools, to excel in extracurricular activities, to get into the good colleges, and in general, they all have highly involved parents who place a powerful emphasis on them ranking high in all of these areas.

Millennials were born in an era full of resources. There are wide choices of tools and materials for studying and learning, variety of visual and auditory stimulation, which make them
versatile and intelligent. They are the first generation to have computers in schools and are vastly shaped by advancement of information technology. They place high values priority on achievement alike their Boomers and Generation X’s parents. Millennials and Generation Xers endorse higher self-enhancement and lower self-transcendence value than the Baby Boomers (Lam, 2010).

Hong Kong is a relatively wealthy city and materials supply is never at deficit. As a matter of fact, over-emphasis on money and material is another concern for the adolescents. Research conducted by Shek & Pu (2016) shows that a significant proportion of 20% to 30% of youths have material orientations based on wealth, hedonism, and sensual stimulation and are in danger of using unethical means to achieve their wants. On the contrary, the majority of young people endorsed values in the areas of benevolence, universalism, tradition and conformity; they valued family, friendship, honesty, responsibility and peace of mind.

Nevertheless, Hong Kong millennials’ study lives are never described as “happy learning” in the present study and previous research (Goldbeck et al. 2007; Martin et al. 2008). There is a significant decrease in adolescent life satisfaction with their increasing age taking into account of the consequences of cognitive maturity. The gradual drop in life satisfaction can be understood in terms of the high study pressure in secondary school settings, and primary and kindergarten preparations. Hong Kong secondary school system is regarded as one of the highly achievement-segregated systems in the world, and entering the most prestigious secondary schools is highly valued by students and their parents (Marsh, Kong & Hau, 2000). The competitive climate and high expectation placed on these millennials would produce higher stress in them as study tasks become heavier when they move to secondary school years, which may affect their perception of quality of life.
**Overseas Educational Opportunities.** While their educational experiences in Hong Kong are filled up with the notion of continuous learning, studying diligently, aiming at good schools, good universities, they are trapped in a pressure cooker since kindergarten. They are born in an education system that emphasizes academic achievement and complemented by parents who deem those without a packed study and learning program a disadvantage in the society.

For those who have lost confidence in Hong Kong education system and do not want the intense pressure to add on the forthcoming 7-8 years when the child reaches the age of 13, middle class parents would consider sending their child overseas to study. Each year, many Hong Kong students would go abroad for secondary and tertiary education. In terms of practicality, students who study abroad can gain cross-cultural experience, become proficient in English language, have greater opportunities to enter top-notch schools, have better job opportunities, have bigger earning potential and higher standard of living in the future. According to the Thematic Household Survey Report No.46 (HKSAR, 2011), Table 4, the findings show a list of 15 pre-determined reasons for studying abroad.

*Table 4. Thematic Household Survey Report No. 46*

Persons aged 25 and below who were studying outside Hong Kong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for studying outside Hong Kong (multiple answers were allowed)</th>
<th>No. of persons (‘000)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To improve English proficiency</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn to be independent</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better learning atmosphere outside Hong Kong</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students outside Hong Kong will be provided with better job opportunities/prospects 14.5 19.4
Dissatisfied with local education system 13.5 18.0
To achieve a wider academic exposure 10.8 14.4
Less pressure 7.1 9.5
Unable to get admitted to local institutions 7.0 9.4
To improve Mandarin proficiency 5.4 7.3
Dissatisfied with local education reform 5.2 6.9
Others 17.4 23.2
Overall 75.0

Source: Thematic Household Survey Report No. 46, Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong. Table 3.2d, p.19.

The millennials who have the privileges to study abroad may have been highly protected by their parents since birth. They would have to learn to be independent and train themselves to deal with challenges and crisis. Overseas experience is a precious opportunity to both parents and child to learn to adapt to life changes. However, the child may face identity challenges when they change to dwell in a new country of different race, culture and history. “Identity development entails the active exploration and confirmation of individual’s moral, belief and aspiration” (Erikson, 1968 in Gaymon, 2013). Empirical evidence has shown that there is an important relationship between students’ sense of belonging, identity and self-efficacy (Gu, 2012). Samuolis, Layburn, and Schiaffina (2001) aptly suggest that attachment rather than separation from parents positively influence the development of an identity. It is pivotal that the
strong family connection forms solid foundation for the child to build his/her own individual identity when they start the overseas journey.

In addition to intercultural and independent growth experiences, millennials also face psychological issues as they are separated from their parents and live thousand miles away from home. By definition, study abroad students are faced with acculturative stress (Berry, 2005 in Savicki, 2013) by virtue of encountering differences in assumptions, values, and expectations of daily living in their host culture (Savicki, 2013). The study abroad experience can bring an influential impact to the millennial and engage them in reflexive process of change, adjustment and development. Research indicates that college students identify parents as the most influential people in their lives and would seek continuous support from them (Kolkhorst et al., 2010).

Different generations experience different and unique life experiences, social changes and education, which led to different value orientations (Lyons et al., 2007). Parenting style experienced by the Generation X’ers would not be the same they apply on their millennial children. The millennials are brought up in the high technology eras and their competency in education is being challenged. They have more choices from materialistic needs to basic education provision, however, they are also the group that have received the most pressure precedent to the previous generations, not to mention the generations after.

**Summation**

The intent of this literature review is to explore the lived experiences of Hong Kong millennials in the context of study pressure and the impacts of the parental involvements. The researcher of this study seeks to set the primary focus on the realm of education as it has the strongest impact to the students and parents in Hong Kong, and parents play a significant role in affecting the development of their academic, social and emotional life.
To study how parental involvements would affect the students’ overall development in Hong Kong, we should start with examining the concerns regarding local education system. Students in local schools are inundated with homework and examinations that they are deprived of space and time to play and relax at early childhood. This is worsened by the collaboration of parents who enroll their child to the multitude of tutorial classes and interest courses, pack their after-class and weekends with learning activities. This not only brings tremendous pressure to the child but also deteriorates the familial relationship and adds burden to the financial expense of the family.

Education is a lifelong journey that encompasses lots of challenges. Not only do the children learn to cope with them, but the parents have to face the multitude of uncertainties that embrace their children’s growth in the realm of education. The application process from kindergarten to tertiary education is daunting and exhaustive to Hong Kong parents especially if overseas study is incorporated in the plan. As parents strive for academic excellence, they will fully engage themselves in their children’s events ranging from academic oriented to recreational based activities. All sort of tutorials, coaches, skills, test and exam drilling centers have occupied a high market position in Hong Kong. Parents and the children are living in an exam/result-oriented environment where scores, rankings, and results are common topics between them. Creativity, innovation, and space for development is neglected. Both parents and children have experienced much emotional stress during the growing stages of the children. In addition, children who study abroad may experience cultural and identity challenges, which would intensify their emotional burden.

The studies cited in this review suggest that there is benefit of parental involvements in child’s learning and a positive relationship between parental involvement and achievement
(Harris & Goodhall, 2007), however, there is also evidence of parenting stress and perceived family function of Chinese parents in Hong Kong (Ma et al., 2011). The previous studies in this Literature Review have proven the high correlation of parental involvement in students’ academic, social and emotional lives, and findings suggest that strong bonding would give good emotional support. In a narrative study of first year students’ reflection of their perspectives of parents, the involvement of their parents are important and supportive to them (Gaymon, 2013), however, it also hinders the growth to maturity into adulthood and development of independence, which affects the social and psychological functioning of the child (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). In addition, the evolution of the millennial generations enhances parents’ immersion in their life and extension to the institution. Well protected students may not feel confident to communicate with the teaching and administration staff, and withdraw from engaging themselves to new environment, which may influence student’s decision of retention (Murphy, 2013). With this concern, parents exert their role of “helicopter” who are ready at any circumstances to rescue and protect for their children’s best interests.

Through the entire inquiry process of this literature review, I have gained an in-depth understanding of the role of parents with children studying in Hong Kong. The overarching study laid the foundation of the research question: What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students with their educational journey and how do they make sense of how their parents shaped their academic, social and psychological development? In other words, how much should they involve in order to bring a positive outcome to the growth of their children? And how do the students make sense of their parental involvements? In this sphere, this research study aims to explore the parental involvement in child’s academic journey under the pressing Hong Kong education system, to develop best coping strategy and to promote the parenting style
that would lead to the overall well-being of the child. Hence, their involvement would make meaning to their child as far as to academic performance, the social relation, and their self-worth. Thus, it is important to listen to the authentic voices of the students by adopting a narrative approach to interview the Hong Kong students studying at local and/or overseas universities in order to examine the impact of parental influences during their education pilgrimages. Given some of the historical and demographic backgrounds discussed previously, it is hoped that this research can shed light on Hong Kong parents who are preparing their children for primary to tertiary education, and the college administrators who help facilitate Hong Kong students to adapt to study in their institutions locally and overseas.
Impacts of Educational System and Parental Involvements to Hong Kong Millennial Students

Figure 3.
Impacts of educational system and parental involvements to Hong Kong millennial students
Chapter III: Research Design

Hong Kong is famous for its examination-dominated culture (Fok & Yu, 2014), and children are raised in the atmosphere of drilling, preparing and practicing for tests and examinations. From early childhood, Hong Kong students are encouraged to sacrifice recreational time for academic rigor. Parents of Hong Kong students take an active role in managing their children’s academic success. While well intentioned, some Hong Kong parents, the rising figure of “tiger moms” who highly control and manage their children’s lives, manifests in an authoritarian parenting style; thus, in many arenas, Hong Kong parents have gained the title of “monster parents.” who excessively emphasize the significance of academic achievement, which they claim is the main determinant of the “success” of their children.

The focus on academic achievement often comes at the expense of the child’s social and psychological development. Students’ overall physical and mental health development can be negatively impacted by extensive pressure to study which is derived in large part from school and family expectations (Equihua, 2010; Kitzrow, 2003; Payne, 2010). The suicide rate of adolescents in Hong Kong has increased in the past few years with suicidal notes indicating the cause is the high demands for academic performance from the school or the family, and study pressures (Mak, 2011).

The dual compression of schools and parents over stressing children and limiting their time for recreational space and freedom begins in early childhood. This has become a prevalent issue in Hong Kong where parents are anxious about student’s academic performances. Understanding how parental involvement has shaped children’s academic, social, and emotional development, and analyzing the extent to which these rigorous influences have made a positive or negative impact in reality on learning experiences, might help in alleviating the severe
pressure to study, thus improving the parent-child relationship. By changing parenting styles and by broadening the perspectives and definitions of “success”, students may indeed begin to be able to live more balanced and healthy physical, emotional, psychological, and social lives.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative analysis was to understand the lived experiences of millennial Hong Kong students who were studying universities in Hong Kong and/or overseas. Throughout the narration of their entire educational path, the goal was to better understand how parental involvement shaped young peoples’ academic, social, and psychological development; the researcher of this study attempted to identify the extent to which and how parental influences have positively or negatively impacted children’s learning experiences; and also attempted to articulate alternatives for parents to guide their child’s educational path in a more holistic way. The educational path has been defined as education from early childhood to higher education.

**Research Questions**

What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students with their educational journey and how do they make sense how their parents shaped their academic, social and psychological development?

**Research Paradigm**

The phenomenon of the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, which informs this study, draws from multiple disciplines and traditions, such as anthropology, history, hermeneutics, sociology, etc. (Merriam, 1991). It is not a static view of the world as compared to positivism and post-positivism. It assumes no objective knowledge. Outside of independent thinking, reality is viewed socially constructed. Since knowledge is subjective, contextualized and dependent, value is not derived from a single perspective but is rather co-created. Researchers
and participants are involved in a conversation/interview of exploration, and the analysis is a meaning making process. In light of this, process becomes the focus instead of outcome or products; the researcher seeks to answer how and what to formulate the meanings from within the data. With this paradigm, the researchers is closely involved in the interview, carefully chooses the participants, shares their own experiences, and understands what their worldviews are. The process of interviewing, observing, and analyzing is of paramount importance.

Explanations of the data are the responsibility of the researcher who does not attempt to find data to match the theory but rather to find a grounded theory that explains the data (Goetz and Lecompte, 1984, p. 4 in Merriam 1991). An interpretive approach is used to build abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories inductively instead of testing the hypotheses (Merriam, 1991). Contributions to knowledge are thus more of theory-generating instead of theory-testing.

The ontology of constructivists-interpretivists holds that there is no universal truth. The world is constructed with one’s experiences and influences from the context of situations, realities, and diversities. Ponterotto (2005) described this approach as having a “relativist position” given that multiple constructed verities exist. In this realm, the epistemological stance is dynamic where the relationship between researchers and participants is closely intertwined.

The researcher’s involvement in the research process is crucial. The axiology of this paradigm is idiographic, which focuses on understanding the individual uniqueness of a complex entity (Ponterotto, 2005). In this approach, the researcher does not isolate his or her experiences and values from the process; therefore, the rhetorical structure can be in the first person and is often personalized. No generalization is found; biases and values are bracketed but not eliminated. Emotional attachment is considerable, which stands in complete contrast to the positivism and post-positivism paradigms. Constructivism-interpretivism does not intend to test hypotheses;
rather, it builds concepts, and theories inductively. Consequently, in relation to this study, what are the common characteristics in students’ lives and how can parents influence their children positively are the questions that were in the researcher’s mind during the entire research process.

**Research Design**

The methodology of this study was qualitative and lived experiences of the participants were reflected upon. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the Hong Kong’s educational system and parental involvement in children’s academic development; to identify what the students’ stressors were; and to discover how they navigated and dealt with significant life challenges. Themes of investigation include the navigation of life, hopes, attitudes, achievements, success, expectations, and aspirations.

By using qualitative techniques, researchers may adopt a structured, semi-structured or unstructured interview protocol to collect data to understand the phenomenon of shared experiences, the perspectives of multiple stakeholders involved in the events, and the ideographic lived experiences of the individual participants, all in relation to the research problem. The why and how of decision making are examined, and the researcher can probe for further information, elaboration, and clarification of responses while maintaining a “feeling of openness” to the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2015, p.17). During the qualitative research process of this study, data collection was based on interviews, which included participants’ photos, the researcher’s notes, and her journals. Data analysis led to the interpretation of a more comprehensive meaning of the findings, themes, and descriptions of the commonalities of the experiences. The final report depicted the researcher’s reflexivity regarding the participants’ information drawn from a rich and complex picture. Instead of using statistics, texts were used to describe the central phenomenon under study, which included themes and categories to
represent the findings. When reflecting upon the analysis to the existing research problem and when drawing meaning from the findings, the significance of the problem was illustrated.

Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative research design often begins with assumptions and the use of theoretical frameworks to inform the study of the research problem and to address the meanings that the participants ascribe to social and human issues. It is a subjective approach that describes the lived experiences of an individual or groups through in-depth inquiry, and data collection and analysis, from which patterns and themes emerge. The voices of the participants and the reflexivity of the researcher unveil the problems embedded in the stories, which have the ability and inclination to be transformative. Denzin & Lincoln (2011) asserted that qualitative researchers study problems in their natural settings, and they attempt to make sense of or interpret the phenomena or the experiences that the participants share. Moreover, Creswell (2013) emphasized that, by use of naturalistic approaches to inquiry, distinct methodologies such as ethnography, grounded theory and narrative are often employed.

By use of qualitative design in this research study, the status of parental involvement in children’s education was examined, and the students’ perspectives of parental involvement and how they made sense of this involvement was fully explored. As Merriam (2009) suggested, qualitative researchers primarily seek to understand how people make sense of the world through their lived experiences. This study conveyed the socially constructed worldview of the participants that addressed the research problems, and many variables were explored.

Research Tradition

Narrative research is the study of the lived experiences of the informants in a “story telling” way. It is through inquiry that the story is told by the informant and retold by the researcher. The story is often captured in a chronological order, and data can be gathered in
various forms. Interviews are the primary form of data collection, while documents, journals, pictures, etc. can constitute secondary forms. Clandinin & Huber (2010) emphasized the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry that serve as a conceptual framework for the approach: *temporality, sociality, and place*, which distinguishes narrative inquiry from other methodologies. Drawing on philosophers such as Carr (1986), *temporality* refers to the quality of experiences through time; hence, narrative inquirers “need to attend the temporality of their own and participants’ lives, as well as to the temporality of places, things, events” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 4). *Sociality* refers to personal conditions such as “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions” (Casey et al., 2017, p.32). Social conditions, meanwhile, refer to a person’s experiences and events. *Place* is defined as the “specific, concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). In this research study, participants were asked to describe their life journeys from kindergarten to university in chronological order, which covered the wide spectrum of temporality, sociality and place.

forms of inquiry in the sense that it unearths the ambiguity, uncertainty, complexity, and dynamism of the individual while capturing the emotions, feelings, images, time, and place in the social representation process. Narrative analysis can record different viewpoints and interpret collected data to identify similarities and differences in experiences and actions. Although the social construct of human experiences has limitations that may affect objectivity of presentation, narrative inquiry provides a “holistic context that allows individuals to reflect and reconstruct their personal, historical and cultural experiences” (Gil, 2001, p. 5).

The goal of this research study was to examine the uniqueness of individuals’ lived situations in relation to the stringent education system and parental participation in their study journeys; thus, it was appropriate to apply a narrative approach to attempt to unearth the stories told and retold by the informants and the researcher, respectively. The researcher aimed to “restory” the stories into a framework that makes sense (Creswell, 2013), and by restorying the stories, a general framework consisting of the key elements of the story such as time, place, plot, and scene were analyzed and organized in a chronological sequence (Ollenreshaw & Creswell, 2002 in Creswell, 2013). This study attempted to delve deeply into the lives of the students from childhood through young adulthood, capturing the chronology of a life history that portrayed the young adult’s entire life through multiple episodes, private situations, or communal folklore (Denzin, 1989a in Creswell, 2013, p. 73). These personal reflections of events provided insights into the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story, which involved joy, predicaments, and struggles of the students during different growth stages. These reflective stories provided the chance for the muted voices of the students, who were rigorously striving to obtain placement in superior schools and to obtain excellent grades in the competitive and rigorous system, to be heard. Through the narrative study, the researcher explored the lived stories of the students who
had been nurtured under this uptight environment, combined with the parents’ and students’ own aspirations for education; it also documented how their academic, social and psychological development had been shaped. The narrative approach elicits the past, present, and future ideas of the three-dimensional inquiry spaces that exhibit personal and social interactions, the continuity of a stretch of time, and the place of the situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 in Creswell, 2013). The researcher’s narrative inquiry of this study has been crafted from within the dimensions of temporality (past, present and future), sociality (the personal and social conditions), and the place (sequence of place of schools locally and/or overseas).

**Participants**

The population for this study was comprised of senior and just graduated college students studying in Hong Kong and overseas. This study recruited six participants, three from Hong Kong and three from universities in the Unites States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. They were all Chinese students who were raised in Hong Kong, they were between 20-24 years old, and they had undergone education in local primary schools and mid-way or all the way through secondary schools in Hong Kong. Given that they were graduating or just graduated students, they could still freshly reflect on the entire academic journeys in relation to their parents’ involvement and the education system that influenced their development. For overseas students, the researcher posited that the level of parental involvement might have been different than in the local setting; this led to selecting students from both the local and overseas contexts.

Creswell (2015, p. 204) noted that, in qualitative research, the intent is not to generalize to a population but rather to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon; therefore, to best understand the phenomenon, the researcher purposively selected the individuals or sites that could help develop a detailed understanding of the phenomenon and its context. Purposive
sampling can provide useful information that best describes the phenomenon and that also gives voice to “silenced” people. This is in contrast to quantitative random sampling where generalization from individuals to a population is observed. Creswell (2015) further suggested that qualitative research methods are capable of gathering multiple perspectives from different individuals which means the complexity of the phenomenon can be represented in the data collection, analysis, and presentation of results. Thus, by way of building that complexity into the research when sampling participants or sites, the maximum variation sampling is the most popular one employed. It consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the participants or sites, then selecting those participants or sites embodying the differences of characteristics or traits. In this study, the participants were students who had undergone the same educational system in Hong Kong, facing intensive study pressure as a crucial characteristic, and who also experienced a close-to authoritarian parenting style as the primary propelling force that aggravated the pressure. By using the maximum variation sampling strategy, six college students were selected from different universities in Hong Kong and overseas to maximize the different variations as well as to reflect various perspectives.

A small sample size is selected when using the maximum variation sampling technique. Plummer (1983) in Creswell (2013) recommended two sources of individuals to study, and Gergen (1994) in Creswell (2013) suggested that narrative does not represent a product of an individual, but a rather a “facet of relationships” that constructs part of the culture and that reveals social roles. Thus, a sizable amount of data can reflect the details of the stories sufficiently to identify salient similarities (Smith et al., 2009). As purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method, researchers select the participants at their own discretion and believe that the selected participants with diverse characteristics can represent the larger
population. The limitation of this sampling strategy can be attributed to the nature of the representative sample, which relies solely on the researcher’s judgement to represent the maximum variability within the primary data. As Dudovskiy (2016) suggested, the researcher’s subjective judgement is vulnerable to errors, reliability problems, personal bias, and an inability to generalize research findings. This research study was subjected to an analysis of the researcher’s subjective bias regarding the study pressure students faced, which was aggravated by the school’s high academic requirements and reinforced by the parents’ high aspirations for their children’s academic and future success.

**Recruitment and Access**

Participants were recruited through the researcher’s network, which included clients, parents, teachers and educators. Through initial contacts, participants who met the criteria and who consented to be interviewed were sent an invitation email detailing the research objective, meeting venue, and duration of the encounter (Appendix A). This was followed-up by a telephone conversation (Appendix C) to state the research purpose again, to verbally answer any questions the participants had, and to confirm the meeting date and time. Interviews took place in a small conference room at either the business center or the community center; and one was conducted in a coffee shop, which were all the preferred choices of the participants. The researcher explained the purpose of the research, ethical considerations, and the protocol for the protection of human subjects as stated in the consent form distributed at the beginning of the first meeting, when it was read and signed (Appendix B). As an incentive for participating in this research, student participants were offered the equivalent of U.S $25 in Starbucks coupons for attending all sessions of the interviews, which were held in two sessions. Each session lasted
about 60 to 90 minutes; follow-up sessions or conversations for clarification or elaboration were requested when necessary.

Ethical considerations establish important guidelines for social science research, and Bryman & Bell (2015) cited ten principles of ethical guidelines for researchers to follow. They are as follows: research participants should not be subjected to harm; respect for the dignity of research participants should be prioritized; full consent should be obtained from the participants prior to the study; protection of the privacy of research participants should be ensured; an adequate level of confidentiality of the research data should be ensured; confidentiality of participating individuals and organizations has to be ensured; any deception or exaggeration about the aims and objectives of the research must be avoided; affiliations in any form or sources of funding that may present conflicts of interest have to be declared; any type of communication in relation to the research should be done with honesty and transparency; and any type of misleading information as well as biased representation of primary data findings must be avoided. Other aspects such as the importance of voluntary participation, the use of non-offensive, non-discriminatory, and acceptable language, and acknowledgement of works of other scholars in accordance with the APA referencing system, were strictly followed. These guidelines were completely employed by the researcher during the interviews in this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Diener & Crandall (1978) listed four ethical principles to consider in the area of protection of human subjects. The four principles to avoid included: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. In this study, there was neither real nor potential harm, no risk of physical harm, and no possible harm to the participants’ personal and future development. Participants had the absolute right and choice to freely express their own
personal lived experiences; they were advised they could stop the interview or participation in general at any time they wished. There were no direct or indirect risks to the participants. Ethical guidelines for this study were strictly followed; participants were involved voluntarily with the option to withdraw; and their identities were kept confidential. An informed consent form was obtained from each participant; the form signed outlined the ethical considerations, and each item was explained to the participant to ensure full understanding of what his/her involvement was likely to entail. The form was required to be signed by both the participant and the researcher. In this research study, pseudonyms for the participants were used; permission for audio recordings of the interview were obtained from the participants. The objective of this study did not, in any case, give the researcher the right to intrude the participant’s privacy nor to disrespect the value of an individual. There were no occurrences of deception in this research as the study focused on exploration of the lived experience of the students, and the results derived from their stories were analyzed to inform the realm of education and possibly parenting endeavors.

All research documents related to the recruitment phase of this research, including informed consent forms, invitation emails, interview protocols, Institutional Review Board (IRB) application form (attached) were submitted for IRB approval. The primary purpose of IRB is to protect the rights and welfare of the human subjects, and the committee meticulously reviewed the methodology proposed to safeguard the ethical conduct of researcher and the protection of the humans participating as subjects in the research study. No interviews took place prior to the completion of the approval from the IRB.
Data Collection

Qualitative research is often conducted through interviews in which the words, sounds, feelings, emotions, colors and other elements that are non-quantifiable form the primary data to be collected (Dudovskiy, 2016). In this study, two interviews of each participant were conducted; the first interview (60 to 90 minutes) aimed to acquire background information and to obtain informed consent. Questions related to the participants’ educational journeys in primary school and beyond were also asked. The second interview (60 to 90 minutes) focused on inquiring about the participants’ experiences in secondary school and college, their views on education, and their aspirations for their future children’s education. As Creswell (2013) suggested, open-ended questions provide an ideal setting for themes to emerge; therefore, participants in this study were asked to share their life stories by responding to a series of open-ended semi or unstructured questions. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) stressed that semi-structured questions allow rapport to build, and help catalyze in-depth, personal discussions. On the other hand, unstructured questions are open-ended but formulated on the spot based on the interviewee’s responses. A comfortable environment is created to engage the participant, and insights are simultaneously gained through the observation of the participant’s behaviors, activities, and actions (Merriam, 2009).

In narrative research, Chase (2011) suggested that data in the form of journals, memo notes, one’s own observations, letter writing, autobiographical writing, relevant documents, newsletters, and pictures can be collected in addition to the interview transcripts. Connelly & Clandinin (2006) shared that video recording could be employed, and field notes should be taken while recording, given the participant’s consent is obtained. Fetterman (2010) expressed that the researcher should be aware of the participant’s general culture, environment, and immediate
context; the researcher must also ensure that confidentiality, credibility, and trustworthiness are observed fully with the participant. For this narrative approach study, since the student participants were reflecting on their experiences from childhood to adulthood, the researcher’s extensive knowledge of and familiarity with the student participant’s culture, environment, and personhood indeed provided them sense of security and engaged them to become more open, thus allowing the fluidity of the interviewing process to be unleashed. Interview questions (Appendix D and E) were asked openly, and student participants were allowed to freely express themselves without interruption to bring forth their stories. Tape recordings were taken with participants’ permission. Notes were taken during the interview, and a journal entry was written after each interview to summarize any thoughts and perceptions the researcher had about the participants and the interviewing process. Noack & Schmidt (2013) further suggested identifying initial categories based on preliminary considerations about how the psychological concept of id-ego-superego relations could possibly be qualified. In light of this, participants’ emotions and peculiarity, if any, that occurred during the meeting were observed and recorded.

Data Storage

The recordings of the interviews were saved on the researcher’s electronic recording device, password protected. The transcript of the recording, researcher’s notes, and any related documents were kept inside a fireproof filing cabinet under key lock in the researcher’s office. The tape recordings will be erased and all the other paper documents will be disposed of in the shredding machine after completion of the study. No one had access to the data except the researcher of this study.
Data Analysis

Narrative research does not have a standard set of procedures to analyze the data, which makes it challenging for novice researchers. Nevertheless, there are several analytic strategies available for use. Polkinghorne (1995) applied the method of chronological organization or diachronic organization in which a story is narrated from the beginning, to the middle and to the end. The relationship between the narrator and participant embodies the historical chronological organization of events. In this research study, the student participants’ experiences were segmented into three stages: early childhood through primary school, secondary school, and college lives. This sequence depicted the complete story of the growth stages of the participants in chronological order.

The qualitative approach seeks to gain a thorough understanding of the particular phenomenon or events happening to the participants; thus, an in-depth interview is essential to facilitate the study of the reasons and rhythms that govern human behavior. Labov’s (1972) thematic organization or synchronic organization approach utilizes an “evaluation model” that organizes the data into an abstract (what), an orientation (who, what, when and where), a complication (what happened then), an evaluation (so what), a result (what happened finally), and a coda (the finished narrative). Multiple or recurring elements may exist within a single narrative. Alasuutari (2010) stressed that qualitative research carries with it the mission of the study of the “social body;” hence, the why and how of decision making in addition to the what, when, where, who, and how are examined. The narrative analysis of the lived stories of the students in this research study covered all these aspects of studies in the discipline of the social sciences.
Bruner’s (1991) functional approach focuses on how individuals construct and make sense of the reality in which meanings are created. It is functional in the sense that the analysis is geared towards making sense of the life of the participant. The emphasis is on the interpretations of events by the researcher who retells the story and remains neutral to the interpretation. This approach is similar to the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach in the way that interpretation is involved and meaning making is shared. In this vein, a semi-structured interview in this research study allowed the researcher to work on unveiling the truth and interpreting the meaning of the lived experiences of the college students, while making sense of parental involvement in their life journeys.

Gee’s (1991) structural analysis emphasized the structural aspects of speech of the speaker i.e. the language uses, the pauses in speech, the verse, and the telling of the story. The stanzas between the dialogue are analyzed and connected to each piece of conversation. In this approach, the interaction between the speaker and listener is pivotal to conveying the message to allow an exploration of the experiences in detail. In addition, Gubrium & Holstein (2009) suggested that the ethnographic form of narrative features of the structure and meaning of texts should not be comprehended separately from everyday contexts. In this vein, the data for this research study was comprised of researcher’s interview transcripts, notes, and personal journals; these served as the primary text from which the life events were analyzed in everyday context. Creswell (2013) emphasized that the presentation of narration should focus on processes, theories, and unique and general features of the life of the participant.

**Trustworthiness**

Chenail (1995) cited that data should be arranged with an eye for storytelling in narrative logic, and researchers should plot out the data in a transitional fashion to relate the particulars
and the details of the story. He further recommended ways to present the findings that encompass the following concepts: openness, data as star, juxtaposition, and data presentation strategies. These concepts establish the indispensable elements of trustworthiness, credibility, and validity that a research design relies heavily on (Creswell, 2009).

In the spirit of openness, building trust between the researcher and the community of readers or critics is of paramount importance given that it will affect the value and quality of the research. This openness allows the readers to judge the validity of researcher’s effort instead of simply being told that validity and reliability exist in the study. Given that data is perhaps the core component of the entire research endeavor, Hooper (1986) suggested that the researcher select exemplary pieces of talk for commentary and review so that readers can get a sense of the flow and see the data in a natural setting. By following this step, readers can obtain a better perspective to judge the trustworthiness of the researcher’s claims in relation to the data and the data analysis. Juxtaposition is the process of choosing the data excerpts from the dialogue, and the researcher needs to be able to juxtapose the data well with the description, explanations, analysis and commentaries and not overstate or understate them. In data presentation strategies, Constas (1992) suggested using a journalistic style, presenting the most important findings first, and relating minor discoveries last.

In this study, trust was established during the first meeting, and participants were voluntarily involved in the research; this created genuine data and maintained a high quality of the data and the analysis. When applying juxtaposition in the extraction of the data from the dialogue, it is essential to not to overstate or understate the meaning of the life events that participants shared.
Credibility and Validity

Lincoln & Guba (1985) proposed the most commonly used criteria to assess the rigor of qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. They described key measures to maintain credibility of the research process, particularly member checking in which researchers share the transcripts with the participants and allow them to either correct them, delete information, or amend the text. By way of doing this, member checking both guards against researcher’s bias and subjective interpretation, and it also bolsters accuracy. By corroborating evidence from the participants, it has the most comprehensive evidence to support the theme. Other measures such as prolonged engagement and persistent observation are also suggested to bring credibility to a qualitative research study (Cope, 2014). In this study, member checking was employed to safeguard the credibility and validity of the data, and participants were given opportunity to add or delete any information. The participants in this study did not have further comments during this process.

LeCompte & Goetz (1982) illustrated several perspectives on validation in relation to qualitative research: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity; each of these, if not properly adhered to, can obstruct or reduce a study’s comparability or translatability (p. 51). Creswell (2015), meanwhile, cited two primary threats for researchers to consider: threats to internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the validity of inferences drawn about the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables while external validity refers to the validity of the cause-and-effect relationship being generalizable to other persons, settings, treatment variables and measures (p.304). Qualitative researchers should take extraneous precaution to minimize the potential threats to internal validity. Creswell (2015) sorted the threats into three categories: threats related to participants, threats related to treatment,
and threats related to procedures. Threats related to participants in the study and their experiences included history, maturation, regression, selection, mortality, and interactions with selection. In this research, the selection of participants contained “people factors,” which could have potentially introduced threats that influenced the outcomes. For instance, the parents of the participants might have influenced their child to withdraw during the study, which would add an additional threat to the robustness and outcomes of the study. Although this scenario did not occur during this study, indeed, one participant needed to seek the approval of his parents to participate in the research. Another participant was concerned that her parent might stop her from participating at any point in the interviews and data collection process, which might have affected the content of her interviews, and thus the results. Other threats involving treatments include diffusion of treatments, compensatory equalization, compensation rivalry, resentful demoralization; those related to procedures are testing and instrumentation. These are more applicable to a larger sampler or to experimental and control groups receiving treatments after the experiments are conducted, which are not applicable to this study.

Transferability, or carrying out a rich enough qualitative study that it may make sense in and provides lessons for other contexts, is akin to generalizability in quantitative and positivist qualitative research. In a constructivist-interpretivist study like this one that aimed to capture and present the lived experiences of the participants, a modicum of transferability can be obtained when the researcher strives to provide sufficient descriptive data to make a transfer of data possible. Suter (2012) advocated for the practice of thick descriptions to enable other researchers or practitioners to make judgements about the appropriateness of the findings applied to other contexts. Thick descriptions involve data that is detailed and well documented—such as the criteria used for selecting the participants, participant interviews, field observations, analytic
memos, and the researcher’s reflexive journals. They can provide context and meaning to the observed behavior. The researcher in this study was thorough in the area of thick description and rich contextualization, in which the criteria of selecting the student participants was documented. Before confirmation of the recruitment, the researcher asked the potential participants to rate their parents according to (a) the levels of involvement in the aspects of homework tutoring, extra-curricular activities, and social life; (b) parenting style; and (c) expectations of their academic success on a five-point scale, with point 1 as “unlikely,” point 3 as “neutral” and point 5 as “extremely likely.” Demographic questions such as student’s race, birthplace, types of primary and secondary schools, local or overseas were asked. After both the first and second interviews, the researcher wrote a reflexive journal and addressed the interview questions in the protocols.

Limitations

The research study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Hong Kong millennials who have endured the stringent local educational system and the influence of parental involvement on their academic development. The research objective may have been formulated too broadly; further narrowing the focus of study could facilitate delving more deeply into the phenomenon. In addition, not including a gender analysis limits the study to some extent because parental involvement or parenting styles may be starkly different for male and female children; additionally, the differences between parental involvement when a student was attending a local university and when they were overseas were not disaggregated in detail.

The primary data collection method was individual interviews; in addition, potential participants were asked to rate the level of parental involvements they had experienced with respect to academic performance, social life, and parents expectations—before the onset of data
collection process. This simple quantitative data collection questionnaire could aptly be modified to include additional questions and be adopted as a tool to collect and thus integrate the data collected throughout the interviews, using mixed methods. The extent of pressure students received would then be revealed and assessed before the interview, more thoroughly quantitatively, and the scope and depth of discussions could be expanded during interviews.

**Transferability and Future Study**

In terms of transferability, the findings could be shared to spark interest in future studies of students who have experienced an academically-driven educational system and controlling parenting styles in Asian countries such as China and South Korea. This research also lends itself well to the use of the case study approach, which involves the perspectives of multiple stakeholders who describe the phenomenon from their vantage points. It might also be useful to conduct an IPA study to explore Hong Kong parental involvement during a specific time period, for example during testing/examinations, or when children are taught multiple tasks or lessons in the period of early childhood.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Hong Kong millennial students with respect to how they make sense of their parental involvement particularly in their academic trajectories. The problem of practice of this study addressed how the high degree of involvement and micromanagement of the parents may exert a negative effect on the overall development of the child. The emphasis on academic achievement by both schools and parents often contributed to tension in the family and to extreme stress for the students. This study is significant to educators and parents who often relate the success of the child to academic achievement, but who simultaneously fail to nurture the psyche and skills that young people need when facing challenges. Apart from academic achievement, social and emotional development are of paramount importance to the child.

The participants in this study shared their individual stories from childhood to adulthood and provided significant information of their accounts with parents and schools. All six of the participants, aged 20 to 24, had attended primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Three of the six had just graduated from different universities in Hong Kong, while the other three were in their senior years at overseas universities at the time of the study. The participants represented a diverse range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds with different levels of parental involvement at different stages and in different areas.

This chapter provides a narrative description of data findings in relation to the lived experiences of the students regarding how they made sense of the ways in which their parents shaped their academic journeys. In view of the perspectives of the six students, strong pressure to study from education systems, and the roles of the parents in shaping the holistic development of their children, were analyzed. The analysis of the data brought forth three superordinate
themes and seven subthemes. The superordinate and subthemes are Theme (1): *Parents took responsibility for their children’s needs* had the subthemes of (a) *Parental support in financial and emotional needs*, (b) *Area and level of parental involvement continued throughout the educational stages*, and (c) *Students possessed a strong sense of responsibility in studying*.

Theme (2): *Parents held high aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievements* was joined with the subthemes of (a) *The impact of parents’ educational levels*, and (b) *The power dynamics between parents and children, and between authorities and students*. Theme (3): *Academic development of the students was a priority* combined with the subthemes of (a) *Students’ motivation to study*, (b) *High academic requirements from schools and parents*.

Table 5: Superordinate Themes and Subthemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Parents took responsibility for their children’s needs</td>
<td>a) Parental support in financial and emotional needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Area and level of parental involvement continued throughout the educational stages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Students possessed a strong sense of responsibility in studying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Parents held high aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievements</td>
<td>a) The impact of parents’ educational levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) The power dynamics between parents and children, and between authorities and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Academic development of the students was a priority</td>
<td>a) Students’ motivation to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) High academic requirements from schools and parents</td>
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Descriptions of the Participants

**Eliza.** During her childhood, Eliza was an active girl, quite articulate, and full of energy. Her mother was a nurse, but her father’s job was unstable, and his education extended only to lower secondary. Thus, her mother provided the primary income for the family. Eliza had a younger brother, two years younger than her. During her kindergarten years, she lived with her grandparents until she got into primary school, then her parents brought her back home to take care of her. It is not uncommon in Hong Kong that when a child is young that they are taken care of by and live with their grandparents until they attend primary school, due to the full-time work schedules of both parents.

From the time Eliza attended primary school, she was placed in a tutorial center run by a couple who taught all children all subjects. They were very strict and punitive. Children that did not do well academically and that were not well behaved would be spanked by hands or caned with a rattan stick. Eliza’s school was half a day, so after school, she went to the tutorial center for lunch and stayed there until her mother picked her up at 7 p.m. She was sent there Monday through Friday afternoons for five hours straight without a break for finishing homework, doing supplementary exercises, and practicing for test/examination papers. After dinner at home, she needed to practice piano. She had bad conduct in primary school such as stealing things from classmates and getting into fights.

I was stuck there from 2pm to 6pm. At that age, you only wanted to play after School. They wouldn’t even let us get any rest. They kept us working, [and] if we didn’t behave well, we would be beaten. I attended this tutorial center from Primary 3 to 6, which drove me crazy. I didn’t want to do the supplementary exercises, I didn’t want to go to school . . . I hated school . . . I ended up skipping classes, getting into
fights and even stealing things from classmates.

Eliza’s acting out and her dislike of school appeared to be connected to the stressors for performance imposed by both her mother and the tutorial center.

She described her mother as controlling, demanding, criticizing, and instructional. Her mother would lose her temper at times, throw things at her, and spank her when she was not behaving well. She explained:

My mom was super strict and demanding. She disciplined me constantly and criticized on everything I did. She commanded me to follow her ways and always got in my way. If I ignored her and closed the door of my room, she would keep knocking and knocking like a zombie. She could keep scolding me for an hour . . . it was unbearable! Sometimes I [beatings] rather than being scolded as the process was shorter. Not sure why she was acting like this to me . . . So extreme, so insane!

In secondary school, Eliza said that her academic performance was not great, and, thus, more tutoring was needed. Eliza perceived that her mother was even stricter and always wanted to know where she went when she was not attending school; her mother restricted her from going out on the weekends and from going out on her own. When her mother was off work on weekends, she wanted Eliza to stay with her so that she was under scrutiny, and she only allowed her to go out to go to church with her on Sunday. Further, her mother was very religious, only wanting Eliza to participate in church activities and school activities, and only allowing her to hang out with church friends. This was what Eliza experienced during the entire time she attended secondary school. Eliza was not that submissive; rather than obeying her mother, she would hang out with the friends she liked and lied to her mother that she was staying in school or going to religious gatherings at church instead. When Eliza was admitted into one of the
universities in Hong Kong, she perceived that her mother became less strict and demanding. Occasionally, her mother would ask Eliza about her progress in university, but she stopped demanding her to attend church and hang around only with Christian friends.

During year three at the university, Eliza’s father suddenly disappeared: he had been imprisoned. From then on, Eliza tried to be more patient with her mother but was still not close to her. Eliza stated: “I don’t know the reason but I get really uptight every time she asks things about me. She was always blunt when talking to me during my primary and secondary school years.” Eliza stayed in the dormitory for the four years she attended university, and she went home on the weekends. Her mother would cook and made soup for her when she was back, but their distance was still apparent. She no longer requested that Eliza attend church, but she expressed she did not like Eliza living in the dormitory and not at home. At the time of the interview, Eliza was planning to move away from her mother’s home after graduation, given that she had been doing part-time work and wanted to earn her own living. She had a boyfriend during her university years, and her mother liked him very much because he was gentle and obedient. However, Eliza expressed feeling awkward about her boyfriend’s close relationship with his parents and his good communication with his mother. Eliza explained:

When we started dating, I was not used to his way of communicating with his mom. I often wondered why he kept telling his mom every detail. Sometimes, when I stayed over at his place, his mom kept talking to me which I found annoying. I disliked it when people expressed too much concern about me. I guess I am an independent person . . . but it gets better now probably because my values have changed based on my boyfriend’s influence. I now begin to treasure the concerns and care from his mom. I guess this
affects my relationship with my mom in a positive way too. I sometimes would miss her [even] though we are not closed to each other.

**Microsystem.** Eliza’s relationship with her mother, who was the primary caregiver, was perceived as sour. Their communication was scarce, and, if there was communication, it usually revolved around unimportant, trivial matters. Eliza stated:

I avoided telling her anything unless it was absolutely necessary, but most of it was on minor matters. During university years, we sometimes talked about the news, or I would share with her about things happening to my friends but never anything about myself… I tend to argue with her a lot over tedious things she says. She would not scold me now instead she would quiet down when I got very up tight . . . then I felt bad about how I had behaved and tried to give an explanation. I think I reacted this way because I kind of stereotyped her as always being negative.

Partly as a result of her mother’s authoritarian parenting style, Eliza said she became conditioned to react by responding badly and being rebellious. She stole in primary school and was caught by her teacher. Overall, she did not have a particularly good experience with any teachers during her entire study journey. Her mother made Eliza’s academic performance the number one priority in her daughter’s life. Her relationship with her father was not close either; she said she observed that he never really cared about her, academically or emotionally.

**Mesosystem.** Eliza’s mother made an effort to leave a good impression with her teachers at school, instructors, and coaches of her extra-curricular activities. She always made inquiries about Eliza’s performance, and she also was involved in her primary school parent-child activities. When Eliza was in secondary school, her mother wanted to join the parent-teacher association (PTA) as committee member, but Eliza did not want her mother to get involved, so
her mother joined the association at her brother’s school. Eliza said she felt her mother embarrassed her in front of the teachers because she always wanted to show off Eliza’s talents, and even herself. Eliza remembered:

At one time during an interview with a school that she wanted me to get in, she brought an electrical piano to perform in front of the admissions officers and teachers, and she made me play a duo with her. I felt so embarrassed . . . She made it such a high profile that I couldn’t stand it.

Her mother took an active role in interacting with her teachers and instructors in both primary and secondary schools. Her mother would discuss Eliza’s educational journey with the academic advisors, and she used her network to find out more information and opportunities for Eliza. Eliza’s relationship with her boyfriend’s mother created interpersonal problems at the beginning, because Eliza had never bonded closely with her own mother and had never felt motherly love from her. It is possible Eliza was avoiding attachment to her boyfriend’s mother who tried to give her loving tender care because it was so unfamiliar to her.

**Macrosystem.** Eliza said she the hardest time she had was during her primary school years given that she was placed in a very harsh tutorial center for six years. She complained that she had no childhood. During secondary school years, Eliza explained that she felt more independent, and studying became more self-driven. Entering university was not difficult for her: her scores met the basic criteria, and a lower-tiered university in Hong Kong accepted her. She said she felt moderate to high pressure to study during her entire academic life; nevertheless, she had an outgoing and independent personality and could make her days pass lightly even given the heavy burden schoolwork and academic requirements. She handled the schoolwork while holding several part-time jobs during her university years.
Chronosystem. Eliza’s mother was sick with cancer when she was in primary school and recovered after a few years. She alluded to her father serving time in jail for about a year after his disappearance. This might have affected her relationship with her parents as she felt that her father was never close to her, and her mother was busy during that time seeking help for her father. Eliza perceived that her father was a troublemaker, and her mother made every effort and used up her savings to resolve his issues. Psychologically, Eliza empathized with her mother; however, behaviorally, she could not endure her controlling and demanding attitude. Thus, it was suggested that Eliza was likely raised in an unloving, critical, and hostile atmosphere. Therefore, her relationship with and responses to her mother were always combative, and they were very distant from each other.

Mimmy. Mimmy had just graduated from one of the top universities in Hong Kong at time of the interview. She was shy, quiet, and polite. She studied effectively throughout her life. Her father had high expectations of her and of her brother, who was just one year younger than her. Her father had a bachelor’s degree and worked in the government; her mother did not have a bachelor’s degree and started working as a junior staff in a trading company when Mimmy was in university.

Mimmy did not recall much about her kindergarten life except she did remember that she was taught in advance the subjects that she would have learned in primary one. So, when she got into primary one, she had already learned the material from the subjects that she needed to know such as Chinese characters, English vocabulary, and arithmetic computation. Since Mimmy’s primary school years, her father commanded her to study rigorously; he made it clear that she must get into university. He always checked the results of her tests and examinations. Mimmy described that her father was strict and would scold her whenever he saw her playing instead of
studying. She was expected to follow his ways. Mimmy had lots of homework while in primary school, and she took piano lessons and tutorials every day. She worked on homework and practiced piano until 9 p.m. almost every night. Mimmy explained:

It was heavy starting from Primary 1, but it didn’t bother me that much because I developed a good foundation in kindergarten. I felt more pressure in Primary 2. When I took up piano in Primary 3, I noticed that I was short of time to relax, not to say play, and I felt tired at the end of the day. I was selected by my school to join a computer course afterschool in Primary 5. I usually didn’t get to leave till 6 pm or so because we needed to prepare for competitions. My Dad arranged a tutor to come over to my home twice a week in Primary 2 and 3. The tutor came after dinner for 1 hour at the beginning and stayed longer as time went by.

My Dad didn’t allow me to have fun during summer holidays. He often told our tutor to give my brother and me more supplemental exercises to do. He would teach us grammar after he came home from work and sometimes left us materials to study. He then gave us a quiz the following day. He would scold us if he found out we didn’t follow as told.

In secondary school, Mimmy perceived that her father was still controlling although academically she did exceptionally well, always in the top five of her entire grade. Her grades were good, and she was placed in an elite class. Mimmy remarked:

I didn’t like staying home much when I was in secondary school. I felt suppressed when I was at home. My Dad was strict and pushy, and he was also sick. The atmosphere was difficult to bear. I usually went out with my friends after school. We would hang out in a restaurant or participate in school activities. I dragged on until after 6 p.m. and then went home.
Mimmy described her homeroom teacher, who taught her consecutively in upper secondary years, very demanding of her and wanted her to stay at the top rank. She received tremendous pressure from that teacher for her to excel ahead of other students and stay at the top of the whole grade. Although Mimmy faced no problems getting admitted to a high-ranking university given her high scores, she was always pushed by her teacher who wanted her to remain extremely competitive. Mimmy narrated:

When I was in Form 3, we had a transfer student who came from Mainland China. He performed really well when he attended our school. My homeroom teacher gave me a lot of pressure by urging me to excel [beyond] this student. I was wondering why ranking was so important when both of us were hard-working students. She always gave each student a note of encouragement before [an] exam, and one time, the message on my note was: “Must win him”! I didn’t quite understand the mentality of my teacher. I thought it was reasonable for some other students to rank higher than me. It wasn’t because my performance had declined, it was just that someone did even better than me. My teacher was extremely demanding, and she always pressed us to do better. I got her as homeroom teacher for four 4 out of the six 6 years in my entire secondary years. I disliked her very much.

At the university, Mimmy faced considerable academic challenges in her first year. Although she managed to handle her schoolwork, she felt lost, and her grades were low. However, after the first year of adaptation to university life, she handled her schoolwork very well and enjoyed a great deal of freedom largely because she lived in the dormitory. Her father was satisfied with her performance academically and did not take control of her life. Mimmy recalled:
I felt lost the first year. The study mode was totally different from that of secondary school. In secondary school, I only needed to learn and memorize the materials within the scope of curriculum. In university, I had to write a lot of essays, especially in my area of studies. My performance greatly depended on my ability to write and express what I had learned. I was not used to this, especially [when] we needed to make presentations of our projects. I got low marks in my Year 1 exams which bothered me a lot. From Year 2 onwards, I gradually mastered the skill of essay writings and presentations, and I was performing much better.

**Microsystem.** Mimmy said that she did not like her father because she was scared of his strict and highly authoritarian ways. She recalled that, in lower primary, she always had stomach pain prior to examinations, but her father would not pay attention to it or take her to see a doctor. One year in upper secondary, she could not sleep most nights. During her secondary school years, her father was sick with cancer but was cured in later years. She felt burdened because she wanted to work harder so that her parents would not worry about her, and so her father could rest well. Since that time, she was not as angry with her father and just wanted to do her best to repay him. Mimmy stated:

I didn’t like the studying part. There was a lot to do, and I wasn’t really interested in it. I always got sick when exams were approaching. I got so nervous to the point that I got an upset stomach. I usually felt better right after the exam. My parents did know about my problem. They realized that I easily got sick during exam period but did nothing in particular. They believed academic accomplishment was more important.

**Mesosystem.** Mimmy’s father was busy, but he usually came home to cook dinner after work. Her mother was busy taking care of her younger brother and helping him with his
homework when he was in primary school. Mimmy said neither of them really involved themselves in her school activities. Hence, they did not have much interaction with the administrators and schoolteachers. They did not hire helpers for carrying out domestic duties like most of the families did in Hong Kong.

**Macrosystem.** Mimmy felt immense pressure from studying. Her teacher held high aspirations of her and expected her to stay ahead of all students when it came to grades. She tried hard to satisfy her teacher and her father. She was afraid of authority figures and never dared to speak to a professor standing next to her at the university. Mimmy felt that all of her life, she had been a good daughter and student. She listened intently to her father, her teachers, and her academic adviser. She wanted to major in the subject that she was interested in. Instead of following her own wishes, however, she followed the advice of her academic adviser and switched her major. Mimmy responded:

I wanted to do European and Cultural Studies in a second-tiered university, but my academic adviser told me to switch to Asian Studies as my score was high and I would have a better chance to get into one of the two top-notch universities in Hong Kong. I felt very unhappy and cried during our conversation as I had worked hard towards my goal. I aimed at majoring in European Studies so that I could get a chance to become an exchange student in Europe. However, after talking to her, I followed her advice and changed my mind. I guess she had her point.

I liked that university after I got in, however, I am just not keen on doing Asian Studies, my grades were not that remarkable. hindsight, it might have been better for me to take the European and Cultural Studies at the other university. It’s harder for me to change the major here as my grades were not high enough.
Chronosystem. Mimmy’s father was sick when she was in secondary school, which made their relationship change: she perceived that he was not as cold as before, and she empathized with her father more. The transition was that her father’s temperament had changed; he was not as harsh to her probably due to his severe illness.

In retrospect, Mimmy said she felt that she always listened to authority figures and not to her own desires. She felt that she was too submissive and lacked critical thinking. She had very little autonomy even in adolescence and was most impacted by her father’s authoritarian parenting style.

I was quite independent. I hardly shared my problems or sought . . . help from my family members. I usually talked to my friends instead. I wasn’t used to sharing my thoughts with my parents. I felt distanced from them, especially my Dad. I only approached him if it was a big deal. As for my mother, I usually talked to her about interesting happenings, but not problematic issues.

I have been frightened of all authoritative figures around me ever since I was small. I often tried to watch out for them and remained distanced from them. I supposed my Dad had a negative impact on me . . . I didn’t like to be scolded or criticized… My classmates used to have a good relationship with our professors, but I tried to stay away from them. I am not the type who is good at asking questions. I often accepted what I was told and seldom followed my own thoughts… This is one of my weaknesses… It could be because I rarely had any opportunities for decision making. Most of the time, someone with high authority would pressure me into making a certain decision.

Bill. Bill was subtle, and not very expressive but was willing to share. He was from a low-income household. He had one brother who was 10 years younger. Bill’s parents were from
China and only finished lower secondary schools. His father worked in a restaurant as a waiter from 5 p.m. to 3 a.m. almost every evening and night during Bill’s primary school life; Bill’s impression of his father’s role at home was that he slept most of the daytime. Their only family time together was dinnertime on his father’s day off. His father was the only bread earner and provided all of the family’s financial support. His mother cared for the home and children; however, she did not take part in Bill’s school activities and was quite withdrawn from the community during Bill’s childhood. Bill described that his mother did not feel a sense of belonging in Hong Kong given that she was an immigrant from China and was ashamed of her colloquial Chinese accent and English illiteracy. Indeed, Hong Kong placed a strong emphasis on English proficiency.

Bill did not recall much about his kindergarten life, but he said his primary years were quite an experience to him. He had changed from studying at a local Chinese-based school to an English-based school in Primary 4. During this transition, he said he felt inferior to other students because he could not speak good English. He also said he felt very ashamed to speak in front of his classmates and the teacher whenever the lessons were taught in English. Basically, he commented that he kept quiet at school, because he was afraid that his peers would tease him and look down upon him because of his poor English. He described that his father was the one who pushed him to study the most, and he was strict and demanding in this academic aspect. Although his father did not involve himself much in Bill’s school life, he emphasized that studying hard would lead Bill to a good school and a good career in the future. “You must study well in order to get into a good school, a good university, then a good career in the future.” Bill had this statement indoctrinated in his heart since he was a little child; therefore, he studied extremely hard. He attended tutorial lessons after school, which were held in the community
center at a very low fee for children from low-income families. This type of tutorial did not push the children to study hard, perhaps because it was not run by private tutors who stressed getting high scores so that the parents would be attracted to sending their children there to boost their academic performance. Bill had relied very much on himself since he was little and received very little assistance from the tutorials. He continued to study on his own when he reached secondary school. Bill stated:

My grades were good in my old primary school, but when I changed to the English school, I always failed in English, . . . but my Math was good though. I was scared of speaking in English. My classmates laughed at me every time I said something not right, and made fun of my pronunciation. My parents were very concerned when I didn’t do well in English. They scolded me [harshly] when I failed English dictations. I tried very hard, but it still wasn’t good enough. I guess I didn’t have a good foundation for it. I wasn’t really interested in it.

When Bill went to secondary school, he felt more confident, in part because his English had markedly improved, and his academic results in all other subjects were always in good standing. He did not attend any tutorials because he believed he could manage it on his own. He did not show much interest in the subjects that he had to study at secondary school. “I didn’t go to any tutorial classes; I studied independently and did plenty of exercises. I probably was the odd one in school as everyone else attended tutorials except me.” During upper secondary school, Bill described that he started to feel very stressed because he needed to get a very high score to enter a good university. He followed his father’s requirement of him to study hard closely to get into a good university so that he could get a good job and have a better life in the future.
When Bill was in lower secondary school, his father had saved enough money to open a small restaurant, and at that time, his younger brother was born. His mother was busy taking care of his younger brother and did not get involved in his studies. However, Bill felt the pressure of being nagged by his mother to go to private tutorials, given that the family could afford more to send him at that time, which his parents believed would help him to get higher grades and give him a better chance to get into good university. However, Bill was reluctant to attend any tutorials; he preferred studying by himself. When he did not get high grades, his parents would become very discontent and would blame him for not going to private tutorials to boost up the grades. His father scolded him a lot about this and kept repeating the statement of “working hard and getting into good university, thus securing a better career.” Hence, Bill received even higher pressure based on the academic requirements of his parents. Consequently, he studied tremendously hard, performing almost non-stop drilling of examination papers the year before getting into university. He became very closed up socially and only stayed home to play video games to vent his pressure from the academic requirements set by his parents and the school.

Bill explained:

I realized that I needed to put in more and more efforts in studying. Gradually, my grades moved up and remained high for the rest of my upper secondary years. I got a lot of pressure from my parents in Secondary Form 1 and 2 because of my poor academic performance. They made me do lots of supplementary exercises and demanded me to attend private tutorials to boost up the grades. I didn’t go to any tutorial classes. I liked studying independently. I knew how to manage my studies; I did plenty of supplementary exercises repeatedly. The last two years were the most stressful years for me. The year before taking public examination, I spent the whole semester . . . working
on mock papers and staying after school for supplementary classes. I didn’t go out at all, just kept practicing papers. I only played videogames when I felt I needed a break.

After Bill went to university, he was very relieved. He felt much happier that, not only did he enter into a top-notch university in Hong Kong, but he also had fulfilled his father’s expectations of him. During university life, Bill’s parents did not get involved in any of his academic activities. Rather, they were more concerned about his social life. They urged Bill to reach out and expand his social circle. His mother would repeatedly remind him to get to know more people, and he said he felt pressured by them in this regard. Conversely, the academic pressure from them, particularly from his father, was largely reduced; also, since he was staying in the dormitory, he had complete freedom. Bill said he felt more independent; he could even spare time to do a part-time job and earn some pocket money, which helped alleviate the financial burden his father was bearing. When he was living in a foreign country by himself for the first time, during a one-year mandatory program in Japan, Bill said that he had a good opportunity to learn to adapt to new environment and make new friends, which required self-care ability and good interpersonal skills. He also perceived that the Hong Kong education system did not prepare students well to develop good social and critical thinking skills. Recalling the experience, Bill stated:

I got to learn simple things like grocery shopping, parking a bicycle, speaking Japanese and drinking alcohol in order to mingle well with Japanese peers and be part of the culture there. Our system requires the students to be obedient and quiet throughout the upbringing, but when we get older, we are expected to be sociable and outgoing. How can we handle such a drastic change in roles? We are putting too much emphasis in studying in Hong Kong, and the students tend to think studying is everything. We are not
strong enough to handle other aspects of life. Most students in Japan have part-time jobs to support themselves as they don’t have a scholarship system. I find them more mature than Hong Kong university students. They are relatively independent. I am not sure how they evolve from relaxed and academically pressure-free primary school students to academic-intensive university students. I suspect they have gone through a lot of trainings in secondary schools.

**Microsystem.** Since young, Bill’s parents had not actively been involved much in his academic life. He was not very attached to either of his parents. His father demanded that Bill study hard to have a chance at entering a good university so that he could get a better career and eventually a brighter future. Bill perceived that his father was all along very cold to him and only looked at his academic performance. His mother always felt ashamed of her immigrant status and was unwilling to participate in any of his school’s activities except parent-teacher days when all parents were invited to meet the teachers to discuss their child’s academic and behavioral records. His mother took care of his daily life and was not as strict and demanding as his father, but she would also scold him if he did not get good results from tests and examinations. Despite this, he felt closer to his mother but was very distanced from his father. Bill said he felt that his father only cared about his academic results and the chance of him getting a good job in the future.

**Mesosystem.** In this regard, since both Bill’s parents were not involved in his school life and had only scant communication with the teachers, and adding that Bill had no tutors or coaches, the interaction between his different caretakers was very restricted.

**Macrosystem.** Bill’s academic journey before university revolved around studying, and he enjoyed only very limited recreational activities. He had a chance to study in Japan for one
year under a mandatory exchange student program through the local university in Hong Kong. He was astonished at the rigor of academic life of the primary students in Japan who were not forced to study hard but who were instead trained more on disciplinary, mannerisms and aspects of teamwork. Bill said he felt that the focus from his primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong was solely on studying and that his father’s doctrine in studying hard, getting into a good school, and landing a good job, delved deeply into his heart. Thus, his study environment was intense. Bill did not get any inspiration outside of studying from his parents, teachers, and peers in his primary and secondary lives. His one-year spent in Japan at the study-abroad program and also the peers at university in Hong Kong broadened his view on education.

 Chronosystem. There was no indication of any significant family transition that created negative effects for Bill. The one-year program in Japan had positive effect to his growth and social ability, which had broadened his ideas regarding both education and his capacity to live independently in a foreign country.

 Alexy. Alexy was very cheerful and articulate. His parents had finished higher education. His father had his own business, while his mother was a homemaker. He had three younger sisters 5-10 years younger than him, so his mother stayed home to take care of them. Alexy changed from a local school to an international school in Hong Kong while he was in the year of lower secondary. Throughout the years, he had been doing very well academically, and his parents were satisfied with his performance. He recalled that he had a happy kindergarten life, but, once he got into Primary 1, his homework and tutorials never stopped. His mother was the one who demanded that he study hard and aim to get admitted to a top-notch college in the United States.
During his primary years, Alexy’s mother would sit next to him and watch him do his homework every day. When there were tests and examinations, she would tutor him. She also hired a private tutor to teach him Chinese because this subject was particularly hard for him, and he always failed. He said that his mother would push him to study, practice all supplementary exercises, drill examination papers, learn viola in which he had no interest, and enroll in other sports and recreational activities. In addition, his mother required him to read the newspaper every day in primary school, which he felt had caused him to hate reading, because he found the newspaper was too hard for him to read at that young age. He was not allowed to watch television or play videogames at home. Alexy only got the chance to watch television while visiting his grandparents. He said he was always afraid of his mother especially on parent-teacher day; he was concerned what might happen if his mother was upset about his performance at school. He remembered his mother always yelled at him and at many other things, spanked him for being naughty and scolded him whenever he did not score high marks on tests or examinations. Alexy described the constant pressure he faced, stating:

It was so stressed out at the parent-teacher conference, one year my homeroom teacher commented I was smart but talked too much. When I got home, my mom scolded me the whole night. I was always worried about making her angry. If she discovered something wrong, she would yell, scold and spank me. She forced me to do a lot of things, even in the restaurant while waiting for food, she would ask me to read something. She made me read [the] newspaper, Harry Potter, and tons of books since [the time] I was little. I was not going to understand it, I was only a kid, I just wanted to watch Batman. So, I didn’t like reading anymore until I got to university. I had negative reaction to it when she made it a mandatory thing for me.
When he was about to enter upper secondary, his mother changed his local school to an international school believing this would open up better opportunities for him to get into a good American college. He described that although the homework load was not as demanding as that in local secondary school, he had to study very hard to get into AP classes given that his mother demanded him to be in all AP classes starting sophomore year. He ended up getting into 14 AP classes. There was constant drilling, including SAT and summer boot camps for different subjects. His mother used materialistic ways to make him study hard such as promising to buy him an iPhone if he could get all A’s, etc. However, she never fulfilled her promises when Alexy achieved what she demanded. He perceived that his mother was in control of everything and would not let him hang out with friends who were not in Honors or AP classes. Alexy said:

I worried that I would disappoint my mom. I would be upset when I got a B+. I am an overachiever and learned to move on. I strive to do well and try my very best. My philosophy is to move on and learn. My mom was too protective. I wanted an iPod to listen to music, she said no cuz it’s a bad influence and bad to the ears with earplugs all the time. She also bargained with me: I wanted an iPhone4, she said, “If you can get all As, I will buy it for you.” I finally got all As that year, but she didn’t buy it for me. I was afraid [that] if I would disappoint her . . . she would take away something from me to make me worried. One time, a family friend gave me a Play Station. I only played a little while, and she saw it, then she threw it in the trash. I was so sad, but I didn’t hold grudges. I am a forgiving person, I was only mad for the night. All the guys played videogames in my high school; I felt like I lost the connection with my friends. I was mad that she always seemed to isolate me from others, not letting me hang out with my friends. She would check if my friends were in honors classes. If so, she would let me
go. She always commanded me to go home to study. She had curfews on me and on my sisters too. She was a control freak.

Alexy finally got into an American college ranked among the top 20. His mother made him apply for Early Decision (ED) for this college; he was not able to explore others that he aspired to get into. He regretted this very much because he said he believed his scores were good enough to get him into one of the Ivy Leagues. Once he got into college, his mother did not involve herself in his life events anymore and was tied up in taking care of his three little sisters. His mother was satisfied with his studies in college; he got into the toughest program in that college and in that field, and he progressed well every year without major problems or intentions to drop out. His mother was happy about the medallion he got in college but did not get involved in any efforts to support Alexy. She wanted to use her connections to get him a job as an intern, but Alexy got all the internship opportunities he needed by himself. She would nag him to get summer jobs, but in the end, she trusted him to do it by himself.

Alexy had a girlfriend in university. He worried that his mother would object to him having a girlfriend because her requirements were that he could not date until he finished college.

When I had a girlfriend, I really worried if [my mother] would ever let me have a girlfriend. She kept telling me not to go dating until finished college. In High School, I had a kind of a girlfriend but I dared not tell her. I feel more comfortable telling her these things now, but in retrospect, I worried if she would like her, if she would chat with her, etc. That was a scary thing for me at that time.

*Microsystem.* Alexy mentioned the words “afraid” and “worried” many times during the interview. He was “afraid” of his mother: “afraid” that she would be mad at his “not good
enough” scores; “afraid” that she would take away all his belongings if he did not do well enough in school and in other activities; “afraid” that she might see him playing instead of studying; “worried” that he would do something that would make her angry or upset her. He did not like the kind of activities that his mother chose for him, which included music and sports when he was in primary and secondary schools, and he did not have much freedom and space to choose what he wanted and thus later sought his own learning opportunities.

**Mesosystem.** Alexy perceived that his mother always maintained a good relationship with his teachers, tutors, and coaches. She wanted to know the details of his performance, his progress, and any areas in which he could improve. Basically, all his teachers, tutors, instructors, and coaches were satisfied with Alexy’s performance given that he seldom caused trouble and behaved well.

**Macrosystem.** Alexy aimed high academically, and despite the perception of his mother’s pushy and demanding manner, Alexy did his best to achieve the highest results, given that he was very self-driven. The schools’ academic requirements were high because he studied in various top-ranking schools. He made it through without major psychological issues such as depression or anxiety and did not need to rely on medication to help him study. Somehow, he enjoyed studying and could cope with the stress and pressure stemming from it.

**Chronosystem.** Alexy went to the United States to further his studies, and his parents stayed put in Hong Kong. So, basically, there was little family involvement during his university years. Alexy said this made him feel more freedom and independence. His relationship with his mother was a little closer then, but he still worried if he would do something to upset her.

**Hayley.** Hayley was quite open and shared a great deal about her life and her views on education. Her parents were both teachers. Her father taught in secondary school while her
mother taught nursing at the university. Hayley went to the United Kingdom to study A-levels (the last two years of secondary school before entering university) and to the United States for university. Hayley had one sister who was five years younger than her. She described herself as the naughty girl while her sister was mother’s good girl. She was spanked by her mother a lot when she was in primary school because she liked to talk back and did not like to listen and follow her mother’s instructions. Her father was not the dominant type of parent, and he did not really pay much attention to her academic, social, or emotional life.

Hayley recalled that she was happy in kindergarten. However, in primary school, she felt considerable pressure to study. Her mother was very concerned about academic results, and, every evening after dinner, she would check Hayley’s homework in detail to ensure that she did it correctly. She would scold Hayley for any errors. She also made Hayley go to tutorials after class. Hayley had to practice piano according to an examination curriculum, but she was only interested in the songs that she liked and, thus, she did not play well. Hayley described that as a result of this, her mother grew even stricter, lost her temper easily, and enrolled her in other courses that she thought would help raise her daughter’s academic results. In upper primary, her mother stopped the ballet lessons that Hayley enjoyed the most of all of her activities to spare more time for Hayley to focus on studying with the goal of attaining higher grades to enter an elite secondary school. Hayley explained:

My mom was overly concerned about test and exams results. She inspected all my homework for details even if I had tutorials. She basically checked every subject. She had a really bad temper . . . scolded me every day and caned me with a cloth hanger if I missed any homework or misbehaved. At primary 5, she stopped my ballet lesson without asking me as she wanted me to spend more time in preparing for those admission
exams for applying to the high ranked secondary schools. I was very obsessed with ballet at that time and danced so well! I was so angry and upset!

Hayley said she felt a great deal of pressure when she was studying in upper secondary school. She had been working hard all along and aimed high. Due to the high academic requirements set by her mother and herself, she only managed to sleep for four to five hours per night when she was in upper secondary; hence, she furthered her study abroad to avoid the intense pressure. She attended her last two years of secondary school in the United Kingdom to have an experience that was more enjoyable and less competitive. Hayley concluded that in the end, this choice led to better chances of her getting into good universities. By then, her mother was not as demanding and controlling as before. There were fewer arguments between them; however, the relationship was still distanced. Hayley described the dynamic:

We didn’t have a good relationship, not because she pushed me too hard but because of her strict, annoying attitude and hot temper. She got upset easily and was hard to get along with. When I was small as a kid, I didn’t know how to deal with her tactfully and avoid conflicting with her. Now that I am older, I learned the way of dealing with her.

Hayley’s father emigrated to the United States when she completed her A-levels in the United Kingdom. Hayley then moved to the United States for university under family reunification status, paying less tuition and fees than that in the United Kingdom. She found university life was even more free, and her mother had stopped scolding and nagging her. Her mother later retired from her teaching job and joined her father under family reunification status when Hayley was in her junior year of college. The whole family would meet two times a year at Christmas and in the summer given that Hayley and her parents lived in different states.

Hayley commented that her communication with her mother was scarce: they talked only
occasionally via telephone calls. Hayley became closer to her father, and they communicated frequently over the telephone. Hayley discussed the process that transpired, stating:

I enjoyed my life here. I worked and earned my own living here so that my parents didn’t have to support me. They spent a lot of money in my tuition fees and living expenses in the U.K. I feel guilty if I don’t work harder here. I am very independent; I can handle lots of things here like moving, finding a job, finding accommodation, everything by myself. I decide everything by myself including college selection; my parents had no knowledge of it. I seldom need assistance from them though they had moved to New York from Hong Kong, which is closer to where I am now than before. I have friends here who can help me if I need. I talk to my Dad via whatsapp more often, but not much to my mom. We are not close, though there are no more arguments. In hindsight, I somehow appreciated her strictness, which makes me a more disciplinary person now. But I didn’t like her way of disciplining: she could have used other ways to teach or correct me instead of beating me with a hanger. I admitted I was not behaving well at that time, I also had a bad temper, theft behavior in school. My mom is a very diligent person, once she sets a goal she will stick to it. I am quite like her.

**Microsystem.** Hayley’s relationship with both parents was not close in primary and secondary school, and it was particularly difficult between her and her mother. Hayley said: “I hated her very much when I was in primary school, and she was never satisfied with my grades even when they were quite good from my perspective.” Only when Hayley moved to the United Kingdom and the United States did her relationship with her parents improve, and she said she felt closest to her father. Nonetheless, Hayley said she felt a huge distance existed between her and her mother and thought her mother was not capable of understanding her. Hence, Hayley
said she did not share any of her thoughts or emotional needs with her mother. Their communication mostly addressed factual matters, and calls to her mother were seldom.

**Mesosystem.** Hayley’s perception of her mother was that she constantly checked with her tutors and coaches of extra-curricular activities to see if she was doing well when she was studying in Hong Kong. She also joined the parent-child activities at school at times and talked a lot to Hayley’s teachers and even her friends in order to know more about Hayley. When Hayley was in primary school, her mother enrolled her in a private tutorial center where the tutors were strict and used rulers to spank the kids for any wrongdoings. Unfortunately, her mother agreed with this type of tutoring and felt it was necessary to punish children physically when they did not listen and do well. The interactions between her mother, the school, and even the tutorial center were constant, and Hayley was not content with her mother’s involvement at that level.

Hayley explained:

She was OK with the physical punishment they imposed on children; she believed it was a good way to teach us to listen and learn to behave well. When she had a chance, she would meet with my teachers, and chat a lot. I don’t know what they talked about; I didn’t listen to their conversations . . . but I didn’t want her to find out things about me through my teachers and my friends. I didn’t want her to get to know my friends. I tried to keep her away from getting to know them. She always wanted to learn something about me through talking with my teachers and friends.

**Macrosystem.** Hayley had a special view on education. She participated in some political events when she was in her upper secondary years. She felt that education in Hong Kong only pushed a student to study in accordance with the curriculum; it never extended to a synergy of thought and, even there was space to allow free thoughts, people could not do much to change
things; thus, creative or critical thinking abilities were not developed, and people tended to ignore problems rather than tackling them. Hayley said she felt tremendous pressure studying in Hong Kong because the perspective was so narrow. Overseas study gave her more freedom and opportunities to broaden her scope, her worldview, and her learning overall.

**Chronosystem.** Hayley moved to the United Kingdom and the United States to study. Her parents had also emigrated to the United States during her teenage years. From the narrative, this transition had a positive effect on the whole family and brought more harmony between Hayley and her mother and a closer bonding between her and her father.

**Matthew.** Matthew presented himself as a friendly, confident, and well-mannered young gentleman. His father was a businessman, and his mother was a homemaker. He was the only child in the family. He was from a well-off family and was given considerable resources to enhance his studies.

Matthew’s said his kindergarten life was happy. He said everything was good and manageable before secondary school. Matthew attended traditional elite primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Loads of homework were expected. He struggled with studying Chinese because his family’s main language of communication was English, and his scores were always low. He perceived his mother as strict and demanding of him academically; she stressed that a boy must have good manners and respect for others. In primary school, Matthew said he felt the pressure of studying and always felt the need to excel. He had private and group tutorials. He worked hard to fulfill his own desires, his mother’s demands, and the school’s requirements. Matthew’s father was rather hands-off and relaxed about his academic life. Matthew said that his English was always of the highest standard; indeed, one time, Matthew complained about his teacher’s limited English skills and got detention. Matthew dared to challenge his teachers at
young age; however, this was not acceptable in his local school. It made his mother angry, and she always disciplined him for this. Matthew described his school experiences:

I was nervous every year when marks were released, which determined if I could stay in the elite class. Everyone looked up to me cuz of my ability to converse fluently in English. My teacher used me as an example and the role model when it came to speaking, presenting things in front of class, etc. That gave me pressure I could hear my heart beat a couple of days before the results came out. Luckily, I was able to get in every year when final results came out. In one incident, the teacher disciplined me because I pointed out his wrong pronunciation of an English word; it was kind of rude.

When he entered secondary school, pressure to study was even greater. Since he was a high achiever, Matthew got into the elite class and was able to stay enrolled in these classes every year. Matthew was also very good at swimming and often won medals in open competitions. He pushed himself a lot, and his mother would not accept a score of less than 90% in almost every subject. Matthew finished lower secondary school then went to a boarding school to complete his high school. His academic and sports performances were so good that he was able to attend a prestigious high school in United States. He loved that school and had every opportunity to be nurtured to become a knowledgeable, confident, well-articulated, and independent individual. He said his mother was less demanding in the aspect of academic achievement: the school already held very high standards, and she was happy that he was admitted. He called his mother every day when he was in boarding school, mostly to report what had happened during that day.

I called my mom every day. Lots of parents were shocked cuz their kids didn’t call them that often. It was semi-mandatory; I really wanted to call her as well. I wouldn’t call
when there was dorm activity . . . I called her for half an hour a day and talked about
daily events. When I got to junior year, I called her less. When I first came here, I was
really dependent on her, really needed support from her. There were no helpers here, no
one to talk to, [we] needed to deal with problems ourselves. After a couple of years in
boarding school, I became more confident, felt more independent, and had built good
relationship with dormmates, seniors, and dorm parents.

After boarding school, Matthew got into a top-notch university in the United States. He
worked closely with his mother about university choice. Although he had his own preferences,
he listened to his mother and got admitted into the one that they both believed it was the right
choice. When he was studying at the university, he did not call his mother as frequently as
before. His mother let him have more freedom, and she did not require him to attain certain
grade points because his studies were tough and intense. She also advised him that he was old
enough to make his own decisions. He made good friends and established networks in college,
travelled a lot, and was enjoying the independent life there. Matthew did well academically and
had no problems integrating into college and social events. Generally, Matthew presented
himself as a happy person and a high achiever who had not come across any hurdles that would
hinder him from progressing. Matthew said he had met people his age that had gone astray and
ruined their futures, but he explained that he had the ability to stay focused and steer himself in
the right direction. Matthew travelled back to Hong Kong two times a year to visit his parents
and relatives. Matthew explained:

I wanted to go to X, a high-regarded university, but my mom didn’t like it. She thinks
it’s not good enough. I wanted a school with a big football field as my Dad said one
should experience the kind of sport there but mom said, “Go to a big school and
experience the diversity there.” I finally got into Y, both of us think it’s the right choice for me. It’s just that the football field there was demolished for building a library. My mom is right on college choice, she’s definitely [got] more experience than I do. My friends don’t want to listen to their parents as they think it’s the new generation. I do treasure her opinion . . . it’s not like blindly follow[ing her], but I do internalize and analyze it myself under a calm situation without bias.

I met some good people in College, useful contact in the future too, no regrets of getting in there. I also met people who went down the wrong path, they were aggressive and spoiled by their parents who were more carefree and not disciplinary. It was kind of fun to hang out with them at the beginning but slowly become more disgusting and then I shift back my focus to study hard and at the same time try to enjoy every moment I live there.

_Microsystem_. Matthew’s relationship with both parents was good, and he was particularly attached to his mother. Academically, his mother was demanding and pressured him. “I usually look up to my mom, if she’s happy, I am happy. She wanted me to be in the top five, she didn’t want me to be . . . average.” Both of Matthew’s parents became actively involved in the PTA and helped in organizing events and activities for the school, parents, and children. His mother was always by his side, cooked him good food, and sat next to him when he was doing homework and studying for quizzes and examinations. He recalled that his mother at one time caned him when he was off the track of studying hard. She forbade him to cry, claiming that boys should not cry. Matthew recalled:

As a little kid, obviously at that moment, I hated it, I hated this situation . . . it hurt so much! Who likes to be beaten? When I got into secondary school, in hindsight, it was
actually a good thing, a good training. I believe a little punishment is needed. I believe it made me a well-mannered person, a more disciplined and respectful person. I saw lots of kids come from wealthy backgrounds, their parents gave them more resources than my mom gave me, but I saw them fall off the rail. I really appreciated the fact that I was disciplined very well. There’s always love and support that comes from the beating. Understand that it’s not necessarily evil, just turn out really well for me. I appreciated it. Mom always says, “Be good and behave.” This was indoctrinated in me. I can relate this to academic and respectful manner. I respect every single person in my family and extended family.

**Mesosystem.** Matthew’s parents maintained good relationships with his principals, teachers, coaches, and instructors. They were both actively involved in the PTA at the primary school, and, from there, they established good relationships with the principal and teachers. In secondary school, Matthew’s mother got to know all the teachers in each subject and maintained a good relationship with his principal even after her son left for boarding school. There, she made a trip to visit him annually and got to know his friends and teachers. In light of this, she made an effort to know the principal, administrators, teachers, coaches, and dorm parents.

**Macrosystem.** Matthew had the advantage of studying overseas and exploring different cultures. In terms of educational pressure, it was less intense when he was in boarding school; however, the challenge and competitiveness was extremely high when he got into university. Matthew worked very hard all along to conform to the requirements of the schools that he attended. In fact, he said that he felt satisfied when his performance was stellar and that such an accomplishment was worth all the hard work.
Chronosystem. Studying in different systems and cultures gave Matthew the opportunity to develop a broader worldview. No significant negative effects originated in this system.

Overview of Research Findings

Six Hong Kong students were interviewed for this study. The findings relate to the research question: What are the lived experiences of the Hong Kong student millennials with respect to their educational journey and how do they make sense of how their parents shaped their academic, social and emotional development? As detailed in Table 5, three major themes and seven subthemes emerged to reflect the students’ perspectives of parental involvement in their academic lives. They are: (1) Parents took responsibility for their children’s needs with the subthemes of (a) Parental support in financial and emotional needs, (b) Area and level of parental involvement throughout the educational stages, (c) Students possessed a strong sense of responsibility in studying. Theme (2) Parents held high aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievements with the subthemes of (a) The impact of parents’ educational levels, (b) The power dynamics between parents and children, and between authorities and students. Theme (3) Academic development of the students as a priority with the subthemes of (a) Students’ motivation to Study, (b) High academic requirements from schools and parents.

Parents Took Responsibility for Their Children’s Needs. Throughout the interviews with the six students, it became evident that their parents were all very responsible for their children’s needs.

Parental support in financial and emotional needs. All the parents described in this study had the strong sense of responsibility to meet their child’s daily needs and plan for their daily activities particularly when they children were in primary school. They were all very involved in their children’s daily lives meaning they were either physically involved in their
daily activities in/outside of school or mentally keep their children’s study and academic activities as top priority in their itinerary throughout their growing stages, even if some of them did not show up in their school activities or other extra-curricular activities.

The parents of these six students were all fully responsible for supporting their children’s financial needs. They did not all come from wealthy families. Only Alexy and Matthew were from well-off families. Bill was from a low-income family, and Eliza and Mimmy were from medium-income families. Their parents were all responsible for their tuition, tutorials, extra courses, overseas travel and study, and university expenses. In addition to providing financial support, other practical support such as taking care of their daily needs was also provided. Almost every family in this study, except Eliza’s, Bill’s and Mimmy’s families, hired a domestic helper, so the daily care was shared by the domestic helper. Moreover, all of the students had tutorials or extra-curricular classes after school when they were in primary school, and Eliza stayed in the tutorial center until 7 p.m. Monday to Friday; hence, the practical support during the day was basically covered by the tutors for her.

In terms of emotional support, almost all parents of the participants in this study seemed to have missed this essential element. The dominant parents had the common characteristics of being strict, demanding, controlling—largely as a result of the high expectations they had of their children. Mimmy’s parents even ignored her illnesses. She recalled:

I always had stomach cramps prior to examinations when I was in Primary 3, but my parents did not pay attention to me and did not take me to see a doctor. There was one episode that in a year in upper secondary school that I could not fall sleep until 3-4 a.m. every night, I felt very low, emotionally distressed, and bitterness, but I did not tell my parents. It happened that I had one friend that could not sleep at night too, so we texted
each other at night and shared our issues. Luckily, the insomnia disappeared the following year.

Hayley and Eliza used the term “hate” to describe their feelings towards their mothers. Hayley said, “I hated my mom when . . . in primary school as she was very strict to me and demanding. She would beat me with a hanger when I misbehaved and talked back.” Eliza described that at one point she detested her mother who was very dominating and controlling in all aspects of her life. Only when she was in upper secondary school did her mother become less controlling; however, she still criticized Eliza a lot. Eliza stole in primary school, acting out. Bill’s father kept a distance between them, and Bill did not feel particularly close to his mother although she took care of his daily needs; indeed, he said that his feelings towards his mother were more positive than those towards his father. Alexy did not receive any emotional support from his dominating mother, either. His mother, as narrated, was controlling and made him follow her wishes. Caning, threatening, scolding, yelling at, and losing temper with Alexy seemed quite frequent; consequently, Alexy disliked his mother and always worried that he would do something that made her angry again. Matthew had a different kind of support from his mother. He went to boarding school in grade 10; his parents visited him occasionally, and he called his mother every day during the four years he was there. Nevertheless, the conversation centered on daily school life, and Matthew seldomly expressed his feelings explicitly. Matthew said, “My mom is a tiger mom, though she had caned me, she also hugged me and, at times we even cried together when she saw me cry. She would make sure I had good food; she’s always with me, and that ‘being there’ and the time that she spent with me were important to me.”

Area and level of parental involvement throughout the educational stages. The parents of these six participants involved themselves in their children’s academic and social lives. Their
involvements in primary school and lower secondary school were associated the most with school activities, tutorials, and extracurricular courses. The parents of Eliza and Matthew participated in the PTA committee during some of their children’s primary years. Both of Matthew’s parents joined the PTA and became actively involved in his school life including fund raising and organizing parent-child activities. In primary school, the parents made all choices regarding the children’s academic and non-academic courses, which include outside of the school curriculum, which cost a substantial amount of money and kept the child occupied for a great deal of time in addition to school and homework. Some students in this study were allowed to choose some school courses that interested them; but, in the area of musical instruments and other practical courses, their dominant parents would choose for them. Bill was the only one of the participants whose parents did not involve themselves much in his school life. He enjoyed considerable freedom to choose what he was interested in, and since his academic ability was high, his father did not really care about his choice of other courses as long as they would not bog down his grades.

In upper secondary school, the level of involvement of all of the participants’ parents decreased, and they very seldomly participated in their school activities. Attending tutorials was thus under the discretion of the child. In the last two years before university, since these students were very busy in preparing for entering university, they would attend tutorials based on their own needs without the impetus from their parents. At university, parents were more hands-free and trusted their children to make their own decisions in almost everything. Given that the participants were not living with their parents while attending university, whether locally or overseas, parental involvement in both the student’s academic and social lives was not explicit. All parents of the participants in this study were satisfied with their children’s admission to
universities; thus, their involvement in their academic studies were kept to a minimal when the children were accepted.

Analyzing parental involvement in college choices, Eliza’s mother was very hands-on. Because Eliza was consistently not very strong academically and did not score high in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), a common examination for admission to universities in Hong Kong, her mother worried about her being accepted to any university. Before she was admitted to university, her mother visited career expos and registered for the fields that she wanted Eliza to explore in case she was not accepted by any universities. Alexy and Matthew’s mothers were very involved in the choice of college and concentration of study. Alexy’s mother made him apply Early Decision (ED) to a college that she felt was good enough for Alexy; however, Alexy was aiming at one of the Ivy Leagues that he felt he had a good chance of getting in. Because of his mother’s involvement, he did not reject his mother’s preference. Matthew’s mother aimed very high for her son, and she wanted Matthew to get in one of the top-notch U.S. colleges. Matthew made it in and was following this path. Matthew worked very well with his mother for college choice and visits, and he listened to his mother’s advice in choosing the right college for him. Some parents paid an educational consultant to guide and advise their choice of subjects, sports and other special talents from grade 9 forward.

Students possessed a strong sense of responsibility in studying. All of the students in this study were very responsible in their studies. They were all high achievers except Eliza. Bill aspired to be the prefect, or the head boy, when he was in primary school; he got that role within one year. He studied very hard and got into one of the top universities in Hong Kong. Mimmy and Matthew were chosen by their teachers as the role models in their schools throughout the years, in primary and secondary school, because of their high academic performances compared
to the rest of the students. Matthew’s English proficiency, meanwhile, was much higher than those of his peers in his local school. Thus, these students were highly praised by their teachers, and their peers looked up to them. Alexy studied extremely hard and got into 14 AP classes. He subsequently was accepted at one of the top universities in the United States. Hayley also aimed high and was always the top in rank in her local school. She was also accepted to one of the top universities in the United States. Alexy and Matthew studied in traditional, elite schools during both their primary and secondary years in Hong Kong; the rest of the participants attended moderate-ranking primary and secondary schools, but the institutions still boasted high academic performance, except for Eliza’s school, which was not particularly outstanding in academics.

The participants were all serious about their studies and never thought about not pursuing university studies. Except for Eliza, all of the students interviewed expressed the stress and worry about getting into reputable or high-ranking universities. They were conditioned for industrious behavior from the time when they were little and were forced to attend various types of tutorials and extracurricular courses and activities during primary and lower secondary school. Most of these students felt the pressure starting even in Primary 1, and it became more intense after Primary 3. The results of the last two years of primary school determined if these students would be moved to secondary division of the same school or if they would be admitted to a higher-ranking school. Thus, recreational time across the board was reduced; the focus was almost exclusively on studying. When the student got into secondary school, the intense pressure aggravated in the upper secondary years. Alexy had changed to a prestigious international school in Hong Kong while Matthew had changed to a prominent boarding school in the United States. Hayley, meanwhile, also moved to the United Kingdom to complete her last two years of A-levels. All of the participants except Eliza targeted high ranking universities;
thus, they all felt very stressed in studying and made use of all the resources they had to improve their studies. Alexy’s and Matthew’s parents provided them with abundant resources. All of the parents had indoctrinated these core values into their children: “must study hard,” “get into good school, get a good job in the future, make a good living,” and “be good, behave well, have proper attitude and respect.” The participants all responded well to these guiding principles. Mimmy’s father was sick with cancer when his daughter was in secondary school; Eliza’s mother was sick with cancer when her daughter was in primary school. They both endured long-term treatment and recovered after a few years. In retrospect, Mimmy said she felt that she should study hard to repay the upbringing her father provided; she said that this was her responsibility. Eliza understood the fact that her mother had gone through a severe illness, compounded by her father’s troubles; consequently, she felt she should try her best to be responsible regarding her mother’s wishes, which focused on admission to tertiary education. Eliza pursued this despite her mother’s controlling and demanding parenting style. Bill showed responsibility for studying hard, in part because he observed his father striving hard to earn a living. Bill wanted to study hard to get into a good university, because he understood that this would help to get a better job. Alexy, Hayley, and Matthew were very self-driven by the goal to enter top schools, and they worked towards those goals and were very responsible on their own in fulfilling their parents’ aspirations.

Parents’ Held High Aspirations and Expectations of Their Children’s Academic Development. All of the participants in this study shared that their parents held high aspirations and expectations for their academic development.

The impact of parent’s educational levels. Most of the students’ parents in this study had at least undergraduate degrees except Bill’s. Disregard their educational levels, the parents all
maintain high requirements regarding their children’s education. When the children were in primary school, the parents all helped with homework and commonly obligated them to go to tutorials or to work with private tutors. All of them checked their children’s homework to assure it was done correctly. The mothers of Alexy, Hayley, and Matthew sat next to them when they did homework, and when they studied for tests or examinations. Eliza’s mother usually took a week off from work when her daughter had an examination even though the girl attended tutorials. These parents often created mock examinations to test their children, hoping to ensure that they fully understood and were prepared well for the syllabi of examinations. Bill’s mother did not tutor him or sit next to him to help him review homework or before examinations given that her educational level was not high; however, she always supervised him and commanded him to finish work first before play or rest. She often borrowed supplementary exercises from neighbors for him to do and made use of other sources provided by their community, which were usually at low-cost or complementary. Bill’s father, who also had a very low educational level, strived hard to earn a living; thus, he expected Bill to study hard, to do his very best, and to earn a good living in the future. These parents by all means assisted their children with schoolwork to meet the schools’ requirements. The parents all focused on the importance of studying hard. None remained hands-free from involvement in their children’s academic lives. When the children were in upper secondary schools, the parents were more anxious about their studies and about the youth getting into excellent universities, but they were not involved much in tutorial arrangements. At that stage, the parents concerned about their children getting good grades to be accepted to good universities. They knew they needed excellent marks for the university applications and the admissions process, and also to have choices about what institution they would attend. Most of the parents had considerable knowledge of the ranking of universities.
Those parents with higher education degrees provided specific guidance, instructions, and strongly influenced which universities their children should apply to or aim for.

The parents of the six students in this study highly valued education and held high expectations for their children’s educational achievement. Education was a top priority, and the parents expected their children to become extremely successful in the future. Bill’s parents were from low-income families and did not have much education. Bill’s father’s only expectation of him was that his son study hard to get into a good university and to secure a good job in the future. Except for Eliza’s mother, most of the parents wanted their children to enter top-ranking universities. Those who had achieved tertiary education themselves wanted their children to achieve more than they had. They hoped that their children could earn a degree from a top-notch university and thus secure future employment in a remarkable field. In fact, all of them held the ultimate goal for their children of earning a college degree, which was the best way to secure future employment with high earning power. Thus, all of the parents set high standards for their children’s education, such as standard working habits, certain expected scores or grades, and certain accomplishments in sports or in musical instrument performance; many made constant statements about the importance of the work effort and the ethics of conduct. The parents of Alexy and Matthew expected them to be well-rounded given that they wanted their sons to enter top-level U.S. colleges. Thus, these parents provided the youth with substantial resources including private academic tutors, educational consultants, private sports coaches, sports training, and overseas trips. They expected their children to be knowledgeable, to have wide exposure, to exhibit the capacity to network, and to connect well with others across the globe.

The power dynamics between parents and children, and between authorities and students. Power and force were seen and used in the relationship between the parents and the
students in this study. The parents often used power over their children, especially when they were small. They appeared to think they knew what was right for their children without asking for their consent or considering the children’s presence. In primary school, parents made almost all of the choices for their children particularly regarding tutorials, sports, recreation, and courses both inside and outside of the school curriculum. Eliza said her mother chose the activities or courses that she liked more without considering if Eliza liked them or not. “She wanted me to learn violin so that I could participate in the school’s orchestra; drawing class was good because I could draw on a T-shirt for her; she forced me to do mental math training”. Hayley, meanwhile, enjoyed ballet very much; however, her mother stopped her from taking the lessons in Primary 5 to reserve more time for studying. Hayley enjoyed playing piano, but when it came to practicing it for an examination, she hated it, yet her mother insisted she continue. Alexy’s mother made him do track and field, which he hated due to the hot weather in Hong Kong and because he just could not run fast. His mother also required him to read the newspaper at a very young age, even though he was not interested and did not understand very much. He related that his mother said, “You live under my house, you follow my rules.” Mimmy’s father, meanwhile, allowed her to make some choices in addition to his choices of academic activities; he chose English reading club that Mimmy did not enjoy it at all. Matthew was good at singing and swimming. Consequently, Matthew’s mother provided huge resources in these areas to help him accomplish his goals. He successfully auditioned into his school choir and ranked third in an open swimming competition in Hong Kong.

Because these parents held high expectations and aspirations for their children, they spontaneously used their power to make their children follow what they believed was good for them. Physical punishment was used by the parents of the six students in this study, often during
the primary school years. Mimmy was lucky that her father did not impose any physical punishment, perhaps because she always listened well and followed her father’s instructions. Nevertheless, her father caned her brother because he was less submissive and often did not follow his father’s way. Mimmy, however, was not allowed to have any free play time at home when she was in primary school. Alexy and Matthew were given both awards and punishment with respect to the grades that they earned at school; disciplinary interventions were common. Alexy recalled that he was forbidden to watch television or play videogames and was not allowed to socialize with his friends freely even when he was in secondary school. His mother would throw things at him at times when she lost her temper. Eliza’s and Hayley’s mothers also had hot tempers and disciplined them with rattan sticks or hangers.

Primary school teachers and tutors also made use of power and force to discipline the children. It was not uncommon for them to use a ruler to cane students when the youth misbehaved or could not finish the work they were asked to do. These instructors also spanked the youngsters or threw things at them. Eliza and Hayley attended extreme tutorials where the tutors took pride in punishing students to make them conform to the rules of performing well and behaving well. Parents who sent children to these tutorials were not only informed of the physical punishment, but they were even attracted to it, because they thought it could help improve their children’s scores and make them adhere to disciplinary rules. Eliza and Hayley both said their parents consented to this type of physical punishment. Matthew and Bill got punished by their primary homeroom teachers as well. Matthew recalled, “In one incident, my primary subject teacher threw the stationeries at us in order to discipline the order of the class. I didn’t pay attention to him because I couldn’t sit still.” Bill got spanked by his teacher. He
explained: “I was not lining up properly. My teacher spotted that and scolded me. I talked back, and she spanked me and sent me to see the disciplinary supervisor!”

**Academic Development of the Students Was a High Priority.** All participants shared that academic development was a high priority for them.

**Students’ motivation to study.** Motivation to study is necessary to become a good learner. All of the students in this study were highly motivated to study; however, their parents’ expectations of them were also a crucial factor that prompted them to work hard. Most of them studied hard for the purpose of future career prospect and to meet the requirements of schools and parents. All of them expressed receiving high pressure particularly in the senior years of secondary school and while preparing for university admissions; studying was a task and learning was not necessarily an enjoyment to them. They all studied hard since primary school and attended all sorts of tutorials. Gaining knowledge became an important component in their study journals. In light of this, the parents prioritized their children’s activities in the area of academics more than in the recreational arena. Activities like instrumental or vocal training that could help the students to get a place in school’s orchestra or choir, and sports in which their children could be trained to be competent in winning, were highly encouraged. During weekends, the children mostly spent time in skills practice, such as swimming or ballet; or they were dedicated to academic training such as mental math or Mandarin language classes and some sort of interest courses, which were all classroom-based learning. Outdoor activities that related to nature were very limited. The students’ intellectual, social, and academic growth did not extend outside the walls of the classrooms. The students’ love of learning was not apparent; studying for examinations and entrance into universities was the primary goal. When the students entered the university or boarding school, some of them discovered a broader
perspective on studying, which was entirely different from what they had experienced in secondary and primary school. They were allowed considerable freedom to choose the subjects they wanted and the activities in which they liked to engage. Bill was in a one-year exchange program in Japan and found:

The Japanese children there were allowed to play more than study, they were taught the aspects of disciplinary, mannerism, and teamwork. My friends in my university in Hong Kong were very hardworking yet kept open-minded and perceived that studying and securing a good job was not definite.

Alexy, Hayley, and Matthew who had overseas experiences enjoyed overseas life very much where they were encouraged to speak up, develop creativity, and learn critical thinking. Almost all of them expressed that, if they would have been able to earn a living abroad, not necessarily lavishly, and to enjoy life, it would have been more satisfying. Overall, their love of learning was not instilled by their parents when they were in primary and secondary, rather they felt more obliged strictly to study. Alexy mentioned that his mother forced him to read newspaper every day when he was only in primary school. He then hated reading, and when he got into university, he picked up reading and enjoyed it very much now. He said, “reading should be nurtured but not forced.” Eliza developed the love of learning in art, and Mimmy wanted to learn non-academic subjects, but their parents would not allow it and forced them to switch it back to academic-oriented subjects. When the participants were asked if their parents had ever taken them to museum, libraries, or art galleries, they responded that they had not. In light of this, none of the parents of the participants had inspired and instilled the love of learning and appreciation of art and history in their children through these visits. Some of them exposed
themselves more to these options only when they had the chance to go abroad for studying; that was when they had the freedom to develop these interests.

**High academic requirements from schools and parents.** Hong Kong students face tremendous pressure under the competitive education system with long school hours, huge amounts of homework, and extra-curricular activities. Many schools have a ranking system, especially the elite schools. Alexy and Matthew went to traditional elite schools in Hong Kong when they were in primary and secondary schools. They expressed that they felt intense pressure and competition between peers. Schools had an elite system of classes, and children were allocated to elite classes according to their scores in various subjects. Both of them wanted to and were stressed about getting into the elite classes, and if they could not, they felt a sense of inferiority within their circle of friends at school, and this dismayed their parents. Alexy said: “I was stressed when the results were released, and if it would disappoint my mom. I would be very upset if I got a B+.” Matthew said:

Every year, I was nervous a couple of days before the release of the results of the final examination, as this determined if I could stay in the elite class. My mom expected me to stay in the top five.

Mimmy did exceptionally well in school, though it was not a traditional elite school. Her teacher told her she needed to stay at the top given she had been in first place academically throughout the years. She felt tremendous pressure when the teacher said that to her, and her teacher even wrote her the note of “must win” when there were outstanding students transferred to her school from other schools. She was under high expectations from her teacher and did not agree with the winning spirit that her teacher imposed on her because she believed that as long as she could maintain a high standard, it was good enough.
All of the students in this study expressed that the education system in Hong Kong had exerted a great deal of pressure on them, particularly while preparing for various types of examinations for admission to universities from different education systems. They all worried about getting into the universities that they desired. Alexy and Matthew aligned with their mothers’ views and choices. Most of the students needed not only to fulfill the academic requirements but to also receive all kinds of trainings to make themselves extremely well-rounded. Mimmy followed the advice of her secondary school academic counselor, while Bill and Hayley were more independent and followed their own hearts. Eliza tried hard to study and, during the admission process, and she followed her mother’s direction to explore different university opportunities.

The quality of education in Hong Kong kept children constantly drilling, which in many ways inhibited them from realizing their full potential. Parents collaborated well with the school to put pressure on their children to achieve academic excellence. They did not want to see their children fall behind, particularly in the case of Alexy and Matthew who successfully got admitted to elite schools where an elite class system was implemented. Competition was keen, and peer pressure was high; parents often compared their children to others and boasted about their high achievements. Alexy said, “There was the comparison between parents about their kids, it’s a ‘face’ matter.” Eliza explained that she felt embarrassed by her mother, stating: “She wanted to show off our talents and made me showcase with her by playing a duo in the piano in front of the admission officers and teachers.” Students competed for admission to elite schools and also elite classes. Thus, their whole lives revolved around performance, competition, and comparison. Both parents and students themselves were indeed proud of being able to study in elite schools and, for some, in high ranking universities. However, educators and parents were
failing to provide and develop a holistic education for these students; rather they were severely pressured to achieve academically in an overly exam-oriented culture.

Summary

The six participants in this study were all open to sharing their stories. Most of them were quite articulate; a few were quiet at the beginning of the interview process and needed time to warm up and build trust. The level of parental involvement was highest during their children’s primary school years, and it gradually subsided when they entered university. Three major themes emerged while coding and analyzing the aspects of the students’ lives related to parental involvement, through their narrative stories. The subthemes unveiled the layers of parental involvement that provided insight into how the parents’ and the various schools’ academic requirements shaped the development of the students in Hong Kong.

The level of parental involvement varied in this study. Even the parents that did not participate extensively in their child’s educational path exhibited strong expectations with very high demands for the participants to work for academic excellence, at the expense of other aspects of their development. The students experienced tremendous pressure in their studies which commonly started in lower primary school. Five out of six were anxious to get into good universities. Parents provided the best resources that they could afford for their children; however, often because of excessive parental involvement, the parent-child relationship was severely compromised, even ruined. Although some participants reflected that their parents’ strictness helped discipline them into well-behaved and respectful people, they held hurtful feelings regarding the type of punishment, particularly physical, rendered upon them by their parents, teachers, and the authorities. Due to filial piety, and to parents’ experiences of sickness and their industrious manner of making a living, the students studied hard to repay their parents
nourishment, and they tended to disregard the strictness, demandingness, and punitive behavior. Family bonding was weak in most of the families, but attachment to the parent still existed. Alexy and Matthew described themselves as forgiving persons and showed a great deal of respect of their mothers. Matthew’s attachment to his mother was strong. Eliza and Hayley said they felt their relationships with their mothers were very distanced; they barely conversed with them. Mimmy and Bill did not have close relationships with their fathers who were the dominant parent, and they were also distanced from their mothers.
Chapter V: Discussion

Academic achievement in Hong Kong is highly valued. In Hong Kong’s examination-dominated culture, children are raised in an atmosphere of drilling, preparing, and practicing for tests and examinations that determine their future academic opportunities. Many parents of Hong Kong youth are highly involved in every aspect of their children’s lives. Some have speculated that this high level of parental involvement and focus on academic achievement often comes at the expense of a child’s social and psychological development resulting in low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence, and low adversity quotient. This study was designed to better understand the educational journey of Hong Kong youth and how they make sense of how their parents shaped that journey both positively and negatively towards the end of being better able to support these youth and their caregivers. In particular, this study sought to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students during their educational journeys and how do they make sense of how their parents have shaped their academic, social and emotional development?

Review of Findings

There were six participants in this study who were nearly seniors or graduates at time of the interviews. They were all born and raised in Hong Kong. Two of them had never gone outside of Hong Kong for studies; one had one-year overseas experience during a mandatory exchange program in Year 3 of university in Hong Kong; three of them had gone to universities in the United Kingdom or United States; and two out of these three had boarding school experiences. They had all completed kindergarten and primary schools in Hong Kong, attended tutorials through both individual and group lessons; only one had not had any tutorials in secondary school years. All shared stories of parental involvements during elementary and lower
secondary school years, which continued at different levels throughout the upper secondary school years. At universities, however, all participants shared that their parents stopped following their routines, and involvement in their academic lives was minimal.

The findings presented in Chapter IV emerged from an inductive analysis of interview transcripts. From the data analysis, three superordinate themes and seven subthemes emerged. 

*Theme 1: Parents took responsibility for their children’s needs* had the subthemes of (a) Parental support of financial and emotional needs, (b) Area and level of parental involvement continued throughout the educational stages, (c) Students’ possessed a strong sense of responsibility in studying. *Theme 2: Parents held high aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievements* was joined with the subthemes of (a) The impact of parents’ educational levels, (b) The power dynamics between parents and children, and between other authorities and students. 

*Theme (3) Academic development of the students was a priority* combined with the subthemes of (a) Students’ motivation to study, (b) High academic requirements from schools and parents.

**Conclusions Drawn from Findings**

The conclusion drawn from this study were supported by the findings elicited in the participants’ shared stories from childhood to young adulthood, capturing the chronology of kindergarten to university life. They recalled that their kindergarten times were happy and playful, however, when they started primary schools, all of them shared that their times were mostly spent on doing homework, drilling supplementary exercises in major subjects such as Chinese, English and Mathematics, and studying for regular tests and examinations. Their play times were very kept to minimal since they were placed in tutorials centers and engaged in extra-curricular activities after schools on a daily basis. They all expressed that the pressure to study from their parents and schools was intense including tutorials and extra-curricular activities. The
high pressure experiences since primary schools years sustained throughout the entire secondary school years although parental involvements in their academic life were loosened up during upper secondary school times. At universities, they shared that parents did not involve anymore in their academic life and even they faced academic and other life challenges, they handled the problems by themselves independently without the intervention of their parents. Most of them achieved high academic results and entered top-notch universities; however, because of tremendous pressures to study since childhood, they said that they were deprived of free time to play and freedom to choose since primary school years. The participants expressed their view of education in a similar fashion: they cited freedom to explore, opportunities for creativity, and pursuit of one’s interest were more fulfilling than remarkable academic achievement. Although the findings of this study support the speculation in the literature that high levels of parental involvement and focus on academic achievement often came at the expense of a child’s social and psychological development in childhood, the participants did not share stories evidencing low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence, and low adversity quotient in adulthood.

**Discussion in Relation to the Literature and Theoretical Framework**

This section reviews, interprets and discusses the research findings presented in Chapter IV in relation to the literature presented in Chapter II, and in relation to the theoretical framework of Baumrind’s parenting styles model and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory presented in Chapter I.

**Parents took responsibilities for their children’s needs.** All of the participants in this study shared that their parents took full responsibility for their basic needs. Although some of the practical daily care was shared with domestic helpers and the teachers in the tutorial center, all the parents supported their children’s financial needs all the way through university.
However, in terms of emotional support, many of the participants shared that they experienced an environment that largely neglected their perceived emotional and social well-being. The participants described constantly feeling emotions of anger, hatred, worry, fear, and anxiety in relation to interactions with and expectations of their dominant parents, particularly with regards to their education. Two participants explicitly described their mothers as “tiger moms” (Chua, 2011) and almost all participants shared stories of interactions with their parents that revealed a high degree of parental control. For example, parents controlled their children’s schedules, the kinds of activities they engaged, and friend acquaintances, with an almost exclusive focus on rigorous academic training and extra-curriculars that would contribute to academic success. Possibly as a result of that focus, participants recalled memories of a soured and distanced relationship with their parents during their childhood.

In relation to the literature, Levine (2012) claimed that parents in these contexts heavily emphasized their child’s academic development and ignored the implication this had for their general emotional, psychological and social well-being. This finding coincided with Erikson’s (1963) analysis of psychosocial development during a child’s growing stages, which asserted that caretakers are a significant source of support to children. As McLeod & Erikson (2013) outlined, failure to develop the basic virtues of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity and intimacy that Erickson’s theory stressed during the stages of development often lead to the establishment of fear, anxiety, guilt, and loss of self-esteem for the participants in this study. A majority of the evidence from the narratives with the participants revealed that they endured negative effects from their dominant parents as the feelings words: fear, worry, panic, guilty were expressed.
Parents imposed stress for their children to achieve almost exclusively on academics, and such standing in part is perceived to be related to perceived family function in Hong Kong (Ma et al., 2011). Most of the parents in this study, like their children, experienced high emotional stress, and they exercised corporal punishment, verbal abuse, and stern demands to their children. Ma et al. (2011) suggested that higher parenting stress was associated with lower family functioning and the interrelationships among vulnerable groups in society. As part of their research result indicated that the parenting stress of mothers, single parents, low-income and individuals, and poorly educated groups was higher than that of fathers, high-income individuals and better-educated groups. This analysis coincided with the narratives of the participants in this study in that four out of the six families had average to low income earning power, most of the dominant parents were nuclear members of the family, and they solely supported the family’s financial needs; two of them had severe ailments during their childhood. They were highly stressed and often loaded strong pressure on their children in the form of hot tempers and negative attitudes, and increased expectations of and pressure for the millennials to excel to the highest degree academically and high-demand careers in the future. Family functioning as evidenced by the narrative stories was perceived as not loving and supportive, but rather demanding, cold and distanced. Conversely, strong attachment to the parent was eminent in only one participant who emphasized that his mother’s physical presence and praises were essential to his success and outlook on education, and this finding supported the literatures that documented the benefit of positive relationship between parental involvement and achievement (Harris & Goodhall, 2007; Gaymon 2013).

From the narrative stories of the participants, their parents exerted high level of involvement in their children’s life, and that high degree of control and rigorous academic
training since childhood have caused the psychological deficiency and a poor relationship with their children. Because of the excessive involvement of parents who focused primarily on their children’s academic excellence, this prevented the close bonding that arises from sufficient emotional support furnished by the parent. As the literatures reveal, it is crucial to a child’s integral health during the childhood stage of development. Erikson (1963) explained that significantly supportive relationships in childhood with the mother, parents, family, neighbors, and school, in emotional and psychological realms, contributes to helping children and youth develop the virtues of hope, will, purpose and competence, from infancy to middle childhood. The participants in this study were required to constantly involve in drilling and studying for tests and examinations; they received high pressure to excel academically and was not given the chance to take ownership of their autonomy. In this sphere, the scope of nurturing the virtues was not enhanced in their childhood development, rather, they all experienced certain degree of psychological impacts from their parents.

This theme and the findings align well with Bronfenbrenner’s description of the microsystem (1994), the structure that includes family, school, neighborhood, or childcare environments, this layer is closest to the child and contains direct contact. The microsystem encompasses the relationship and interactions a child has with his/her immediate surroundings, and intellectual, emotional, and psychological development are primary here. As Plutchik (1980) suggests Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem is the first domain of emotions, and this system is central to a child’s development. According to Berk (2000), if the relationships in the immediate microsystem breaks down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his/her environment and develop strong skills, for example, socially or in relationships. Related to the stories from the narratives in this study, the participants may have experienced a partial
microsystem breakdown. Under the scope of the microsystem, the findings revealed a high correlation between parental involvement in students’ academic, social, and emotional lives and negative family bonding.

Parents held high aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic achievements. Scholars and researchers cited in the literature review in this study suggested that parental involvement was impacted by parents’ values and beliefs regarding education and the aspirations they hold for their children: Hao & Bruns (1998) argued that agreement between parents and children on educational expectations facilitated children’s achievement, and Hill et al. (2004) suggested parental involvement related to the parents own values, goals, and aspirations. The findings in this study revealed that parents’ educational backgrounds neither affected their level of involvement nor their aspirations for and expectations of their children’s academic achievements. Not all of the parents of the participants were highly educated, but their involvement was high across different aspects and to various extents. Their involvement ranged from frequent and regular physical visits to schools and activity centers to close supervision of doing homework and studying for tests and examinations. When children became adolescents, parental involvement extended to the youths’ social acquaintances. The findings indicated that the parents concerned about the growing path for their children; they desired that they stay on track to, and more importantly, achieve or maintain the highest academic standards. In this way they disciplined their child in accordance to their values and beliefs, which in part supported Leithwood & Riehl (2003) who examined that parents and educators frequently stressed the importance of the teenagers forming a strong identity, and they strived to help them develop a sense of efficacy and direction in life. However, in this study the findings unveiled that parents stressed the status and direction of life to academic achievement and future career success, and
the participants followed their parents’ ways when they were in the childhood and adolescent stage; they conformed to the values and beliefs of their parents. They were made to attend tutorials, even the harsh ones with punitive rules, and the activities that they did not enjoy; if they enjoyed them too much, they were forced to quit due to the perception of the parents that they had insufficient time for studying. Parents did not seek agreement with their children regarding what they liked or disliked. Parents were located in a powerful hierarchical position during primary and lower secondary stages and could determine all aspects of their children’s lives. Young children consciously and unconsciously adopt the beliefs espoused by their parents or by the caretakers around them through the identification process (Herman, 2008). When the children reached the stage of adolescence, they explore their identities and seek to establish a sense of self by formulating personal values, beliefs, and goals (Sokol, 2009). The participants in this study followed their parents’ ways when they were in the childhood and adolescent stage, but when they were reaching adulthood stages, they learned to individuate themselves from their parental influences by adopting different values, beliefs, and behaviors. They developed a stronger sense of self-discovery. All of them had their own perspectives of learning and achievement, which were not only pinned to academic success as defined by their parents. However, parents’ expectations and aspirations of success revolved around their children’s academic success. In the findings, most of the parents worked hard to make a living, and their requirements for their children involved studying hard and achieving high outcomes. Their collective beliefs of what constituted the pathway to success for their children was that they would work hard to be accepted at a good school that would secure them a good job and a prosperous and abundant life in the future.
To reinforce the pathway to success, Chinese parents commonly believe in “guan”, the method of strict discipline, which is grounded in the Chinese child rearing system. Ho (2014) explained that the concept of “guan” has a positive connotation in Chinese parenting, symbolizing love, care, concern, and good discipline. Chinese parents largely believe the strict discipline trains an individual, improving strength and self-control, which commonly involves the act of punishment that permits them to gain control of the child and enforce obedience; this develops the valued trait of being well-behaved. Punishments and awards were commonly used by the parents and educators of the participants in this study. Punishments were in the form of caning and spanking, or taking away the belongings of the child; awards were related to materialistic items. The literatures examining Hong Kong Chinese parental involvement in child development indicated that these parents, especially mothers, who embraced guan and filial piety exercised either an authoritarian or a psychologically controlling parenting style (Chan, Bowes & Wyyer, 2009). This method of practice in the system of rules of conduct enables the mother to control the child by psychological means, creating feelings of guilt and fear of withdrawal of love. One participant repeatedly said that he was worried that he would do anything that upset his mother or made her angry. Five out of six participants in this study had received certain degree of physical punishment from their parents or educators. Chinese value filial piety and expect children to “repay” them by following their views and wishes.

Ginsburg & Bronstein (1993) stressed that children reared under authoritarian parenting styles commonly have lower self-esteem, weaker social skills, and higher chances of depression, but they also usually perform extremely well academically. The participants in this study were all reared under the authoritarian parenting styles and encountered certain problems emotionally, socially, and psychologically. One participant had recurrent episodes of sleeplessness during one
secondary school-year and physical pain before examinations, while others experienced nervousness before the release of final examination results. Some exhibited theft behaviors, lacked confidence in socializing and constantly worried if they had fulfilled their mother’s desires during their childhood and adolescent stages.

Baumrind’s theory of parenting styles ascertained that authoritarian parenting is very demanding, rigid, and extremely strict, with expectations that children will rigorously follow orders. All of the parents of the participants fell into this category. Some of them were even abusive when the participants were small, rendering the punishment of caning and spanking, and delivering verbal abuse—scolding yelling, and exhibiting further aggression by throwing things at the participants. Baumrind (1973) did not claim all authoritarian parents were abusive; instead, she asserted that authoritarian parents showed low levels of warmth or responsiveness. In short, they were not attentive to children’s needs. As evidenced in the findings in this study, the parents of the participants were all attentive to their children’s practical and financial needs only but the majority lacked the emotional support of embedded warmth and responsiveness. Baumrind (1991) further classified responsive parenting as a supportive behavior that cultivated individualism, self-motivation, and self-assertion. These students were pushed to study, attend tutorials and all kind of activities that were under the wish and authority of the parents. This may lead to the loss of self and purpose of life because the underlying motivation for studying was to achieve high outcome in response to severe pressure from parents and schools. In addition, these young people before turning to adults lacked the autonomy to choose for themselves and chance to make responsible decisions as evidenced in the findings that some were not allowed to select courses according to their preferences or the colleges that they aspired to attend, they had to follow their parents’ strategies and gave up their own favorite options.
A supportive and respective attitude with a certain degree of authority may help a child to grow with independence and autonomy. Baumrind’s (1967) authoritative parenting is high on demandingness and high on responsiveness. She claimed that the authoritative parents’ behavior, values, and belief systems should be assertive but not intrusive and restrictive, striving towards allowing children and youth to develop their own potential within a controlled framework, and not restricting them as a preventive measure for bad behavior. This disciplinary method is supportive instead of punitive; it recognizes the child’s needs for autonomy; and it strives to find balance between discipline and control. Some scholars and researchers have considered the authoritative parenting style to be the most positive and effective way to nurture the child (Larzelere et. al., 2013; Merlin et. al., 2013). On the contrary, an authoritarian parenting style does not allow room for autonomy, which inhibits the development of the child’s social skills and increases delinquent activity over the course of time (Allen, et al., 2002). It was evidenced that most parents of the participants fell into the category of authoritarian parenting as the participants were always monitored and imparted rules and standards for studying and behaving. The participants expressed that they were rarely praised and seldom received affective attention from their parents. They did not have the autonomy and were always directed to follow their parents’ instructions. This may have constituted some of the behaviors such as weak social skills, theft and fight behavior, and emotions such as depressive symptoms and loss of self the participants exhibited in the childhood and adolescence stages.

The mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the child’s microsystem (Berk, 2000). In this layer, both parents and educators of the participants revealed that they were behaving in an authoritarian style of nurturing; the participants felt immense pressure and were compelled to aim high and excel in academics. Punishments were both
enforced by parents and the teachers or tutors. Parents of two participants were in agreement with using physical punitive methods to discipline their children; teachers of two participants exerted high demands on them to maintain positions of the highest rank in the class; and a few parents maintained close relationship with the teachers and tutors to ensure their children upheld high standards of performance academically, athletically, and recreationally. In this context, researchers have emphasized the need for a positive school and class-room atmosphere to enhance emotional well-being among adolescents, and teachers play an important role as a surrogate support system for the adolescent apart from the proximal influence of the family and home environment (Sekaran et. al., 2017); while Sclafani (2004) stressed that parents should provide a warm, supportive home environment that supports exploration, self-directed and autonomous behavior that will greatly increase the chances of having an academically successful child. Notwithstanding, the influence of the parents, the educators, and the inter-relationship between them in this mesosystem is significant; the participants in the study did not receive a supportive parenting base furnished with an adequate and appropriate teacher-parent-child relationship. It is evidenced that their whole person development is not promoted.

**Academic development of the students was a priority.** Students’ beliefs and behavior related to academic achievement can be associated with one’s self-efficacy. In the findings of this study, five out of six participants said they believed that they were capable of achieving high academic standards given all the pressures and competition they had undergone since childhood. They expressed in their stories that they were independent and capable of facing challenges when they went to universities, without parental interventions. Their assertion affirmed Keeling (2003) who cited that the millennial generation has some of the distinguishing traits—such as confidence, team spirit, being achievement oriented, and experiencing strong pressure but not
inclined with Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) who described that highly effective learners have a genuine interest in mastering the content and a curiosity to engage in learning in and out of school. Although the participants displayed independence and proved high ability in excelling academically, it is evidenced that they had a lower intrinsic motivation to learn as that they were externally influenced and molded to aim for high academic achievement since childhood. When asked if their parents had taken them to museums, art galleries, theatres, concerts, or libraries to enhance their outside classroom learning, they all responded that their parents focused almost exclusively on their homework and academic results. They only attended when the visits were initiated by their schools. All of them said they believed that the atmosphere of learning in Hong Kong had placed too much emphasis on academic achievement. Four out of six who had one to six years of experience living abroad expressed that they had enjoyed life overseas because they were given the opportunity to explore a new nation and unleash their curiosity and excitement; gained an understanding of different cultures and interacted with people with different languages and backgrounds; and discovered that vast learning opportunities were not bound to textbook learning or tests, or from drilling repeatedly through examinations. The findings supported the comments of some scholars and researchers that Hong Kong’s millennials study lives have never been described as “happy learning;” (Goldbeck et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2008). Indeed, none of the participants praised learning experiences in Hong Kong as happy or lightened. In contrast, the climate of high pressure for learning and studying filled the content of the narration of their lived experiences. It was not evidenced that their motivation for learning came intrinsically from within themselves without the force of the external influential factors.

Almost all parents of the participants in this study placed a significant emphasis on them ranking high in academic areas, and they were highly involved parents. Most of the participants
were accepted to highly ranked universities; they had maintained high academic performance and were academically driven in primary and secondary schools where elite performances and consistent ranking of academic results were the focus. The participants had faced keen competition between peers and high expectations from teachers. None of the participants lauded the attributes of Hong Kong’s pre-tertiary education system; instead, they criticized the drastic level of competition, which they expressed that they had to learn to live with. Most believed that the constant drilling only produced higher skills for examination, and that rote memorization was the learning approach primarily used in studying in Hong Kong. The higher-level skills that stimulated the development of a more complex, multi-perspective thinking were not taught in the participants’ local schools, while some of them found that these higher-level skills involving the process of interpreting, integrating, and evaluating information were illuminated while studying abroad. Eccles et al (1993), in the literatures in this study examined through stage environmental fit theory (SEF) that influential factors from the school environment bring together the environment of learning and student competency, thus contributing to continued motivation, interest and engagement. The SEF theorists posit that individuals are motivated and engaged in learning when their psychological needs (construct) for autonomy (control), competence (self-efficacy), and relatedness (belonging) are satisfied within an academic organization (school fit). These are intertwined and must be fulfilled for optimal achievement (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2015). As reflected in the findings, the local school system offered lower-level skills, forcing students to handle large volumes of homework and intense examinations, and it placed exclusive emphasis on competency and achievement. When students do not develop the quality of competence, they will not perceive a “relatedness” to the environment. This complements well with Jenkins et al (2015) who stress that the environment of relatedness focuses on student-
teacher and student-peer relationships, which are simultaneously supported and influenced by the academic environment. The student participants in the present study faced high expectations from schools that prioritized academic achievement and encouraged a competitive environment between peers. From the narratives of the participants, the development of multi-perspective thinking, life-skills training and love of learning were not instilled in their local school systems, in this regard, learning seemed to become a duty and a filial response to their parents, which resulted in a hierarchy of pressure.

The macrosystem of Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) theory manifests school influence in the outermost layer in the child’s environment. This layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws, which has a cascading effect throughout the interactions of all the layers (Berk, 2000). From the findings in this study, it is identified that culture in Hong Kong prioritizes that students study hard to attain a high academic standard, parents are responsible for supporting their children to achieve the goal, and ultimately schools play the role of providing the environment for furnishing education for the students. This, in turn, affects the aspirations and expectations of the parents who endeavor to provide a myriad of resources for their children to reach these goals. The parents and schools pass on the cultural values of high academic achievement to the children, and the children receive it in turn. Via this structure, the school becomes responsible for fostering a competitive model in the education system, rather than an inspiring and cooperative one, or the “fit” environment ascribed in the SEF theory. Cultural beliefs have actual power to affect all of Bronfenbrenner’s systems, and these beliefs are deeply held and become a basis for a child’s sense of self (Seifert, 1999). When the participants reached adulthood in universities, they all discovered that academic achievement was not the only means of success, even though it is indeed highly regarded by the societal culture in Hong Kong. Some unveiled the sense of
identity when facing the cultural and social challenges overseas, such as speaking a foreign language, mingling with people from different backgrounds, and learning the new way of adaptation to a new environment. All of them expressed that the culture in Hong Kong dictated the belief in “brand names” – received pre-tertiary education from reputable schools, graduated from high ranking universities with a professional degree and acquired a sought-after career, which projected “success” by its definition.

**Conclusion**

This narrative study of the lived experiences of Hong Kong student millennials reflected how the parental involvement in student’s academic pursuits has sculpted their academic, social, and emotional development. In addition, the narratives also reflected the study pressures that they received from schools, teachers and education institutes. The information collected from their narrative stories warrants a thorough review of the parental involvement role and the meaning and function of education in the parameters of the social system. At the level of the microsystem, individual development intersects with the parent’s child rearing practices, or the parenting styles, as discussed in this study, all of the parents of the participants exhibited authoritarian parenting styles which created high tension in the family and affected the child’s psychological and social development. This directly impacts the relationship between the parents and the children, thus affecting family bonding. Bronfenbrenner perceived the stability and predictability of the family life as the most constructive force to the development of the child (Addison, 1992). Addison (1992) has further claimed that, if the relationship in the microsystem breaks down, the child will have limitations in the acquisition of tools for exploration in other parts of his/her environment. The participants of this study looked for affirmation from their parents, and most of them did not receive affection and emotional support from them.
Conversely, they bore cold responses or harsh attitudes and punishment from their parents and tutors for low academic performances. The findings evidenced that there were deficiencies in supporting the children with affection and praises, possibly as a result, social and psychological issues such as anti-social behavior, theft behavior, insomnia, anxiety, and feelings of disappointment, sadness, fear and anger in the participants’ stages of childhood and adolescence were manifested. In this vein, the findings are in congruent with the literature that the high level of parental involvement that focuses on academic achievement often comes at the expense of a child’s social and psychological development.

Although it has been suggested that overinvolvement of parents may hinder the growth into maturity of adulthood development, which affects the social and psychological functioning of the child (Hudson & Rapee, 2011), the findings in this study did not support the notion that high level of parental involvement resulted in the child’s low self-care ability, low emotional intelligence and low adversity quotient into adulthood. With regard to low capacity in self-care, a few participants used the word ‘independent’ to describe themselves when they narrated their university lives, and indeed the narrations evidenced that they did not ask their parents for opinions or seek their approval for making responsible decisions when they reached adulthood. Those who studied locally and lived in the residences of universities practiced self-care management, and those who studied abroad were able to self-learn to adapt to new environment and practice self-care management well. None of them expressed self-care issues in their university lives.

With respect to emotional intelligence and adversity quotient, the participants were not defective in these aspects. According to the theorist, Mayer et al. (2008,) emotional intelligence, also known as EI, is defined as the ability to identify, process and manage emotion in both self
and others, while adversity quotient, or better known as AQ, is defined as the science of resilience (Stolz & Stolz, 2000); it describes how well an individual withstands adversity and the ability to overcome it. The findings did not support that these students during their growing stages towards adulthood have low EI and AQ abilities to overcome major challenges in their lived experiences. Their stories illustrated that when they entered universities, they faced academic challenges, life-changing events, social integration and relationship issues, however, they did not express that they suffered from major emotional disturbances arisen from their life challenges or had insufficient strength to overcome the hurdles that they would need parents’ intervention. The biggest impact happened when they were in childhood and young adolescent stages; when they were under the wings of their parents.

Related to the stories from the narratives, it could be stated that the high level of parental involvement and mere focus on academic rigor and excellence indeed represented a moderate to significant “microsystem breakdown” for the participants. Although when the parents’ expectations and aspirations of their children entering high ranking universities were met, and when the students did excel academically, the parents’ control diminished. The millennial students sacrificed other facets of life and the wholistic balanced development during their childhood and adolescent stages. The sacrifice also came at the expense of the relationship or bonding with their parents. Most of the millennials kept a distance with their parents, which made them “independent” in the sense that they did not feel the need or were not comfortable in sharing their life happenings with their parents as most of them expressed that their parents would not be able to understand, and they had never had the intimacy to disclose the inner feelings with them since childhood. In similar vein, the narratives disclosed that they had the
ability for handling self, social, and emotional management independently when they entered universities without the company or assistance of their parents.

The breakdown occurring within most of the participants’ families is aggravated by the pressing educational system in society. Moreover, teachers and educators are not responsible for responding to these deficiencies, instead, they deem the success of the children by measuring their academic ability and thus imposing greater pressure for them to study. This forms the vicious cycle of compelling the parents to exert a higher force to the students and thus to involve deeply in their academic lives to ensure their children’s performance are up to satisfactory. The child’s social and psychological development lies within the layers of ecological system and changes in any of the layers may exert a ripple effect on other layers. The high level of parental involvement coupled with the schools and teachers’ demand of academic achievement have shaped the student millennials’ social and emotional developments. It is hoped that the partnership of parents and educators fulfill the pivotal primary and secondary roles of nurturing students’ developments and building the strong mesosystem.

**Implications for Practice**

The primary objectives of this exploratory study were to understand the lived experiences of Hong Kong student millennials with respect to their academic, social, and emotional trajectories, and to explore the impact of parental influences in their academic journeys on shaping their overall development from childhood to adulthood. Comprehensively, the family, the educators and the schools play an intertwined role in the development of the millennials in their life journey. The deep insights into the narration of the students’ perspectives of parental involvements have significant implications for potentially creating positive change on the individual, organizational, and societal levels. The premise of this research is that, by gaining a
better understanding of the link between the influences that parental involvement has during their children’s developmental growth and the intense study pressure they have coped with, strategies for supporting the child’s education and relieving family tensions could be more appropriately configured. Henceforth, a more desirable outcome for promoting a healthy physical and mental well-being could be achieved.

**Implication for parents.** In investigating the lives of the six Hong Kong student millennials in relation to parental involvement, the findings revealed that the wide spectrum of parental involvement exhibits a “tiger” behavior (Chua, 2011), which has the connotation of an authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind, 1973). The authoritative parenting style is best supported by scholars and researchers (Larzelere et al., 2013; Merlin et al., 2013) as the most positive and effective way to nurture the child. This type of parenting style complements well with Erickson’s (1963) stage development theory that parents should provide a supportive environment to facilitate the healthy growth of the child. This environment comprises the core elements of reliability, care and affection throughout the developmental stages. The parents of the participants in this study deprived the autonomy of their children, lacked affection and demanded academic excellence, which often manifested through physical punishment and verbal criticism for failures. A balance of life is required from the parents who must not focus solely on academic performance and criticize them for failures. They must not measure the success of their child only through academic achievement. Their value of success needs to be re-examined. Their children’s holistic development is the focus rather than an isolated emphasis on academic results, and an authoritative parenting style should be acknowledged and adopted.

The findings in this study also revealed that some parents had received much pressure on their own, partly due to physical sickness, spousal issues or low earning power. To lessen the
pressure, parents would benefit from counselling services, visits by social workers, and parent support group organized by the community or churches. When they find a channel to vent their emotions and acknowledge their weaknesses in current situations, they will have a better control of the temper, which in turns will not need to shift the pressure to their children. They would also benefit from attending parenting seminars and to learn that they are the prime educators of their children (Buscemi et al., 1996) – they are the role model who remain a strong influence in the child’s life; they need to understand that children studying in Hong Kong is receiving a tremendous pressure due to the competitive environment and robust culture of Hong Kong, academic achievement is highly valued, but if they do not follow suit, they are not perceived as losers. There are talents in every child and the parents should take the privilege to discover and nurture their child in various aspects.

**Implication for students.** The participants in this study were all industrious and most of them entered high ranking universities. Due to the tremendous study pressure exerted both from schools and parents, they studied hard to attain high academic performances. The findings revealed that some experienced physical and mental discomfort during examinations periods. In this sphere, it would be beneficial for students who experienced high pressure to incorporate more activities in their life events such as actively engage in physical activities to relieve stress, mindfulness exercise to relax the mind and body, participate in support groups to avoid isolation or mentorship program for guidance, social group for communication and relationship building. They could also consider consulting counselling services or taking some life coach courses to enhance personal development and remove negativity. Since there is strong emphasis on academic development in Hong Kong students, they are highly encouraged to take part in voluntary services to widen their scope of learning outside classroom and bring meanings to life
through helping the underprivileged. In view of the strained relationship that the participants established with the parents in this study, it is advised that young adults who have distanced family bonding can take the initiative to reconcile with their parents such as make the first move to converse, learn to forgive and try to understand their limitations when playing a parent role at times of adversity and in some undesirable circumstances.

**Implication for schools.** The results of this study informed us that schools set an extremely high academic standard for students, hence parents spontaneously felt the responsibility and pressure to provide academic support to their children. From the narratives of the participants, the development of multi-perspective thinking, life-skills training and love of learning were not instilled in their local school systems. In this regard, students’ motivation to learn is bound to attaining high academic result. Hong Kong’s educational curriculum is often criticized for the lack of development of critical thinking and creativity (Chan, 2010). It is advised that schools should provide an inspiring and encouraging environments to engage students, and to inspire them to reach their full potential. By way of creating a fun-filled learning atmosphere instead of a winning-driven climate inside and outside the classroom, students are not pressed to learn, and when their talents are unearthed in many aspects, they feel the sense of accomplishment, which is not necessarily derived from the academic realm.

**Implication for educational organizations.** Most of the participants in this study spent a massive amount of time attending academic tutorials particular in their primary and lower secondary years. In addition to academic tutorial centers, a variety of learning centers claiming to provide all-round development in the domains of intellect, physique, social, music, art, science, and hi-technology became a thriving market in Hong Kong. It is crucial for the educational organizations to take a closer look at the aim of providing education and learning services as if it
is in the sphere of cultivating positive learning attitudes as well as developing healthy physical and mental well-being. All the academic and non-academic institutes may join force to conduct seminars, talks or family-activities for promoting positive parenting and family bonding, developing coping strategies for managing emotions and relieving tension.

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of the research questions and a small sample of participants, this research adopted a qualitative narrative approach. However, this small sample limited the findings of this study, and the results could not be generalized readily to other context (Merriam, 2009; Silverman, 2013). Although the data could not represent the statistical results of the larger population, it led to a sample of diverse cases that elicit unique individual experiences. It also allowed the voices of the students in the realm of parental involvement and the educational system to be heard. It is possible that a homogenous group of all participants who have only studied in either Hong Kong or overseas should be studied separately as their experiences in one country may differ from other, and so forth, in parental involvement. Consequently, more data can be collected to compare the similarities and differences in a specific geographical region. In addition, while this study involved both male and female students; indeed, the difference based on gender related to parental involvement need to be more deeply explored. In similar vein, paternal and maternal involvements may vary in terms of parenting behaviors, aspirations, and expectations in relation to a child’s education.

Given that this qualitative study explored student’s lived experiences throughout their entire developmental journey to adulthood, feelings and emotions about incidents or persons involved may be evoked, and it may be helpful to conduct a mini quantitative research study by way of providing a scale of emotional experiences to assess the participant’s stress or pressure.
levels. As a result, the stories evoked in this study warrant supplemental exploration through a combination of methodological approaches.

Other limitations may include the openness of the student participants, as their stories cover the parents, the teachers, the schools and any other persons and organizations that interacted with them. The participants may not have felt completely comfortable in disclosing sensitive information about the persons or organizations that may still be having negative impacts to them. The nature of narrative approach allows the participants to have control over the content of the data; the scenarios cannot be objectively validated. Likewise, the participant is free to unfold the stories without much of the out-of-context concern, the duration of the interview is usually longer than one hour, and the participants may find it time-consuming and lose interests in coming to the second and third interviews, if necessary. As Elo & Kyngas (2008) suggested, the approach may prove excessively labor intensive for the researcher, limiting the acquisition of targeted data and of coding analysis. Moreover, different conclusions can be derived from the same information; results to some extent depend on the personal characteristics and life experience of the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). This researcher has endeavored to carry out thoughtful planning to collect and analyze the qualitative data.

**Areas for Future Research**

The limitations of this research have helped the researcher identify a few areas of study to be addressed in the future. Given that the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine parental involvements from the perspective of the students, future research could be conducted through the lens of the parents. In this context, it would be important to deepen the examination of parental behavior by segregating mothers and fathers. Similarly, student participants could be divided into groups of male students and female students, adding gender to the analysis. This
study has two implicit groups: three participants from local universities and three from universities abroad. Both of these groups experienced the same educational system in Hong Kong in primary and lower secondary schools; future studies could use a sample that is even more homogenous, for instance, students who went to the same university or same country for universities; students who went to boarding schools; or students who studied in international schools in Hong Kong.

A comparative study could be conducted in other Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, and South Korea where students have been known to be pressured to be high achievers, particularly in the last decade. These countries share common traits of culture and history.

Educators and policy makers could benefit from research conducted on topics of motivation and interest in learning, from the students’ perspectives. Based on the findings in this research, students did not develop the intrinsic value of learning as they were forced to study hard and were deprived of time and space for recreation and rest. What interests the students and the connection between the interests and the subject matter could best be understood by further exploring the perspectives of the students.

Based on the conclusion drawn from findings, the student participants were capable of self-care and had emotional stability to deal with life challenges in universities, which was as opposed to scholars’ speculations that that they might develop into young adults with low self-care, low emotional and low adversity quotient under the impact of high level of parental involvements and mere focus on academic achievement. In this sphere, future research could be conducted on how the students made this spectacular shift.

The student participants held fond memories in kindergarten years, which were playful and joyful, however, the pressure to study commenced in early primary years. The journey from
kindergarten to primary was of a drastic change. It would be noteworthy to explore why the stakeholders, including parents and schools, perceived that play had to be halted to focus on studying once they entered primary schools.

Since this study has examined Baumrind’s (1973) parenting styles while addressing the behavior of the parents of the participants, other conceptual frameworks or parenting models could be explored that best lend themselves to the context of Chinese culture where students are high achievers but receive full emotional support from parents. They are well-disciplined, maintain filial piety, and possess the intrinsic motivation to learn.

**Personal Reflection**

I felt excited when I engaged the first student volunteer serving as a participant in my study and was even more thrilled when I successfully interviewed more students for this research project. I appreciated their enthusiasm in participating, their openness, punctuality, and attentiveness to my enquiries. I was impressed with all of them as each had a life story that was inspiring, enthralling, and touching.

Reflecting upon the participants, I was fully absorbed by their life stories. The first one that I interviewed was a cheerful and outspoken girl. One would not have imagined that she had undergone a great deal of hardship studying since her primary years and that she had a poor relationship with her parents. Luckily, she had an outgoing personality that seemed to have swept away her bitterness in her primary school years. I enjoyed listening to her story as she made the interactions with her mother sound funny when they were as not, or even when situations were embarrassing. She definitely had a sense of humor; however, when she talked about deeper issues, I observed her become serious and quiet down. I felt sorrow about her facing harsh punishment and a sour relationship with her mother. Given my professional role as a counselor, I
did understand that her mother was carrying a heavy burden for the reasons that she was the only bread earner and was working a stressful job. Her father was a trouble maker, according to the participant; she was not willing to share much about him, and I could sense that she felt very ashamed of his wrongdoings. The next interviewee had a less active personality but was very organized in relating the series of events from childhood to adulthood. Her academic performance was superb, and she was a person who was complying without articulating her own ideas much. She described episodes of anxiety attacks and depressive periods; sadly, her parents did not take notice, and she did not feel like telling her parents. She chose to deal with it herself. Luckily, she had a friend with whom she could share her worries, and such troublesome emotions lifted after a year. If the symptoms continued without treatment, she could have developed more severe depression. Since she was not the outgoing type, but rather was obedient and shy, her vulnerability to depression might have been heightened. This made me think of the suicidal issues facing many Hong Kong students at a very young age. Indeed, parents might have been negligent in failing to notice of their children’s emotional state, and affection was deficient in the parent-child relationship. These students lacked support, but because they daily faced pressure related to studying, family tensions escalated.

Another interviewee that impressed me much was his high level of tolerance and acceptance attitude with his mother who lost temper easily and even during the family holiday trip. It was probably of his easygoing personality and a grateful heart that helped him not hold onto the grudges of his mother’s hysterical behavior towards him. He said that he was a forgiving person, which was indeed touching to hear! He mentioned that he wrote journals that made him reflective, and he was a person that people would turn to for help. He was quite cheerful all along the interviews. I think his habit of writing journals had anchored him a healthy
mental state and a grateful heart in dealing with his mother and other challenges, which I felt amazed that he developed this good habit at young age.

There were two participants that I perceived as really independent young adults. Their relationship with their parents were not great, so they learned to take care of themselves in every aspect especially they went to live abroad. They neither have any parental guidance nor relative assistance for living a new life overseas when they were still adolescents. Compare to their parents, I am thinking if I have given too much assistance to my girl when she went abroad and how much parental involvement would be adequate to develop a child’s independence and resilience at times of challenges? How could parental involvement in a child’s life better prepare him/her for studying abroad in adolescent stage or separation from parents? I was also inspired by their unique views in education particular the one who was interested in politics. She had participated in dissident activities of which not many Hong Kong students of her age dared to speak out from their perspectives.

In conclusive remarks about these participants, I believe that the Confucian philosophy in filial piety was strongly indoctrinated in each of them. Despite the pressure, the push and the push themselves, their parents had in part crushed their sense of autonomy, still, they possessed the virtue of respect for their dominant parents. Although most of them did not maintain a close-knit relationship with their controlling parents, and emotions of fear and anger were aroused when physical punishment was enacted on them or their possessions had been taken away, none of them did anything drastically to rebel against their parents, and the emotions did not turn into hatred. Two of them reflectively said that they needed to be disciplined because of their bad attitudes when they were small; therefore, they had become a more self-disciplined and well-behaved persons. I would not say they blindly followed their parents without reflection; indeed,
they were quite reflected, which was sincerely revealed in their narrative interviews. Some of them witnessed their parents just barely earn a living, deal with physical sickness, work under high stress, or handle troublesome spousal issues, they learned to respect their parents despite the unpleasant or offensive child-rearing practices. I could see that they still loved their parents deep in their hearts, even if they did not show it much. Expressing feelings of affection towards others is not a characteristic practice in Chinese culture. Their parents had never expressed their affection towards them in this manner, so how could they model this attribute from their parents?

As a parent and counsellor in profession, I was touched by the virtue of respect inherited by the student participants and had a feeling of empathy for them. I wish their parents had recognized their feelings and learned about their expectations and built the kind of parent-child-relationship that the students yearned for. I am also impressed by the distinctive views that the student participants held for education and the meaning of success to them. When I asked their views on child-rearing and education that they would adopt with their children in the future, they all emphasized the notions that freedom to choose and space for developing the love of learning were of paramount importance. This research study has also helped me to examine my own parenting style and made me question if I have given sufficient emotional support to my child; if I have shown enough affection to my child, paid sufficient attention to her holistic needs, and strived to find the balance of developing her interests and talents outside the regimen of studying.

This research study has also urged me to advocate in my professional practice the level and type of parental involvement to a more collaborative partnership, which is to understand the concerns of the children and support their emotional needs. There are several key areas that could be developed in order to support parental involvements – the development of relationships, communication and education of parents. As a scholar and practitioner, I would endeavor to hold
seminars and workshops in promoting family cohesion and to build the relationship between family members, to educate parents to support their children of their lows and highs, and to develop their talents outside the realm of academic aspects. In addition, parenting talks on various styles of parenting would be increasingly important as this research study has informed the readers that parents exert the greatest impact on the psychological development of their children. While some parents may adopt a harsher parenting style or the parenting styles that stemmed from their own experiences as children, they would need to know the widely recognized parenting style that allow developmental advantages to their children. In order to reach the public for a larger audience, I would aim to educate and promote family bonding and mental health through the media channels such as radio program or column writing in the education session of the newspaper.

When reflecting on the process of writing up this dissertation, I have to admit that it was in fact a daunting job. It involved an inordinate amount of both writing and reading, and it was vital for me to develop a thoughtful plan and to skillfully organize, synthesize, and analyze huge volumes of information. Despite the difficulties, life-changing events, and setbacks that I experienced in these few years of my doctoral program, I found the entire research process inspiring and rewarding. The writing of each chapter was challenging, and the completion of first three chapters was a big leap towards success. Crafting the research topic questions to identifying the research methodology was like scaffolding the structure of a very tall building; recruiting volunteers for interviews was akin to raising the walls and completing the exterior and interior finishing of the building; synthesizing the data and the discussion of the findings was like becoming an interior designer who polishes up all units of the building. It is astonishing to see the completion date of constructing this edifice called a dissertation is drawing close.
Undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience, for I have acquired extensive knowledge from different areas of study and have significantly improved my ability to comprehend complex and voluminous material. The literature search, the review, and the critique of scholarly writing enhanced exploration into my topic area both deeply and widely. It is significant to learn that we all have biases and to acknowledge our biases. Indeed, sometimes our limitations can help us remain impartial in analyzing data. I appreciated the thought-provoking process throughout the training and learning trajectory, which involved massive amounts of reading and writing; I also thoroughly enjoyed the discussions with my fellow doctoral students. Although the journey was long and arduous, determination to succeed with academia and peer support made the impossible possible. The completion of the dissertation was self-affirming, built my confidence, and enhanced my physical and mental endurance. On the cusp of completion, I have affirmed that success does not come easy, but it is attainable.
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Appendix A – Invitation email

Dear Participant Name

This letter serves as an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral Degree in the Department of Education at the Northeastern University under the supervision of Dr. Kelly Conn.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the lived experiences of Hong Kong student millennials in relation to Hong Kong educational system and the parental involvements in their academic development. As the demand of academic achievement from schools and parents’ aspirations are high, the study pressure of the students is increasingly strained. There is lot of tension in the family, and students are often overloaded with homework and examinations. If we could better understand the impact of the education system and parental involvement in student’s academic journey, we might be able to provide leeway for uplifting the study pressure, improving the parent-child relationship, and the expectation and demand from schools.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It may involve 3 sessions of interview of approximately 45-60 minutes each in length to take place at a mutually convenient location. Date and time of the meeting will be arranged with you by telephone in due course. You may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences by advising me, and all information you have provided is completely confidential. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to
facilitate collection of information. Other ethical considerations will be explained to you in more detail upon our first meeting.

Should you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 9163-2674 or by e-mail at chan.wa@husky.neu.edu.

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to the parents and educators who nourish and nurture our future leaders in the fast-paced innovative 21st century. In addition, I hope my research will bring a spark of cogitation to the parents with young children of the importance of mental, physical, social and moral development of their child.

Kindly email me at chan.wa@husky.neu.edu to indicate your participation in this study. If I do not hear from you within two weeks, you will not be contacted again regarding this research. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thanking you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Josephine Chan
Appendix B – Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator:
Dr. Kelly Conn, Principal Investigator
Josephine Chan, Student Researcher

Title of Project:
To Explore the Lived Experiences of Hong Kong Student Millennials in relation to Parental Involvements and Local School System in their Academic Development.

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in this research study. This form will tell you about the study, and the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a senior student attending University in Hong Kong or overseas. You have been educated in Hong Kong since
kindergarten, and have at least completed local school education up to Secondary Form 2 (equivalent to grade 8, U.S. system).

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of the local school system and parental involvements in the student’s academic development.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, the student researcher will ask you to describe your lived experiences from kindergarten to college. It may take 3 sessions to finish the reflection of the history of experiences. The first session will be around 45-60 minutes, the second session will last about 60-90 minutes, and the third session may last about 30 minutes. The researcher will ask you some questions to further elaborate the experiences when necessary. The researcher may ask you to provide some pictures, letters or journals to reflect the lived experiences described. The interview will be audiotaped with your consent.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
The interview will take place at a location you choose, though none can take place at the student researcher’s office. There may be three interviews conducted on different dates at a mutually convenient time. First interview will last 45 to 60 minutes, second interview will last 60-90 minutes, and the third one will be about 30 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There is no harm or serious risk to you for participating in this research. However, in description of your experiences with respect to school work and parental involvements might trigger some emotional discomfort. Though the student researcher is a counselor, she will not, in any way, offer any counseling to you regarding your emotions during this study. She will provide you with names of other counselors who can help you.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There is no direct benefit for participating in this research. However, your sharing of the lived experiences may enhance the deeper understanding of Hong Kong student’s level of study pressure, their aspirations of the local education system, and maintenance of family bonding. It could also provide valuable information to the parents with young children to focus on the importance of mental, physical and social development. The data may be of use to future research in the area of academic driven education system in other Asian countries.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

The researcher will give all participants the pseudo names for maintaining confidentiality. All names of persons or institutions mentioned in the interview will not be mentioned in the dissertation. The researcher is the only person who will manage and get access the stored data. The collected data will be used for analysis of this research study only. The researcher will
protect the data from physical damage such as fire, loss or theft, as such the data will be kept in a locked fire-proof cabinet. The data will be destroyed after the research is completed and shall not be kept more than three years from date of collection.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No harm should incur from participating in this research. No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student at your University.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher at 9163 2674 or chan.wa@husky.neu.edu. Alternatively, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kelly Conn at 857-205-9585 or k.conn@northeastern.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue,
Will I be paid for my participation?
No. But your participation is significant to the prospects of the educational reformation, promotion of positive parenting and mental health of parents and students. As a token of thanks, you will be given an equivalent to USD25 Starbucks gift certificate.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
It will not cost you anything to participate.

Is there anything else I need to know?
You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission. The researcher, Josephine Chan, is a counselor by profession and the doctoral student at Northeastern University.

I agree to take part in this research.

____________________________________________ ________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part        Date
Printed name of person above

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above
Hi, this is Josephine Chan, thank you for showing your interest in participating in my research about the impact of the education system in Hong Kong to students and the parental involvements in student’s academic journey.

I would like to tell you a little bit more about my research. The purpose of my research is to explore Hong Kong student millennials’ lived experiences in relation to school and parental involvements in their academic development. Throughout the narration of your entire educational path from early childhood to higher education, it will help us better understand how the requirement of high academic achievement from schools and parents’ aspiration have shaped a student’s mental, physical and social life. I hope my study will provide possible plans for parents and educators to alleviate the study pressure of the students under the long traditional stringent and competitive education system in Hong Kong.

Would you be interested in participating?

You can choose the location of the interviews; where and when would you like to meet?

Thank you again for showing your interest to my study!

Bye now and see you soon!
Appendix D - Interview Protocol I

Date: ____________________

Interviewer: Josephine Chan

Interviewee (Title and Name): ________________________________

Venue: ___________________________________________________

Central research question: What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students with their educational journey and how do they make sense how their parents shaped their academic, social and psychological development?

Introductory Session Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions (under typical circumstances an informed consent form would be reviewed and signed here).

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the experiences of student’s educational lives in Hong Kong. My research project focuses on student’s lived experiences in relation to school system and parental involvements. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into the impact of parental involvements in child’s academic, social and emotional development. Hopefully this will allow us to identify ways in which we can improve the parent-child relationship, lessen the study pressure and to promote a balance state of mental health.
Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, I would thank the participant, let him/her know I may ask the question again as I start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment]. I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. To meet our human subject’s requirements at the university, you must sign the consent form I have with me. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?

As we are interested in learning about your lived experiences from childhood to adulthood, I will conduct the interviews into 2 separated sessions. In this first interview session, I would like to hear about your perspective/experience from kindergarten to primary school in your own words. I have several questions that I would like to cover. If you mention other people or institutions, please do not mention their names. You may give them a pseudonym or say their position. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

**Interviewing session** (60 minutes; participant’s background information and lived experiences from kindergarten to primary school):

**Interviewing Questions:**
1. Before the age of 11-12 i.e. before primary school, can you share how you and your family spent time together?

2. How did you go to school? By school bus, parents’ car or other transportation means?

3. Have you ever changed school in your primary school years? If so, at what age and grade? Why? (Follow-up: How would you describe this experience?)

4. Is there any incident that your parents would bring you to work? Can you describe what this experience was like?

5. How do your parents facilitate your homework and examination preparations? (Prompt: What is typical about this experience? Follow-up: Can you describe what this experience is like and why you think it stands out?)

6. How are they pleased/disappointed with your academic performances? (Prompt: How do you know if you are behaving well or not in terms of academic studies? Follow-up: What about social activities?)

7. How would they create opportunities for you to learn at home, outside of school and other recreational activities? (Prompt: How do they provide resources and structures of the activities?)

8. Can you describe your experiences of learning at home as opposed to learning at school and outside of school?

9. How do you understand your parents’ roles in your school(s)? (Prompt: For example, their participation in PTA or other school activities?)

10. What are your perceptions of your parents’ relationship with your school’s administrators, teachers and principal(s) of your school(s)? (Prompt: How do they communicate? How often do they meet?)
11. What are your parents’ relationships with the academic tutors, sports coaches and mentors? (Follow-up: How does this relationship facilitate your interests in learning?)

Concluding remark

1. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your participation.
Appendix E - Interview Protocol II

Date: _________________  
Interviewer: Josephine Chan  
Interviewee (Title and Name): ________________________________  
Venue: _____________________________________________________

Central research question: What are the experiences of Hong Kong millennial students with their educational journey and how do they make sense how their parents shaped their academic, social and psychological development?

Opening remark

Thank you for having participated in the first interview session and now coming to my second interview session. In the first session, I heard about your perspective/experience from kindergarten to primary school in your own words. In this second session, I would like to hear about your perspective/experience from secondary school to college in your own word. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key experiences you encountered. If you mention other people, please do not mention their names. You may give them a pseudonym or say their positions. Do you have any questions at this time?

Interviewing session (60-90 minutes; participant’s lived experiences from secondary school to college):

Interviewing Questions:
1. After the age of 11-12, i.e. when you are promoted to secondary school, how did you and your family spend time together?

2. How did you go to school? By school bus, parents’ car or other transportation means?

3. Have you ever changed school in your secondary school years? If so, at what age and grade? Why? (Follow-up: How would you describe this experience?)

4. How do your parents facilitate your homework and examination preparations? (Prompt: What is typical about this experience? Follow-up: Can you describe what this experience is like and why it stands out?)

5. How are they pleased/disappointed with your academic performances? (Prompt: How do you know if you are behaving well or not in terms of academic studies? Follow-up: What about social activities?)

6. How would they create opportunities for you to learn at home, outside of school and other recreational activities? (Prompt: How do they provide resources and structures of the activities?)

7. Can you describe your experiences of learning at home as opposed to learning at school and outside of school?

8. How do you understand your parents’ roles in your school(s)? (Prompt: For example, their participation in PTA or other school activities?)

9. What are your perceptions of your parents’ relationship with your school’s administrators, teachers and principal(s) of your school(s)? (Prompt: How do they communicate? How often they meet?)

10. What are your parents’ relationships with the academic tutors, sports, coaches and mentors? (Follow-up: How do this relationship facilitate your interests in learning?)
11. How did you select your university’s choice? Are your parents involved in any school choices and subjects of concentration?

12. When you have gone to college, how do you and your family spend time together?
   (Prompt: How do you keep the communication with your parents? Follow-up: How has the relationship changed?)

13. In retrospect, how would you describe your parents’ parenting styles in general? What kind of parenting style would you like to see?

14. How do you understand “success” in Hong Kong society? (Prompt: What does it mean to you? Follow-up: Does it have any impact to you during your entire study journey?)

15. What is your perception of your parents’ measurement of “success”?

16. What is your educational aspiration? Has your personal educational aspiration been influenced by your parents’ perception of success? (Prompt: If there is, how? Follow-up: How do you reconcile if there is any deviation?)

Concluding remark

1. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your participation.