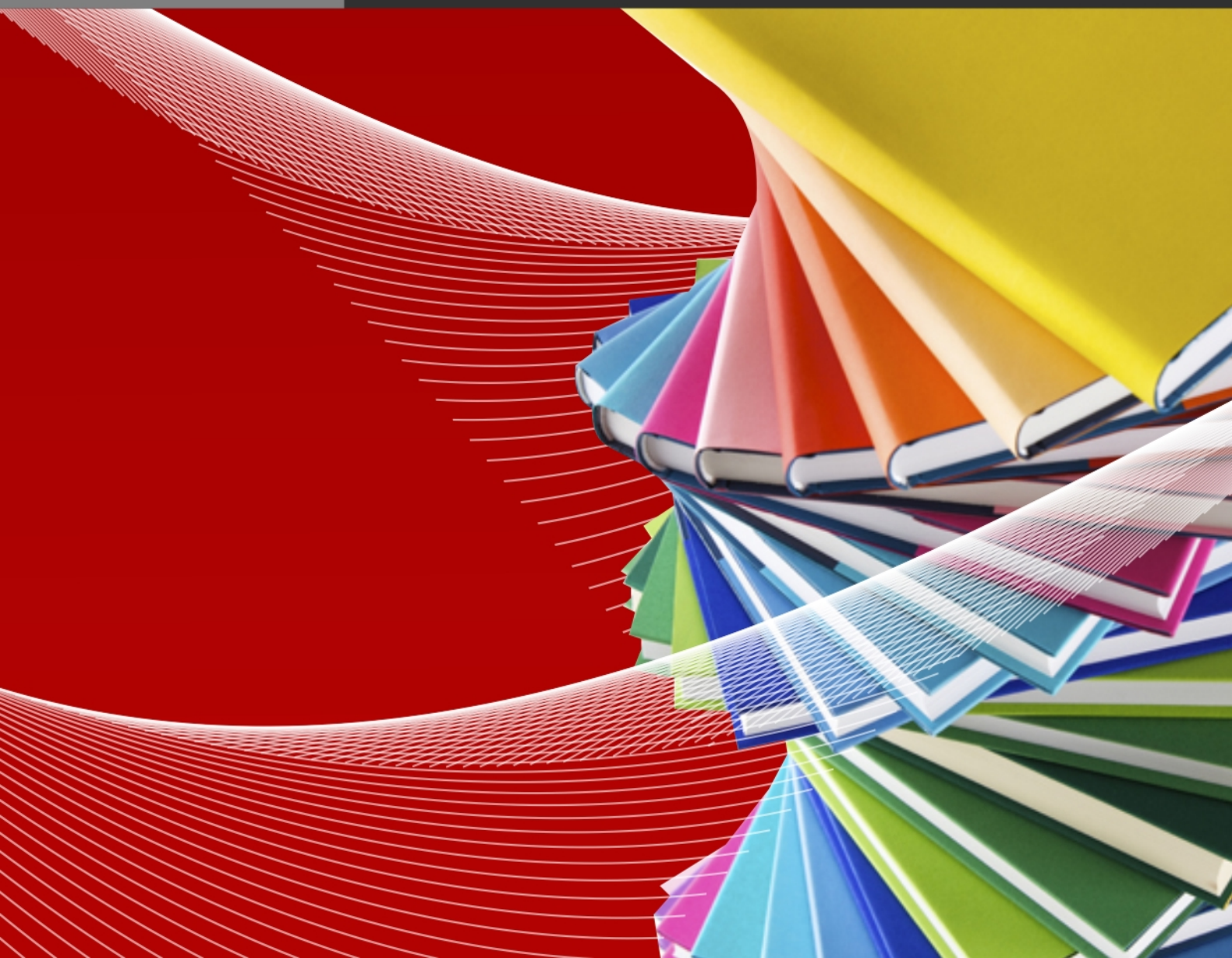




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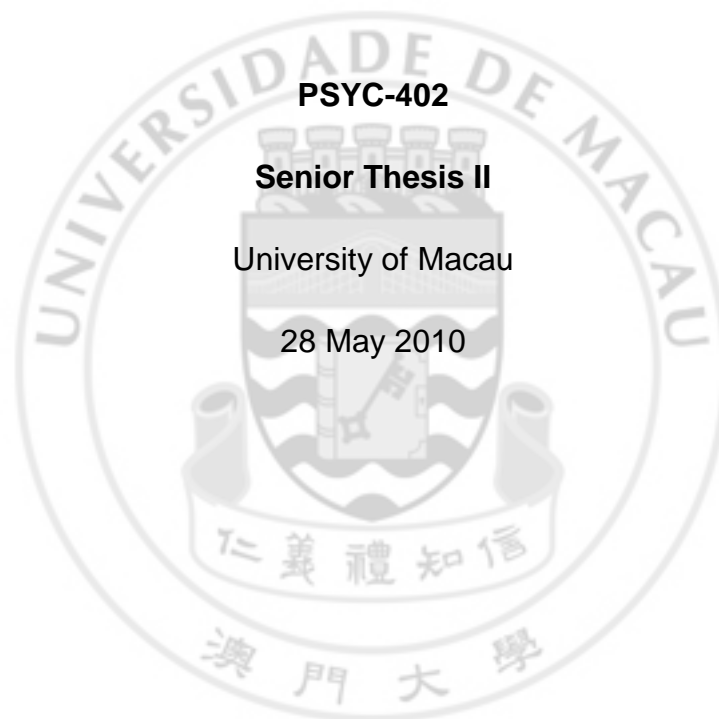


## **Life Satisfaction of Middle-aged Men in Macao**

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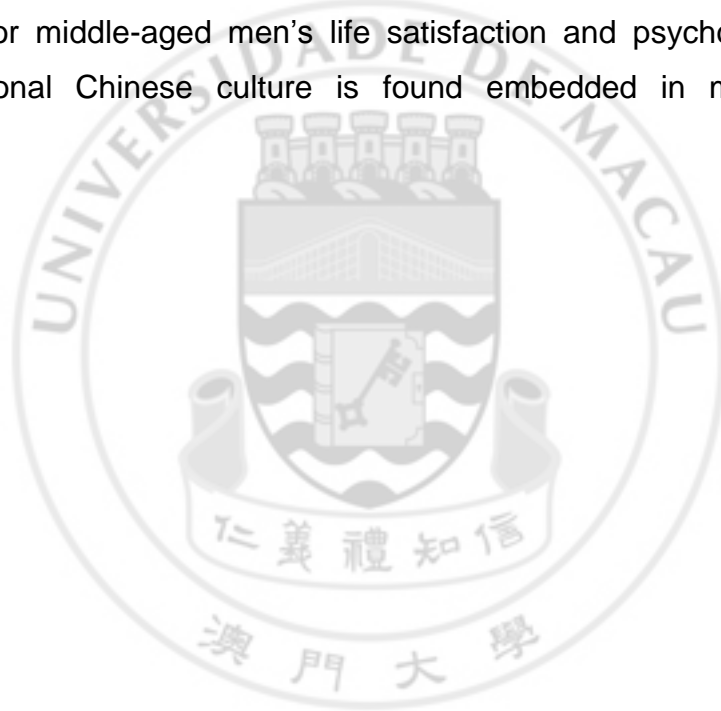
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### **Abstract**

Life transitions categorize different changes, which may eventually affect one's own life satisfaction. The purpose of this story-telling qualitative study is to understand the life satisfaction and subjective well-being of middle-aged men in Macao who are aged between 40 and 54 years. Seven participants' narratives were analyzed by means of in-depth thematic analysis. Three central themes were examined, which include Culture, Managing life and Self-perception in answering the central questions of "What is the life satisfaction of middle-aged man in Macao?" Findings show that a good balance between life aspects and shaping an image of oneself as capable in the workplace and family are vital for middle-aged men's life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Moreover, traditional Chinese culture is found embedded in middle-aged men's behaviors.



Growing older and stepping into different stages of life is a necessary process that every person will experience. Each stage in our life represents different characteristics and challenges that relate to how satisfied we are with life in general. For people who step into middle age (around the age of 40), they will start to evaluate their achievements, mostly at this point, they have reached the high points of their life such as they have been promoted in a job, established a family, or are in the process of launching the children (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Their life satisfaction at this stage may reveal how they view themselves in life and how well they have adapted to the circumstances and challenges around them. At the same time, mid-life transitions occur where many different kinds of changes and challenges occur as aging takes place. For instance, physical health declines and they may face the death of parents (Foos & Clark, 2008). These changes may somehow be stressful and unpredictable and have an influence on the person's well-beings and their life satisfaction, particularly if a person cannot cope with it successfully and appropriately.

Different previous research has been conducted on different aspects in order to view a person's life satisfaction. People, who have a job, are generally more satisfied with their lives than those who do not have one (Schoon, Hansson & Salmelo-Aro, 2005). Work is the vital life event that middle-aged men would experience. According to the statistic provided by the Statistic and Census Services of Macao Government, between the period of June and August 2009, the unemployment rate was 3.0% (DSEC, 2009). It is quite low when compared to the other cities or countries in the world. In a place where Chinese culture is deeply ingrained, men perceive a great responsibility as the breadwinner of the family. It seems that the income level matters more rather than the unemployment in Macao. As men perceive themselves as a breadwinner, their life satisfaction would be hurt if they do not earn enough income. This could be as hurtful as being unemployed. Interestingly, previous research carried out in Japan (Sagara, Ito & Ikeda, 2006) suggest that the more traditional the values of a man, the stronger his perception as the financial support of the family. Thus, their subjective well-being will be lower because they would easily feel dissatisfied about their work, settings and income.

Besides, family plays an important part to a person's life satisfaction. Married people are more satisfied than those who got divorced (Schoon et al., 2005). Most middle-aged adults have a family and children and at this point in their lives face a challenge regarding family life. As their children grow older, they will need to let go of their children with less restrictions and control over the children (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Conflicts and arguments usually happen at this stage when children ask for freedom and relationship between parents and children may become worse unfortunately. As previous research shows the father-child relationship is a good predictor towards family function in the future when compared to the mother-child relationship (Shek, 2001). Father bears a great responsibility in sustaining a healthy family relationship where satisfaction of life may be highly related to it. Understanding the family aspect of middle-aged men may help to understand their life satisfaction better.

As both a father and breadwinner of the family, playing these roles may be stressful and getting balance may be very difficult. In addition, many other roles they need to fulfill could be bearing down on them. Resources may not be enough for men to cope with these roles simultaneously. As a result, conflict between these roles may lead to poorer psychological and physical health. Balancing between these conflicts are vital to perceived self-rated health (Winter, Roos, Rahkonen, Martikaninen & Lahelma, 2006). The combining roles may be conflicting especially if the two domains fuse together without any emotional support from the family yet little fusion may correlate with greater emotional support (Adam, King & King, 1996). Concerning about these roles, better balance between these roles may result in higher level of life satisfaction.

Furthermore, understanding the culture could help to get a more holistic picture on how one perceives and experience life satisfaction. Cohen (2010) states that culture and individual minds are mutually affecting each other and individual lives under the same culture share values, beliefs, practices, norms, definitions and the other elements. Macao is a city, which is a combination of Western and Eastern cultures due to the rule under Portuguese Government for centuries. However, Eastern cultures still play a main role in Macao. As Chi-Hou (2004) states, most Chinese adult population in Macao have

experienced the presence of the Portuguese and the Catholic. However, they still practice Chinese culture such as family ethics. The traditional inter-dependent Chinese culture is embedded in Macao which puts lots of emphasizes on others rather than oneself. People's behaviors are motivated by reaching a sense of belongingness in in-groups and the identity is developed by means of relating oneself to the others (Heine, Lehman, Markus & Kitayama, 1999). Culture has a great impact on how one perceives oneself. The way of perceiving oneself greatly influenced one's perception on life satisfaction.

The above researches have given us a general understanding of middle-aged men's life satisfaction and their subjective well-being. However, most of them are conducted in a way of quantitative research in which the inner voice of middle-aged people cannot be heard. Because of this, I hope to conduct a qualitative research to have a deeper understanding of how this group of people experience and perceive their life satisfaction. Qualitative research provides a more in-depth story and a more holistic picture of how the different aspects of life come together in ensuring a sense of wellbeing.

As a Chinese male who lives under the culture that really suppresses my feelings and free expression of emotions, also negative emotions, which triggers my interest towards the gender of male. I want to know more about their experience and their emotion, so as to understand this group of people more and also it can help me try to understand myself. By the end of the year 2008, there are 28% of people aged between the age of 40 and 54, among those, women's population is slightly higher than men's (DSEC, 2009). Although men has a lesser population, men need to face many challenges in handling the aspect of family and work life when they step into middle aged (Palkovitz & Daly, 2004). Most previous researches have only been done on women where men voices' could hardly be heard. There is also little research done on this particular culture or men in particular, I hope to conduct this research to give an insight to the counselors in Macao so as to help them to have a better understanding towards the life satisfaction of middle-aged in Macau. Thus, they may be able to provide better counseling sessions for them when they need such services.

In short, the purpose of this story-telling qualitative study is to understand the experiences of life satisfaction and subjective well-being among middle age men in Macao who are aged between 40 and 54 years. At this stage, the life satisfaction will be generally defined as how one perceives oneself as successful in life.

### **Method**

This study is a narrative inquiry using multiple case studies (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and aiming to gain an in-depth understanding on the life satisfaction of middle-aged men in Macao who are in the age range of 40 to 55 years. Since previous research has done primarily in a quantitative method on the topic of life satisfaction, a qualitative method can provide another point of view towards this issue. As “men” are generally less self-disclosing in the society, their stories are often not heard. Thus, their experiences are also silenced and we have little understanding about their perceptions and sense of wellbeing. In order to have a better understanding towards their stories, especially their emotional aspects, it is better to conduct a qualitative research. By means of a qualitative method, rich information can be found in each participant’s story and the uniqueness of each person can be observed. This can provide another perspective and insight to the topic of life satisfaction.

Narrative inquiry is based on the concept of interpretation as providing a starting point for formulating assumptions, conducting interviews, transcribing the spoken language into textual data, and the steps of analysis (Josselson, 2006). By this method, we can then understand human experiences as truly lived by a person, in which their uniqueness will not be lost in the formal statistical analysis method and their complex emotional aspects will not be oversimplified (Josselson, 2006). Thus, using a narrative inquiry will help us gather rich information from the story where the uniqueness of each person will be respected. Furthermore, as Stake (1995) stated that case study is an in-depth study of a single case, which helps us to understand its activity within important circumstances. By means of collecting multiple cases, I hope to gather rich information and have an in-depth understanding of their stories and perspectives in viewing life satisfaction.

## Participants

There were totally ten participants. Participants were aged between 40 and 55 years of age, and lived in Macao for at least seven years. They are all married and have at least one child. Also, they have a stable job in which they earn salary from. In addition, they are able to express themselves fluently in Cantonese. It is because normally participants can share their stories and their feelings best in their native language.

In this research, non-probability sampling was used. Due to the limited time and resources we had, we were not able to draw a probability sampling. Thus, a faster and easier way in finding participants was non-probability sampling. Also, the number of participants gathered need not be large due to the complicated and time-consuming qualitative method. A snowball approach was used in this study (Trochim, 2006). Firstly, I found a participant that met the criteria of this research. Secondly, I asked him or her to introduce another person that met the criteria also to participate in the research. In order not to have any bias and minimize the subjectivity of the interpretation, it was important to note that the interviewers did not know the participants beforehand. I have conducted five interviews and another fieldworker who shared the same criteria of participants and similar topic, have conducted another five interviews. Finally, we each analyzed seven participants' data for our respective studies - I conducted five and took two from my co-worker.

## Procedures

Each participant was asked to conduct a one-hour interview in their native language, which is Cantonese. Participants chose the place where they felt comfortable to do the interview. In this study, all participants chose to do the interviews at home. Since the period of conducting the interviews is Lunar New Year, a gift would be presented to the participants that followed the traditional rituals of Chinese culture. It also showed our appreciations for them in taking time to participate in this study. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured format. Using a semi-structured format of interview can help to discover the unique story of the participants. Unlike the structured

format of interview in which a set of questions are prepared and asked in an order, semi-structured interview has previously set several central questions to ask, but does not necessarily follow the order (Van Schalkwyk, 2008b). It aims at discover the story. Thus, the flow of participants' answer is the primary goal. The advantage of semi-structured interview is that follow-up questions can be asked and it is more like a conversation in which the participants are feel free to express their feelings.

The procedures unfolded in the following steps:

1. Participants were treated with respect and were given a letter to clearly introduce the aim and process of the study.
2. They were given a consent form to sign and they were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded for later transcription use. If they did not feel comfortable during the interview, they could have stopped and ended the interview immediately for no reason. They were assured of their anonymity and that they would not be identified in any way in the report that followed the research project. They were guaranteed that their answers would be kept strictly confidential and all the audio recordings of the interviews were used for transcription purpose only.
3. A form of demographic data which included name, age, occupation and education was distributed to the participant to fill in so as to gather some basic demographic information which could reduce the time in asking them.
4. Participant was asked to draw a convoy model of a social support network.
5. The semi-structured interviews then took place to gather the data.

Convoy model can illustrate the social relationship with others such as friends, spouses and family members (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takahashi, cited in Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). As we considered it, it may be difficult for the "men" to express fully at the initial stage of the interview. Drawing a convoy model can help to build rapport and start the interviews in a more friendly way. People usually find it difficult to talk about themselves and tell their stories in an initial contact with a stranger, which would be the

interviewer in this study. Thus, by asking questions about the people in the convoy model can help initiate topics and avoid frighten the participants.

In addition, the convoy model could tell us about the relationship of the participants, which was very useful for our study. By observing the relationship that the participants fill in the convoy model, we may find out stories about different domains of life which affecting people's life satisfaction. Moreover, as my co-worker focused on the topic of friendship, drawing a convoy model helped to gather rich information.

The questions in the semi-structured interviews would mainly aim at digging out the answers of the central question of this study: "How do middle-aged men in Macao perceive and experience life satisfaction?" In doing so, questions on different aspects like social network, work and family were asked so as to gather further information. By asking these different types of questions, it was easier for later interpretation because these questions could be fit into different categories and themes. These categories and themes were aligned with the literature reviews that we have done.

### **Analysis and interpretation**

In a qualitative research, credibility and trustworthiness is the same as reliability and validity in quantitative research (Van Schalkwyk, 2008a). In order to achieve trustworthiness, the research procedures were explained clearly and followed systematically. The outcomes also followed in coherent and consistent manner, and interpretations are open to criticism. On the other hand, in order to achieve the credibility, the textual data was interpreted based on the comprehensive literature. In addition, credits were also given to the participants' emotions, experiences, thoughts and feelings.

As mentioned earlier, narrative inquiry can help to gather the unique stories of each case with real life experiences, which cannot be simplified by the quantifiable numbers. Thus, the recorded data from the interviews are the important sources for the interpretation. Before the analysis, the recordings of the interviews was transcribed into Chinese, and then translated into English. The transcription was done immediately after each interview. It was to ensure that we have gathered enough information. If it was not

the case, we could have discovered it immediately and made improvement in the next interview. Furthermore, in order to increase the credibility of the data, and decrease the error rate in translating, after translating the data into English, another field experimenter translated a section of the translation back to Chinese. There was over 80% overlap in the sections that were back-translated. Thus, the translation was sufficiently credible.

The analysis included both the analysis of the textual data and convoy models. The transcriptions of the recordings were analyzed and categorized into different themes for further discussion. The main themes emerged as cultural impact, managing life, and self-perception. The quality of the relationship was observed subjectively by the perceived support received by the participants and objectively observed by the numbers of people the participants fill in the convoy model (Birditt & Antonucci, 2007). We then combined the convoy model and the textual data to analyze to find coherent themes.

In addition, in analyzing the textual data, thematic reading was used. As Van Schalkwyk stated that, "thematic reading is a method of analyzing qualitative data (e.g., narrative, life story remembering)" (Van Schalkwyk, 2008a). Reading is an important aspect in finding themes through the data. Through reading, we identified different concepts, themes and patterns from the text and then generated a holistic picture and stories of the participants. Together with another field experimenter who shares the similar topic as me, we then discussed together so as to gather more ideas and themes and increase the trustworthiness of interpretations. Since the story of each participant is unique and complex, openness must be maintained in analyzing and interpreting the data.

## **Finding and Discussion**

The mean age of the seven participants was 49.7 years of age. They all work as a full-time employees and earn on average between 10,000 and 14,999 patacas per month (the monetary unit in Macao). Six participants have at least two children while one participant has only one. All participants have at least one male child, and they all currently live with their wife and children. Six participants have lived in Macao for more

than twenty years and the other one has lived in Macao for seven years. Each participant was given a pseudonym for ethical consideration (i.e., David, Calvin, Ben, Anson, Michael, Smith and George) to ensure confidentiality in such a way that the humanity of each participant was respected.

During the interview, each participant was encouraged to express his thoughts and feelings freely. Thus, each interview represented the participant's unique story and their real life experiences. These stories provided insights in response to the central question of the study, "How do middle-aged men perceive and experience their life satisfaction?" Three critical questions were derived in order to answer the central question of the study.

- What is the cultural impact on life satisfaction of middle-aged men?
- How do middle-aged men manage different aspects in their life?
- How do they perceive themselves?

Some common patterns were found in these seven qualitative data sets in response to the above questions. I discuss these three key themes more deeply below.

### **Cultural Impact**

The participants spent a lot of their time talking about their children. When talking about their children, there were many emotions mentioned. Most of them were the positive one. On average, each participant would mention the word "happy" five to six times whenever talking about his children. At this point of their lives, middle-aged men put a lot of emphasis on the off-spring. They invest resources and time and pay attention of the up-bringing of the children. *As Ben indicated, "My purpose of working is to help the children to grow up healthily." If they are good, they do not have any bad habits. I am happy."*

In Chinese culture, giving birth to a child to carry on the family name is the vital mission and purpose of life for middle-aged men. Among the seven participants, six of them have at least one male child. The tendency of son preference can be observed. In

China, where one child policy is implemented, the concept of son preference has indirectly increased the rate of abortion to around 10 million cases each year (Van Balen, 2005). We can see that middle-aged men carry a huge responsibility for the continuation of the family name. Having a son can relieve from the pressure and stress given by their parents, and thus a better psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Moreover, filial piety is another traditional Chinese culture concept that everyone practices. Middle-aged men expect their children to repay them in the future and respect them. *As Ben said, "The daughter is very hard working in her study. She gives me a lot of respect. I feel that when she grows up, she will repay me. I will get reward."* Filial piety is a concept derived from Confucianism in which it means that children should respect their parents, and the concept of reciprocity in which children should return love, care and concern to their parents, especially when the parents are old, because the parents have raised them up (Sun, 2008b). These values have greatly influenced the relationship and interaction between children and parents in East Asian countries (Tsai cited in Tsai, Chen & Tsai, 2008) and guide the thoughts and behaviors of middle-aged men. Middle-aged men tend to "invest" a lot on children in the hope to get "repayment" from the children at a later stage in life. They hope to have a shelter when they get older. This is somehow an economic and financial concept of filial piety where the men expect to have at least the basic financial support from the children after their retirement. It also relates to an expectation on gaining satisfaction in the future when they retire from work and the duties of raising the children. They will experience a restart of exploring the environment and have time to reminiscence the past.

Filial piety can also ensure the emotional support and companionship from the children when middle-aged men step into the later stage of life.

*Michael: "We hope that they (the children) will hang around us and stay with us but my eldest daughter is now working at the United States. We miss her very much. We often contact through telephones and emails. But...yeah...we miss her. We want her to live with us."*

Middle-aged men do not want their children to leave home. A feeling of loneliness could be observed. This was also related to traditional Chinese culture, which

together with the gender issue results in the phenomenon that the male was not encouraged to express emotion publicly. A feeling of loneliness can be understood by means of their desire of companionship with people. All seven participants emphasized the practice of “drinking tea” (a traditional Chinese practice in which people gather together to eat “dim sum”). This practice usually involves several people, and a sense of belongingness can be obtained by regularly carrying out this activity with family. Being in communion with others and the children can help to protect the psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Communion is the construct that a person cares for and co-operates with others in a group (Bem cited in Aubé, 2008). It is vital for both men and women. According to our findings, it is important for middle-aged men especially when they stepped into the later stage of life.

During the interviews, there were several unspoken issues. The wife was seldom mentioned during the interview. In addition, they did not talk about any arguments happening between people and the expression of negative emotion was absent. They would normally answer, “*It’s fine*” and “*It’s ok*” when asked about these particular topics. Middle-aged men did not want to speak out those events because they perceived these were embarrassing and a kind of losing face. According to Sun (2008a), being challenged in one’s authority status, being publicly insulted or humiliated, being out of control or turning down an invitation would surely cause the person to lose face. Talking about the negative aspects about one’s own family or relationship were something private in which outsider should not know. The idiom, don’t wash your dirty linen in public, means exactly the same. This may cause them to be insulted publicly. Losing face would eventually hurt a sense of well-being and satisfaction level. Thus, they would rather keep those things in secret.

Furthermore, instead of rejecting the interviewers directly, they hope to show respect and give face to the interviewers also. Thus, the answer would be “*it’s fine*” or “*it’s ok*”. This is another aspect of giving face in which to ensure good communication with others. Sun (2008a) also states that, indirect communication is often used in Chinese culture. This way of communication can leave room for alternate interpretation

and it can always be changed or buffered with another message. By means of this, face would be saved and better relationship with others could be ensured.

Culture is important in a sense that it shapes a person's values and attitudes. These values and attitudes then shape how a person behaves and they would also be good constructs of knowing about one's own life satisfaction. It was obvious that middle-aged men in Macao exhibit the traditional Chinese culture of Confucianism in which many these aspects could be found. Thus, by knowing a culture well, we then could understand more about how they perceive and experience the life satisfaction.

### **Managing life**

Family, work and social network were the aspects that middle-aged men need to handle well in life. According to the data that convoy model represents, the quality of the relationship mainly based on family members. All participants fill the names of nuclear family members in the inner circle. Other than that, friends and relatives were filled in the outer one. Quantitatively, the average number of people they filled in the convoy model is around fifteen. It shows that they have quite a narrow social network. Middle-aged men perceive nuclear family members as more important than the others. This is also confirmed later in the interview.

*Calvin: "Whenever friends call you out or going out to travel, you may say that, sorry, there is family waiting for me."*

When men stepped into middle-aged, the nuclear family members become the most important group of people in their life. It is because of the companionship and emotional support gained from the family members. Family members are the ones that would accompany them until the end of their life, especially the partner. Moreover, according to the reciprocity in the filial piety mentioned earlier, middle-aged men also expected their children to accompany them. A sense of belongingness could be found within the private family settings.

*George: "I can share everything and details with my wife. However, I am also willing to share with others, but we are adults, so we have our limits, different*

*limits of opening the inner world. There is something that only the partner can understand while others can't understand."*

Middle-aged men felt a greater intimacy and security when they shared with their partner. A sense of trust tight the two parties together. The elements of trust and love are essential in the emotional support given by a person (House cited in Malecki & Demaray, 2003). As a result, nuclear family members are placed in a higher priority compared with friends.

On the other hand, middle-aged men reported that the friends they have are mostly their colleagues, which they have met in the work settings. They do not have many close friends outside of the work environment. Most of them perceive friends as a "business friend" in which they can provide opportunity for them to earn big money. There is a lack of emotional contact between them and thus, they do not share their inner feelings with friends.

*Ben: "Yes, colleagues...some of them introduce me to some projects. I think these are very important because if I want to have a good project, I need to rely on some good friends. I need to rely on them to introduce me some projects or some company."*

How they perceive the others greatly influenced whom they will disclose to. For middle-aged men, a large numbers of friends do not necessarily give them the feeling of emotional support. They would rather focus more on the quality of the relationship. High quality or close and intimate relationship brings them more satisfaction.

For middle-aged men, family roles and work roles inevitably become the most important issue in their life. Two domains are highly linked together in a sense that the family settings need the financial income from the work settings. However, both settings compete for the time resources in which middle-aged men would find conflicts between the two. How to manage to balance between the two is vital for the feeling of successful in life. Nonetheless, the paid work is always the central focus of middle-aged men's life.

*Ben: "Work is the most important thing in my life. I am happy if I can work and have a job."*

Society expects middle-aged men to make work the central domain of their lives. As a result, flexibility in the work settings is low for middle-aged men (Palkovitz & Daly, 2004). On the other hand, the flexibility in the unpaid work in family settings such as housework is comparatively high. They do not need to carry out the responsibility of daily routine work such as cooking (Palkovitz & Daly, 2004). Participants report that they would do some repair work for the family. Only two would cook for the family. One likes to cook while the other one was forced to do so because his wife was not at home at lunchtime. This particular man claimed that he would normally buy the lunch box rather than cook by himself because this can save time and he could rest more. Thus, middle-aged men would rather invest more time and energy on the paid work rather than the unpaid work.

Moreover, satisfaction is derived from the work domain. Success is undoubtedly tied with the work settings. Six out of seven participants attribute the high points and low points to the work settings. As they have invested many time and resources on this area, the subjective perception of the outcome would become more important. Thus, satisfaction would be derived more easily. This satisfaction is also in a higher ratio with compare to the housework or other unpaid work since they do not perceive those as important.

As middle-aged men put more time in work settings, over dosage or over work would be problematic in which it would probably damage the relationship with the family members or resulted in poor health (Palkovitz & Daly, 2004). Getting balance in time usages between family and work settings become inevitably the important issues for middle-aged men. Conflicts between the roles of fatherhood and the roles in the work settings were often observed. They would feel guilty of not putting enough time and resources to the family.

*Michael: "The most regret is that...life will not always be 100% perfect. Yes. We need to work till very late initially and we did spend less time to our children when they were small. We need to rely on our family or my mother to take care of them. Thus, at those periods, we...er...we did not give much care to them (the children)."*

*Smith: "If every citizen is very happy, you will also be happy. However, the unhappiness is that they (the citizens) are very happy, my family, the whole family is without me during the festivals. It is just like they have lost the festivals and they do not know how to celebrate it." (His work is to hold some functions for citizens during the festivals).*

We can see that conflicts always happen as these two domains compete for the time investment of middle-aged men. Negative feeling of the self derived from this conflict. During this period, they would always try to compensate and get a good balance between the two. Normally, they would take some extra time to accompany the children so as to compensate for the inner guilty feeling of not able to fully carry out the responsibility as a father. As Michael later added, *"But...at those periods, when we had holidays, we would hang out with them (children)."* Getting a good balance in different domains of life is essential for middle-aged men's life satisfaction. A day has only twenty four hours and each domain needs their presence. Thus, managing the time well becomes an important issue for them to handle each aspect well.

### **Self-perception**

As Heine et al. (1999) suggested, people normally seek positive self-regard. This self-regard eventually brings satisfaction for the self. Positive self-regard comes from how one perceives oneself. For middle-aged men, it is important for them to perceive themselves as capable. Since they have various roles at this stage of their life such as fatherhood, husband, worker and friends, it is essential for them to view themselves as doing well at all these domains. Living within an inter-dependent culture, others perceptions are important. It is important for them to meet the shared expectations and norms of the culture and confirmed by the others (Heine et al, 1999). Thus, positive self-regard is gained from the other's point of view or perception. Feeling satisfied about oneself mainly derives from how the others perception under the culture since the self is not separated with the groups.

*Michael: "All the things I need to handle on my own. There is a lot of satisfaction when starting out this business. This can be called a high point. The people outside will also appreciate and accept my effort."*

Moreover, the role of fatherhood puts a lot of responsibility on their shoulder in which they start to realize “the self” more. Many participants reveal that they need to be a good model for the children because the first learning setting for the children is family.

*Calvin: “He (the son) is a mirror, the image of you. When you have some good habits or bad ones, this mirror can reflect it. Or maybe you have some unconscious behavior, or some very bad habits, maybe the son, from not knowing the behavior to learning the behavior, modeling you at home and you may not even notice it.”*

*George: “There are differences with the changes of yourself and your roles and identity. In the past, when I was young, I was not others’ father, I would play hard, not so serious and unruly behaviors, there are these. But when you becomes others’ parents, maybe you need to be serious and see the possible results of your speeches and behaviors.”*

This realization makes them start re-evaluate “the self”. This renewable of self perception makes changes on their behaviors for the good sake of the children. This new self-perception needs self-acceptance of one’s good aspects and bad aspects first. Eventually, they come to realize “who they are” and a sense of identity as a father developed. This identity would then fulfill the responsibility as fatherhood. Observing the children made them understand themselves better. Raising them up increases this realization. They would pay lots of attention on the child because they see themselves in the children. Satisfaction is then derived from providing them a good environment to grow healthily. This motivates them to work hard so as to act as the role of breadwinner of the family.

*George: “I am...I am (emphasizing the point) the main economic source of the family, but I will spend my economic sources on them (family members) rather than on me.”*

This is also the reason why they accept the responsibility as a breadwinner. Besides the fact of social expectations, they find a sense of self during the process. Feeling oneself as capable and realization of one’s own identity brought them satisfaction in life.

## **Limitation**

In conducting this study, there were some limitations. As mentioned earlier, the losing face concept is one of the barriers that there were some unspoken issues. Since our participants are middle-aged, while there is a large discrepancy between the ages of interviewers and interviewees. Power distance is developed. As a result, some of the important issues and aspects about life satisfaction may not be mentioned in this study.

A follow-up questionnaire could be distributed to the participants in order to compensate for the weakness of this study. Private questions and a life satisfaction scale may be included in the questionnaire. Filling a questionnaire in a private setting may let the participants feel more freely in expressing oneself. This can also solve the problem of losing face because the power hierarchy and age differences disappear in such setting. Unspoken issues in the interviews would then be expressed in the way of written form. Of course, the ability of written expression of the participants may need to take in consideration.

Participants have mentioned about the generation difference of fewer children were given birth recently. Further study may be carried out on how the number and gender of the children have an effect on middle-aged men's life satisfaction. Since the tendency of son preference may disappear in the new generation, resources put on the off-spring may vary differently. The birth order may also be an important issue to consider. Further study may be carried out to complement on this particular area.

## **Conclusion**

In answering the question of “how middle-aged men view and experience life satisfaction”, we found that cultural values and attitudes have a great impact on middle-aged men's behavior. These cultural values shape their view and their experience towards life satisfaction. Moreover, the way they manage their life also affects their perception on life satisfaction in which getting a good balance on different aspects. They may need to be cautious of distributing the time well on each aspect. Finally, a new self is developed during the process of fatherhood in which it motivates them to carry out the

responsibility as the role of breadwinner. As a result, satisfaction derives from this new emerged sense of self.

In short, by conducting this study, I hope to give an opportunity for the middle-aged men to express their emotion freely and to understand how they view and experience the life satisfaction. Furthermore, I hope to provide ideas for the counselors and social worker in Macao so that they can understand this group of people in another point of view. Hopefully, more research could be done on this unheard group of people in the future.



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