

2017 FYP FORUM HIGHLIGHTS

1st Prize

Negotiating Sexual Lives among University Students in Student Hostels: To Shag or Not to Shag?

By Mok Kar Yan

The question of whether, when, why and the way students having sex in hostels entails not only an intimate individual decision, but also requires a profound understanding of self, relationships with others and the space. This research aimed to challenge the homogenizing discourse of student residents having sex in hostels as purely transgressive or improper and re-conceptualize the student residents as desiring and sexual subjects that open to the negotiation of their identities.

The student hostel as a contested terrain is imbued with paradoxes that construct and deconstruct sexualities of university students. The regulatory framework of hostels aims to shape the students to have a de-sexualized script under different techniques of disciplinary power. However, the ambiguity in the sexual stance in regulations offers opportunities of resistance, thereby enabling sexual activities to take place in this vaguely defined space. The resistance of university students manifests their sexual legitimacy, though not recognized in the hostels and at home.

Zooming out from the hostel site, the researcher analyzed the sexual legitimacy and illegitimacy of university students in relation to their personhood. The category of 'university student' is grounded in several sets of paradoxes --- contradictions between university education and hostel regulations which celebrate

some but deny some parts of their lives, contrasts between sexual oppression at home and the possibility of transgressing sexual oppression in hostels as well as identities of university students as autonomous but still dependent adults. In this sense, student hostels play an integral role of reconciling these paradoxes and making university students as sexual subjects with agency.