Gender-biased and selective media representation is ever-present, and this is not helped by the construction of sites of protests as dangerous, hence ‘masculine’. With frequent eruptions of violent confrontations since 3 October, Mongkok has become a site ‘for man’: “One is not a real man unless he has guarded Mongkok”. Clara was often approached by male protestors in Mongkok for friendly conversations, but also for asking why she was there as a girl. She was frequently urged to go home, or to Admiralty, the other site located in a district of government offices, hotels and business. It was occupied by many university students and frequented by office ladies, thus perceivably ‘safer’ for women.

Women’s existence in the movement has been categorized as one of passivity, vulnerability and victimhood. Clara’s experience, alongside the sexual and verbal abuses directed at female protestors by both police and public, testify to how women’s freedom to exercise their bodies and strength in the movement is constantly policed. The gendering of sites of protests attests to the entrenched divide between the masculinity-coded ‘public’ sphere, i.e., economy and politics, and the ‘private’ sphere, i.e., family, housework and childcare, which seemingly continues to be where women ‘belong’. How unpaid ‘private’ labour limits the inclusion of many women is the realm of the ‘public’, remains hidden from the purview of the public and many protestors.

The presence of the LGBT community

Since the decriminalization of [male] homosexuality in 1991, the local LGBT community has been struggling for recognition of their identities and relationships. They have fought for legislation against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (2005/12), and for transgender people’s right to marry (2009/12), etc. Nevertheless, they are still excluded from certain social rights (e.g., couples’ eligibility for joint tax return or to apply for public housing). This is because from certain social rights (e.g., couples’ eligibility for joint tax return or to apply for public housing). This is because from the purview of the public and many protestors.

However, with blocked access to decision-making through suffrage and rights to run for office in elections, everyone in Hong Kong is a second-class citizen. Without doubt, many have made their yearnings heard internationally in the Umbrella Movement, but the voices of women and the LGBT community are neglected. There is a long way to go for Hong Kong’s democratization, but without redressing the hypocrisy in excluding women and sexual minorities as viable political actors, the battle will only be made more treacherous.

Epilogue
Doing umbrella sociology
Beatrice Oi-yeung Lam

FROM THE JULY 1ST MASS RALLY in 2003 to the Umbrella Movement, social activism empowers Hong Kongers as citizens. The new media is often credited for how it pluralizes discourses and mobilizes action. Nonetheless, virtual communities remain susceptible to tendencies to exclude rather than include. This mirrors the apprehensions towards diversity in the larger political society, rife with demonizing personal attacks that serve no more than to name and shame. In these pages, our colleagues and students from the Department of Sociology of The University of Hong Kong spoke of what happens under the Umbrella in the Movement, at the same time doing umbrella sociology: we share marginalized, if not unheard voices, so as to protect them from being swamped. From these voices we learn to understand our personal troubles, from not afford- ing a decent shelter to being questioned about presenting one’s sexual identity in the protest area, as public issues. On this premise we learn to listen, put ourselves in others’ shoes, and examine our own values, assumptions, interests, and the larger social context in which we find ourselves. In this sense, (umbrella) sociology nurtures our capacity to engage in dialogue and deliberate, respectfully and reflexively. It is in this way we enable ourselves to guide our communities to democratic decision-making and self-governance – just as we witness in the flowering of the Umbrella Movement.

Sociology frightens because of how it often exposes the inconvenient truth, just as the Umbrella terrifies, for how it reflects upon and lays bare the cynicism that suffaces local politics. But get under the Umbrella, and we see possibilities of creating ourselves as actors who fight for human dignity, social conscience, and justice, in the process changing our politics and making history. Why should we be afraid of the challenges that the Umbrella brings to our city?

Below: Among others, the study space in the Admiralty occupy area is emblematic of democratic deliberation and organic self-governance from the bottom up. Image courtesy of Jimmy Wong.