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Hong Kong's Gender Divide

Our shameful attitude towards women

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There was an uproar from women's groups – and reprimands from government officials – after radio hosts Sammy Leung Chi-kin and Kitty Yuen Siu-yee asked the teenage listeners of their programme, So Fab, to vote for the female celebrity they most wanted to indecently assault. Commercial Radio was subsequently fined \$140,000 by the Broadcasting Authority.

What most upset people was the poll's poor taste, which was an insult to women and entertainers, and the casual attitude towards violence against women. In Hong Kong, 95 per cent of sexual crimes are against women, and there was a 22 per cent jump in domestic violence from 2004 to last year. Leung and Yuen's poll did not help to curb that trend.

The general manager of Commercial Radio, Rita Chan Ching-han, apologized and promised that the company would organise a series of training sessions to improve its employees' broadcasting ethics, professionalism and sense of social responsibility. Maybe every organisation, both public and private, needs to do the same. Leung taught journalism part-time at a university, but that job has since been terminated.

Some have speculated that the two radio hosts were aware of the controversy their poll was bound to cause – but that they pushed ahead with it to maintain their programme's high ratings. Such thinking implies that teenagers in Hong Kong are so attracted to the idea of "having a bit of fun" that they cannot stop themselves from listening to a radio programme – or from participating in a poll – that blatantly degrades women.

Are teenagers here really that gullible and unsophisticated? Have they not learned basic concepts of decency and respect for women? Or is the survey more a reflection of the marketers' attitudes?

It may be difficult to comprehend how such crass and irresponsible attitudes towards women could be exhibited in a city that aspires to be "world class". That seems to reflect a general lack of respect for women and their rights.

When women's groups protested, the poll was changed to "the sexiest female celebrity". While voting for sexiness seems less offensive than the original poll question, it conforms to the notion that women should be celebrated by their looks, not their brains.

The gender divide in the public and private spheres persists in Hong Kong despite the

city's economic successes. Less than 50 per cent of women are in the workforce, in contrast to over 70 per cent of men. Only about a quarter of managers and administrators are female. The median monthly income for women is \$8,000; for men, \$11,000.

In the Executive Council, two of the 14 official members, and two of the 15 unofficial members, are women. In the Legislative Council, 11 out of the 60 lawmakers are women. Of the 527 district council seats, only 90 are held by women.

Women in Hong Kong continue to be regarded and treated as subordinate and subservient to men. It is not just Commercial Radio that needs to review its attitudes towards women, every citizen and organisation needs to do the same.

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