

*Stork & Cupid Out to Lunch?*

**A Sociological Appreciation of Late  
Marriage and Low Fertility on Singapore  
Society**

Paulin Tay Straughan

Department of Sociology

National University Singapore

# Overview

- **Marriage & Fertility Trends**
- **Rationalizing the Inevitable**
  - **Change in women's social status**
- **Contesting Ideologies**
  - **Marriage as self-fulfillment**
  - **Idealization of the sacred child**
  - **Power of paid work**
- **Family Policies as Facilitators?**
  - **New Pro-Family Policies 2004**
- **The Road Ahead**

# Where is Cupid?

- **Marriage trends**

- delayed first marriage

- increase in proportion single

# Marriage Trends – Delay Marriage

<b>Year</b>	<b>Grooms</b>	<b>Brides</b>
<b>1985</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>24.6</b>
<b>1995</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>25.8</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>27.2</b>

# Marriage Trends – Increase in Proportion Single 35-44 years

Year	Male	Female
1970	18	8.4
1980	19.7	9.1
1990	28.2	26.1
2000	37	30.3
2005	39	32

# Where is the Stork?

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Fertility Rate</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>1.73</b>
<b>1996</b>	<b>1.66</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>1.61</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>1.47</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>1.50</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>1.60</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>1.42</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>1.24</b>

# Ageing Indicators

<b>Year</b>	<b>Proportion Elderly</b>	<b>Dependency Ratio</b>	<b>Median Age</b>
<b>1970</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>19.5</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>24.4</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>29.8</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>34.2</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>36.2</b>
<b>2030</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>--</b>

# Living Arrangements of Elderly

	2000	2005
<b>Living with spouse only</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>17.4</b>
<b>Living alone</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>7.7</b>



# What Women Gained ...

- **More educated**

→ % no formal education down

1970		2003	
Male	Female	Male	Female
17.4	39.4	12.4	14.2

# What Women Gained ...

- **More educated**  
→ % tertiary educated up

1970		2003	
Male	Female	Male	Female
2.3	0.9	11.1 dip 20.6 deg	9.1 dip 17.7 deg

# Female Education & TFR

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>1990 TFR</b>	<b>2000 TFR</b>
<b>Below Secondary</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>
<b>Secondary</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>Post Secondary</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<b>University</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>

# What Women Gained ...

- **Greater access to paid work**

<b>Labour Force Participation rate</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
<b>1970 Census</b>	<b>67.6</b>	<b>24.6</b>
<b>1980 Census</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>44.3</b>
<b>2004 Labor Force Survey</b>	<b>75.6</b>	<b>54.2</b>

# What Women Gained ...

- **Greater income equality**

\* Average monthly income – Census

\*\* Median monthly income – Labor Force Survey

	Male	Female	% Male
1980*	\$692	\$421	60.1%
1990*	\$1584	\$1161	73.3%
2000*	\$3420	\$2660	77.8%
2003**	\$2000	\$1500	75%

# Marriage in Women's Eyes

- Alternative means of self-actualization
- Marriage as self-fulfillment – Intrinsic rewards vs economic stability
- Ideal spouse → SNAG
- Marry only if value-add to quality of life
- Result → delayed marriages

# Contesting Ideology I – the Power of Paid Work

- Increase in reliance on income
- Increase in demand of paid work
  - Serving a global market
  - Technology & the trans-spatial work place
  - The dominance of paid work

# Wage Labour Ideology

- **Dual-sphere ideology** (Lopata, 1993):  
"... the two-spheres imagery was an ideological tool used to justify restrictions on women's involvements in economic and political activity and men's involvements in family and community. The ideology was, and still is, an artificial polarity that ignores the continuum of social relations in real life and which has become increasingly dysfunctional to modern life." (p.176)



# Ideology of True Womanhood – What Women Really Want ..

- Lure of paid work vis-à-vis call of nature
- Low uptake of part-time work & flexi-work (Straits Times 18 Jan 2005)
- Paid work
  - Extrinsic rewards – immediate
  - Economic – social – political might
  - 24/7 allegiance

# Contesting Ideology II: The Idealization of the Sacred Child

- Children as economic assets?
- Child = innocent, precious & priceless
- Rights of children
- Child care
  - child-centered philosophy
  - methods informed by experts
  - labour intensive & expensive
- 24/7 dedicated nurturer called “Mother”

# Contesting Ideology III: The Social Construction of Parenthood

- Intensive mothering
- 2 socially constructed cultural images of mothers
  - Homemaker mom
  - Super-mom
- Culture of fatherhood vs practice of fatherhood

# Contesting Ideology IV: Power of Gender Ideology

- Ideal family structure → nuclear, no maid, 3 children
- Traditional roles
  - 54.8% husband = head of household
  - Wife → 25.2% fulltime work  
36.6% part-time work  
38.2% homemaker
  - 65.4% joint responsibility for children

*Straughan, Huang & Yeoh 2000*

# Who's Doing Family?

Division of domestic labour in Singapore:

	<i>Ideal</i>	<i>Actual</i>
<b>Wife</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Husband</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>Shared</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>

*Straughan, Huang & Yeoh 2000*

# Balancing Work & Family?

	<b>Dual-Income</b>	<b>Single-Income</b>
<b>Husband's Chores</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Wife's Chores</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>8.7</b>
<b>Shared Chores</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>3.1</b>

# Ideology as Barrier

- Self-sufficiency as Ideal  
→ nuclear family structure, no maid
- Tradition as Ideal  
→ the power of gender socialization
- Childcare responsibility of the Ideal Mom
- Contradiction between work and family → the eradication of the Supermom imagery
- *Marriage and family as traditional institution*

# 24/7 at Work, 24/7 at Home

- Demands of paid work
  - Restructuring of work – contract vs tenure, performance appraisal, technology & the virtual office, effects of globalization
- Rewards of paid work
  - \$, social status, extrinsic, immediate
- Rewards of parenting
  - intrinsic, long-term investment
- Rational choice?



# Singapore's Pro-Family Policies

- 12 weeks paid maternity leave
- 2 days paid childcare leave per year
- Center-based infant care subsidy
- Lower foreign domestic maid levy
- Parenthood tax rebate
- Working mother's child relief
- Grandparent caregiver relief
- 5-day workweek
- \$10 million Work-Life Works! Fund

# Overcoming Barriers

- Integrated approach
- Value of family & family time in society
- Men's role in family life → empower involved fathers
- Work-life balance → the case for family-friendly work policies
- Value of child – beyond academic excellence

# Concerns for the Immediate Future

- Elder-care → over-reliance on the family
- Redefine filial piety → reduce stress on sandwiched generation
- Increase community support for self-sufficiency
- Are we ready to grow old?  
→ Financial adequacy, social acceptance of institutionalized care