Marriage Dissolution in Singapore

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Edited by

Vineeta Sinha
Syed Farid Alatas
Chan Kwok-bun

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Revisiting Family Values and Ideology in Marriage

By

Paulin Tay Straughan

BRILL

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book arises from possibly the most comprehensive survey on divorce, done in Singapore. In 2001, Mr Laurence Lien, who was then Director of the Family Studies Division of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) invited me to be consultant for the proposal he had on a study of divorce in Singapore. I thought the proposal was both timely and of great social significance for two main reasons. First, there was no available comprehensive quantitative data on divorce; so much of what we know about divorce in Singapore was based on either small-group non-representative qualitative studies or anecdotal evidence. While the Department of Statistic publishes an annual report on divorces trends ("Statistics on Marriages and Divorces"), the report details mainly demographic characteristics like age, ethnic group membership, and duration of marriage. No information is available on divorce across the life cycle—so we know little about when the stressors of marriage occur. The only comprehensive sociological study on divorce was done more than 2 decades ago by Aline Wong and Eddie Kuo (see Wong & Kuo 1981). Much has changed in the social fabric of Singapore society since then, with married couples having to overcome new challenges in the course of their marriage. It was time to capture the slew of this new information. Secondly, the urgency of such a study piqued due to the rise in divorce cases. Marital dissolutions consistently increased from 1985 to 2005 (Singapore Department of Statistics 2005:11), and the 6909 divorces recorded in 2005 was an all-time high.

We commenced the project in 2002 with an analysis of the administrative data. In my own research on marriage and family in Singapore, I developed a thesis on the implication of changing ideologies governing courtship, family roles, and marriage across the life cycle. I was particularly interested in the changed normative expectations we attached to the ideal mate, the importance of romantic love in marriage, and the evolution of intensive motherhood. Central to these themes was the changed social status of women, and the significance of paid work in women's lives. In my first working paper on sociology of the family, I had begun to identify contradictions in the social structure which made it difficult for young married couples to find congruency

between the ideologies they embraced and their practiced family lives (Straughan 1999). In this project on divorce, I developed those ideas further, and tested the various hypotheses. The results were very encouraging, and we see empirical support to suggest the contributions of these contradictions to marriage dissolution.

The survey instrument was detailed and expansive, covering over 50 main questions in seven sections: gender roles, courtship & marriage, parenthood & marriage, perceptions of marriage, work & family, leisure & family, and social demographic. As divorce is still a very sensitive topic in Singapore society, I opted for a self-administered questionnaire to protect the respondents' privacy and a drop-off/pick-up variation (as oppose to a mailed questionnaire) to optimize returns. The outcome of the project is a rich data-set on topics not previously available. For this book, I have chosen five themes which I felt would be of interest to a general audience: courtship—which includes motivations of marriage, courtship and marriage preparation; the practice of marriage—the implication of gender ideology on marital roles, particularly the division of domestic labour; work-family interface; conflict management and communication. Within each general theme, I explored ideology and practice, and the implications of dissonance on sustainability of the marital union.

The findings of this project were not easy to pen in an academic-driven exercise. The results were oftentimes almost commonsensical, and I had to remind myself that it is precisely because these contradictions were so very much a part of everyday that makes it sociologically challenging and renders this project socially significant. There is an inherent difficult in studying a common social institution like marriage and the family because of the paradox of familiarity. We are socialized to expect that finding a spouse, getting married, starting a family, and growing old together are natural and part of the life cycle. As a result, we find it very difficult to identify larger social trends that surface, because we tend to look at marriages through lens coloured by our own experiences. And when conflicts arise in the marriage, it takes us by surprise and many are ill-prepared for the challenges couple-hood brings.

Studying marriage and divorce from the sociological perspective trains our analysis on challenges in the social environment. Common threads surface when we listen to idiographic discourse on challenges of contemporary marriages. This hint of the contradictions between our expectations of marriage, and the experiences of the reality of everyday life. Marriage is a social institution governed by powerful normative expectations which are policed by various social agents around us. In

Chapter Two, I discussed the significance of romantic love, an evolution of contemporary marriage which changes the way we perceive couple-hood. Thanks to the onset of industrialization which facilitated the entry of women into paid work, women gained economic and social independence. Financially independent, they no longer marry for economic and social security; instead, contemporary marriage is expected to result in 'value-add' to our lives. We now marry to fulfill intrinsic emotive needs of companionship, social support, and the all-important illusive notion of romantic love.

This new ideology of marriage is ever more demanding as notions of marrying your soul-mate requires total commitment from each other. These expectations of contemporary marriage are constantly policed by popular culture through various media like romance novels, popular magazines, music, and even visual manifestations through television and big screen dramatizations. Even the most private aspects of marriage like sexual practices are over-dramatized to the extend that many young couples find it hard to reconcile their mundane conjugal sexual experiences to the vivid sexual exploits portrayed in popular culture. Herein lies one major contradiction marriage faces—the experience of marriage is oftentimes unable to match the raised expectations.

The changes in norms governing marriage and family evolved currently as Singapore's transition from a traditional society of migrant workers to a vibrant cosmopolitan global city. However, traditional norms continue to coexist in the midst of modernity. For example, in the choice of the ideal spouse, certain traditional expectations that the husband should possess characteristics that befit the head of the union persist. Couples who go against the norm (like men marrying women a lot more established then themselves) find it hard to sustain their marriages in the midst of the strong social policing from friends and family. Gender ideologies are another good example. Women in particular find themselves caught in the transition of gender roles—while they may embrace more liberal ideologies that prescribe equitable division of domestic labour, the powerful socialization of traditional gender roles continue to tie them to define their womanhood according to how well they manage their childrearing and housekeeping roles. Herein lays the second major contradiction marriage faces—the challenges of maneuvering between the old (traditional ideals) and the new (contemporary ideals).

Finally, while the family is a central pillar in our society fabric, there are other equally powerful social institutions which are also governed by authoritative and potent ideologies which contest the demands of

the family. One such agency is the organization of paid work. Work in contemporary capitalist societies has taken on an all-powerful dominant presence, and our reliance on wages to sustain family has, in many cases, rendered family time as surplus work time. Many give their most productive part of their days—and lives—to servicing paid work. Marriage and the family are often shoved to the background, to be taken care of when work is done. As a result, marital problems accumulate, and sadly, sometimes to the point where the damage to relationships is irrevocable. This is the third challenge highlighted in my thesis—the contradictory ideologies which make it hard for married couples to honour their promise to each other that the family will always come first.

This project and this book have taken me on a long journey, forcing me to reflect on my own marriage and commitment to my husband and sons. Like many others, I have often taken my harmonious family life for granted, that regardless of how engaged I am in my role, fully expecting my family to be always there for me. But as I study the trends that surface in the course of my analysis, I realise that to keep a marriage going, we must work at it all the time. I believe many of us are lucky in that both spouses are so caught up in their obligations outside the family, that they have no time to even sit down together to take stock on how they have progressed as a couple. But there will come a time when work and other obligations will inevitably slow down and children are no longer around to buffer the silence between the spouses. That is the time when we will be forced to face our spouses alone—and ask ourselves that critical question, "Do I still recognise the man (or woman) I married twenty years ago?" It is therefore not at all surprising that the statistics show a high incidence of dissolution in the mature marriages.

Many of us tend to take our marriages for granted. After the exuburation of a successful courtship, we settle down to the routine of everyday life, and we focus our energies and attention on other challenges along the life course. Work and career advancement becomes a primary concern. Child rearing also takes up much of our energy and attention. In the midst of all these, we tend to forget the reason why we marry—to share our lives with our soul mate. I had asked my young graduate student, Cheryl for her opinion on the draft of the manuscript. She told me that it was "a wake-up call" for married couples to work at their marriages. My research assistant, an earnest young graduate had similar comments. Elvin asked that I include more details on how to

sustain marriages in the final chapter, so that he could refer this book to his friends when they get married. I laughed when I thought about that—that he should direct newly-weds to a study on divorce, to avoid the pitfalls.

A Word of Thanks

I have so many people to thank for the successful completion of this book. First, to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports (MCYS) for their strong support of this project. In particular, my sincere appreciation to the wonderful talents in the Family Service Division, especially Pauline Moe and June Wong. These two stewards were faithful in their responsibilities, and without them, I would have had a hard time meeting the project deadlines. I want to place on record my appreciation of their friendship and their patience during the course of this project. I am grateful to the wonderful respondents who shared of their time and rich experiences—from these, many will benefit. My dedicated team of research assistants—Wan Suet Syn, Cheryl Tan Shiling, Elvin Xing, Megas, Anil, and of course, my faithful Mathew Loh—all these young talents gave significantly to this project. It is my wish that they have learned as well, and go on to forge life-long unions with their soul mates.

Finally, and most important of all, I want to thank my family—for their patience, love, and support. My big boy, Robbie who was constantly reminding me that I must complete my draft during my sabbatical. My little boy, Tim who had to go to bed "without cuddling with Mom" because I was glued to the computer. And my reason for living—my soul mate and best friend, Rob who is ever so patient as I rush through the days fulfilling my multiple obligations as mother, teacher, researcher, etc. From this book, I learned that I must now demonstrate my affiliation—we will return to our courtship days when holding hands was more important than grabbing that file or shopping bag.

OVERVIEW OF DIVORCE IN CONTEMPORARY SINGAPORE—TAKING STOCK

This book portrays the significance of marriage in contemporary societies, and the central role it plays in the facilitation of self-actualization and self-fulfillment in every day life. While the focus on divorce may suggest that the content lends weight to the argument of a decline and destabilization in marriage and family, I argue to the contrary. Adopting an individual perspective of marriage (see Amato 2004), the rising incidence of divorce documents the changing expectations we have of marriage. Thus, as the institution of marriage is going through a phase of transformation, divorce is indicative of the resilience of marriage.

That women, in particular, are empowered to seek alternatives to an unhappy marriage should not be seen in negative light. That the incidence of remarriages is up also lends strong support to my argument, that divorce may be the chance for reconstitution of a happy marriage. Nonetheless, this argument does not negate the ill-effects of marriage dissolution on victims—particularly dependent children. The aim of this book is to highlight the changing expectations of marriage and family, appreciate the root cause of these changes, as well as identify socio-cultural and structural inconsistencies that impede this pursuit of happiness in the conjugal.

It is important academically to study divorce in the context of Singapore, a small city state which is currently going through amazing transformations where traditional Asian ideals are juxtaposed among alluring western icons. While the course of industrialization and modernization took decades in Western Europe and North America, economic restructuring in Singapore was compacted into a mere 20 years or so. From a sleepy fishing village which was home to pig farms and agrarian modes of production in 1965, the city-state rose quickly to become one of the four economic dragons in Asia by the mid-1980s. Today, Singapore is a cosmopolitan business and technological hub, and the commercial gateway to Asia.

How has the Singapore family adapted to these changes? This is indeed an exciting, dynamic and challenging phase for the family as

contesting ideologies often give rise to social, cultural and structural contradictions, which makes the practice of family increasingly complicated. Annual demographic data which shows trends of delayed marriages, ultra-low fertility, and an increase in marriage dissolution, have made headlines and attracted the attention of law-makers. State-sponsored agencies have sprung up to champion the social significance of the family, and family policies have never been so generous and broad-based. In the context of such a pro-family climate, it is indeed timely to systematically investigate when marriage does not work. It should be noted, at this juncture, that the only large scale study on divorce in Singapore was published more than 20 years ago by Aline Wong and Eddie Kuo, both of whom were sociologists in my Department when I was an undergraduate (see Wong and Kuo 1983). Because of the difficulties of drawing a large representative sample of divorces, no other attempts have been made since then to take stock of marriage dissolution in Singapore. Thus, the data and analysis that follow fills the gap in the study of family in Singapore.

1.1   MARRIAGE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

Demographic trends of delayed marriages, an increase in the proportion of singles, and low fertility rates have hit the headlines globally in recent years. As we observe our young adults delaying marriage and parenthood, another phenomenon is developing concurrently—those who are married are ending their union prematurely. Worldwide statistics suggest that marriage has become increasingly fragile as reported divorce rates have raised to alarmingly high levels in many developed countries. In the United States for example, it is estimated that 50% of all first marriages will end up in divorce (Amato and Irving 2006). Social scientists note the emergence of these trends as we observe the shift from rural, agrarian society to cosmopolitan model of city life, as exemplified in Singapore (Amato and Irving, 2006; Cho and Yada 1994; White 1990). To appreciate the social and cultural dynamics at play in these evolving trends, we must look to the changing role of marriage in our society.

   As societies evolved from a rural, agrarian-based to the urban industrial centres we are familiar with today, expectations and functions of marriage also changed. Marriage in traditional societies served to organize members' roles in the economic, political and social hierar-

chies that governed social order (Coontz 2004). Kinship ties sealed by marital union often served as means to forge political alliances, raise capital or enhance social prestige. Individual needs and preferences were seldom considered. In pre-industrial rural settings where there was generally an absence of formal support services like childcare, economic production and elderly care, it was in the interest of individual family members as well as the larger community that members get married and stay married. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) described, the traditional family facilitated "a community of need held together by obligation of solidarity" (p. 97). Traditional expectations of marriage demanded personal sacrifices for the sake of the family, and as marriages were patriarchal, wives were more likely to sacrifice personal goals then husbands (Amato and Irving 2006:54). Divorce, under traditional settings, was sanctioned only if serious violations like spouse abuse or desertion took place.

The onset of industrialization transformed economic structures and the way society was organized. As labour moved away from the familial settings to take on paid work in industrial cities, specialized services and institutions outside of the family were established. These included the evolution of financial, educational, healthcare, other lifestyle and social support services which augmented the social void left by the absence of the extended family. This alleviated the reliance on the family for social stability, and reduced the effectiveness of the extended family as a social policing agent. With industrialization came the rise of democratic institutions, which in turn increased the social status and power of women. Women no longer had to depend on men and marriage for economic sustenance. Concurrently, the increased relevance of secular institutions also rendered religion less effective in moderating social norms. This resulted in an increased tolerance towards unconventional and more liberalized views and behaviour. Marriage, which used to be a social institution governed by social obligations, became a private arrangement between consenting adults (Amato and Irving 2006; Techman et al. 2006). In the past, people used to marry for economic reasons and for procreation. Now, contemporary marriage is based primarily on emotional bonds between two individuals. Economic restructuring in the United States which began in the 1920s eroded the economic autonomy and independence of urban middle-class men, which had sustained the male authority and hierarchy in family relations. Pre-industrial family labour transformed to family wage economy

at the onset of industrialization, and this was later replaced by the present-day individual wage economy. As contract work became the norm and men could no longer depend on lifetime employment by a single employer who provided benefit packages for the entire family, the norm of wife-homemaker-husband-breadwinner was replaced by the companionate family in which husband and wife would be friends and lovers (Mintz 2005).

Cherlin (2004) argued that marriage in contemporary societies has deinstitutionalized, characterized by weakened social norms governing marriages. Instead, an individualized form of marriage dominates where marriage is expected to fulfill personal needs and self-satisfaction. He traced the changing perceptions of marriage in the United States, and argued that marriage has gone through three phases of transition. The first transition happened around post World War II, when the traditional institutional perspective of marriage was replaced by a companionate perspective of marriage. This was the period when the North American family was primarily nuclear in structure and governed by a gender-based division of family responsibilities. With a husband-breadwinner and wife-homemaker as the ideal model, satisfaction from companionate marriages focused on successfully playing the marital roles of economic providers, homemakers and parents. Cherlin traced the second transition in the meaning of marriage to have begun in the 1960s when marriage's dominance began to diminish in American society, and an individualized perspective of marriage soon replaced companionate marriage. The significance of roles was replaced by individualistic perspectives of rewards from marriage, and we enter marriage expecting to fulfill development of self and self-actualization. As the traditional expectations of marriage diminish, family becomes more of an 'elective relationship' where individuals bring to it personal interests (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

These developments triggered an upswing in the incidence of marriage dissolution when individual needs were not satisfied and the union was no longer perceived as attractive. In the United States, public attitudes towards divorce became more liberal in the 1960s and 1970s as Americans observed a cultural shift in the expectations of marriage. Personal happiness and self-fulfillment became increasingly important goals of marriage, and family and friends were sympathetic of those who initiated divorce on grounds of unfulfilled personal satisfaction, even if there was an absence of cruelty or adultery (Amato and Irving 2006). By the end of the 1970s, most Americans perceived divorce as

"an unfortunate but common event, and the stigma of divorce, although still present, was considerably weaker than in the earlier eras" (2006: 50). In an era where advances in mass communications, influence of popular culture coupled with a global economic platform bring countries and cultures closer together than ever before, it is inevitable that these developments in the United States had significant bearing on other societies, like Singapore.

1.2   Transformation of Marriage in Asian Societies

Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore are three Asian countries which share similar trajectories in both economic and social transformations. All three nations experienced rapid economic growth in a relatively short period of time, resulting in transformations of domestic labour conditions, and convergence of eastern and western ideologies on the family. A significant outcome of industrialization is the entry of women in the labour force. In all three societies, the high economic growth period saw spikes in the female labour force participation rate as well as the number of married women in the work force. More significant is the empowerment of women through formal education and engagement in professional work. With economic independence, these Asian women—like their western counterparts—were no longer tied to the family through practical economic constraints. Instead, with the opening of options other than family formation in the progression of their life course, marriage became a choice among other options with differing rewards.

In Japan, the most significant change in marriage was facilitated by the reduced family and community control over marriage arrangements and choice of life partners (Fuess 2000). An individualized model of contemporary marriage is widespread especially among urban dwellers where spouse selection is an individual choice. Post marriage familial arrangements where the nuclear family structure dominate also perpetuated an individualized model of marriage. Fuess argued that living away from parents-in-law was not so much a rejection of traditional ideals of filial piety and obligation, but rather "the result of a sheer surplus of children reaching adulthood who had been born in the demographic transition decades of high fertility and low mortality" (2000:153). Nonetheless, these new living arrangements weakened the

social policing of the nuclear family by the extended kin, leaving the contemporary Japanese family to indulge in meeting the needs and concerns of the individuals in the marital union.

A 1991 study of marriage in Hong Kong showed similar patterns, that this transition in expectations—from institutional to companionate, and finally to an individualized perspective—has also occurred in Asian societies where rapid economic development has evolved social structural conditions similar to that observed in the western developed economies (Young 1995). In Hong Kong, a predominantly Chinese society, the convergence of eastern and western ideologies has serious implications on the family. Conjugalism is the central of modern spousal relationships in Hong Kong where marriages are characterized by a nuclear family structure, with intrinsic values of love, affection, companionship and happiness, are essential. Young (1995) observed that for the Chinese, the emergence of conjugal marriage in place of the traditional extended family system "involves a break in tradition greater than in many other cultures" (p. 123). The normative core of traditional Chinese families centered on Confucian ethics which prescribes a hierarchical kinship order based on patriarchal authority. In contemporary Hong Kong marriages, spousal relations ranked as most important, followed by parent-child relations. Only 4% in the 1991 study ranked relationship with elderly parents as primary. As we would expect from companionship, marriage which emphasizes the emotional bond between husband and wife, it was love that ranked the number one benefit to be derived from marriage.

Like Japan and Hong Kong, Singapore also saw rapid economic growth in a compact period. The sleepy fishing village which gained independence in 1965 was transformed in a mere 20 years or so into the hub of modern commerce and industrialization in Southeast Asia. As gross domestic productivity increased with the shift from agrarian to industrial economy, demographic trends emerged to detail the changing face of Singapore society and the Singapore family. Like Japan and Hong Kong, economic development encroached on the socio-cultural environment which cocooned the family. The three-generation extended family was soon replaced by the nuclear family, and with more women engaged in paid work, conjugal relations favoured ideals accentuated in individualized marriage (Straughan et al. 2000; 2005). In focus groups interviews conducted with young Singaporeans, ideals of romantic love and intrinsic expectations of family were emphasized (Straughan et al.

2006). These ideals have also attracted the government's attention, and notions of romantic love and companionship were used in the tag lines for various campaigns aimed at promoting marriage (Straughan et al. 2007).

Notable is the annual "Romancing Singapore" campaign which was first initiated in 2002 by the state, and subsequently taken over by the private sector in 2005. As noted in its website, "Romancing Singapore is a celebration of life, love and relationships" and serves as a platform for celebrating the conjugal and create opportunities for singles to meet potential partners (http://www.romancingsingapore.com).

Clearly, just as it has been observed in western cultures, marriage in developed Asian societies like Singapore has also evolved from the traditional institutionalized perspective to an individualized perspective where notions of love, companionship, self-fulfillment and happiness are hallmarks of a good marriage. So why does a union that is forged through careful selection by the individuals themselves end?

1.3 Divorce Trends in Singapore

Divorce rates in western developed countries like the United States, Western Europe and United Kingdom have been on the rise for several decades now, and extensive research has been conducted in these nations (Carvel 2003; Simon and Altstein 2003; Russel 2000). While it is noted that not all nations who transit from pre-industrial to industrial status had high divorce rates, and indeed, Singapore has one of the lowest divorce rates among industrialized nations, divorce has nonetheless become a grave social concern in these countries as well. In many Asian countries like South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore, divorces have been on the rise. As these divorces tend to be initiated by women, one possible explanation is the alleviation of a negative social stigma, particularly on female divorcees. This is facilitated by women's financial independence derived from their engagement in paid work. For example, Ono (2006) argued that as Japanese women became less dependent on their husbands economically, they found that exiting an unhappy marriage now involved a much lower cost—both socially and financially.

In Singapore, where divorce rates are considered low compared to other developed nations, our concern is with the slow but consistent increase in the number of divorces, signaling a convergence in trends

with other industrialized nations (see Table 1.1). More alarming perhaps is the rate at which relatively "young marriages" are breaking up, particularly for the Muslim marriages. In 2006, short-lived marriages of less than 5 years formed the largest group of all Muslim divorces (33.6%). The corresponding figure for the non-Muslim divorces is 13.2% (Department of Statistics, 2006). The largest group in the non-Muslim divorces were those who were married between 5–9 years—they constituted 36.3% of all non-Muslim divorces in 2006. Interestingly, there are also a significant number of break-ups among seemingly long-lasting marriages, especially among non-Muslims. The number of non-Muslim divorces for marriages that lasted more than 20 years was 19.6%, forming the second largest group of all non-Muslim divorces that year (Department of Statistics, 2006). Both peaks in recent divorce trends are particularly worrying for the state, because they threaten the ideology that marriage is a desired state, and that it lasts forever.

Given these trends, it is critical that we achieve a better understanding of what makes marriage work, the risk factors that trigger marriage dissolution, and the impact of divorce in Singapore. While many studies on divorce have been conducted in Western countries, the findings are difficult to generalize for cross-cultural comparisons in Singapore. Singapore is a unique city-state that has gone through tremendous changes in the past 40 years, growing from a sleepy fishing village to one of the most vibrant commercial hubs in the world. As the economy and infrastructure were transformed to position the nation state as a competitive player in the global business market, the Singapore family was also transformed. Particularly for the better educated who valued privacy in their family unit, the smaller nuclear family form, a more desired option, soon outnumbered three-generation extended families. Of significant impact for the family is the change in women's social status. In the past, when women had few socially acceptable alternatives to marriage, social expectations of marriage were more binding on them in a way it had never been for men (Shumway 2003). With the emancipation of women through empowerment, and the dissociation of sex from procreation with the advent of accessible birth control, the old model of marriage became increasingly unacceptable to women. As Shumway noted, "Women began to envision life projects beyond those of wife and mother" (2003:22).

Three developments in the history of Singapore women since 1965 (post-independence) have significant bearings on the family. The first

Table 1.1: Singapore Divorce Rates: 1980–2006.

	General Divorce Rate	
YEAR	MALES Per 1000 married resident males	FEMALES Per 1000 married resident females
1980	3.7	3.8
1985	4.5	4.6
1990	6.1	6.1
1995	6.1	6.2
1996	6.4	6.6
1997	6.6	6.6
1998	7.5	7.6
1999	6.9	7.0
2000	6.7	6.7
2001	6.3	6.5
2002	7.1	7.2
2003	7.9	8.0
2004	7.5	7.6
2005	7.9	7.9
2006	7.9	8.0

Source:
Singapore Dept of Statistics (2006), Singapore 2006 Statistical Highlights p. 48
Singapore Dept of Statistics (2006), Statistics on Marriage and Divorces 2006 p. xi

is the shift in the mode of production, from a primarily male-dependent semi-agrarian economy to an industrialized, manpower-intensive economy. The demand for labour resulted in the second significant development, the mass entry of women into the labour force. And to facilitate the induction of women into paid work, the doors to formal education were opened to women. Table 1.2 below shows the increase in the labour force participation rate for women from 1970 to 2004, and the corresponding gains in formal education for women.

Table 1.2: Changing Women's Status.

	Males (%)	Females (%)
Labour force participation rate:		
1970*	67.6	24.6
1980*	81.5	44.3
2004#	75.6	54.2
Proportion with no formal education:		
1970*	17.4	39.4
2003#	12.4	14.2
Proportion with tertiary education:		
1970*	2.3	0.9
2003* Diploma Degree	 11.1 20.6	 9.1 17.7

* Census data, Department of Statistics
\# Labour Force Survey

As the social status of Singapore women changed with these developments, so does the role of women in the family. With more women entering the labour force and gaining economic independence, the social significance of marriage for women necessarily shifts—from that of economic security where the married woman expects her husband to provide for her financially as head of household, to one of more comprehensive support which includes economic, emotional, and social. As expectations of marriage intensify, it takes a lot more to sustain marriage in contemporary society. "What makes a marriage?" and "what breaks a marriage" become socially significant and relevant questions that demand a sociological insight.

   The only available comprehensive sociological publication on divorce in Singapore was published in 1983, and detailed Wong and Kuo's 1981 study on non-Muslim marriages. Written in the period after Singapore experienced dramatic transformation from developing to developed nation status, the book analysed the trends and patterns of

divorce from 1960 to 1981. This study will cover the period after that, and will look at divorces filed in the period 1995–2001. As in the earlier study, I will look at the socio-cultural, marital and familial factors that tip a marriage towards dissolution. First, documentary analysis was conducted on all divorce cases filed between 1995 and 2001. With this background, augmented by a thorough literature search on causes of divorce, a detailed survey of a representative sample of intact marriages and dissolved marriages was conducted. The empirical findings from the survey informs the key arguments detailed in the following chapters.

1.4   The Social Context of Divorce— Why Do Marriages Break up?

Divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a marital union. Marriage is a legally and socially binding open-ended contract between a husband and wife. It is ideally expected to last a lifetime. When marriage breaks down, it is inevitably interpreted by many as a weakness—both in the social institution of the family, as well as in the social fabric of the society. Many scholars argue that the onset of industrialization shifted the motivation of marriage—from one which was community-focused to one which was individual-focused (Huber & Spitze 1980).

There are two general perspectives on divorce, both with contrasting value-based assumptions on marriage as a social construct. The more conservative institutionalist perspective views marriage as being functional to community solidarity and divorce is seen as being dysfunctional and destabilizing to the existing social order. Conversely, the individualist perspective values individual happiness above all else, and supports dissolution of unhappy marital unions (Wong & Kuo 1983). In Singapore, the state and public perception towards divorce is still very much conservative and pro-institutionalist.

To appreciate how and why social perceptions of divorce vary, we must study it in tandem with the changing expectations of marriage. The cultural context of marriage in contemporary society has transformed with a decline in practical importance, but a rise in symbolic significance as marriage takes on the marker of prestige and significance (Cherlin 2004; Gillis 2004). More significantly, marriage is now characterized by a predominantly individualized perspective where self-actualization and personal happiness are primary expectations. In short, marriage is expected to fulfill individual needs.

Much of the shift in expectations of marriage is fuelled by the changing social status of women. Restructuring of the economic arena has resulted in tremendous gains for women in terms of formal education, skills enhancement and opportunities of paid work. A key difference in marriage of the past and now is the gains from marriage for women. Where marriage was crucial for women's economic sustenance in pre-industrial society, it is now a choice. Women in contemporary society no longer depend on marriage to achieve economic stability and social status. They are now increasingly self-reliant, and aside from marriage and family formation, there are other options with differing rewards that women can embrace. Contextualizing marriage in these cultural settings, we can better appreciate how divorce is interpreted.

As Young (1995) observed in Hong Kong the significance of the rise in conjugal marriage within Confucius ethics. Similarly in Singapore—a primarily Chinese population—the transition to an individualized marriage is a huge divergence from cultural tradition. Singapore is a multi-ethnic society, with three main ethnic groups: Chinese (75%), Malay (13.7%) and Indian (8.6%) (Department of Statistics 2007). Patriarchal norms govern all three cultural traditions, where husbands expect to head their respective households. Of notable significance are contradictory messages for women, particularly through family policies.

Manpower remains the primary resource for this small nation-state, and procreation continues to be strongly sanctioned only within legally recognized marital unions. To support this ideological stance, family policies in Singapore promote marriage, parenthood, and self-sufficiency (Straughan 2008). As median age at first marriage continued to increased and fertility rates fall, the state was more aggressive in rolling out pro-marriage and pro-natalistic incentive. Many of these polices are targeted specifically at women.

Singapore women are strongly encouraged to be gainfully employed, get married, have kids (three or more if they can afford), be good primary caregivers, and look after their elderly (Straughan 2008). Through these ideological plays, domestic work continues to be rendered invisible. As a result, role strain caused by multiple role demands has resulted in many women—especially the younger, educated and professional ones—rethinking marriage. In our discussion with young adults on their fertility decisions, we found that many hesitate family formation not because they fail to value marriage as a life goal, but because they were afraid that they would not be able to honour the demands of marriage

and parenthood (Straughan et al. 2007). How is divorce contextualized within this social and cultural mosaic?

From the institutional perspective, where marriage is seen as serving community functions, divorce is interpreted as dysfunctional and moral decay, and triggers alarms of marital decline which threatens the sacredness of marriage. However, from an individualized view of marriage, divorce is appreciated from a marital resilience perspective and hopes of reconstitution of the family through remarriage predominate (Amato 2004). The shift from fault to no-fault divorce in the United States in the 1980s sent a global signal that marriage should fulfill one's individual happiness.

While Singapore does not allow for no-fault divorces, shifts in global attitudes towards marriage and divorce have effected changes in local attitudes towards failed marriages, and more importantly, victims of failed marriages. There is a shift from appreciating marriage as a social obligation, to the current state where marriage is epitomized as "repository of powerful utopian desires" (Gillies 2004:989) and self-happiness is the main catalyst for entering matrimony. As a result, negative labeling has shifted the progressive away from "blaming the victim" to one of sympathetic understanding. From this perspective, one would look at divorce as a result of a mismatch in ideals and expectations between the couple, and not as a rejection of marriage as a social institution. And remarriage is viewed positively as an opportunity for reconstituting a happy family and fulfilling self-happiness in couple hood.

Non-Muslim marriages and divorces fall under the purview of the Civil Courts, which executes the statues governing women's rights in marital unions as stipulated by the Women's Charter. First passed in 1961, and amended in 1996, the Charter specifies that for a marriage to be considered "broken down irretrievably"; the petitioner for the divorce must meet one of the following conditions:

(a) that the defendant has committed adultery and the petitioner finds it intolerable to live with the defendant;
(b) that the defendant has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the defendant;
(c) that the defendant has deserted the petitioner for a continuous period of at least 2 years immediately preceding the filing of the writ;
(d) that the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous period of at least 3 years immediately preceding the filing of the writ and the defendant consents to a judgment being granted;

(e) that the parties to the marriage have lived apart for a continuous
    period of at least 4 years immediately preceding the filing of the
    writ.
    (For more details on the Women's Charter, please refer to Singapore
    Status Online at http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/ reference Chapter 353).

For petitioners married under the Muslim law in Singapore, all dis-
putes are handled by the Syariah Court under the Administration of
Muslim Law Act. (For more information, see the Syariah Court website
at http://www.syariahcourt.gov.sg/ and Singapore Statutes online,
Administration of Muslim Law Act, Chapter 3).

   In contemporary society, spouse selection and marriage remain
key milestones to a young adult's initiation into full adulthood status.
Marriage remains a desirable life goal for the majority of young adults
surveyed (see Quah 1998). So given the social desirability of getting
married, and staying married, what would trigger the ultimate dissolu-
tion of this union?

   Sociological works on divorce globally are extensive. A search on
the electronic databases surfaces thousands of scholarly works on this
research problem. An extensive literature review highlighted two main
categories of probable rationales—macro structural determinants, and
socio-cultural determinants (see White, 1990 for a detailed summary
of research outcomes in the 1980s). The former referred to macro-
level factors that are likely to impede on sustainability of marriages.
These include changes in divorce laws (e.g., from fault to no-fault),
economic cycles (e.g. Cherlin, 1992 observed that number of divorces
are concurrent with the vicissitudes in the economic cycles), and even
advancements in economic development (e.g. from pre-industrial to
industrial society). An interesting cross-cultural study of 66 developing
and developed countries by Trent and Scott (1989) found a significant
effect between socioeconomic development and female labour force
participation on divorce rates. In addition, they also demonstrated that
a high sex ratio which favours women (ie fewer women compared to
men) was associated with lower divorce rates. A good demonstration of
how macro structural changes affect divorce rates is the work of Heaton,
and associates in Indonesia (Heaton et al. 2001). They attributed the
fall in divorce rates in Indonesia to, among other factors, changes in
divorce laws. With the new legislation, divorce has become more costly
and time-consuming, and the tedious process has hindered Indonesians
from seeking legal dissolutions to end unhappy marriages.

The factors categorized under the socio-cultural umbrella is vast, and includes factors relating to family background and life-course issues, as well as attitudes and perceptions towards marriage and divorce. Family background covers areas like parents' marital history (Amato 1996), wife's employment (South 2001; Booth et al. 1984; Cherlin 1981; Huber & Spitze 1980), and division of domestic labour (Frisco & Williams 2003; Kluwer et al. 1997). Life course factors include parental divorce (McLanahan & Bumpass 1988), age at marriage (Martin & Bumpass 1989; South & Spitze 1986; Thornton & Rodgers 1987; Booth & Edward 1985), marriage duration (Thornton & Rodgers 1987), number of children (Huber & Spitze 1980) and stress of parenthood (Helms-Erikson 2001). Attitudinal factors that have surfaced correlating with divorce include gender roles (Amato and Booth 1991), marital satisfaction (Kurdek 2002; Booth et al. 1986), and propensity towards divorce (Booth et al. 1986).

There are several theoretical frameworks that have been developed to make conceptual sense of the inter-play between these socio-cultural variants (see Rodrigues et al. 2006 for a good overview). Proponents of the marital cohesion frameworks focus on rewards for staying married, barriers to seeking dissolution, and alternatives that make divorce an attractive option (see Previti and Amato 2003; Levinger 1965). Rewards refer to the perceived gains from marriage, and to tangible and quantifiable ones like economic security and instrumental support, there is increasing focus on intangible components like companionship, emotional support and affection. Costs would include negative aspects of the relationship like unhappy in-law relations, having to deal with conflicts and even abuse. Following a social exchange perspective, one would be expected to remain in the marriage if rewards outweigh the costs. To move proactively from an unhappy marriage to marriage dissolution, one must be able to overcome the barriers to divorce. These barriers include perceived familial obligations to the family unit (including parents, in-laws, and children especially), social stigma, legal requirements, and of course, financial dependence on one's spouse (especially for homemakers).

My primary aim in this book is provide an appreciation of the dynamics that hold marriages together (i.e. the rewards), the stressors that trigger marital discord (the costs), and the barriers to divorce. Before explaining the premise on which I based my study, the following is an overview of the divorce patterns based on available administrative data from the courts.

1.5   OVERVIEW OF DIVORCE TRENDS: 1995–2001

Prior to the commencement of the large-scale survey, court data on divorce was obtained and analyzed to gather insights on trends as to why and when marriages break down. We looked at divorces filed between 1995–2001 from both the Civil Court which governs non-Muslim marriages registered under the Women's Charter and the Syariah Court overseeing all Muslim marriages.

1.5.1   *Civil Court Cases*

Altogether, there were 53,728 divorces filed under the Civil Courts from 1995 to 2001. The median age at marriage for the sample was 25 years. The duration of the marriages was 12.3 years, thus suggesting that overall couples who dissolve their marriage had been together for a significant amount of time. However, it is not reflected in these statistics exactly when the marriage started facing problems.

Of significance is the large proportion of marriages lasting 5 years or less. From Table 1.3, we see that 25% of all divorces were from relatively young marriages of 5 years or less. The year-on-year statistics show that the proportion of divorces peaked at 4 and 5 years of marriage (9.5% and 8.3% respectively). These statistics suggest that couples in young marriages may be going through various stressors that make it hard for them to stay in the commitment for life. Thus, it is important for us to re-look at the role of pre-marriage counseling in our society and appreciate what marriage preparation can do to alleviate the stress young marriages face.

Compared to the trends highlighted by Wong and Kuo (1981) in their earlier study, we see similarities. First, about 50% of the marriages that ended up in divorce lasted more than 10 years. Wong and Kuo explained that this was due in part to the restrictiveness of divorce laws in Singapore that deterred petitioners in unhappy marriages from seeking dissolution earlier. Second, divorces documented between 1960 and 1978 peaked at 5–6 years of marriage. Together with the statistics from 1995–2001, the trends confirm that the most vulnerable period of a marriage was in the initial years.

The presence of children in dissolved marriages causes concern for social agencies, particularly when existing information tends to support an adverse effect of divorce on children's well being (Amato 2000, 1996). While it is comforting that 44.3% of the dissolved marriages had no children, it is important to note that the average number of children was one for marriages dissolved in the Civil Court. 22.8% had 1 child, and

Table 1.3: Duration of Marriage Categories.

Duration of marriage	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 1 Year	102	0.2	0.2
1 Year	1056	2.0	2.2
2 Years	1343	2.5	4.7
3 Years	1548	2.9	7.5
4 Years	5108	9.5	17.0
5 Years	4468	8.3	25.4
6–10 Years	14668	27.3	52.7
11–15 Years	8754	16.3	69.0
16–20 Years	6867	12.8	81.7
More than 20 years	9814	18.3	100.0
Total	53728	100.0	

22.6% had 2 children at the time of divorce (see Table 1.4). The median age of children for the sample at the point of their parents' divorce was 12 years, thus indicating that overall, the children affected were young. Therefore, given that there were 55.8% dissolved marriages involving children, thus resulting in 33,869 children in the divorce cases administered by the Civil Court, we must be cognizant of these children's needs.

It is also important to note that, compared to the trends highlighted from the period 1960–1978, more marriages with no children have dissolved. This suggests that it may be easy for couples to consider divorce when there are no children involved. The role of children in solidifying marriages will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

As we expected, majority of the petitioners were women (see Table 1.5). The trend of female petitioners outnumbering male petitioners has been sustained since 1960. The documented grounds for divorce threw little light on the causes of divorce as most stuck to officially and legally recognized reasons for divorce. There is a statistically significant association between the gender of the petitioner and grounds for divorce. Women were more likely to cite "unreasonable behaviour" than men (see Tables 1.6, 1.7).

Table 1.4: Number of Children.

| Number of Children | 1995–2001 | | | 1960–1978* |
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent	Percent (sample size 880)
0	23813	44.3	44.3	25.6
1	12270	22.8	67.2	24.7
2	12125	22.6	89.7	25.7
3 or more	5520	10.3	100.0	25.7
Total	53728	100.0		100.0

* Wong and Kuo (1981) p. 35

As women tend to derive more of their social identity from marriage, and therefore, are assumed to have greater vested interest (both socially and economically) in staying married, why then do we continue to observe this trend of more women initiating divorce proceedings? Wong and Kuo (1981) adopted Goode's (1956) proposition that husbands who want out of their marriages make life so miserable for their wives that the women had no choice but to file for divorce. To extend this argument, if we look at the reasons for marriage presented later in Chapter 2, we see that women are more likely to cite romantic love as an important criterion for marriage. Romantic love, as conceptualized in modern society, encompasses notions of loyalty, total commitment and unwavering support to one person (see Amato 2007; Shumway 2003; Giddens 1992). Given that expectations of marriage are tied so much to intrinsic values of personal happiness and satisfaction, when these expectations are not met, women would rather call an end to an unhappy marriage than to hold on, especially when they are not economically dependent on their husbands.

Table 1.5: Gender of Petitioner.

| Status of petitioner | 1995–2001 | | 1960–1978* |
	Frequency	Percent	Percent (sample size 878)
Husband	21191	39.4	43.3
Wife	32537	60.6	56.7
Total	53728	100.0	

* Wong and Kuo (1981) p. 29

Table 1.6: Grounds for Divorce by Year.

Ground for divorce	1995–2001[#] (n=50537)	1975–1978[*] (n=434)	1970–1974[*] (n=231)	1960–1969[*] (n=200)
Adultery	3.5	19.6	23.4	29.0
Desertion	3.8	47.5	49.8	50.5
Separation	51.1	26.3	18.2	4.0
Unreasonable behaviour	41.6	–	–	–
Cruelty	–	6.5	6.9	14.5
Others	–	0.1	1.7	2.0
Total	100	100	100	100

[#] 1995–2001 data from Civil Courts courtesy of MCYS
[*] 1960–1979 data from Wong & Kuo (1981) p. 24

Table 1.7: Grounds for Divorce by Petitioner.

Ground for Divorce		Petitioner		Total
		Husband	Wife	
Adultery	Count	712	1054	1766
	% within Petitioner	3.7%	3.4%	3.5%
Unreasonable Behaviour	Count	5905	15116	21021
	% within Petitioner	30.5%	48.5%	41.6%
Desertion	Count	1010	910	1920
	% within Petitioner	5.2%	2.9%	3.8%
Separation	Count	11760	14070	25830
	% within Petitioner	60.7%	45.2%	51.1%
Total	Count	19387	31150	50537
	% within Petitioner	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-square		1666.43[*]		
Goodman & Kruskal's Tau-A[1]		0.033[*]		

[*] statistically significant at 95% confidence

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[1] Goodman and Kruskal's Tau-A is the best measure for statistical association between nominal categorical data. Its value ranges from 0 to 1, and has proportionate reduction in error (PRE) properties which tells us the strength of the bivariate association. Because of its PRE qualities, it is a superior statistic to Chi-square, which is used most commonly to demonstrate statistical correlation between categorical variables.

Table 1.8: Education of Divorcees.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	6622	20.4	20.4
Secondary	23306	71.7	92.1
University	2570	7.9	100.0
Other	11	.0	100.0
Total	32509	100.0	

In terms of formal education, most of divorcees have some secondary education, and there was no statistically significant difference between educational qualification of men and women (see Table 1.8).

1.5.2   *Syariah Court Cases*

There were 18,572 cases filed under the Syariah Court between 1995 and 2001. Median age of sample was 25 years, and average duration of marriages was 10.2 years, which is lower than that of the Civil Court cases. The trend of young marriages at higher risk of dissolution is repeated here. Proportion of divorces peaked between 2 and 5 years of marriage, and 36.4% of divorces involved marriages that were 5 years or shorter (see Table 1.9). Once again, we are reminded that marriage preparation and pre-marriage counseling may have an important role to equip young couples with skills that help them overcome stressors in the early years of marriage.

Unlike the Civil Court cases, more marriages with children are involved in the Syariah Court divorces. Only 23% of the cases had no children (see Table 1.10). This is not unusual as fertility rate for the Malays is generally higher than the non-Malays. Thus, it is critical that we look specifically at the welfare of the children involved when we study divorce.

As in the Civil Court cases, majority of the petitioners are women (see Table 1.11). The Syariah Court records included an additional field of "joint petitions", but only 0.5% of cases fell in this category. It is interesting to note that the proportion of female petitioners (77.6%) is even higher than that of the Civil Court cases.

Most of the respondents had some form of secondary education (58.8%) (see Table 1.12). As in the Civil Court cases, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of educational level. The data on social economic status suggests that divorcees tend to come from lower-middle class background. Most

had some form of secondary education (58%), and were employed in clerical, sales or services sectors (59.5% in this broad category). None of the divorcees had university education. Only 5% had "A" levels or diplomas, and only 4.3% held professional, administrative or managerial positions. Almost all (99.1%) lived in HDB apartments.

The re-marriage rate was higher for the Muslims than for the non-Muslims. For most of the divorcees, it was their first failed marriage (82.1%). 17.2% had previous failed marriages, and 0.6% were widowed prior to this failed marriage.

As the Syariah Court data are not compatible with the Civil Court data, we are not able to compare the two sets of trends directly. However, analysis of administrative data does throw some light on the profile of divorcees in Singapore. With the benefit of this information, we constructed a detailed 20-page questionnaire for the large-scale representative survey in Phase 2.

Table 1.9: Duration of Marriage Grouped.

Duration of marriage in years	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Less than 1	126	.8	.8
1 Year	924	5.6	6.4
2 Years	1264	7.7	14.1
3 Years	1254	7.6	21.8
4 Years	1256	7.7	29.4
5 Years	1144	7.0	36.4
6–10 Years	4086	24.9	61.3
11–15 Years	2618	16.0	77.3
16–20 Years	1776	10.8	88.1
More than 20 years	1946	11.9	100.0

Table 1.10: Number of Children.

Number of Children	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
None	4276	23.0	23.0
1	4468	24.1	47.1
2	4620	24.9	72.0
3 or more	5208	28.0	100.0
Total	18572	100.0	

Table 1.11: Petitioner of Divorce.

Status of Petitioner	Frequency	Percent
Husband	4078	22.0
Wife	14406	77.6
Joint	88	.5
Total	18572	100.0

Table 1.12: Education.

Highest Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Primary	6611	35.6	35.6
Secondary	10926	58.8	94.4
Tertiary	346	1.9	96.3
Other	688	3.7	100.0
Total	18571	100.0	

1.6 PRIVATE WOES—PUBLIC ISSUES: SETTING THE STAGE FOR SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

Academic research on divorce in Singapore when this study was first commissioned (in 2002) was limited to qualitative interviews with small groups of divorcees. While these give insightful glimpses into the phenomena, they were based on focused, non-representative samples that did not allow for generalization. In short, aside from these pockets of information, we had little idea that drive Singapore couples to file for divorce. This study is the first large-scale survey of a representative sample of divorces. The unit of analysis is the petitioner of the divorce as research has demonstrated the merits of seeking reflections from the aggrieved partner's perspective (see Kitson 1992).

   Two key factors guided my selection of a target population. As I wanted respondents to be able to reflect on their failed marriage so that I could obtain a good sense of what triggered the divorce, I had to ensure that the event had taken place within the past five years to facilitate accurate recollection. Second, given that relocation of domicile was very likely post-divorce, I had to select a divorced population where registered addresses were still valid—both these factors pointed to target population of recent divorcees. The study was commissioned in 2002. I expected fieldwork to commence soon after, and as divorce

was such a sensitive and painful event, I wanted to ensure at least a 2-year post-divorce gap before conducting the interviews. Taking all these factors into consideration, I decided to select as the target population all petitions for divorces filed in 2000. A quick check on the divorce rates (see Table 1.1) show that figures for 2000 did not stand out as an anomaly, which suggests that while the findings can only be statistically generalized to all divorces filed in 2000, there is also no reason for us to suspect that the trends surfaced would be very different for divorces in Singapore in general. Altogether, there were 4943 divorces in 2000 (3336 in the Civil Court under the Women's charter and 1607 in the Syariah Court under the Muslim Law Act).

A probability sample of 1505 divorces was drawn—957 cases from the Civil Court, and 548 cases from the Syariah Court, to yield a 99% confidence (Neuman 2000). This sample was split 64%-vs-36% between cases from the two courts, which is representative of the proportionate distribution of divorces cases between Civil Court and Syariah Court for the year 2000. To facilitate cause-effect analysis, a control group of intact marriages was drawn for each of the divorced group, and comprised 64% of marriages registered under the Women's Charter and 36% registered under the Syariah Court. The control group is important to facilitate comparisons between divorced and married respondents so that unique characteristics and experiences of the divorced study group can be statistically teased out (Kitson 1992:25–26).

The survey instrument was a 12-page detailed questionnaire (see Appendix 1A & 1B), and included factors on attitude towards marriage, attitude towards divorce, practice of marriage, courtship, effect of social network on marriage attitudes and practices, effect of work, effect of parenthood, and social demographics (religion, ethnicity, education, income). The questionnaire was designed and packaged following Dillman's Total Design Method (Dillman 1978), and was translated into Mandarin and Malay (the two most common second languages used in Singapore). The questionnaire was pre-tested on 60 respondents (30 married, 30 divorced) from different age, ethnic and gender backgrounds.

As divorce is still a socially sensitive topic in Singapore, I decided on a self-administered survey which would yield a higher response rate for surveys on socially sensitive topics (see Dillman 1978). To further improve the response rate, the self-administered survey was accompanied by a drop-off/pick-up augmentation. Interviewers were

trained to deliver the survey package with a brief introduction to the study. For literate respondents, the drop-off-pick up method was used, and the interviewer would leave a copy of the appropriate question-naire, and arranged for a pick-up time within 48 hours to collect the completed questionnaire. Face-to-face interviews were conducted for respondents who were not able to complete the questionnaire on their own. About one quarter of the interviews was conducted using face-to-face methodology (27% for the divorced group, and 22% for the married group). Fieldwork commenced in March 2004 and was completed in June 2004.[2] A team of 60 trained interviewers conducted the fieldwork, and they were matched to the respondents on ethnicity and gender to maximize response rate. A 30% call-back was required to ensure quality control in data collection.

Altogether, a total of 1853 successful interviews were accomplished, which comprised 1026 married respondents and 827 divorced respon-dents. The response rate averaged 56%–54% for Civil Court divorces, 56% for Syariah Court divorces, 51% for Civil Court marriages, and 67% for Syariah Court marriages. Statistical analysis using the software package SPSS was conducted, and only statistically significant findings that can be generalised with at least 90% confidence are presented.

1.7   Overview of Demographic Profile—
the Divorced Study Group and the Married Control Group

The unit of analysis for the divorced study group was the petitioner for the divorce. Altogether, a probability sample of 827 divorcees responded, and they are representative of all divorcees who annulled their marriage in 2000. As reflected in the overall trends, there was a gender bias in the make-up of petitioners—64% were female compared to 36% male. Divorce is disproportionately higher for Malays than non-Malays. To capture this, we had sampled using proportionate random sampling following the Civil Court (non-Muslim)—Syariah Court (Muslim) ratios. The ethnic composition of the study group was

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[2] As divorce is a very socially sensitive topic, we were very selective about who we awarded the tender for data collection to. After the first round of public tender, we were not able to identify a satisfactory survey company for data collection. As a result, commencement of fieldwork was delayed for about 1 year as we had to call for a re-tender after 6 months.

similar to the ethnic distribution of the population divorce trends—32% were Malay, 61% Chinese and 6% Indian or "Other". The average age is 41 years for both divorced and married groups. Almost all our respondents were Singapore citizens. Average age at marriage was 24.8 years for the divorced group, compared to 26.5 years for the married group.

Given that females formed the majority in this study group, it was not surprising that the social class indicators were somewhat lower than the national average (which is better reflected in the profile of the control group). After divorce, most women suffer a downward social mobility, especially if they had custody of their children.

In the divorced study group, only 3% lived in private housing (compared to 8% in the married group). 38% lived in 3-room public housing[3] and 40% in 4-room public housing (the respective figures for the married group are 13% and 38%). The median personal monthly income was between S$1500–S$1999[4] (compared to S$2000 to S$2499 in the married group). The lower economic status of the divorced group is accentuated when we look at the combined household income. Median household income for divorcees is between S$2000 to S$2499, compared to S$3000 to S$3499 for the married group. The median education for both divorced and married groups was secondary schooling.

The probability sample of 1026 married respondents is representative of all intact marriages at the time when the study was conducted. The gender distribution of the control group was split equally between males and females (51.3% and 48.7% respectively). The control group was stratified by ethnicity, to match the ethnic distribution of the study group (60.8% Chinese, 5.9% Indians and "Other" and 33.3% Malays). Details of the demographic profile are in Table 1.13.

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[3] Public housing in Singapore, more commonly known as "HDB" is provided by the state-run Housing and Development Board. Census data from 2005 show that 80% of the population resides in HDB flats. HDB provides a wide range of housing options—from small 1–3 bedroom flats to service housing needs of the working class, to 4–5 bedroom bigger flats to cater to the housing needs of the huge middle-class segment of the population.

[4] The exchange rate at the time of publication was 1S$ = US$0.50.

Table 1.13: Demographic Profile of Sample.

		Divorced		Married	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Gender	Males	298	36.1	499	48.6
	Females	527	63.9	526	51.3
Ethnicity	Chinese	485	58.6	622	60.6
	Indian	49	5.9	47	4.6
	Malay	264	31.9	341	33.2
	Other	29	3.5	13	1.3
Citizenship	Singapore	794	96.0	992	96.7
	Permanent Resident	28	3.4	30	2.9
	Non-resident	2	.2		
Housing Type	HDB 1-and-2-room	57	6.9	10	1.0
	HDB 3-room	253	30.6	122	11.9
	HDB 4-room	330	39.9	391	38.1
	HDB 5-room and Executive flats	158	19.1	428	41.7
	Private apartment/ condominium	19	2.3	37	3.6
	Landed property	10	1.2	38	3.7
Education	Lower primary or less	43	5.2	27	2.6
	Primary	143	17.3	152	14.8
	Secondary	360	43.5	426	41.5
	Junior College	117	14.1	111	10.8
	Polytechnic & Other diplomas	126	15.2	212	20.7
	University	38	4.6	97	9.5

Table 1.13 (*cont.*)

		Divorced		*Married*	
		Count	*%*	*Count*	*%*
Language of Interview	English	506	61.2	616	60.0
	Chinese	166	20.1	233	22.7
	Malay	155	18.7	177	17.3
Age	Mean (standard deviation)	41.3 years (8.7)		41.3 years (8.9)	
	Median		40 years		41 years
Age at Marriage	Mean (standard deviation)	24.8 years (5.3)		26.9 years (4.9)	
	Median		24 years		26 years

1.8   Ties that Bind—Till Death Do Us Part

The extensive details derived from the study would exceed the capacity of one book. In the presentation of highlights, I had to sieve out revelations that would be useful to an academic audience. Given all that we know about divorce from both local and international scholarship, what will be sociologically stimulating from the findings? Goode (1973) mused in his book on *World Changes in Divorce Patterns*, "What is 'new' in the presence era?" (p. 3). For this book on divorce in Singapore, I asked myself "what is new" since Wong & Kuo's 1983 publication on this topic. Two key themes strike me as being significant, both of which can be attributed to the changing social status of women in Singapore—changes in expectations of marriage and parenthood, and the implications of women's work on the family. In many ways, the Singapore family is at the cross-roads between, borrowing Quah's (1988) euphemism, "tradition and modernity". When I first began work on the family, one of the first thoughts I had on the topic was the glaring divergence between expectations and the reality of family life. Marriage and the family in Singapore are still very much guided by traditional expectations, especially with regards to gender roles where women continue to be responsible for most of the domestic work (to be detailed in Chapter 4). These traditional norms are sustained by family policies which continue to reward those who subscribe to traditional

family expectations (see Straughan 2008). Yet, other social institutions, particularly the organization of paid work, function along paradigms that do not always recognize the needs of those with familial responsibilities (I will discuss this is greater detail in Chapter 5). Concurrently, with greater access to formal education and paid work, Singapore women have come to embrace and expect a more egalitarian outlook to gender divisions. These women, who grew up in a cosmopolitan Singapore and are privileged with insight to global perspectives on women's rights, expect marriage to be an equal partnership between husband and wife. And they expect marriage to enhance their personal lives. When these expectations fail to materialize, and when stressors enter the marriage—unlike the generations of women before them who needed to stay married for economic sustenance, these women are less likely to put up with a less-than-ideal marriage.

Following the concerns highlighted above, I have organized my key findings along two main themes—expectations or ideology of marriage and family, and stressors that contradict these prescribed ideologies. Given that my thesis is based on the premise that expectations of marriage has changed, an important consideration in the study of divorce would be the process of anticipatory socialization for marriage—the courtship process. Chapter Two looks in detail at the courtship and marriage preparation processes, and how these facilitate the transition from single-hood to couple-hood. What happens where there is inadequate marriage preparation? Will the marriage be doomed to fail? And what goes into spouse selection? Is it purely based on individual preferences, or does social policing still play an important role in contemporary Singapore? Chapter Three focuses on the ideologies of marriage. Particular attention is placed on gender role ideologies and the divisions of domestic labour. What happens when there is a divergence between expectations and the reality of everyday life?

In the trajectory of life's course, parenthood is expected to come naturally after courtship and marriage. Some argue that the presence of children helps to solidify the marriage. Others are quick to point out the parenthood is a key stressor in marriage. The second half of Chapter Three will detail the implications of having children on marriage and divorce. Chapter Four is devoted to the findings on the implications of work on the family. Singapore workers have been spending more time at work, and this comes at the expense of family time. When do we spend too much time at work? Are there "kosher times" when a no-show

at home triggers off danger signals for the marriage? This chapter will throw light on the dynamics in work-family interface. The last chapter, Chapter Five will take stock on what has been found in this study, and looks at the future of marriage from this vantage point.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT ONE—ROMANTIC LOVE, COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Marriage is a social institution governed by norms and expectations, and situated within a social context of intricate kin networks. Just as we argue that "no man is an island", the same can be said of marriage for marriage is situated within a larger social order. Therefore, we expect that for a marriage to succeed the couple must have done adequate preparation to meet the expectations of marriage—both from the individuals involved, as well as from their 'social significants' who have vested interest in the union. Marriage preparation is increasingly important as we transit from a traditional family system which ties down the conjugal unit both socially and geographically (Goode 1973) to one where personal happiness and self-fulfilment are the main goals of getting married and staying married (Amato and Irving 2006). When marital happiness is increasingly determined by the satisfaction of one's perceived needs, it becomes critical that adequate anticipatory socialization is done before tying the knot. In this chapter, we look specifically at courtship patterns, family support for the union, and the role of marriage preparation in sustaining contemporary marriages.

2.1 COURTSHIP PATTERNS

Contemporary marriages are increasingly dominated by individual interests and expected to meet personal needs of self-fulfilment and happiness (Techman et al. 2006; Huber & Spitze 1990). A marriage that is held together by mutual satisfaction between the partners involved takes a lot of work compared to marriage held together by community expectations and legal requirements (Amato and Irving 2006). This cultural shift in marriage expectations elevates the importance of courtship and the spouse selection process as personal choice takes precedence over community needs.

In the past when marriage was an important aspect of kinship extension, courtship depended significantly on family-initiated match-making. Dating in contemporary society is very much participant-run, and while personal choice plays an important role, the influence of peers

is significant (Nock 1992; Murstein 1991). This is evident among our respondents. In both the divorced and married groups, the role of family intervention is minimized. Only 8% of the divorced group met their ex-spouse through family members (the corresponding statistic for the married group is not much higher—12%). Most met their spouses either through friends or at work (see Table 2.1 below).

The average length of courtship was about 3 years for both groups, although the duration of courting varied quite widely, as demonstrated by the large standard deviation. 12% of the divorced group dated for 6 months or less, compared to 6.7% in the married group. The difference in the means test (at 95% confidence) showed that on average, married people enjoyed a longer courtship period than those who were divorced.

This reinforces the importance of courtship as a form of marriage preparation. In contemporary Singapore where idealization of marriage is centred on intrinsic qualities like companionship and romantic love, courtship becomes even more important for it is only through this, that dating couples get to know each better and discover if they are suited for a life-long social relationship.

2.2   MOTIVATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

Romantic love was the most cited top reason for getting married (see Table 2.2). This is congruent with the new cultural shift in expectations

Table 2.1: How Respondents Met their Spouse (Ex-spouse).

How 1st met spouse/ ex-spouse	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Through friends	37.2%	41.5%
At work	25.4%	26.2%
Through family members	11.8%	8.1%
Match-made	6.2%	5.3%
At school	8.4%	8.4%
Church	1.2%	.1%
Neighbour	0.0%	1.5%
Others	9.9%	9.0%
Total	100%	100%
Average courtship (Standard deviation)	37.4 months (26.8 months)	34.4 months (29.8 months)

of marriage, where self-fulfilment has replaced community obligations and the promise of romantic love has surfaced as a perceived reward for getting and staying married (Previti and Amato 2003; Buss et al. 2000). Marriage in contemporary society takes the form of what Giddens (1991) defined as a pure relationship—one not anchored in external conditions of social or economic life, but rather, is motivated by the rise of romantic love.

In his book on "Modern Love", Shumway argued that the ideals of romance and intimacy emerged in the late 20th century in response to the marriage crisis (2003:3). Expertise on how to evoke emotional closeness and romantic love in one's marriage availed in the form of marriage gurus and self-help manuals. In Singapore for example, the government sponsored program called *Romancing Singapore* which was first launched in 2002, had its mission "to inject love and excitement in marriages and to celebrate couple-hood" (Straits Times 7/10/2002).

While most cited self-fulfilment through romantic love as their top motivation for getting married, the other half cited tradition-centered reasons of procreation, family obligation and economic security. These statistics are interesting as they reflect the transitions in cultural expectations of marriage in Singapore.

Table 2.2: Reasons for Deciding to Get Married.

Reasons for deciding to get married	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Romantic love	42	37
Starting a family	35	24
Family Pressure	10	17
Economic security	6	7
Applying for HDB flat[1]	3	7
Other reasons	4	8
Total	100	100

When an individual's motivations for marriage gels with those propagated widely by the larger social order, the congruency is likely to seal

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[1] As part of the state's pro-family stance, married couples are given priority in the allocation of Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats. HDB flats are highly subsidized by the state and there is strong demand for them, particularly among young married couples who cannot afford the more expensive private housing.

the marital union for the couple has at the least the satisfaction that
they got marriage for the "right" reasons. And what are the socially
acceptable reasons for getting married in contemporary society? Two
main motivations stand out: love and to start a family.

The development of discourse on modern love, characterized by
romance and intimacy, can be traced through the development of
different genres of print and film, and this notion of romantic love is
supported in other forms of media as well (Shumway 2003). The rise
of individualization in post-industrial society also fosters a longing for
intimacy, security and closeness (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This
idealized imagery of couplehood is perpetuated through the various
mediums of popular culture and religiously prescribed by marriage
counsellors and other experts, all of which result in sustained social
policing of such expectations in modern marriages.

Concurrently, procreation within marriage is still very much the
norm upheld by the state and society in general. Procreation out of
wedlock continues to carry a strong negative social stigma in conserva-
tive Singapore, and the effective social policing of this, is demonstrated
by the small proportion of single mothers in our society.

To test this, I cross-tabulated motivations for marriage with status
of marriage. As the shifts in motivations for marriage are driven pri-
marily by the change in women's empowered social status, we should
expect a gendered differentiation in motivations for marriage. Thus, I
controlled for gender in the analysis. Several aspects of the results are
noteworthy. First, normative expectations of marriage in Singapore are
in transition. While some traditional reasons for getting married like
bowing to family pressure, economic security or securing a home failed
to sustain marriages (see Tables 2.5–2.7), others, like starting a family,
were still able to hold marriages together (see Table 2.4).

Second, the results support the hypothesis of a gendered differentia-
tion in motivations, and lend support to the argument that changes to
ideology of marriage in contemporary Singapore is fuelled largely by
changes in women's social status. Women who married for romantic
love were more likely to remain married, and those who married for
reasons of economic security or to secure housing were more likely to
be divorced. The results for men were not statistically significant at 95%
confidence level (see Tables 2.2–2.3). The impact of peer influence on
status of marriage was not significant for either group (see Table 2.8).

These findings reinforce the importance of convergence between
ideology and practice. The importance of romantic love as a catalyst
for sustained marriages in contemporary Singapore, when compared

to the negative effect of family pressure and pragmatic arguments for marriage (as license for HDB application) tells us that when the idealized expectations of marriage are contrasted with realities that do not necessarily match up, marriages are strained. Where basic needs of housing, food and health care are met fairly adequately, it is inevitable that people will look for higher level, intrinsic needs of love and companionship. That the motivations affect women more so than men is indicative of women's changing expectations of marriage.

The desire to enter parenthood as a positive factor for solidifying marriage is good news for family stability. The family remains the only legitimate source of reproduction, particularly in a conservative society like Singapore. Thus, if a couple ranks entering parenthood as a top decision for getting married, it also hints that they are cognizant of their social responsibility as parents, and that childrearing should be done in the social context of the family. This is also indicative that the normal family ideology of intact parenthood is still very strong in Singapore.

Table 2.3: Cross-tabulation of Romantic Love & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Romantic Love (Males)		Romantic Love (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	*Count*	170	128	346	181
	% within Romantic Love	34.6%	38.4%	56.2%	44.1%
Married	*Count*	321	205	270	229
	% within Romantic Love	65.4%	61.6%	43.8%	55.9%
Total	*Count*	491	333	616	410
	% within Romantic Love	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Kendall's tau-b[2]		*Value*	*Approx. Sig*	*Value*	*Approx. Sig*
		0.039	0.265	−0.118	.000

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[2] Like Goodman and Kruskal's tau-A, Kendall's tau-B has proportionate reduction in error (PRE) properties and is used to measure strength of bivariate association for ranked categorical variables. In this research, marital status is coded as a dummy variable (0 = divorced, 1 = married), and we can assume ranked status (who is more likely to be married). All the predictor variables in binary forms are also coded as dummy variables. Kendall's tau-B ranges from −1 (for perfect inverse relationships) to +1 (for perfect relationships).

Table 2.4: Cross-tabulation of Start a Family & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Start A Family (Males)		Start A Family (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	Count	230	68	397	130
	% within Start A Family	40%	27.2%	55%	42.8%
Married	Count	344	182	325	174
	% within Start A Family	60%	72.8%	45%	57.2%
Total	Count	574	250	722	304
	% within Start A Family	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig	Value	Approx. Sig
		−.123	.000	−.112	.000

Table 2.5: Cross-tabulation of Family Pressure & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Family Pressure (Males)		Family Pressure (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	Count	246	52	439	88
	% within Family Pressure	34.2%	49.5%	49.2%	66.2%
Married	Count	473	53	454	45
	% within Family Pressure	65.8%	50.5%	50.8%	33.8%
Total	Count	719	105	893	133
	% within Family Pressure	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig	Value	Approx. Sig
		.106	.004	.114	.000

Table 2.6: Cross-tabulation of Economic Security & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Economic Security (Males)		Economic Security (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	Count	280	18	490	37
	% within Economic Security	57.9%	30%	50.6%	63.8%
Married	Count	484	42	478	21
	% within Economic Security	42.1%	70%	49.4%	36.2%
Total	Count	764	60	968	58
	% within Economic Security	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig.	Value	Approx. Sig.
		−.036	.285	.061	.049

Table 2.7: Cross-tabulation of Apply a HDB Flat & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Apply a HDB Flat (Males)		Apply a HDB Flat (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	Count	284	14	484	43
Married	% within Apply a HDB Flat	36.2%	35%	49.7%	82.7%
	Count	500	26	490	9
	% within Apply a HDB Flat	63.8%	65%	50.3%	17.3%
Total	Count	784	40	974	52
	% within Apply a HDB Flat	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig.	Value	Approx. Sig.
		−.005	.874	.145	.000

Table 2.8: Cross-tabulation of Peer Pressure & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Peer Pressure (Males)		Peer Pressure (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	*Count*	290	11	520	7
	% within Peer Pressure	36%	57.9%	51.3%	53.8%
Married	*Count*	515	8	493	6
	% within Peer Pressure	64%	42.1%	48.7%	46.2%
Total	*Count*	805	19	1013	13
	% within Peer Pressure	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig*	*Value*	*Approx. Sig*
		.019	.598	.006	.857

2.3   COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE PREPARATION

While there is a cultural shift in the expectations of marriage, the practice of marriage is still governed by very traditional, rigid norms and expectations. The transition from single-hood to couple-hood when we take on the roles of "husband" or "wife" requires tremendous preparation. Even more formidable are the roles of son or daughter-in-law that marks the transition from "outsider" to "insider" status. Given that parental support is an important condition for sustained marriages, an important aspect of marriage preparation would include anticipatory socialization into the potential spouse's family.

Of equal significance is the role of marriage preparation in preparing the "script" for navigating modern marital relationship. This script is based on romantic love, which "presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself" (Giddens 1992:2). Thus, we are not surprised that the script, while it is rich on notions of passion and romance, is glaring in deficiencies on how to manage the practical demands of everyday married life. There is now more than ever a need for marriage preparation where attention is focused on managing the challenges in a marriage.

One of the functions of courtship is to facilitate marriage preparation. Courtship is an important socialization period when the courting

couple is expected to make firm plans for their future together, and transit from single-hood to couple-hood.

In this study, I included both formal and informal marriage preparation. Formal preparation involves attendance at religious and non-religious marriage preparation programs. Informal preparation includes general discussions on issues relating to marriage and family formation with family members, friends, and most importantly, with the potential spouse.

43% of the married group attended religious marriage preparation programs and only 6% attended non-religious marriage preparation programs. The pattern is similar in the divorced group, where a larger proportion (30%) had religious preparation and a smaller fraction (9%) attended non-religious program (see Table 2.9).

Cross-tabulated results of duration of courtship against the various aspects of marriage preparation supported the importance of courtship as a pre-marriage socialization process. Those with extended courtships are more likely to have done some form of marriage preparation (see Table 2.10). There are significant correlations between duration of courtship and non-religious marriage preparation, as well as the informal channels of marriage preparation like talking to family members and talking to friends (see Tables 2.11–2.12). These findings tell us that when couples enjoy a longer courtship period, they are more likely to have attended non-religious marriage preparation programs, and they have also tapped on their informal support network for help. Those with shorter courtship are less likely to have done any marriage preparation before formalizing their union. Only religious preparation had no significant association with duration of courtship.

Table 2.9: Preparatory work for marriage.

Preparatory work for marriage	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Talked to family members	67	53
Attended religious marriage programs	43	30
Talked to friends	34	27
No special preparations	11	29
Attended non-religious marriage programmes	6	9

Table 2.10: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation.

MARRIAGE PREPARATION		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Did not prepare for marriage	Count	123	64	50	112	349
	% within Courtship Categories	31.7%	15.7%	11.6%	18.7%	19.1%
Prepared for marriage	Count	265	344	382	487	1478
	% within Courtship Categories	68.3%	84.3%	88.4%	81.3%	80.9%
Total	Count	388	408	432	599	1827
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-B	0.089*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.11: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Non-religious
Marriage Preparation.

Attended Non-Religious Marriage Preparation Programs		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	13	33	48	39	133
	% within Courtship Categories	3.4%	8.1%	11.1%	6.5%	7.3%
No	Count	375	375	384	560	1694
	% within Courtship Categories	96.6%	91.9%	88.9%	93.5%	92.7%
Total	Count	388	408	432	599	1827
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		−.033*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.12: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Informal Marriage
Preparation—Talking to Family.

Talked to Family Members		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	202	255	278	376	1111
	% within Courtship Categories	52.1%	62.5%	64.4%	62.8%	60.8%
No	Count	186	153	154	223	716
	% within Courtship Categories	47.9%	37.5%	35.6%	37.2%	39.2%
Total	Count	388	408	432	599	1827
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.062*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.13: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Informal Marriage
Preparation—Talking to Friends.

Talked to Friends		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	78	126	163	201	568
	% within Courtship Categories	20.1%	30.9%	37.7%	33.6%	31.1%
No	Count	310	282	269	398	1259
	% within Courtship Categories	79.9%	69.1%	62.3%	66.4%	68.9%
Total	Count	388	408	432	599	1827
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.091*				

* significant at 95% confidence

If the couples had done some marriage preparation during courtship, what did they talk about? We investigated this by testing the correlation between the duration of courtship and whether the couple had discussed issues on money matters, marital roles and responsibilities, life goals and priorities, family planning, marital expectations, in-law issues, and sexual intimacy before entering marriage.

The results confirmed that indeed courtship plays an important role in marriage preparation. Those with longer courtships are more likely to have talked about money matters, marital roles and responsibilities, life goals and priorities, family planning, marital expectations, and in-law issues before they formalized their union. The statistical correlations are significant, but relatively weak. Given our concerns with financial capability to sustain a family, it is not surprising that the strongest correlation is between duration of courtship and discussion of money matters before marriage (see Tables 2.14–2.20). The only relationship that is not statistically significant is that of duration of courtship and discussion of sexual intimacy before marriage.

Table 2.14: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Money Matters.

Money Matters		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	118	162	200	255	735
	% within Courtship Categories	32.3%	41.9%	48.8%	44.5%	42.4%
A little	Count	84	96	119	182	481
	% within Courtship Categories	23%	24.8%	29%	31.8%	27.7%
No	Count	163	129	91	136	519
	% within Courtship Categories	44.7%	33.3%	22.2%	23.7%	29.9%
Total	Count	365	387	410	573	1735
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.117*				

* significant at 95% confident

Table 2.15: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Marital Roles & Responsibilities.

Marital Roles and Responsibilities		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	144	158	169	217	688
	% within Courtship Categories	39.9%	41%	41.4%	38.2%	40%
A little	Count	64	104	138	179	485
	% within Courtship Categories	17.7%	27%	33.8%	31.5%	28.2%
No	Count	153	123	101	172	549
	% within Courtship Categories	42.4%	31.9%	24.8%	30.3%	31.9%
Total	Count	361	385	408	568	1722
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.030**				

** significant at 90% confident

Table 2.16: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Marital Expectations.

Marital Expectations		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	105	124	145	173	547
	% within Courtship Categories	30.0%	33.2%	35.8%	31.3%	32.5%
A little	Count	67	118	156	183	524
	% within Courtship Categories	19.1%	31.6%	38.5%	33.1%	31.2%
No	Count	178	132	104	197	611
	% within Courtship Categories	50.9%	35.3%	25.7%	35.6%	36.3%
Total	Count	350	374	405	553	1682
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.055*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.17: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Life Goals & Priorities.

Life Goals and Priorities		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	108	150	152	181	591
	% within Courtship Categories	30.3%	39.6%	37.7%	32%	34.7%
A little	Count	75	104	149	210	538
	% within Courtship Categories	21%	27.4%	37%	37.2%	31.6%
No	Count	174	125	102	174	575
	% within Courtship Categories	48.7%	33%	25.3%	30.8%	33.7%
Total	Count	357	379	403	565	1704
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.056*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.18: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed In-Law Issues.

In-Law Issues		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	78	108	110	134	430
	% within Courtship Categories	22%	28%	27.2%	23.8%	25.1%
A little	Count	86	103	147	201	537
	% within Courtship Categories	24.2%	26.7%	36.3%	35.6%	31.4%
No	Count	191	175	148	229	743
	% within Courtship Categories	53.8%	45.3%	36.5%	40.6%	43.5%
Total	Count	355	386	405	564	1710
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.057*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.19: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Family Planning.

Family Planning		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	109	145	143	208	605
	% within Courtship Categories	30.4%	38%	36.4%	37.1%	35.7%
A little	Count	67	92	126	166	451
	% within Courtship Categories	18.7%	24.1%	32.1%	29.6%	26.6%
No	Count	183	145	124	186	638
	% within Courtship Categories	51%	38%	31.6%	33.2%	37.7%
Total	Count	359	382	393	560	1694
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.081*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.20: Cross-tabulation of Courtship & Marriage Preparation—
Discussed Sexual Intimacy.

Sexual Intimacy		Courtship Categories				Total
		1 year or less	2 years	3 years	More than 3 years	
Yes	Count	61	80	83	105	329
	% within Courtship Categories	17.8%	21.7%	23.5%	19.6%	20.6%
A little	Count	71	97	92	134	394
	% within Courtship Categories	20.7%	26.4%	26.1%	25%	24.6%
No	Count	211	191	178	297	877
	% within Courtship Categories	61.5%	51.9%	50.4%	55.4%	54.8%
Total	Count	343	368	353	536	1600
	% within Courtship Categories	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.024				

2.4 Being Prepared for Life—
The Importance of Marriage Preparation

Just how important is marriage preparation? For these results, the answer is 'very'. Being prepared builds confidence in the negotiation of marital roles. While it is nearly impossible to be fully prepared for the challenges of couple-hood, marriage preparation efforts are an indicator that the individual is conscious of the demands of marriage, and is mentally ready for the exciting journey ahead.

The cross-tabulation results show a significant positive correlation between attendance at religious preparation programs and whether the marriage is intact (see Table 2.21). Attendance in non-religious marriage preparation programs is not significantly correlated with marital status. We should not read too much into this because the correlation, while statistically significant, is very weak, and only 135 out of 1853 respondents had attended these programs. Instead, what should be noted is the very low prevalence of non-religious marriage preparation programs (see Table 2.22).

In the informal preparation category, while both talking with family members and talking with friends have significantly positive effects on the status of marriage, family involvement has a stronger effect (see Table 2.23). Overall, the analysis shows that having some preparation, regardless of whether it is formal or informal, puts one in a more advantageous position in securing one's marriage. Those who have had some preparation are more likely to be in intact marriages. Marriage preparation explains 22% of the variation[3] in the status of the marriage. (See Table 2.24)

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[3] The Kendall's tau-B has proportionate reduction in error (PRE) properties. It tells us how prediction error is reduced if we use the independent variable to predict the dependent variable (in this case, to predict the status of marriage). PRE ranges from 0% (where there is no relationship between the variables) and 100% (which indicates a perfect association between the independent variable and the dependent variable).

Table 2.21: Cross-tabulation of Religious Preparation
& Marital Status.

Marital Status		Religious Preparation	
		No	Yes
Divorced	Count	578	249
	% within Religious Prep	49.7%	36.1%
Married	Count	585	441
	% within Religious Prep	50.3%	63.9%
Total	Count	1163	690
	% within Religious Prep	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig.*
		0.132	0.000

Table 2.22: Cross-tabulation of Non-Religious Preparation
& Marital Status.

Marital Status		Non-Religious Preparation	
		No	Yes
Divorced	Count	752	75
	% within Non-Religious Prep	43.8%	55.6%
Married	Count	966	60
	% within Non-Religious Prep	56.2%	44.4%
Total	Count	1718	135
	% within Non-Religious Prep	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig.*
		−0.062	0.009

Table 2.23: Cross-tabulation of Talk to Family & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Talk to Family	
		No	*Yes*
Divorced	Count	388	439
	% within Talk to Family	53.4%	39.0%
Married	Count	339	687
	% within Talk to Family	46.6%	61%
Total	Count	727	1126
	% within Talk to Family	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig.*
		0.141	0.000

Table 2.24: Cross-tabulation of Talk to Friends & Marital Status.

Marital Status		Talk to Friends	
		No	*Yes*
Divorced	Count	604	223
	% within Talk to Friends	47.2%	38.9%
Married	Count	675	351
	% within Talk to Friends	52.8%	61.1%
Total	Count	1279	574
	% within Talk to Friends	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig.*
		0.078	0.001

2.5   Specific Discussions on Marital Expectations

In a typical marriage, newly weds would have to negotiate through
several key issues. These include money matters (for example, should
they have a joint account or single account? Who pays for what and
how much to contribute to each partner's family of origin?), marital
roles and responsibilities (what is the agreed upon division of domes-
tic labour? Will the wife be expected to take on the role of full-time

Table 2.25: Cross-tabulation of Any Preparation & Marital Status.

Marital Status		*Any Preparation*	
		No	*Yes*
Divorced	Count	239	588
	% within Any Preparation	67.1%	39.3%
Married	Count	117	909
	% within Any Preparation	32.9%	60.7%
Total	Count	356	1497
	% within Any Preparation	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*	*Approx. Sig.*
		0.221	0.000

homemaker?), life goals and priorities (should career come before family formation?), family planning (should they have kids? If so, how many? And when?), marital expectations (what do they envision their life journey together to be like?), in-law issues (should they stay with any set of parents? How often should they visit? What to do if in-laws or parents should interfere with their marriage), and sexual intimacy (are they comfortable discussing ways to improve their sex lives?). As expected, those in the married sample were more likely to have raised these pertinent issues for discussion with their partners (see Table 2.26). That sexual intimacy was raised by less than half of both samples remind us that sex in Singapore is still a very private affair, and even among couples in serious courtship, it is not as frequently raised as a discussion point.

Another indication that marriage preparation is important for sustaining marriages is the significant correlations between discussions of these highlighted issues and the status of marriage. Those who had invested time during their courtship in getting to know each other's perspectives on their married life together were more likely to be in intact marriages. The bivariate relationships between discussion on the 7 specific issues and status of marriage are both statistically significant and fairly strong (see Tables 2.27–2.33). For example, discussion of life goals and priorities before marriage explains 19% of the differences between the married and divorced group.

Table 2.26: Discussing Future Issues with Spouse/Ex-spouse.

Future issues discussed with spouses/ex-spouses	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Money matters	74	58
Marital roles/responsibilities	72	56
Life goals/priorities	71	52
Family planning	67	48
Marital expectations	66	51
In-law issues	61	46
Sexual intimacy	46	33

Table 2.27: Cross-tabulation of Money Matters and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Money Matters		
		Yes	A little	No
Divorced	Count	272	209	298
	% within Money Matters	36.8%	42.7%	56.3%
Married	Count	468	280	231
	% within Money Matters	63.2%	57.3%	43.7%
Total	Count	740	489	529
	% within Money Matters	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value		Approx. Sig.
		−0.152		0.000

Table 2.28: Cross-tabulation of Marital Roles and Responsibilities
and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Marital roles and responsibilities		
		Yes	*A little*	*No*
Divorced	Count	252	207	308
	% within Marital roles and responsibilities	36.3%	42.3%	54.8%
Married	Count	443	282	254
	% within Marital roles and responsibilities	63.7%	57.7%	45.2%
Total	Count	695	489	562
	% within Marital roles and responsibilities	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*		*Approx. Sig.*
		−0.147		0.000

Table 2.29: Cross-tabulation of Marital Expectations
and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Marital Expectations		
		Yes	*A little*	*No*
Divorced	Count	182	233	333
	% within Marital Expectations	32.9%	44.1%	53.4%
Married	Count	371	295	291
	% within Marital Expectations	67.1%	55.9%	46.6%
Total	Count	553	528	624
	% within Marital Expectations	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*		*Approx. Sig.*
		−0.161		0.000

Table 2.30: Cross-tabulation of Life Goals and Priorities and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Life goals and priorities		
		Yes	A little	No
Divorced	Count	200	220	339
	% within Life goals and priorities	33.6%	40.7%	57.6%
Married	Count	396	321	250
	% within Life goals and priorities	66.4%	59.3%	42.4%
Total	Count	596	541	589
	% within Life goals and priorities	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value		Approx. Sig.
		−0.189		0.000

Table 2.31: Cross-tabulation of In-Law Issues and Marital Status.

Marital Status		In-Law issues		
		Yes	A little	No
Divorced	Count	158	217	395
	% within In-Law issues	36.3%	40%	52.5%
Married	Count	277	326	358
	% within In-Law issues	63.7%	60%	47.5%
Total	Count	435	543	753
	% within In-Law issues	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value		Approx. Sig.
		−0.133		0.000

Table 2.32: Cross-tabulation of Sexual Intimacy and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Sexual Intimacy		
		Yes	A little	No
Divorced	Count	114	156	448
	% within Sexual Intimacy	34.2%	39.2%	50.2%
Married	Count	219	242	444
	% within Sexual Intimacy	65.8%	60.8%	49.8%
Total	Count	333	398	892
	% within Sexual Intimacy	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value		Approx. Sig.
		−0.131		0.000

Table 2.33: Cross-tabulation of Family Planning and Marital Status.

Marital Status		Family Planning		
		Yes	A little	No
Divorced	Count	207	191	358
	% within Family Planning	33.7%	42.0%	55.1%
Married	Count	407	264	292
	% within Family Planning	66.3%	58%	44.9%
Total	Count	614	455	650
	% within Family Planning	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value		Approx. Sig.
		−0.175		0.000

2.6   Family Support for Marriage

While the cultural shift in expectations of marriage has placed individual fulfilment in the forefront, we must be cognizant that marriage is still very much a kinship affair (Bryant and Conger 1999). Marriage, procreation, and to a lesser extent adoption are the only means through which a kin group expands its membership. As marriage must precede

procreation for the child to be legitimate, marriage becomes the primary vehicle through which the family continues its lineage. Through marriage, an "outsider" is accorded "insider" status. Marriage is a social contract between two kin groups, not just between the husband and wife. When we marry, we marry into our spouses' families as well. In a small nation-state like Singapore where geographical mobility is limited, it is even more critical that one's marriage has the blessing of both sets of parents, as frequent contact is almost inevitable.

The period of courtship is important as this is when parents would have had the chance to get to know their children's dating partners. Not surprisingly, most of our respondents' families had supported their marriage and spouse selection. However, those who were in the married control group reported higher levels of support from both parents and in-laws (see Tables 2.34 & 2.35). The bivariate analysis showed a strong, significant relationship between parental support and ability to sustain the marriage. Family support for the marriage explained the 25% variation indicating whether the couple was still married or divorced (see Tables 2.36 & 2.37).

That family support is instrumental in solidifying marriage suggests that the family as social support continues to be important in contemporary Singapore. When a marriage enjoys parental support, it allows parents to be effective mediators should conflict arise in the course of the marriage. When parental approval is absent, that itself might be a persistent thorn in the union that might aggravate conflict between the couple.

Table 2.34: Own Parents/Family were Supportive of Marriage.

Own parents/family were supportive	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Yes	92	71
No	3	15
Don't know/Refused	5	14

Table 2.35: Spouse/Ex-spouse Parents/Family were Supportive of Marriage.

Spouse/Ex-spouse parents/family were supportive	Married Respondents (%)	Divorced Respondents (%)
Yes	91	72
No	2	9
Don't know/Refused	7	19

Table 2.36: Cross-tabulation of Family Support Marriage &
Marital Status.

Marital Status		*Family Support Marriage Ordinal*		
		No	*Don't know*	*Yes*
Divorced	Count	124	112	591
	% within Family Support	82.1%	66.7%	38.5%
Married	Count	27	56	943
	% within Family Support	17.9%	33.3%	61.5%
Total	Count	151	168	1534
	% within Family Support	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*		*Approx. Sig*
		0.268		0.000

Table 2.37: Cross-tabulation of In-Law Support Marriage &
Marital Status.

Marital Status		*In-Law Support Marriage*		
		No	*Don't know*	*Yes*
Divorced	Count	73	159	595
	% within In-Law Support Marriage	76%	68.8%	39%
Married	Count	23	72	931
	% within In-Law Support Marriage	24%	31.2%	61%
Total	Count	96	231	1526
	% within In-Law Support Marriage	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		*Value*		*Approx. Sig*
		0.242		0.000

2.7   SPOUSE SELECTION—HOW TO SPOT A LIFE PARTNER?

The earlier part of this chapter highlighted the motivations for marriage and the importance of marriage preparation in enhancing the marital union. This section will focus on spouse selection. What are the criteria for choosing a partner for life?

Dating is perhaps one of the most under-rated social processes in the discourse of marriage. The courtship period is an important phase of the marriage preparation process for this time when spouse selection takes place. Spouse selection in a participant-run system is even more complicated under the new vision of romantic marriages, for the expectations are emotionally strong but visually hard to operationalize (Shumway 2003). In the literature on spouse selection, the most common postulate is that of homogamy—marrying your social equal. Kitson wrote, "When two people who marry have similar 'homogamous' social backgrounds, this is thought to make it easier for them to have or to develop common attitudes and values; in turn, this is thought to lead to greater mutual understanding and fewer arguments and disagreements." (1992:61)

In a participant-run dating system, we tend to choose partners who are like ourselves in anticipation that like-minded souls will have a greater chance of building a life together as contemporary marriage is a partnership. Marriage is a social and legal contract between a husband and a wife. In addition to legal obligations, the couple also has social roles and responsibilities within their marital union. Sociologists argue that marriage is a social construct, and the normative and social expectations governing these unions vary over time and across cultures (Bernardes 1985). These social expectations are internalized and socially policed through various agents like formal education, family, friends, ethnic and religious communities, the mass media, and even the state through family policies. Through the process of socialization, we learn of ideals in courtship and marriage, and these idealized expectations become barometers against which we measure the quality of our own marriages.

In Singapore, marriage has been and still is governed by patriarchal norms, where the head of the household is accorded to the husband. In an ideal partnership, the husband should take on characteristics of the leader. This means he should be older, better educated, and should earn more than his wife. Research elsewhere, documented that men who were older than their wives thought less about divorce (Huber and Spitze 1980). The annual publication Statistics on Marriages

and Divorces show consistent trends of men marrying women who are less educated than themselves, though the proportion who marry their equals has been on the rise (Singapore Department of Statistics, various years.) For example, the 2005 figures show that proportions of marriages with tertiary educationed grooms marrying brides who are just as educated as themselves was 71%, but the corresponding figure for university educated brides was only 46% (see Statistics on Marriages and Divorce 2005:6). While the emancipation of women in Singapore has led to women having an equal say in relationships, nonetheless, in the traditional institution of marriage, both men and women continue to marry partners who will yield a socially and culturally acceptable match.

Taking these traditional cultural preferences into consideration, I posit that the ideal matches in Singapore would position the man in the advantages position to take on the head of household status. This means that preferred matches will include men who marry women of equal or lower education, and men who marry women who are of the same age or younger. I argue that such socially acceptable unions will sustain because they are less likely to receive negative sanctioning from the community. I tested this hypothesis for both education and age.

Therefore, under these cultural expectations, a 'homogamous' couple would be one where the husband is better educated or just as educated as his wife. Given the advances made in formal education by women, we see in the marriage statistics that more men, particularly the more educated ones, are marrying their equal. However, it is still undesirable for women to marry 'downwards'. Following this rationale, I expect the likelihood of divorce to be higher for those not yielding this ideal prescription of couples matching their educational levels (e.g., when the wife is more educated than the husband). I created a variable to measure this educational coupling. A couple would "conform" to the gender expectations for education, if the husband is as educated as or more educated than the wife. Conversely, a "non-conformist" couple is one where the wife is more educated than the husband. The cross-tabulation results for education difference and status of marriage confirms my hypothesis (see Table 2.38). At 95% confidence level, the results confirm that where there is education conformity vis-à-vis gender, the marriage is more likely to be intact. Though significant, the relationship is weak. This may be due to the fact that we tend to practice self-censorship when it comes to non-conformist practices, and therefore, those in these marriages share other commonalities.

Table 2.38: Cross-tabulation of Education Difference &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Education diff vis-à-vis gender		Total
		Does not conform	Conforms To Gender Expectations	
Divorced	Count Column %	187 49.2%	640 43.4%	827 44.6%
Married	Count Column %	193 50.8%	833 56.6%	1026 55.4%
Total	Count Column %	380 100%	1473 100%	1853 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.047*		

* significant at 95% confidence

Under the norms of patriarchy, it is difficult for both men and women to accept that the husband is less educated than the wife. As long as we continue to accept the model that the husband is the head of the household, it is difficult for women especially, to envision the possibility that a less educated spouse would be a better head than herself. It will also be difficult for a man to differ to his more educated spouse. While self-policing is one mechanism that guards against such mismatches, family members and friends also play important censoring roles. As much as what we do in our everyday lives seeks the affirmation of these significant others around us, it is no different in our marriages. When we control for family support in the marriage, we see that when there is family support, the relationship between education difference and status of marriage is not statistically significant. However, when family support is absent, the correlation is significant and stronger than in the original bivariate table (see Table 2.39). In the bivariate correlation between education difference and status of marriage, only 4.7% of the differences in marriage status can be explained by education difference vis-à-vis gender. However, when family support is considered, we see that 18.1% of the differences in marital status is explained by education difference where family support is absent.

As with education, the ideal age difference between the couple depends on gender. Under a patriarchical system, where the head of the family is the husband, it is logical to expect that the head be older than his spouse, whom he leads. Thus, an ideal age combination would

be for the husband to be older than the wife, or if both are the same age. Going against the norm would be a situation where the wife is older than her husband. As in the test for education homogamy, I expected that a marriage will sustain when it meets the normative ideals. The results confirmed this. Those who do not conform to the ideal age difference between the couple are more likely to be divorced (see Table 2.40).

Table 2.39: Cross-tabulation of Educational Difference vis-à-vis Gender & Status of Marriage—Support from Family Controlled.

Family Support Marriage				Education diff vis-à-vis gender		Total
				Does not conform	Conforms To Gender Expectations	
No	Status	Divorced	Count Column %	46 92.0%	78 77.2%	124 82.1%
		Married	Count Column %	4 8%	23 22.8%	27 17.9%
	Total		Count Column %	50 100%	101 100%	151 100%
			Kendall's tau-b	.181*		
Yes	Status	Divorced	Count % within status Column %	115 19.5% 39.5%	476 80.5% 38.3%	591 100% 38.5%
		Married	Count Column %	176 60.5%	767 61.7%	943 61.5%
	Total		Count Column %	291 100%	1243 100%	1534 100%
			Kendall's tau-b	.010		

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 2.40: Cross-tabulation of Age Difference vis-à-vis Gender &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Age diff vis-à-vis gender		Total
		Does not conform	Conforms To Gender Expectations	
Divorced	Count Column %	114 .010	713 43.8%	827 44.6%
Married	Count Column %	112 49.6%	914 56.2%	1026 55.4%
Total	Count Column %	226 100%	1627 100%	1853 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.044*		

* significant at 95% confidence

The consideration of ethnic and religious homogamy is straightforward. Inter-ethnic marriages are but a very small proportion of marriages in Singapore. In our sample of 1853 respondents, only 7.9% or 146 married someone outside of their own ethnic group. The relationship between ethnic homogamy is not statistically significant. As Singapore is a cosmopolitan hub, this finding is not surprising, and speaks well of our ability to integrate across ethnic boundaries.

Ethnicity is important as an indicator of heterogeneous cultural values, where each ethnic group holds their own specific beliefs and valued norms. However, in Singapore where there is a national education system, common language of instruction, integrated public housing, and a conscientious effort on the state's part to promote ethnic integration via racial harmony programs (for example, racial harmony day at schools and similar programs in the community), it is not surprising that inter-ethnic couples do not experience "cultural barriers" in their marriage that may destabilize the union (see Table 2.41).

Perhaps a more serious barrier to homogamy values is cross-religion marriages. For those who are religious, the self-identification to one's religion may be greater than to one's ethnic roots. As religion prescribes specific guides to everyday life and life after death, a couple with divergent religious beliefs will find it harder to go through life together. The effect of religious differences between spouses on mar-

riage is negative. Those who marry outside of their own religion are more likely to be divorced. This relationship is statistically significant, and strong. Religious difference explains 17.7% of the difference in the status of marriage (see Table 2.42).

Table 2.41: Cross-tabulation of Ethnic Difference & Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Ethnic difference between spouses		Total
		Different	No Difference	
Divorced	Count Column %	72 49.3%	755 44.2%	827 44.6%
Married	Count Column %	74 50.7%	952 55.8%	1026 55.4%
Total	Count Column %	146 100%	1707 100%	1853 100%
Pearson Chi-Square	1.408(b)	Goodman & Kruskal tau-A		0.001

Table 2.42: Cross-tabulation of Religion Difference & Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Religion difference between spouses		Total
		Different	No Difference	
Divorced	Count Column %	204 63.9%	623 40.6%	827 44.6%
Married	Count Column %	115 36.1%	911 59.4%	1026 55.4%
Total	Count Column %	319 100%	1534 100%	1853 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.177*		

* significant at 95% confidence

2.8   JUXTAPOSED BETWEEN OLD AND NEW—
THE STATE OF MARRIAGE IN SINGAPORE

This chapter surfaced empirical support for many hypotheses link-
ing marital choices and marriage stability. The evidence pointed to
implications of motivations for marriage and courtship patterns on
sustainability of the union. The results spin an intricate story, one that
details the tug-of-war between changing expectations and the clutches
of traditional cultural norms. We see that Singapore society is caught
in transition—between the old and the new. Marriage and the fam-
ily are perhaps one of the most traditional social institutions in any
society for it is the family that sustains cultural traditions and norms.
Indeed, the family remains an important social policing agent, and
we see the power of parental support on the health of marriages. The
traditional motivator of getting married to start a family continues to
play a significant role in sustaining marriages. This suggests that both
men and women continue to believe that children should be raised in
intact families.

Yet, with the changed status of women, motivations and expectations
of marriage also shift. As popular culture continues to redefine marriage
to include personal fulfilment and satisfaction of the individual's needs,
we see the surface of romantic love as a significant motivator for staying
married—particularly for women. The evidence also supports marriage
shifts—from being a social obligation to an individual choice. Those
who marry because of parental pressure were more likely to end up in
divorce. Indeed, Singapore marriages are embedded in both traditional
and modern expectations. Many young adults continue to struggle with
these expectations of marriage that are both old and new.

Just as critical as contradictory expectations is the dissonance between
ideologies and practices. In the midst of these changes in expectations of
modern marriage, a series of contradictions emerged. When we marry
for personal satisfaction, the motivations for marriage concur with the
shifts in cultural expectations of marriage, and the congruency serves
to glue the union. But cultural shifts do not evolve overnight, and in
contemporary marriages, we continue to uphold traditional norms.
While it is hip to marry for romantic love, we continue to uphold the
husband as head of household. Of greater significance is the everyday
practice of marriage and family. We will see in the next chapter when
marriage ideals and practices do not converge, and how this affects the
sustainability of the marital union.

WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF—ROLE OF IDEOLOGY IN MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Ideologies are prescriptions on values and expectations, a "systematic and typically rigidly held body of ideas" which we uphold to help us position ourselves in the larger social order (Shumway 2003:4). These ideologies are learned through socialization, and reinforced in our everyday interactions with significant others and social groups. Ideals and expectations can be very powerful agents of social control for they serve to police conformity to the dominant ideologies that are supported by powerful stakeholders in our society. These stakeholders span a wide spectrum of the powerful and influential in any society, and include formal social agencies like political parties, mass media, educational and religious institutions, as well as informal social agencies like the family and peer networks (Hays 1997; Bernardes 1985). In the study of marriage and divorce, it is important that we understand the power of societal expectations in the function of the family, and how these ideologies support or hinder marriage.

When we enter marriage, we take on new social roles and responsibilities which may deviate significantly from what we are used to as single adults. Marriage is about couple-hood, and married couples are expected to function as one social unit to facilitate a meaningful life together. Much then depends on our expectations of marriage, and whether these are met in our everyday life as husband or wife. It is also in the social institution of the family that gender roles are specified and reinforced. Marital roles of husband and wife are almost solely gender-based regarding their responsibilities.

In this chapter, I will focus on the role ideologies play in sustaining marriages. The focus is on two sets of ideologies—one governing gender roles and the other, parenthood. Specifically, I will examine the effects of gender ideology and its implications on the division of domestic labour. The discourse will throw light on the power of ideologies in policing social behaviour, including how we *do* marriage.

3.1   GENDER IDEOLOGY—CONCEPTUALIZING SPOUSAL ROLES

It is in the social institution of marriage that gender roles are most rigidly defined and specified. We '*do gender*' most acutely when we get married, and especially when entering parenthood. Gender, unlike biological sex, is conceived of as "an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" (West and Zimmerman 2005:56). The gender roles divide was accentuated with the rise of industrialization and capitalism when the mode of production was shifted from the home to the factories. To explain how gender roles were entrenched in contemporary family life, the rise of the ideology of the sacred child and the ideology of intensive motherhood have been traced to the economical evolution of the early industrialization period (see Mintz 2005; Hays 1996; Zelizer 1994; Lopata 1993). To keep women and children out of the keen competition for paid work, new ideologies of child-rearing and mothering were invoked which defined the child as precious and vulnerable, and in need of a full-time caregiver. Who better to provide this important care than the mother? DeVault argued, "The home as an arena that requires women's domestic activity was actively constructed during the nineteenth century, partly in tandem with larger projects aimed at consolidating men's power, and partly by women reformers who assumed to develop the home as a site of power and influence for women" (2005:59).

Feminist writers throw light on how and why gender roles are created and sustained. West and Zimmerman wrote, "Doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and men and women, differences that are not natural, essential or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to enforce the 'essentialness' of gender." (2005:56). It is in the family that children first learn to "do gender", where little girls learn from young how to differentiate themselves from boys. Boys are sent out to do "rough and tough" work like taking out the garbage, lawn work, or working on home repairs with their father. Girls, on the other hand, are socialized by their mothers to take on domestic duties like cleaning and cooking. They are, as DeVault noted, "recruited into the work of care" (2005:59). Thus begins the new cycle of gender-based division of domestic labour.

However, because the division is based on unequal distribution of power in the family, and not on the natural innate abilities in men and

women, the family unit is not always in harmony over how the domestic work is managed. When partners found that they could not meet the role expectations, it increased the likelihood that the marital union will be disrupted (Kitson and Holmes 1992). Thus, in a study on the health of marriage, we must investigate the expectations of gender roles, and compare this with the actual divisions of responsibility in the family.

To measure gender ideology, I conceptualized the expectation of gender roles as having two main dimensions: role of men and women in the home, and their respective roles in the work place. Within the home, the division of domestic labour and childcare responsibilities are important aspects to be captured. A 10-item index measuring all these, was created to measure gender ideology (see Table 3.1). Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The answer categories are coded such that high scores indicated a more liberal gender ideology—that is, they are more likely to embrace more liberal beliefs about women's roles in the family and at the work place, and gender equality in general. The index has a range from 10 thru 40 (midpoint 25), with high scores representing liberal gender ideology, and low scores indicating more traditional gender role expectations. The average score for both the divorced sample (mean = 18, standard deviation = 3.2) and married sample (mean = 17.7, standard deviation = 3.3) were below the mid-point, indicating that both groups of women were generally more traditional than liberal.

The family is perhaps the most traditional social institution where gender roles are concerned, for it is still structured such that a traditional division of domestic labour along gender lines facilitates smooth functioning of the family. Challenges of paid work vis-à-vis home work and child care, together with gender inequality and disparity result in a traditional paradigm where family work is most successfully accomplished if women are responsible for the invisible work at home while men take charge of the more public roles of breadwinner and economic provider. Thus, it is expected that women who are more willing to adopt this traditional gender role expectation will be more likely to stay married. Given that the family is situated in a traditional gender role setting, women who embrace liberal gender expectations will find it harder to stay happily in their marital union unless their spouses too adopt liberal gender expectations. This is confirmed by the data. The difference of means test at 95% confidence shows that those in the divorced group have more liberal gender ideology than those in the married group (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.1: 8 Item Index to Measure Gender Ideology.

Gender Ideology Index*
1. It is better for the husband to be the breadwinner and the wife to be the homemaker. 2. Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed. 3. Ideally, the mother should take care of her children full-time. 4. No matter how hard they try, men will never be good at housework. 5. Women are too emotionally inclined to make good employees. 6. Even if the wife works, her job should be supplementary to her husband's. 7. A good wife is one who takes good care of her husband, her children, and her home. 8. A good husband is one who is able to provide well for his family financially. 9. If both the wife as well as husband is employed, the wife's job is just as important as the husband's job (scale reversed). 10. It is perfectly fine if a wife works and her husband stays home to take care of the children (scale reversed).
Reliability index—Cronbach's Alpha = 0.632

* Some item were adapted from Lennon, M.C. & Rosenfield, S. (1994), "Relative fairness and the division of housework: the importance of options." *American Journal of Sociology* 100(2):506–31.

Table 3.2: Difference in Means Test: Gender Ideology &
Status of Marriage.

ALL	Status	N	Mean
Gender Ideology (High Score—Liberal)	Divorced*	718	17.9666
	Married*	881	17.6515

* significant at 95% confidence

3.2   DIVISION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

The division of domestic labour and its impact on various aspects of family life is a well-researched area (see Coltrane 2000). There is abundant literature that documents the unequal division of domestic labour and its effects on marital satisfaction (Straughan et al. 2005; Dillaway and Browman 2001; Wilkie et al. 1998; Benin & Agostinelli 1988), mental health, marital conflict (Kluwer et al. 1997; Perry-Jenkins and

Folk 1994; Suitor 1991) and divorce (Frisco and Williams 2003). While gender ideology tells us what is expected of being a man/husband and a woman/wife, analyzing the division of domestic labour allows us to contrast these expectations of marital roles with the actual practice of husband and wife.

Overall, my findings confirmed that the unequal division of domestic labour contributes significantly to dissolution of marriage, especially among women. I listed 19 domestic responsibilities that covered homecare, childcare, eldercare and domestic supervision and asked respondents to indicate the person who was usually responsible for the respective tasks. The self-perceived division of labour by gender is detailed in Tables 3.3a & 3.3b.[1] From the frequency distributions, it is evident that in Singapore marriages, domestic work was considered women's work. While the reports from men tend to over-report men's involvement in self-responsible chores (and likewise, women tend to under-report their husbands' contribution), the overview clearly showed that, with the exception of disciplining children, childcare was primarily the responsibility of women. In terms of homecare and supervision, women take the lead too in all but three tasks: household repairs, washing the car and paying the bills. Maids were instrumental only for fewer than 10% of all cases. This is not unexpected as only about 20% of households have foreign domestic workers, the most common group of domestic helpers in Singapore.[2] About 60% of all respondents were involved in eldercare.

The difference in means test between men and women on all three aspects of domestic labour (self-responsible, spouse-responsible, shared-responsibility) were statistically significant at 95% confidence level. On average, women reported that they were responsible for 8.8 domestic tasks compared to the average of 2.7 for men. The male respondents reported that their wives were responsible for an average of 6.1 tasks, while the female respondents reported that their husbands were responsible for only an average of 1.8 tasks (see Table 3.4).

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[1] The index measuring division of domestic labour was used by Straughan, P., Huang, S., & Yeoh, B. in their project, and the findings were first reported in a 2000 conference paper, "Work, family and marital satisfaction: Singapore women's perspectives" presented at *Conference on Families in the Global Age: New Challenges Facing Japan and Southeast Asia*, Singapore.

[2] Straughan, P., Huang, S. & Yeoh, B. (2000) ibid.

Table 3.3a: Division of Domestic Responsibilities—
Male Respondents ONLY (n = 824).

	Mostly me (%)	Mostly my spouse (%)	Shared equally between spouse and I (%)	Maid (%)	Others (%)
CHILDCARE:					
a) Feed young children	9.9	43.2	39.0	6.1	1.7
b) Bathe young children	6.2	50.8	35.1	5.1	2.1
c) Take children to/from school	1.1	40.4	31.6	7.8	3.2
d) Take children to additional classes (eg. music, tuition)	10.6	42.4	41	4.7	1.2
e) Discipline children	16.7	27.5	53	2.3	0.5
f) Supervise children's homework	11.8	39.9	45.5	2.6	0.3
g) Take children to doctor/dentist	10.4	38.3	48.2	2.8	0.3
h) Stay home with sick children	7	52.9	35.4	4	0.8
HOMECARE & SUPERVISION:					
i) Assign chores	7.6	47.4	40.3	4.2	0.4
j) Do marketing/grocery shopping	8	44.1	43.1	3.5	1.4
k) Cook	7.3	58.5	23	8.4	2.9
l) Wash up after meals	10.7	43.2	35.3	10	0.9
m) Tidy the home	9.2	44.3	35.5	1.7	1.2
n) Do laundry	8.1	57.7	22.6	9.9	1.7
o) Supervise maid	10.6	44.7	42.6	1.1	1.1
p) Do household repairs	64.8	15.9	17.5	1.4	0.4
q) Wash the car	47.6	15.1	27.7	8.5	1.1
r) Pay bills	53.4	17.2	28.6	0.5	0.2
ELDERCARE:					
s) Look after elderly parents or parents-in-law	27	16.8	50.8	5	0.3

This unequal division of domestic labour had a negative impact on marriage. Difference in means test outcomes confirmed that marriages with unequal distribution of housework were more likely to have dissolved (see Table 3.5). On average, divorced respondents were responsible for 7.3 tasks while the married respondents were only responsible for 5.1 tasks. This is further reinforced by the average tasks that the spouses were responsible for. Divorced respondents reported that their ex-spouses were responsible for 2.9 chores while the married group statistic was 4.4.

Table 3.3b: Division of Domestic Responsibilities—
Female Respondents ONLY (n = 1026).

	Mostly me (%)	Mostly my spouse (%)	Shared equally between spouse and I (%)	Maid (%)	Others (%)
CHILDCARE:					
a) Feed young children	71	2.7	5.6	6.3	4.5
b) Bathe young children	71.9	2.6	13.5	7.8	4.3
c) Take children to/from school	58.8	6.5	19.4	7.9	7.3
d) Take children to additional classes (eg. music, tuition)	64.4	7.4	20.7	4.5	3
e) Discipline children	52.2	5.6	40.7	0	1.5
f) Supervise children's homework	68.4	6.8	23	0.3	1.5
g) Take children to doctor/dentist	63.4	5.8	28.8	0.5	1.6
h) Stay home with sick children	76.2	3	15	2.4	3.3
HOMECARE & SUPERVISION:					
i) Assign chores	67.2	4	25.1	2.6	1.1
j) Do marketing/grocery shopping	61.3	6	29.2	1.4	2.1
k) Cook	72.7	3.9	9	7.7	6.6
l) Wash up after meals	61.9	5.2	19.1	12.4	1.4
m) Tidy the home	59.6	4.2	21.4	12.6	2.3
n) Do laundry	70.5	4.2	10.6	12.6	2
o) Supervise maid	71.1	5.2	18	3.3	2.4
p) Do household repairs	19.2	59.2	18.2	0.2	3.2
q) Wash the car	8.8	65	8.8	11	6.3
r) Pay bills	32.2	40.8	25.9	0	1.1
ELDERECARE:					
s) Look after elderly parents or parents-in-law	37.6	10.2	50.2	1.2	0.8

In addition, married respondents reported a higher average number of shared tasks than the divorced group (5.2 compared to 3.2, difference significant at 95% confidence). This suggests that egalitarian marriages or marriages that practiced a shared-responsibility towards domestic tasks are more likely to sustain than those where the wife takes on the greater burden. This is likely to be tied to gender ideology, where those who embrace a more liberal gender ideology and uphold

gender equality are less likely to tolerate unequal division of domestic responsibilities in the family.

Are both men and women equally affected by the unequal division of domestic labour? Given that this is a gendered inequality with women most often saddled with the additional load, I expected that women would be more affected by these then men. The results confirmed my hypothesis. When gender is controlled, the relationship between the division of domestic labour and status of marriage showed a pattern of repetition for women, but not for men (see Tables 3.6 and 3.7). For men, the only statistically significant difference between the divorced and married group was the average number of shared tasks. Men who were more likely to share in the domestic responsibilities were more likely to sustain their marriages. This tells us that to promote healthy marriages, we should encourage men to adopt more egalitarian practices in the family. In contemporary Singapore where women are more likely to embrace liberal gender ideologies which promote egalitarian principals in both paid and home-related work, this becomes an important social factor affecting the quality of marital life. With more women enjoying empowerment from both higher education and paid work, I do not see this trend reversing in the near future.

Table 3.4: Division of Domestic Labour and Gender.

Division of Domestic Labour	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Male*	824	2.7	2.4
	Female*	1026	8.8	4.8
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Male*	824	6.1	4.2
	Female*	1026	1.8	2
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Male*	824	5.6	4.4
	Female*	1026	3.2	3.4

* Difference is statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 3.5: Responsibility for Domestic Tasks & Status of Marriage—
Whole Sample.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Divorced*	827	7.3	5.5
	Married*	1026	5.1	4.2
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Divorced*	827	2.9	3.7
	Married*	1026	4.4	3.9
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Divorced*	827	3.2	3.8
	Married*	1026	5.2	4.1

* Difference is statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 3.6: Responsibility for Domestic Task & Status of Marriage—
Males Only.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Divorced	298	2.7	2.5
	Married	526	2.7	2.3
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Divorced	298	5.8	4.3
	Married	526	6.3	4.2
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Divorced*	298	5.2	4.3
	Married*	526	5.9	4.3

* Difference is statistically significant at 95% confidence

Research on household labour consistently points to women's reported satisfaction with the division as the key to understanding the dynamic relationship between household labour and marital well-being. Most women do disproportionately more domestic work than their husbands, but not all are unhappy about the unequal distribution (Major 1993). In other words, unequal division of labour is not a sufficient condition in itself to cause marital discord as gender norm internalized from young determines one's perception of fairness (Frisco and Williams

Table 3.7: Responsibility for Domestic Tasks & Status of Marriage—
Females Only.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Divorced*	527	9.9	5.1
	Married*	499	7.6	4.2
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Divorced*	527	1.2	1.7
	Married*	499	2.4	2
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Divorced*	527	2	2.9

* Difference is statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 3.8: Satisfaction with Division of Domestic Labour.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very happy	219	11.9	11.9
Happy	1040	56.4	68.3
Neutral	229	12.4	80.7
Not happy	277	15.0	95.7
Not happy at all	79	4.3	100
Total	1844	100	

2003; Wilkie et al. 1998). In particular, Huber and Spitze (1980) had noted that wives' perception of what constitutes a fair division of labour affects propensity for divorce. Thus, regardless of the formula for dividing domestic work, it is essential that we also measure the perceived satisfaction with this division.

Respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the division of domestic labour in their marriage. While the majority (68.3%) were satisfied (see Table 3.8), women were more likely to express dissatisfaction than males (see Table 3.9). As expected, satisfaction of division had a significant effect on status of marriage. Regardless of gender, those who were more dissatisfied were more likely to be divorced. However, it should be noted the relationship was stronger for women than it was for the men. While satisfaction with division of labour explained 26% of the variation in status of marriage for men, it also

explained 37% of the difference among women (see Table 3.10). This finding, that perception of unfairness hurts women more, is consistent with that reported in other research (see Kluwer et al. 1997; Benin and Agostinelli 1988).

3.3   The Challenges of Parenthood I— Parenthood as Solidifying Marriage?

The unequal distribution of domestic work that favours husbands and the overload on wives is accentuated when the couple enters parenthood. While childcare is inevitably defined as women's work (Hays 1997, 1996; Hochschild 1997, 1989; Lopata 1993), whether having children will necessarily add a destructive strain to the marital union depends on several factors. The effect of parenthood is dynamic and multidimensional. There is some evidence that having children, particularly younger children, prevents parents from initiating marriage dissolution (Booth et al. 1986; White & Booth 1985; Huber and Spitze 1980).

Table 3.9: Cross-tabulation of Satisfaction with Division of Domestic Labour and Gender.

Satisfaction with division of domestic labour		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Very happy	Count % within gender	106 13%	113 11%	219 11.9%
Happy	Count % within gender	516 63.1%	522 51%	1038 56.4%
Neutral	Count % within gender	116 14.2%	113 11%	229 12.4%
Not happy	Count % within gender	64 7.8%	212 20.7%	276 15.0%
Not happy at all	Count % within gender	16 2%	63 6.2%	79 4.3%
Total	Count Kendall's tau-b	818 100% 0.146*	1023 100%	1841 100%

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 3.10: Satisfaction with Division of Domestic Labour with
Marital Status.

MALES		Satisfaction with division of domestic labour (Males)				
		Very Happy	Happy	Neutral	Not happy	Not Happy at all
Status Divorced	Count	21	155	75	36	8
	% within Satisfaction	19.8%	30%	65.7%	56.3%	50%
Married	Count	85	361	41	28	8
	% within Satisfaction	80.2%	70%	35.3%	43.7%	50%
Total	Count	106	516	116	64	16
	% within Satisfaction	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig.			
		−.260	.000			
FEMALES		Satisfaction with division of domestic labour (Females)				
		Very Happy	Happy	Neutral	Not happy	Not Happy at all
Status Divorced	Count	27	202	81	158	56
	% within Satisfaction	23.9%	38.7%	71.7%	74.5%	88.9%
Married	Count	86	320	32	54	7
	% within Satisfaction	76.1%	61.3%	28.3%	25.5%	11.1%
Total	Count	113	522	113	212	63
	% within Satisfaction	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig.			
		−.367	.000			

Most of our respondents were parents. Only 20% of the divorced group had no children, and an even smaller proportion, 12.1% of the married group was childless. There was a statistically significant relationship between parenthood and the status of divorce, with parents more likely to be in stable marriages (see Table 3.11). This result is consistent with the fact that those who got married to start a family were more likely to have stable marriages (see Chapter Two). As the value of children in our society shifts from mere economic assets (of additional labour) to priceless beings that require intensive nurturing, the normal family ideology that persists situates the care of these precious beings in two-parent intact families (Bernardes 1985, 1990). Perhaps nothing bonds a man and woman more than having children to care for and nurture. Having children may serve to solidify a marriage as the couple shares a common mission, to be effective parents for their children. Nonetheless, childcare responsibilities do add to the unequal division of domestic labour. I divided the domestic tasks into subgroups of child care, home care and elder care, and the results are consistent—wives were responsible for more childcare responsibilities than husbands (see Table 3.12).

Table 3.11: Cross-tabulation of Children & Status of Marriage.

Status		Presence of Children		Total
		NO	YES	
Divorced	Count % within Presence of Children	165 57.1%	662 42.3%	827 44.6%
Married	Count % within Presence of Children	124 42.9%	902 57.7%	1026 55.4%
Total	Count % within Presence of Children	289 100%	1564 100%	1853 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.108*		

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 3.12: Difference in Means Test for Division of Domestic Labour.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self-responsible for Childcare	Male*	824	.6238	1.30955
	Female*	1026	4.1715	2.98415
Self-responsible for Homecare	Male*	824	1.9284	1.53484
	Female*	1026	4.4142	2.33258
Self-responsible eldercare	Male*	596	.2701	.44440
	Female*	502	.3765	.48499
Spouse-responsible for Childcare	Male*	824	2.5619	2.48173
	Female*	1026	.3138	.98721
Spouse-responsible for Homecare	Male*	824	3.4296	2.31901
	Female*	1026	1.4201	1.29763
Spouse-responsible eldercare	Male*	596	.1678	.37399
	Female*	502	.1016	.30241
Shared-responsibility for Childcare	Male*	824	2.5765	2.50860
	Female*	1026	1.4006	1.97999
Shared-responsibility for Homecare	Male*	824	2.6820	2.41066
	Female*	1026	1.5712	1.89462
Shared-responsibility eldercare	Male	596	.5084	.50035
	Female	502	.5020	.50049

An additional consideration could be that bickering couples stayed together for the sake of their young children. This would be especially probable for those with children aged 12 years and younger as young children need more care. This hypothesis finds support in my data (see Table 3.13). In addition to minimizing trauma in young children, another deterrent could also be how the courts would determine custodianship of these young children (Huber and Spitze 1980). In cases of divorces involving children under 12 years, the mother would very likely be the custodian parent. This would deter men from petitioning for divorce as they would want to have uninterrupted access to their young children. Women would also likely postpone evaluating their marriage until single-parenthood appears more feasible. If the divorce implied the burden of becoming a single parent, it would hamper their continued participation in paid work.

Table 3.13: Cross-tabulation of Presence of Young Children &
Status of Marriage.

Status		Presence of young children 12 years or younger		Total
		NO	YES	
Divorced	Count	424	403	827
	Column %	52.4%	38.6%	44.6%
Married	Count	385	641	1026
	Column %	47.6%	61.4%	55.4%
Total	Count	809	1044	1853
	Column %	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		.138*		

* significant at 95% confidence

3.4   The Challenges of Parenthood II— Prepared for the Arrival of the Stork?

When we think of parenthood as a stimulant for cohesive marriages, we assume that the entry into parenthood is anticipated and welcomed. Of course not all who plan for their first child feel adequately prepared. Conversely, not all unplanned pregnancies are un-welcomed by the parents. Nonetheless, if a couple was not prepared for parenthood, the arrival of the child could cause additional stress on the marriage, which may later result in divorce. Being prepared for parenthood, particularly for the arrival of the first child, is important in this culture of intensive parenthood where raising children involves a greater investment of time and money (Hays 1997; Zelizer 1994; Cherlin 1992). Indeed, this is supported by the data. When asked if they were prepared for the arrival of their first child, 41.2% of those in the divorced group were not, compared to only 18.5% from the married group. Those who were not prepared for the arrival of their first child were more likely to be divorced (Table 3.14). The relationship is strong with preparedness explaining 24.9% of the difference in status of marriage (see Kendall's tau-B).

Table 3.14: Cross-tabulation of Prepared for First Child &
Status of Marriage.

Status		Prepared for Child		Total
		No	Yes	
Divorced	Count % within Prepared for Child	260 60.9%	371 33.5%	631 41.2%
Married	Count % within Prepared for Child	167 39.1%	735 66.5%	902 58.8%
Total	Count % within Prepared for Child	427 100%	1106 100%	1533 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.249*		

* significant at 95% confidence

3.5   PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD AND PARENTHOOD— A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

Parenthood is never a smooth-sailing enterprise. While the rewards are priceless, the challenges are also plentiful. The presence of children in a marriage can either serve to solidify the bond between the parents, or act as a catalyst to deteriorating relations between husband and wife when the stressors of parenthood step in. Much of how we deal with these challenges depends on our attitudes towards the child and towards parenthood in general. When challenges prevail, a positive outlook provides surplus energy that fuels optimism while a negative outlook serves as a catalyst for deteriorating relations.

I constructed a 4-item index to measure attitudes towards children. The items include the role of children in a marriage, and parenthood as a life goal (see Table 3.15). The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.761, confirming that the 4 items held well together as an index. The index was coded such that low scores indicated a more positive perception of the role of children in marriage. The index ranged from 4 to 16, with the mid-point at 10. While the average scores of both divorced and married groups levelled at below 10, thus suggesting a more pro-child attitude, the married group was largely more favourable towards children than those who were divorced (see Table 3.16). This suggests that those who were married enjoyed a more positive attitude towards children than those who were divorced.

Table 3.15: Index Measuring Attitude Towards Children.

	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
a) Children make a marriage more meaningful	29.1	53.4	12.3	1.8
b) A marriage without children is an empty marriage	13.1	41.9	35	3.4
c) Parenthood is one of the most important life goals	24.2	55.2	14.9	2.2
d) A marriage is not complete unless you have children	16.9	40.2	32.1	4.7
Cronbach's Alpha	0.761			

Table 3.16: Difference in Means Test for Attitude Towards Children and Status of Marriage.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude Towards Children	Divorced*	710	8.8169	2.30661
	Married*	937	8.0203	2.18352

* significant at 95% confidence

To measure general attitude towards parenthood, I created a 12-item index. The Parenthood Index covered a wide range of concerns regarding parenthood: loss of personal freedom, discipline of children, effective parenting, childcare responsibilities, as well as the effects of parenthood on health, self-perceived stress, and the health of the marriage (see Table 3.17). Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The responses were coded such that low scores indicated negative attitudes towards parenthood (that is, the perception that being parents is more harmful than good). The reliability test confirmed that all 12 items held well together to measure one concept (the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.72). The index ranged from 12 to 48, with the midpoint at 30.

The average of both married and divorced groups were above the midpoint, and this suggests that overall, the respondents shared a positive perception towards parenthood. However, the difference of means test confirmed that at 95% confidence, those who were married were likely to have more positive perceptions of parenthood than those who were divorced (see Table 3.18).

Table 3.17: Index Measuring Attitude towards Parenthood.

Low scores indicate negative perceptions of parenthood

	Strongly Agree (%)	*Agree (%)*	*Disagree (%)*	*Strongly Disagree (%)*
a) Parenting responsibilities places stress on my marriage	4.6	31.2	39.6	5.1
b) Ever since I became a parent, I lost my personal freedom	5.1	24.4	43.6	8.4
c) Being a parent has a bad effect on my health	2.2	12.4	52.1	13.7
d) I become upset, angry, or irritable because of things that my children do	2.4	24.7	44	9.1
e) If I can start again, I will choose not to have children	3.4	12.3	39.7	24.4
f) My spouse and I often disagree on how the children should be disciplined	4.5	28.2	37.7	6.9
g) I am the one who bears all the responsibility for our children in our marriage	13.7	30.5	29.5	6.7
h) I knew what parenthood demanded and I was prepared for it (scale reversed)	1	9.4	53.3	15.8
i) I had no problems adjusting to parenthood after the birth of my first child (scale reversed)	0.9	10.7	55.2	14.5
j) I believe my spouse thinks I am a good parent (scale reversed)	1.3	11.4	49.3	12
k) My life would seem empty without my children (scale reversed)	2.8	16.8	41.7	19.1
l) I feel competent and fully able to handle my responsibilities as a parent (scale reversed)	1.9	12.4	55.7	8.6
Cronbach's Alpha	0.720			

Table 3.18: Difference in Means Test of Parenthood Index and Status of Marriage.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude towards Parenthood (High scores—pro-parenthood)	Divorced*	409	33.0049	3.96430
	Married*	744	34.6734	4.11831

* significant at 95% confidence

3.6 Importance of Pre-natal Preparation

Taken altogether, the results stressed the importance of being prepared for parenthood. When a couple is ready to embark on this journey together, the addition of a new member to the family can serve to facilitate greater family bonding. However, if a couple is unprepared to accept the challenges of parenthood, having children may further cause stress to the marriage.

I compared attitudes towards children between those who were prepared for their first child and those who were not. As expected, the results showed that those who were prepared for their first child were more likely to have positive attitudes towards children (see Table 3.19). The results are similar for attitudes towards parenthood. Those who were prepared for their first child were more positive towards parenthood.

Table 3.19: Difference in Means Test: Attitudes and
Being Prepared for Parenthood.

	Prepared for Child	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude towards Parenthood (High scores—pro-parenthood)	No*	289	31.8893	3.68200
	Yes*	862	34.8132	4.03079
Attitude Towards Children (Low scores—pro-children)	No*	378	9.2090	2.29894
	Yes*	1007	7.8500	2.11413

* significant at 95% confidence

As attitudes and perceptions change with experiences, these findings point consistently to the importance of preparing for parenthood. We often see parenthood as a normal progression after marriage in the life course. This, together with our society's pro-natalistic stance given the low fertility rate, also gives the perception that parenthood does not require serious preparation, as it is a "natural" step after nuptials. However, in contemporary society where ideology of child and parent have become much more complex and demanding, ill-prepared parents may find it difficult to get back on a normal course once the stressors of parenting factor in. It is also when there are children in the family that traditional gender roles become even more entrenched. Once the

baby arrives, regardless of the work status or preferences of the parents, someone has to be the full-time caregiver of the dependent child. Unlike a commodity that can be shelved when interest and patience wanes, the child cannot be "returned" ever. Regardless of how determined the couple might have been to a fair division of labour prior to the arrival of baby, the onset of childcare responsibilities usually result in a traditional gender-based division of labour with the wife taking on most of the childcare responsibilities. Thus, if a couple is not prepared for parenthood, these additional demands may trigger off irrevocable damages in marital relations.

Taken together, the findings from this chapter reinforce three main arguments. First, that marriage is a social construct and expectations are shaped by dominant ideologies which vary over time and cultures. Second, these expectations or ideologies serve to police the marital union. Where expectations are not met, the marriage may experience tension and conflict that can lead to marital dissolution. Third, as coherence of expectations needs to be addressed, this chapter reinforces the importance of being prepared—for domestic responsibilities that are inevitable once the couple sets up home, and for the added demands of parenthood when children arrive.

In addition to expectations of marriage and parenthood, married couples have to deal with yet another major contender for their allegiance—that of paid work. The following chapter examines this and its implications further.

THE TIME BIND—WORK AND FAMILY INTERFACE

Perhaps the most significant social development that has affected family life globally is the entry of women into paid work. Opportunities for women in the labour force increased with the transformation from a manufacturing to a service-based economy since the 1980s (Menaghan & Parcel 1990). In addition, as cost of living increased, majority of families relied on more than one earner to maintain their standard of living (Heckert, Nowak & Snyder, 1998:690).

The labour force participation rate for females in Singapore has been increasing steadily since 1970. This is accelerated by the increase in opportunities in formal education and enhanced skills training for females. Encouraged by the momentum of the feminist movement in the west, women in Singapore looked toward paid work as a means to self-actualization. The outcome is a shift in the structure of the family, from a single-income husband-as-breadwinner & wife-as-homemaker model to the modern dual-income family.

The tension between work and family has been documented in numerous studies (see Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000, for a good summary of the work done in 1990s). Role strain and role overload that results in work-to-family and family-to-work spillover is a common outcome (Mennino et al. 2005; Rogers and May 2003; Small and Riley 1990). Work-to-family conflict is particularly accentuated for younger to mid-life workers as they are at most vulnerable points in their lives with work and family demands peaking (Grzywacz et al. 2002). Research in this area also showed that work-to-family conflict is more prevalent than family-to-work conflict (see Hill et al. 2004). An implication of globalization and expansion of traditional economic borders is the rise of business-related travels. Evidence informs that, more often than not, frequent business travels have a negative impact on family harmony as this extreme form of work commitment takes the worker away from the family for extended periods and, in the process, disrupts family rituals (Hill et al. 2004). Similarly, non-standard work schedules which have become more common as we move towards a '24/7' service orientation

have shown to be detrimental for family relations (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2007; Davis et al. 2006; Strazdins et al. 2006). Concurrently, there is strong support for flexi-work policies which grants workers a greater sense of control of their schedules and results in a healthier work-family balance (Grönlund 2007). However, it is often women who take advantage of pro-family job flexibilities (Singley and Hynes 2005).

The impact of work on Singapore families is similar to what has been observed in other developed capitalist economies. With the rise of a '24/7' organizational culture driven by competition within a borderless global economy that transcends several time zones, expectations from paid work has increased tremendously in contemporary Singapore. Concurrently, the demands from the family have also increased, particularly for younger families where the wives embrace a more liberal gender ideology. When women were not as educated or involved in paid work, the Parsonian nuclear family structure with husband-as-breadwinner and wife-as-homemaker was ideally functional (Parsons and Bales 1955). There was a clear division of labour along gender lines, and the work-family conflict was minimized as home-work and childcare were taken care of by the full-time domestic manager. In contemporary Singapore, and particularly among younger families, the dual-income family dominates. This is a result of the demands arising from the cost of living (where increasingly, families are finding that they need two incomes to sustain a desired lifestyle) as well as the changing aspirations of a more educated and worldly generation of Singapore women. Paid work yields economic, social and negotiation power. Thus, it is not surprising that women in Singapore strive to sustain their involvement in paid work. However, as noted by Siberstein (1992), the foray of women into the traditional male world of paid work is asymmetrical, and is not reciprocated by an increased participation of men in domestic work. As a result, there is a serious gap in the family when the wife/mother works full-time.

This gap contributes significantly to the tensions in contemporary family, and is conceptualized as a work-family conflict. In this chapter, we will see how paid work affects quality of marriage and contributes to sustaining marriages.

4.1 '24/7'—WORK PATTERNS AND FAMILY LIFE

62.4% of the divorced group and 56% of the married group fall in this category of dual-income families. Overtime work is a norm in both groups. About 40% in both groups do overtime work each week, and about 10% do overtime work almost everyday. The work commitment indicators show Singaporean employees to be extremely tied to paid work, with the average respondent clocking about 60 hours per week. How does this over-commitment to paid work affect the status of marriage?

First, I looked at the implications of women's work on marital stability. 67% of the 1026 women in the study were working (either full-time or part-time). Numerous studies have shown that while women take on the added responsibilities of paid work, they continue to manage domestic responsibilities at home (Straughan et al. 2007, 2005; Hochschild 1997; Rogers 1996). We see that reiterated here as well. Regardless of single or dual-income status, women continue to do more at home (see Table 4.1). The patterns of division of domestic labour are consistent in both household types. Given that women tend to suffer from role overload when they take on paid work, it is not surprising that gender specified the relationship between the dual-income and marriage statuses (Kiecolt 2003; Ginn 1997; Hochschild 1997). While there was no statistical difference for males, women from dual-income marriages were more likely to be divorced. The relationship between wives' income and divorce is a complex one that goes beyond what the data can offer here (see Rogers 2004). From this simple correlation, I can offer two possible reasons to account for the gendered difference in the effects of two-income on marriage stability. The first finds congruence with the data on unequal distribution of labour, and it suggests that role strain contributed to tension in the marital union. The second looks to empowerment of women through paid work, and this posits that having economic independence allows women to walk out of unhappy marriages. Therefore, women's paid work is not a direct cause of marital tensions, but rather, a facilitator of exit from an unsatisfying relationship.

Table 4.1: Difference in Means Test for Gender and Domestic
Responsibilities: Single-Income Families.

Single-Income	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Female*	411	9.9392	4.44738
	Male*	349	2.8195	2.39589
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Female*	411	1.7324	1.87705
	Male*	349	7.2034	4.20678
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Female*	411	3.0365	3.44661
	Male*	349	5.2550	4.12809

Difference in Means Test for Gender and Domestic Responsibilities:
Dual-Income Families

Dual-Income	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self Responsible for Chores	Female*	615	7.9886	4.89547
	Male*	475	2.6947	2.35586
Spouse Responsible for Chores	Female*	615	1.8179	2.02573
	Male*	475	5.3116	4.09174
Shared Responsibility for Chores	Female*	615	3.3382	3.43285
	Male*	475	5.8989	4.48795

Cross-tabulation of Gender, Income Status and Marital Status

Marital Status		Dual Income (Males)		Dual Income (Females)	
		No	Yes	No	Yes
Divorced	Count	127	171	183	344
	% within Dual	36.4%	36%	44.5%	55.9%
Married	Count	222	304	228	271
	% within Dual	63.6%	64%	55.5%	44.1%
Total	Count	349	475	411	615
	% within Dual	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		Value	Approx. Sig	Value	Approx. Sig
		.004	.908	−.112	.000

Conflict in the work-family interface is often triggered by the blurring demarcation between family time and work time. Lopata (1993), in her critique of the dual-sphere ideology wrote about how family time is often treated as surplus work time because of the power disparity between paid work and family in the capitalist economy. It is when family time is taken up by work commitments that those caught in the role overload, feel the tensions. A lay conceptual agreement of "family time" is usually understood as time outside the stipulated office hours. Part IV of the Singapore Employment Act specifies regular office hours for a full-time employee to be 44-hours per week (see the Ministry of Manpower website at http://www.mom.gov.sg/ for more details). Given the five-day work-week Singapore adopts, most would consider weekends and public holidays to be family time, and anything more than 44-hours spent at the office would impinge on family time in the 24-hour cycle.

I looked at two concepts of overtime work—self-reported frequency of doing overtime work, and validated this with hours worked. As in the discourse on division of domestic labour, I followed the arguments on perceived distributive justice by Major (1993) and Thompson (1991) in this analysis of work patterns. Rather than focus on quantitative indicators of amount of work done, I was more interested in the perceived satisfaction with the work schedule arrangements. I posit that as long as the couple finds equilibrium in their work-life balance, involvement in paid work will not have an adverse effect on marital quality. And where this equilibrium is would vary from couple to couple, depending on their resources, stage of family life cycle, among others.

The quantitative indicators of how much work was done included number of hours worked, frequency of overtime work, and frequency of business travels. Overall, the findings showed a bias towards spouses' work over commitments. This is not unexpected as these reports from the respondents' perspective, record their perceived deficiencies which would, inadvertently favour them. The first set of results on hours worked reviewed an interesting finding. While hours spent on paid work on weekdays did not differ significantly across the status of marriage, hours worked on weekends made a difference (see Table 4.2). At the 95% confidence level, we see that those who are divorced were more likely to have spouses who worked longer hours on weekends (i.e., Saturdays and Sundays). Time spent at work is time spent away from the family. This absence from family is felt most acutely during the weekends, which are traditionally perceived of as family time. This is

good news for champions of the family as Singapore had mandated a
5-day work-week in late 2004 as part of the nation-state's pro-family
thrust (Straits Times, 17 August 2004).

While an individual's overtime work was not significantly associated
with the status of marriage, the spouse's overtime work was. Margin-
ally, more divorced respondents reported that their spouses worked
overtime (38.2%) than the married respondents (33.2%). In addition,
spouses of divorced respondents also worked overtime more frequently,
with 15.8% doing overtime almost everyday (compared to the 11.9% of
spouses in the married group). These correlations, though weak, were
statistically significant, confirming that the more overtime the spouse
did, the greater the likelihood of divorce (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.2: Difference in Means Test for Marital Status and
Work Indicators.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
a) On an average weekday, how much time do you spend at work?	Divorced	660	9.2457	1.71985
	Married	756	9.5149	5.26110
b) On an average Saturday, how much time do you spend at work?	Divorced	471	6.5138	2.48170
	Married	551	6.2980	2.87393
c) On an average Sunday, how much time do you spend at work?	Divorced	119	7.4538	3.05389
	Married	158	7.3462	3.94028
d) On an average weekday, how much time does your spouse spend at work?	Divorced	561	9.4000	2.26164
	Married	744	9.4316	5.15746
e) On an average Saturday, how much time does your spouse spend at work?	Divorced*	410	7.2329	3.03646
	Married*	539	6.4976	2.97597
f) On an average Sunday, how much time does your spouse spend at work?	Divorced*	136	8.7206	3.27435
	Married*	150	7.7980	3.91304

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.3: Cross-tabulation Between Spouse Working Overtime &
Status of Marriage.

Status of Marriage		Spouse Working Overtime					Total
		Everyday	About 5–6 days a week	About 3–4 days a week	About 1–2 days a week	Seldom/ Never	
Divorced	Count	73	39	83	83	431	709
	Column %	59.3%	39%	47.2%	39.9%	41.6%	43.2%
Married	Count	50	61	93	125	605	934
	Column %	40.7%	61%	52.8%	60.1%	58.4%	56.8%
Count		123	100	176	208	1036	1643
Column %		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-B		0.053*					

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

A stronger indicator of how work commitments affect family relations surfaces in the indicators on perceived satisfaction with work-life balance. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their spouses' overtime work patterns, and if they thought it affected the quality of their marriage. In both cases, there was a strong correlation between perceived satisfaction and status of marriage. While 61.4% of the married group reported that they were happy or very happy with it, only 30.1% of those in the divorced group felt the same way. Thus, not surprising, there was a strong significant association between reaction to spouses' work time and status of marriage. Those who were happier with their spouses' work commitments were more likely to be in intact marriages (see Table 4.4). We also asked if respondents felt that their spouses' working hours contributed to unhappiness in their marriages. 30.8% of the divorced group said "Yes", compared to only 9.5% of those in the married group. Again, there was a strong significant correlation between this perception (that spouse's working hours contributed to unhappiness in marriage) and status of marriage. Those who perceived that their spouses' work commitments contributed to unhappiness in their marriage were more likely to be divorced (see Table 4.5). Each of these perceived satisfactions independently explained almost 30% of the differences in marriage status.

Table 4.4: Cross-tabulation Between Effect of Spouse's Work &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Perception on Spouses' Overtime Work					Total
		Very Happy	Happy	No Effect	Not Happy	Very Unhappy	
Divorced	Count Column %	11 15.3%	177 29.8%	220 56.3%	163 59.7%	55 74.3%	626 44.6%
Married	Count Column %	61 84.7%	416 70.2%	171 43.7%	110 40.3%	19 25.7%	777 55.4%
Total	Count Column %	72 100%	593 100%	391 100%	273 100%	74 100%	1403 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	−.295*					

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.5: Cross-tabulation Between Spouse's Working Hours &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Do you think your spouse's working hours contribute to unhappiness in your marriage?		Total
		Yes	No	
Divorced	Count Column %	192 74.4%*	431 40.8%	623 47.4%
Married	Count Column %	66 25.6%	626 59.2%*	692 52.6%
Total	Count Column %	258 100%	1057 100%	1315 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.268*		

* significant at 95% confidence

4.2 Overseas Business Travels—The Price of a Global Economy

About 14% from each group also travel out of Singapore on work-related trips (see Table 4.6). While this is a relatively small group, we do expect that more and more Singaporeans will have to take on overseas business travel as a normal expectation of their work. In addition, the trips will likely be longer as we venture further to explore business opportunities. Thus, it is important that we understand the effects of frequent overseas business travels on status of marriage.

Table 4.6: Cross-tabulation of Business Travel and Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Do you or your spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?		Total
		Yes	No	
Divorced	Count	112	715	827
	% within status	13.5%	86.5%	100%
	% within Do you or your spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?	43.9%	44.7%	44.6%
Married	Count	143	883	1026
	% within status	13.9%	86.1%	100%
	% within Do you or your spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?	56.1%	55.3%	55.4%
Total	Count	255	1598	1853
	% within status	13.8%	86.2%	100%
	% within Do you or your spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?	100%	100%	100%

Table 4.7: Difference in Means Test for Marital Status and Business Travels.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
a) Number of business trips you make in a year	Divorced	43	7.000	8.6932
	Married	78	8.340	18.1245
b) Average length of trips you make in a year	Divorced	45	8.656	6.8489
	Married	82	7.500	11.2527
c) Number of business trips your spouse makes in a year	Divorced*	61	17.230	48.4570
	Married*	73	6.911	7.4112
d) Average length of trips your spouse makes in a year	Divorced*	71	28.176	74.0751
	Married*	77	9.532	16.4213

* significant at 95% confidence

On average, our divorced respondents who travel take about 7 trips per year (standard deviation 8.7), and the average length of each trip is 8.7 days (standard deviation 6.8). Married respondents who have to travel for work take an average of 8.3 trips per year (standard deviation 18.1), with each trip lasting an average of 7.5 days (standard deviation 11.3).

As in the normal work patterns, only spouses' overseas business trips differ significantly across status of marriage. Ex-spouses of divorcees took an average of 17.2 trips per year, with each trip lasting an average of 28.2 days. Both number of trips and length of trips are significantly higher than the corresponding statistics from the married group (see Table 4.7). Clearly, the more time spouses spent away from the family, the greater the likelihood of divorce.

As overseas business travels are sometimes unavoidable, how then can the effect of these disruptions to family life be minimized? One way is for the couple to travel together. I asked if the spouses accompanied the business traveler (be it either the respondent or the spouse) on these trips. In both cases (where the respondent was the traveler or if the spouse was the traveler), there was a significant association between whether the couple traveled together and the status of marriage. Those who were accompanied by their spouses or who accompany their spouses on the latter's business trips were more likely to be in intact marriages. Conversely, those who traveled overseas alone on business were more likely to be divorced (see Tables 4.8 and 4.9).

Table 4.8: Cross-tabulation Between Spouse Accompanying on Business Trips &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Does your spouse usually accompany you on these trips?				Total
		Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	
Divorced	Count Column %	1 16.7%	5 25.0%	7 35.0%	33 39.8%	46 35.7%
Married	Count Column %	5 83.3%	15 75.0%	13 65.0%	50 60.2%	83 64.3%
Total	Count Column %	6 100.0%	20 100.0%	20 100.0%	83 100.0%	129 100.0%
	Kendall's tau-b	–.124**				

** significant at 90% confidence

Table 4.9: Cross-tabulation Between Accompanying Spouse on Business Trips &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Do you usually accompany your spouse on these trips?				Total
		Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	
Divorced	Count Column %	2 33.3%	6 26.1%	13 43.3%	63 59.4%	84 50.9%
Married	Count Column %	4 66.7%	17 73.9%	17 56.7%	43 40.6%	81 49.1%
Total	Count Column %	6 100%	23 100%	30 100%	106 100%	165 100%
	Kendall's tau-b	–.230*				

* significant at 95% confidence

In the study of marital relations, we have to appreciate that there is no one-model best-practice approach to happy marriages that can be prescribed. Ultimately, it is what the couple arrive at together as their specific optimum arrangement that makes a difference in whether they are able to accept the challenges to family life that surface. As long as the couple can arrive at an agreed upon arrangement to facilitate the work commitments, they are likely to overcome the challenges. I concluded this section of the survey with two indicators of perceived satisfaction. I asked respondents if they were happy with their arrangements on whether they accompanied their spouses on business trips, and if they were happy with their spouses' business travels. In both cases, there was a strong significant correlation between perceived satisfaction and the status of marriage. Those who are happy with the arrangements they had arrived at with their spouses to cope with the latter's business travels were more likely to be married. And the relationship was strong—satisfaction with how the couple managed overseas business travels accounted for about 32% of the differences in marital status (see Table 4.10). Likewise, those who were happy with their spouses' business travels were more likely to be in intact marriages (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.10: Cross-tabulation Between Happiness with Spouse's Business Travels Arrangements & Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Happy with arrangement for spouse's business travels					Total
		Very happy	Happy	Neutral	Not happy	Very unhappy	
Divorced	Count	2	21	23	27	10	83
	Column %	20%	31.3%	71.9%	62.8%	76.9%	50.3%
Married	Count	8	46	9	16	3	82
	Column %	80%	68.7%	28.1%	37.2%	23.1%	49.7%
Total	Count	10	67	32	43	13	165
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		−.324					

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.11: Cross-tabulation of Happiness with Spouse's Business Travels &
Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Happy with spouse's business trips					Total
		Very happy	Happy	No effect	Not happy	Very unhappy	
Divorced	Count	2	11	33	24	14	84
	Column %	50%	27.5%	54.1%	53.3%	93.3%	50.9%
Married	Count	2	29	28	21	1	81
	Column %	50%	72.5%	45.9%	46.7%	6.7%	49.1%
Total	Count	4	40	61	45	15	165
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		−.260*					

* significant at 95% confidence

4.3 BRIDGING THE GAP—COUPLE-TIME AND COMMUNICATION

Sociologists researching on work-family issues have long cautioned against the myth of the dual-sphere ideology (Lopata 1993). The ideology assumes a neat compartmentalization and separation of work and family, and thus, nullifies the strong correlation between paid work and family time. The dual sphere ideology functions on the assumption that there is a full-time domestic manager (e.g. housewife) at home, thus freeing the employee to devote as much time to paid work as needed. The contradictions created by this myth are most acutely felt with the emergence of the dual-income family where the full-time domestic manager is absent. When employees are forced to spend prolonged periods of the productive day at the office, away from the family, it relegates the family to "second-class" status, and for many, the home becomes simply a place to get some sleep, a change of clothes, and it is back to the lure of more tangible rewards at the office. Given the change in expectations of marriage in contemporary society where marriage is idealized to provide companionship and romantic love as indicators of a quality and desirable union, the lack of couple-time is sure formula for disaster in any modern marriage. These intrinsic couple-qualities can only be nurtured and sustained in a relationship where both husband and wife are able and willing to spend time together cultivate their marital union.

The importance of quality couple-time in sustaining marriage is supported by the data. On average, married respondents reported that they spent 20.9 hours per week with their spouse "doing things together or just enjoying each other's company". The corresponding statistic for the divorced group was 13.9 hours (see Table 4.12). The difference in quality couple time between the married and divorced groups was statistically significant at 95% confidence, and tells us that marriages with lower quality couple time are more likely to end.

The importance of communication is also reflected in the data. Respondents were asked if they talked to their spouses "about things that are important to them". 68.6% of married respondents reported that they enjoyed this relationship with their spouses most of the time, while only 31% of the divorced group talked to their ex-spouses frequently about matters important to them (see Table 4.13). This relationship between frequency of communication and status of marriage was significant and strong, with frequency of communication explaining 35.1% of the difference in status of marriage. Finally, I asked if the respondents were happy with the amount of time they spent with their (ex) spouses. About 60% of the married group indicated that they were satisfied, and the corresponding figure for the divorced group was only 28.5%. The relationship between satisfaction with quantity of couple time and status of marriage was significant, and fairly strong (see Table 4.14).

The spill-over module in work-family studies suggests that satisfaction with work will lead to satisfaction with home, and vice versa. This is also demonstrated in the data. Those who were happy with their spouses' work schedules were also satisfied with the amount of time they had with their spouse (see Table 4.15), and enjoy healthy communication with their spouse (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.12: Difference in Means Test Between Marital Status and Quality Time.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality couple-time: doing things together(average hours per week)	Divorced*	751	13.9148	17.46824
	Married*	967	20.8847	21.23151

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.13: Cross-tabulation of Communication & Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Do you talk to your spouse about things that are important to you?				Total
		Yes, all the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	No	
Divorced	Count	113	139	395	166	813
	Column %	25.7%	27.6%	58.3%	83%	44.7%
Married	Count	327	364	282	34	1007
	Column %	74.3%	72.4%	41.7%	17%	55.3%
Total	Count	440	503	677	200	1820
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-B	−0.351*				

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.14: Cross-tabulation between Satisfaction with Amount of Time Spent with Spouse & Status of Marriage.

Marital Status		Are you happy with the amount of time spent with your spouse?			Total
		Yes	No, would like to spend more time with spouse	No, would like to spend less time with spouse	
Divorced	Count	229	431	143	803
	Column %	27.6%	52.2%	92.3%	44.4%
Married	Count	600	394	12	1006
	Column %	72.4%	47.8%	7.7%	55.6%
Total	Count	829	825	155	1809
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Pearson Chi-Square	258.888*	Goodman & Krushal tau			0.143*

* significant at 95% confidence

Table 4.15: Cross-tabulation Between Satisfaction with Amount of Time
Spent with Spouse & Effect of Spouse's Work.

Effect of Spouse's Work		Are you happy with the amount of time spent with your spouse?			Total
		Yes	No, would like to spend more time with spouse	No, would like to spend less time with spouse	
Very Happy	Count	50	21	0	71
	Column %	8.3%	3.1%	.0%	5.2%
Happy	Count	345	219	15	579
	Column %	56.9%	32.6%	15.6%	42.2%
No Effect	Count	152	166	61	379
	Column %	25.1%	24.7%	63.5%	27.6%
Not Happy	Count	53	207	10	270
	Column %	8.7%	30.8%	10.4%	19.7%
Very Unhappy	Count	6	58	10	74
	Column %	1%	8.6%	10.4%	5.4%
Total	Count	606	671	96	1373
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%
Kendall's tau-b		.316*			

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

4.4   EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION—THE CATALYST FOR SOLIDIFYING MARRIAGES

Marriage is the beginning of a new life together for two persons who
are, for the most part, relatively unknown to each other prior to their
courtship. For many of us, it is only when we marry that we have to
learn to live with someone who has not always been a member of our
immediate family. While we may romanticize marriage as an extended
period of bliss where we spend the rest of our lives with our selected
spouse, it is inevitable that in the normal course of married life, con-
flicts will emerge. Thus, in order for a marriage to wither through these
episodes of discord and divergence in opinions, the couple must be
equipped with adequate conflict management strategies.

Table 4.16: Cross-tabulation Between Talking to Spouse & Effect of Spouse's Work.

Effect of Spouse's Work		Do you talk to your spouse about things that are important to you?				Total
		Yes, all the time	Most of the time	Sometimes	No	
Very Happy	Count	36	13	20	2	71
	Column %	10.7%	3.2%	3.9%	1.5%	5.1%
Happy	Count	171	195	184	29	579
	Column %	50.9%	48.6%	36.3%	21.3%	42%
No Effect	Count	61	103	155	67	386
	Column %	18.2%	25.7%	30.6%	49.3%	28%
Not Happy	Count	48	76	121	25	270
	Column %	14.3%	19%	23.9%	18.4%	19.6%
Very Unhappy	Count	20	14	27	13	74
	Column %	6.0%	3.5%	5.3%	9.6%	5.4%
Total	Count	336	401	507	136	1380
	Column %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	Kendall's tau-b	.173*				

* statistically significant at 95% confidence

To measure how couples dealt with conflicts that occurred in the course of their everyday life, a 7-item index was constructed. The index included both positive and negative responses to situations of discord (see Table 4.17). Negative responses include internalizing the pain, ignoring the spouse, talking to others about the problem instead of the spouse, and confronting the spouse in anger. A positive management strategy enables the individual to talk calmly about the problem with the spouse. In addition, I included an item to indicate the respondent's self-perceived ability to deal with marital conflict.

The conflict management index ranges from 7 through 28, with a mid-point at 17.5. The index was coded such that low scores indicate poorer conflict management skills. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.689, thus validating the items as a composite index. A similar index was created to measure spouses' conflict management skills, as perceived by their

partners. This index was also validated by the Cronbach's Alpha (see Table 4.18).

A difference in means test was conducted on the conflict management indices and status of marriage. While the mean score for the divorced group was marginally lower than the midpoint of 17.5 (thus indicating below-average conflict management skills), the mean score for the married group was much higher, suggesting that on the whole, this group enjoyed better conflict management skills. The difference in means test confirmed the hypothesis that those who were in intact marriages had better conflict management skills than those who were divorced. Similarly, those who perceived their spouses to have good conflict management skills were more likely to be married than those who felt their spouses could not manage conflict well (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.17: Index Measuring Conflict Management Skills.

	Response categories for items (a)–(f)			
	All the Time	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
a) Get angry with my spouse and shout at him/her	86 4.7%	675 37.2%	619 34%	441 24.2%
b) Ignore my spouse	152 8.4%	804 44.4%	508 28.1%	345 19.1%
c) Expect my spouse to talk to me first as he/she is the cause of the problem	180 10.25	703 39.9%	500 28.4%	377 21.4%
d) Feel very hurt and angry	348 19.35	858 47.6%	414 23%	181 10%
e) Talk to other people about it	100 5.5%	581 32.2%	491 27.2%	632 35%
f) Talk about the problem with my spouse calmly (scale reversed)	410 22.4%	930 50.8%	364 19.9%	126 6.9%
	Response categories for item (g)			
	Very Well	Well	Not Well	Not Well at all
g) Overall, how would you rate your ability to deal with conflict? (scale reversed)	155 9.7%	943 59%	404 25.3%	95 5.9%
Cronbach's Alpha 0.689				

Table 4.18: Index Measuring Spouse's Conflict Management Skills.

	Response categories for items (a)–(f)			
	All the Time	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
a) Get angry with my me and shout at me	245 13.4%	624 34.2%	496 34.2%	462 25.3%
b) Ignore me	246 13.6%	777 42.9%	462 25.5%	327 18%
c) Expect me to talk to him/ her first as I am assumed to be the cause of the problem	2690 15.7%	686 40.2%	466 27.3%	287 16.8%
d) Feel very hurt and angry	147 9.6%	708 46.1%	438 28.5%	244 15.9%
e) Talk to other people about it	110 8.1%	401 29.4%	329 24.1%	525 38.5%
f) Talk about the problem with me calmly (scale reversed)	307 16.8%	727 39.9%	460 25.2%	329 18%
	Response categories for item (g)			
	Very Well	Well	Not Well	Not Well at all
g) Overall, how would you rate your spouse's ability to deal with conflict? (scale reversed)	135 8.5%	763 48.3%	447 28.3%	236 14.9%
Cronbach's Alpha 0.79				

Table 4.19: Difference of Means Test: Conflict Management Skills & Status of Marriage.

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conflict Management (Low scores—Poor skills)	Divorced*	636	17.4167	3.22895
	Married*	842	19.8670	3.48346
Spouse Conflict Management (Low scores—Poor skills)	Divorced*	400	16.0400	3.75749
	Married*	705	20.0922	3.84298

* significant at 95% confidence

4.5   Looking Back, to Move Forward

This chapter has highlighted one aspect of our everyday life—commit-ment to paid work—that is a major contender for our time with the family. There is little to suggest that there will be a let-up in investment in paid work in the near future. With advancements in technology and the blurring of work-family space, our work is now more portable than ever, and especially for the professionals who are not desk-bound, we can now work anywhere and anytime. And statistics on extended work hours suggest we do. In turn, as we spend longer hours at the office, we also expect the service sector to extend longer hours of service to meet our needs. As a small city-state that is highly dependent on international trade, we have encouraged our young to capitalize on the global opportunities for business and skills expansion, and frequent overseas business travels and relocation will, in due course, become a norm of working life.

As contract work becomes the norm and rewards commensurate a performance-based system, job security becomes a very real concern for the family. As we become more and more reliant on wages from paid work to sustain a desired standard of living, we work longer hours. And we also spend a greater proportion of the productive part of our lives at work as we delay retirement age.

Time spent at work is time away from the family. No matter how well one manages to multi-task, the 24-hour day has its limitations. The irony remains that as the demands from paid work increase, so do demands from the family. Both men and women marry if marriage can bring added valued to their quality of life. For most women, this value-add must go beyond enhancing economic well-being. Earlier in Chapter Two, we are reminded that expectations of marriage in con-temporary society have accentuated the satisfaction of intrinsic needs. These normative changes are fueled by changes in gender ideology. The conflict in modern marriages is oftentimes a result of incongruence between men's expectations and women's expectations of marriage. Chapter Three took a closer look at the contest between traditional and contemporary expectations of the roles husbands and wives play in everyday family life. The importance of being prepared is resonated through both chapters. Given the importance of satisfying the intrinsic needs of companionship and love, a lot more effort must be invested in learning what these normative expectations are.

This research has highlighted the importance and significance of family ideology in marriage and the family. Oftentimes, we accept marriage as a natural progression in our life-cycle. As a result, we expect to get married as part of the rites of passage—what every young adult should aspire towards. However, as society develops, the expectations and demands of social institutions like marriage and the family also evolve. Expectations of roles, particularly of wife and mother have changed tremendously with the empowerment of women through formal education, participation in paid work, and the gains of the feminist movement. These changes inevitably affect changes in the men's roles in the family.

Family ideology, or expectations of how we conduct our family lives, specifies the attitudes and values that govern the principles of courtship and spouse selection, division of domestic labour, parenthood, and how we divide our attention between work and family. So strong are these ideologies of contemporary courtship that those who cannot find elements of romanticism in their own marriage tend to give up on their spousal relations. The power of family ideology is constantly and persistently fueled by social agents in our environment—be it the mass media (like Hollywood portrayals of the ideal mate), or popular culture (like the frenzy that surrounds Valentine's Day). And the expectations are socially policed by those around us—our family, friends, neighbours, and others who react to how we "do" family.

The complexities caused by the expectations of paid work highlighted in this chapter will continue to plague us, as the dual-earner family is fast becoming the statistical norm for family types. This family form poses serious challenges to how the family functions. The traditional family where the husband works and the wife stays home to take care of the family full-time have not yet been successfully replaced by a new family structure which adapts well to the absence of a full-time domestic manager. The stress of work demands on the family is particularly accentuated when married employees fail to strike a balance between work demands and family obligations. Here, we see the powerful workplace ideology at play, where employees are expected to display loyalty and commitment to the organization in order to advance in their career. The contemporary family demands every member to demonstrate the value of his/her membership too. The findings remind us that we cannot be in two places at any one time. When we spend too much time at the office, our marriage suffers. The effects of work on the family

are more acute for those caught in the bind of serving an increasingly borderless economy in the quest for globalization.

The findings show several key action areas, which can be reinforced to promote marriage stability and to reduce the likelihood of marriage ending prematurely. These are the acquisition of effective communication and conflict management skills (highlighted in this chapter), repositioning the significance of marriage preparation to the forefront, marriage enhancement, pre-natal and parenting programs, and finally, achieving a healthy work-family balance in everyday life.

The findings highlight the significance of ideology in marriage and family. Ideology specifies expectations of attitude, values and behaviour. For two strangers to live the rest of their lives as one cohesive social unit after marriage, it is critical that they learn to communicate their expectations to each other. As we move along the path of our life cycle, our roles outside the family will also affect our expectations of our spouses, and later, our children. So the channel for communication must be kept open, as the cultivation of social relations is a life-long journey. Taking stock of the above, I will elaborate in the last chapter how we can rethink divorce within the context of contemporary marriages.

LOOKING AHEAD—THE FUTURE OF FAMILY

This book on divorce in Singapore is not a study on the failure of marriage. Contrary, it is about the resilience of the social institution of family. As Wong and Kuo (1983) noted in the first comprehensive study on divorce in Singapore, "Incidence of divorce may reflect not so much an increase in family instability, but rather the basic changes in value systems pertaining to marriage and family institutions, sex roles and sex mores, the changing status of women in society, as well as the societal tendencies toward secularization and individualization" (p. 4). Adopting a marital resilience perspective, divorce is seen as a reaction to changes in the expectations and meaning of marriage. From the sociological perspective, we recognize that marriage as a social construct has been influenced by changes in the larger social order, particularly in the way work is organized and the rise of the feminist movement. From a sociological perspective, we appreciate the fluidity and dynamic nature of marital expectations, and how these affect marital satisfaction. These expectations give rise to ideologies of marriage which police how we evaluate the way we live out our married lives.

We also note that these expectations of contemporary marriage promise a marital bliss that is high on self-fulfilment and rich in personal satisfaction. Giddens (1991; 1992) wrote of an idealized contemporary marriage as the exemplification of a "pure relationship" which brings tremendous enrichment to the individuals involved. Clearly, from this perspective, marriage continues to be held in high esteem in contemporary society, and getting married remains a life goal for singles in our society. However, it is precisely because the idealized marriage promises utopia that marriage breaks down.

Gillis (2004) argued that one key reason for the high rates of divorce in modern society can be attributed to the high expectations we have of marriage. He noted that there are two family systems that govern us: one we live with—the practice of family in every day life, and one live by—the ideology of family that arises from expectations of modern marriage. Gillis lamented while the ideology of family seems to be flourishing, the practice of family is encountering multiple difficulties.

Contradictions from contesting ideologies, particularly expectations of paid work and gender ideologies are constantly challenging how we think family should be. In a similar analogy, Coontz (2006) pointed to the dissonance between expectations and the practice of marriage and family as resulting in discontentment with one's own marriage. With constant reminders from marriage experts, media imageries and popular culture that marriage should bring fulfilment of intimacy, romance, passion and satisfaction of other intrinsic needs, we become acutely aware of the shortfall when every day experience yield otherwise. It is the promise of a "pure relationship" that results in vulnerability to disappointment and renunciation (Gillis 2004:990). As we look at marriage dissolution as the struggle between contradicting expectations, we are rationalizing the seemingly irrational. There are several key points that this book has highlighted.

First, that we should be cognizant of the importance of the normative perspective. This is because ideologies of courtship, marriage, couplehood and parenthood will continue to show up contrasts in the way we do family. Where divergences appear and we fail to meet internalized expectations, marital satisfaction will inevitably be adversely affected. As the contemporary marriage privies fulfilment of individual needs over commitment to a group, satisfaction of personal happiness becomes very critical for sustaining marriages (Techman et al. 2006). Thus, any dissonance between 'doing marriage' in everyday life and the ideologies of marriage that have been internalized will trigger dissatisfaction and threaten marital stability.

The earlier chapters highlight some of the more glaring contradictions between these ideologies and their effects on marital stability. Broadly, the concerns regarding ideologies can be summarized under two themes. The first theme details the implications of contesting ideologies on marriage and the family. The second theme focuses on the dissonance between embraced ideologies and experiences in everyday life.

5.1   Contesting Ideologies

Several dominant ideologies surfaced through the discourse in this book—gender roles, expectations of marriage, ideology of the precious child, and the ideology of waged labour. These ideologies often contradict each other in the contesting for dominance, and managing

the discrepancies in expectations is one major challenge contemporary marriages have to overcome.

5.1.1 *Traditional Gender Roles and Gender Equality*

Perhaps the most glaring contradictions can be observed in gender ideologies, for the tremendous change in women's social status has significant impact on marriage and the family. Quah (1988) observed that Singapore women were caught between the transitions from tradition to modernity. Throughout this book, we observe the inter-twine between old and new. It is observed in the first stages of preparation for marriage, in the courtship process where spouse selection takes place. While romance is an important motivator for successful marriages, conformity to traditional gender-based specifications of social matches between men and women, also take up a substantial place. In my informal discussions with young Singaporeans, particularly the more educated females, their ideal soul mate is oftentimes a good mix between traditional expectations of a strong, dependable and economically stable provider and the contemporary ideals of a sensitive-new-age-guy (SNAG) with a softer and tender emotive quality. This is indeed a tall order for any young man, and indeed many have confided that their female counterparts' expectations were almost impossible to meet!

These raised expectations of women are the outcomes of two social dynamics at work: very successful gender socialization—which entrenches them into traditional expectations of women's roles in marriage, and improved social status of women in society—which frees them from dependency on marriage for economic sustenance and facilitates women to seek self-fulfilment and self-actualization in life-long commitments. Much of the literature on maternal gate-keeping (see Guendouzi 2006; Fagan & Barnett 2003; Allen & Hawkins 1999) documents women's attempt to maintain dominance on the home front while concurrently struggling to balance responsibilities of their new roles in the workplace.

5.1.2 *Couple-hood and Parenthood*

Yet another glaring challenge in the formula for successful marriage is the contest between self-fulfilment and social obligation. Nowhere is it more evident than in prescriptions of an ideal modern marriage and the ideology of parenthood. Social developments in the 20th century have resulted in an evolution in the meaning we accord to marriage

(Amato 2004; Cherlin 2004). As we trace the transition from institutional marriage to companionate marriage, and finally, to individualized marriage, we see how expectations of marriage take on a more self-centered focus. Gratification from marriage is no longer determined primarily on playing our marital roles well. The ideology of contemporary marriage, as detailed in the earlier chapters, requires participants to demonstrate 100% commitment as it is a partnership that promises to promote self-actualization and personal satisfaction for the couple involved. A relationship motivated by notions of romantic love and satisfaction of intrinsic needs necessarily demands that the partners put each other's needs first. And in order to be able to satisfy another's inner-most desires, one must first invest the time to get to know the person. Therefore, an investment in marriage necessarily demands an investment of oneself totally—in terms of time, resources, priorities. This is demonstrated by the findings on courtship and marriage preparation in sustaining marriages. And the investment continues as we traverse through life, entering stages of adulthood where new demands and role challenges may strain the marriage and cause the couple to drift apart. To stay the course together, the couple must continue to place their relationship as priority and continue to invest time and resource to growing old together if they want to honour the life-long commitment that marriage promised.

Yet, there are other ideologies which threaten our ability to place the marital union as top priority in our lives. A significant development in the study of the family is the evolution of the priceless child, which details a shift in expectations of parenthood as we move from pre-industrial societies to industrialized economies. In traditional societies, children were valued for pragmatic reasons: they grew up to be the next generation of workers and wage earners. So in the past, couples had children immediately after marriage (for marriage is the only socially sanctioned source of reproduction in a vast majority of developed societies). And they had as many as they could afford to feed, to maximize the chance that a desired number will grow up to be productive adults who can contribute to the economic well-being of the family unit.

However, as societies develop and the expectations of the family shift, the value and role of the child in the family also evolves. The ideology of the child has shifted from one with economic worth to one with intrinsic worth. The contemporary child is conceptualized as a precious and precocious being that needs intensive nurturing 24 hours a day, 7 days

a week (Zelizer 1994). This in turn affects the expectations of parent-hood, and the roles that mothers and fathers have to play. Who will take care of this priceless child? The ideology of intensive motherhood has evolved and assigned this role to mothers, which placed tremen-dous demands on mothers 24/7, and put childrearing as the number one priority in these women's lives. The persistent social policing from child-care experts, educationalists, enterprising capitalists, popular cul-ture, family and peers remind mothers of their responsibilities towards their young charges. Fathers are under pressure too, but the shift in the cultural role of fatherhood has been slow as men are reluctant to be drawn into a situation where they may have to give up their dominance in paid work in exchange for intrinsic rewards from the home front. So by and large, most continue to play their part as chief economic providers, to fund this expensive enterprise called parenthood.

The entry into parenthood is the time when most young marriages face the first threat to couple-hood. Many entered marriage with dreams of fulfilling self-centered interests. However, the couple-cen-tered relationship is transformed to a child-centered relationship when parenthood sets in. With the limited time and energy confinements of reality, many find it difficult to honour commitment to the precious child and at the same time, focus their attention on each other. We saw in Chapter Three how important being prepared for the first child is in sustaining marriages. Because childbearing is considered a natural process following marriage, many are caught off-guard when the first child arrives together with the tremendous demands on contemporary parents. As the demands on childrearing continue to snowball with the advancement of the child, the couple who is unprepared for the long haul will inevitably drift apart.

While courtship, marriage preparation and pre-natal preparation may help ease couples into these expectations and facilitate a smooth transition into couple-hood and parenthood, there seems little the individual can do about the most formidable contradiction that chal-lenges the ideology of marriage—and that is the contest from wage labour ideology.

5.1.3   *Ideology of Wage Labour*

The work-family dialectic has intrigued and consumed family research-ers since the 1960s. By the 1980s, with the emergence in the promi-nence of the dual-income family, the bulk of research in this area was

focused on how women's entry into paid work threw the entire family unit into direct conflict with wage labour ideology (Perry-Jenkins et al. 2000). The evolution of paid work in capitalist economies continued work's dominance over all aspects of social life, including that of the family. Our dependency on a regular wage has enslaved us to demands of the workplace. As profit margins tightened in competitive markets, employees are forced to work longer hours to remain relevant, and they spend less time with their families. Wage labour ideology demands that employees give their best to paid work, and that they should find self-actualization in work. This contradicts the ideology of marriage, which specifies that marriage should be the epitome of self-actualization. Can an individual serve two masters?

Work-life balance has received a lot of attention given the alarm sounded by demographic trends in marriage and fertility. As age at first marriage continues to inch up, and fertility rates drop to all-time lows, policy makers acknowledge that a major hurdle to investment in family is the over-commitment to paid work. There have been efforts to encourage employers towards enabling a healthy work-family balance, as well as the state's provision of incentives for organizations that promote innovative schemes supporting a happy marriage between work and family. In October 2004, the Singapore government invested S$10 million in the new WoW! (Work-life Works!) Fund, to provide financial support to companies and facilitate the development and implementation of family-friendly work practices. Under the WoW! Fund, companies are entitled a reimbursement of up to 70% of the cost of family-friendly initiatives at the workplace, to a cap of S$30,000. The initial take-up was slow, with less than 10 percent of the initial S$10 million committed through 32 projects in the first year (*Straits Times*, August 23, 2005). However, interest picked up and the entire inaugural fund was committed by April 2007. This encouraged the Government to top up the fund with another S$10 million (Ministry of Manpower online news portal at http://www.mom.gov.sg/publish/momportal/en/communities/workplace_standards/work-life_harmony/WoW__Fund.html) However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which employed more than half of Singapore's workforce found it particularly difficult to embrace family-friendly initiatives. Constrained by their labour pool, SMEs tend to see family-friendly practices as "luxuries, distracting from their main aim—survival" (The Straits Times, 23.08.2005, pH18).

Capitalizing on the advancement in technology, work in contemporary society was restructured to allow a blurring of spatial boundaries

so that employees, wherever possible, were not straightjacketed into rigid schedules. The aim was to encourage them to work when and where they could, so that they could also 'do family' when they needed to. However, portability of work had resulted in an opposite effort—rather than encouraging employees to free themselves for investment in non-work activities, it has created a 'work-all-the-time' mentality. In short, work in contemporary society has invaded family space and family time in an extended manner unsurpassed before. The dual-income family with both husband and wife engaged in full-time paid work is now the most common household structure. Further more, we are now also working longer hours, and for a longer period of our productive life. This trend is observed globally; our Japanese and Korean neighbours, for example, have recently passed legislature that mandated the taking of holiday leave. Time spent at work is time spent away from the family, and away from nurturing the marriage. This contest for our time is one contradiction that will require a mindset change to overcome. The recent uncertainties in the economic cycles, a tenuous global outlook and the dominance of contract work have contributed to a perception of vulnerability among workers. Many are unwilling to take any risk on their job security, and instead, have risked their marriage with over-commitment to work. But as long as demonstrated commitment to marriage comes at a personal cost, the outlook for the future will not yield any lapse in this tension between work and family. Work-family balance remains a challenge that faces marriage and family in the 21st century.

5.2   Dissonance in Ideology and Practice

As the normative perspective gains dominance in the discourse of marriage, meeting expectations takes on greater significance in sustaining the marital union. When women were dependent on their spouses for economic sustenance, their expectations of marriage rarely went beyond that of economic security. I recall conversations with my grandmother who came from Canton, China to Singapore in the early 1900s on marriage and women's roles. She firmly believed that as long as the man was able to provide for his family economically, he would have met his social and moral obligations as a good husband. Notions of love, emotional support and fidelity were secondary concerns, and she attributed it to the sad fate of women. With the empowerment of women

through education and paid work, contemporary wives in Singapore are a lot less willing to accept divergences between what they expect of marriage, and their experiences in everyday married life.

This dissonance is manifested in three key findings. The first is in the motivations for marriage. Contemporary expectations of marriage tend to focus on romantic love and fulfilment of personal satisfactions. For couples who married for reasons other than romantic love, the strain of not conforming to expectations can be so severe that the marriage may dissolve. The second significant finding is the impact of unequal division of domestic labour. While contemporary expectations of marriage tend to be biased towards that of equal partnership, the practice of marriage is still very much dominated by a gender-based division of roles. Goode wrote in 1964, "The primary status of women in all societies is that of housekeeper and mother." (p. 110). It seems like, after 40 years, very little has changed. Men are just not doing enough at home. And in many instances women themselves may be ambivalent about the unequal efforts at the home front. Through years of successful socialization and social policing, women have internalized the perception that they have fewer needs or have less important needs compared to their husbands or children, and therefore, often put their own needs on the back burner; much of this is related to that internalized belief that women are innately better as caregivers (Major 1993). The result is a tremendous role strain on wives, and a strong resonance of unfulfilled expectations.

The expectations of marriage are further compromised when we are torn between work and family allegiance, and our commitment to paid work surpasses time spent with our family. The significant presence of women in the labour force served to further tilt the tenuous partnership at home. At work, women are governed by a system of social exchange that prescribes a justice rule of equality. It became harder for working women to accept the inequality of the politics of domestic work at home. Concurrently, as more women advanced in their careers, particularly single women who are not distracted by domestic responsibilities, the arguments supporting natural demarcation of men and women started to wane. Inevitability, unless the division of domestic labour adopts a new formula incorporating working women's needs, there will be a trade-off between greater gender equality and marital stability. As women become economically independent, their reliance on marital stability will also wane. Research arising from Asia, documents this

evolving trend (for examples, see Ono 2006 and Raymo et al. 2004 for Japan; Thai 1996 for Vietnam; Zeng and Wu 2000 for China).

Overall, these findings suggest that while the expectations of marriage have increased, our ability to meet these expectations is limited by the social structure we live in. This social structure is still very much governed by a dual-sphere ideology which imposes a false segregation between men's world of work and women's domestic domain in the family (Lopata 1993). However, as disparities in power between men and women level out, the artificial polarity between work and family becomes increasingly dysfunctional for contemporary marriage.

5.3   Divorce and the Politics of Morality

Some scholars like Coltrane and Adams (2002) argued that a discourse on divorce necessarily engages the politics of morality. Drawing on the sociology of knowledge and adopting a social constructionalist's perspective of social problems, they contended that divorce is constructed as a social problem by family moralists, as a "reaction to cultural anxiety caused by women's increasing independence from men" (p. 363). The first influential study that fuelled this debate was Judith Wallersteins's 1971 study on the negative effects of divorce on children, and Wallerstein continues to be in the forefront supporting the traditionalist perspective of divorce.

Divorce continues to be socially and legally labelled as an adversary action involving a guilty party, and an aggrieved petitioner. Marriage serves to unite two otherwise unrelated strangers into one shared identity and the union is expected to last forever. So when the union dissolves, it transforms dramatically from that of a harmonious partnership to one that is fraught with antagonism (Gottman & Levenson 2000). As Coltrane and Adams (2002) noted, "Someone had to be at fault for breaking the marriage contract, and someone had to be harmed by the other's action." (p. 365). Such is symbolic of the need to maintain and sustain a social order that is dependent on an ideal family structure that is intact with a functional set of players. As Shumway (2000) contended, "As long as marriage functioned as a cornerstone of the social edifice, divorce has to be prohibited or strongly discouraged" (p. 22).

This social context where we situate divorce creates severe adjustment issues for the victims, particularly the children. Kitson (1992)

was mindful that "divorce is a complex social and psychological event. Few other commonly occurring events influence so many spheres of a person's life: legal, social, psychological, economic and (for those with children) parental" (p. 4). In the advent of the involved parties subjecting to trauma and stress divorces, we can no longer continue negative labelling and social stigmatization to prevent unhappy marriages from breaking up. That would just be socially irresponsible, for stigmatization tends to generalize and suffers from the inability to distinguish victims from perpetuators. Contextualizing the negative sentiments towards divorce within the social policing perspective shifts the blame away from the individual and focuses on divorce as an individual choice. This allows re-centering our concerns on post-divorce adjustment for the parties involved.

With sufficient social support, people do recover from failed marriages, and they can move on to form functional unions with other partners. The rise in remarriage rates testify to the fact that sacredness of marriage continues to be upheld even among divorcees.

5.4   REFLECTIONS FROM WITHIN—GLEAMING INVALUABLE LESSONS

We enter marriage with the assumption that the relationship is forever. When the union breaks down, inevitably, we try very hard to identify the catalyst that triggered the dissolution—the process of rationalizing the irrational. Much can be learned from subjective accounts of those who have been through the process, as these accounts serve to inform marital interventions that can be designed to avert marital dissolution (Rodrigues et al. 2006).

From the accounts of the 827 divorced respondents interviewed for this study, the first signs that their marriage was failing was in the initial years of the union (see Tables 5.1 & 5.2). 70.3% felt that the inability to communicate with their ex-spouse was the reason for the marital breakdown. However, the straw that broke the camel's back is when adultery had occurred. 54% indicated that adultery was the *most important* reason that pushed them towards petitioning for the divorce (see Table 5.3).

With the benefit of hindsight, our divorced respondents were asked to reflect on what could have been done to strengthen their marriages. 50.2% felt that compulsory marriage preparation programs would help build stronger marriages. However, 58.3% felt that compulsory mar-

riage counseling at the point of petitioning for divorce would not have helped save their marriage—too much damage had already been done by then. Reflecting on their own marriages, 41.6% felt that pre-marital programs might have helped them sustain their marriages, while 40.7% and 38.2% respectively felt that marriage enrichment programs and counseling during marriage would have helped (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.1: Divorcees' Reflection on the Most Difficult Phase of their Marriage.

Most difficult phase of marriage	% (sample size 827)
a) During the initial years	48.6
b) When children were born	25.6
c) When children entered school	10.5
d) When children entered adolescence	3.8
e) When children had grown up	3.0

Table 5.2: Divorcees' Reflection on when Problems Began in their Marriage.

Point when marital problems began	% (sample size 827)
a) During the initial years	48.4
b) When children were born	24.1
c) When children entered school	10.7
d) When children entered adolescence	4.8
e) When children had grown up	3.2

Table 5.3: Reasons for Marital Breakdown (Sample size 827).

Reasons for Marital Breakdown	% Citing reason as contributing to divorce	% Citing reason as most Important cause of divorce
a) Unable to communicate with each other	70.3	37.3
b) Problem with in-laws	27.2	22.2
c) Problem with children	12.6	13.5
d) Financial problems	49.6	28.8
e) No common interest	43.2	8.4
f) Differences in values	40.9	8.6
g) Differences in life goals	39.5	10.4

Table 5.3 (*cont.*)

Reasons for Marital Breakdown	% Citing reason as contributing to divorce	% Citing reason as most Important cause of divorce
h) Disagreement over marital role & responsibilities	33.6	7.9
i) Tension due to work	17.9	10.8
j) Drifted apart	37.6	10.6
k) Religious differences	4.7	10.3
l) Spousal abuse	19.2	27.7
m) Alcohol abuse	11.6	15.6
n) Adultery	33.0	54.0

Table 5.4: Reflections on How to Sustain Marriages (Sample size 827).

Compulsory marriage preparation programs would build stronger marriages	YES	50.2%
	NO	45.7%
Compulsory marriage counseling at point of petitioning for divorce would help save marriages	YES	41.7%
	NO	58.3%
Programs that might help sustain marriages:		
Pre-marital programs	YES	41.6%
Marriage enrichment programs	YES	40.7%
Counseling during marriage	YES	38.2%
Parenting classes	YES	21.3%

These findings clearly endorse the promotion of marriage preparation and marriage enhancement programs. The reflections confirm that marriage is not an easily manoeuvrable state, and availability of formal social support may ensure that in face of challenges, the knot does not get untied.

The importance of marriage preparation in modern marriages is perhaps understated. Amato (2007) cautioned that the absence of conflict is not a guarantee for sustaining marriages. More important is the demonstrations of commitment to the relationship that keep couples together in spite of manifestations of disagreements. The notion of love itself includes the demonstration of commitment to each other. Actively seeking marriage preparation and enhancement opportunities is a direct demonstration of commitment to marriage and couple-hood. Sadly, the take-up for such programs is still low as many are ignorant of the tremendous work that modern marriages entail. We still see marriage

and parenthood as a natural part of the life-cycle, and the pro-family policies encouraging marriage often negate on the commitments that sustain a life-long partnership. Through this paradox of familiarity arises a misperception that marriage is something that can be easily managed as so many around seem to be able to do it with ease which sadly trips many young adults in particular.

The good news is that most divorcees do not see marriage in a negative light after their failed marriage. Only 19.5% said that they would not consider getting married again. 52.6% indicated that they would consider remarriage—and that confirms that marriage remains a valued social institution, even among those who have been hurt in previous relationships.

5.5   Looking Ahead—Managing Divorce in the 21st Century

This book has been a reflection on what causes marriages to break up. In this progressive era where we appreciate the underlying social dynamics a lot more, we realise that we should not deter dissolution of unhappy marriages by exercising social stigma and negative labelling. Stigmatization will only hurt the innocent, especially children caught in the emotional war between adults. We only end up blaming the victim. Instead, in the management of marriage dissolution, we need to pro-actively promote and enhance marriage by noting the weak links and create sufficient buffer so that the marriage will be able to withstand the stress in times of crisis. Looking ahead, a two-pronged approach may hold the key to sustaining marriage and family in Singapore—facilitate healthy marriages by resolving the contradictions that cause couples to falter, and support adjustment for those involved in failed marriages.

5.5.1   *Building Healthy Marriages*

Where do we start? To arrest the worrying trends of declining marriage rates and marriage dissolution, the challenge for society is two-fold: encourage young adults to get married, and more importantly, to stay married. The latter is a difficult task, as marital fidelity now goes beyond avoidance of adultery. I would argue that in modern marriage, fidelity includes a conscientious commitment to put our spouse as first prior-ity. It is the only way in which both partners will be able to sustain a life-long commitment that promises self-actualization, fulfilment of individual needs, and personal satisfaction.

From trends in divorce statistics, we can identify two points where marriages are most vulnerable. The first is when the marriage is young, where couples have been married for under 5 years. To minimize the potential conflict in the early stages of marriage where the couple is learning to live together, we must reinforce the importance and significance of courtship. Unlike in the past where traditional matchmakers and family members step in to help find potential spouses who have the potential to make a good social fit into our existing kinship network, contemporary participant-run spouse-selection processes bring two strangers together. It is during courtship that these two strangers get to know each other and assess each other's suitability as one's life-long partner. Contemporary courtship perhaps needs to go beyond enjoying each other's company. Given that demands on marriage are much higher now, and expectations are greater than they have ever been, it is important that these expectations are articulated during courtship. We are in an era where traditional gender roles which are slowly giving way to contemporary gender ideology, and younger women in particular are facing the challenges of being attracted by the more appealing contemporary gender expectations and at the same time, trying to pull away from traditional gender roles that their mothers propagate. Here is where marriage preparation programs are important. In these programs, couples should be alerted to the challenges of contemporary marriages so that they are prepared for their life-long journey. Issues of who does what in the household, where to live and who to live with, how to achieve work-family commitments, management of in-law relations and expectations of parenthoods should be added to traditional discussions on finances, what kind of wedding reception one should hold, and when to apply for a Housing Board Development (HDB) flat.

Adopting the life-course perspective, we appreciate marriage as a journey through different stages of the life-cycle. At different points, the challenges and demands would vary. Therefore, the skill sets that guide through the courtship years may not be sufficient to overcome challenges in early parenthood. Being cognizant of the evolving expectations will protect couples somewhat. However, on-the-job training may not be sufficient when challenges are overwhelming. Our findings show strong endorsement for marriage enhancement programs, which may help address concerns on the various challenges at different stressor points in a marriage.

What are these critical points? The first would certainly be entry into parenthood. Pre-natal and post-natal programs on what to expect as

one enters parenthood and how to successfully and effectively raise toddlers, young children and teenagers; are essential as the expectations of parenthood and childhood are a lot more complex and demanding in contemporary society. In addition, parents also need to learn to adapt to an "empty nest" when their children are independent and very likely to move away from their provided home to set up their own homes.

However, as in all that involves normative directives, all marriage preparation and enrichment programs will inevitably either reinforce or contest existing ideologies. It is hard to prescribe generic models without privileging specific normative guides. Therein lays a serious challenge for the family. How do we prepare couples for the marital journey without imposing more prescriptives in the ideology of marriage when we argue that it is precisely these expectations that overwhelm? While general guiding principles like protecting the welfare and well-being of children and the general rights of children may be shared by our society as a whole, the details of what constitutes 'rights', and how to operationalize a conducive home environment would be subject to different interpretations by different sub-groups in our society. Perhaps the purpose of these programs is not to prescribe, but rather, to raise our consciousness to the complexities involved in doing family, and to set larger socially acceptable parameters within which couples can navigate through and negotiate the principles of practice.

In all these, the primary aim is to encourage effective communication between the married couple so that they can acquire negotiation skills to facilitate a harmonious union. Communication skills are also essential for effective conflict management. In any marriage, conflict is inevitable. If there exists an open channel for communication and discourse, it will minimize conflict and ensure that the couple have the relevant management skills when conflict occurs. Our findings confirm that good conflict management requires the couple to deal with the unhappiness directly with each other, rather than involve third parties in the conflict. Both men and women need to place premium on cultivating open communication to facilitate better understanding of the emotive needs in a marriage.

That we all look at our social order through gendered lenses will continue to pose challenges in couple-relations. In analysis of the division of domestic labour, wives often interpret their husbands' lack of responsiveness to household demands as demonstration of inconsideration and care for their wives (Thompson 1991). Husbands, on the other hand, continue to be befuddled by the sudden manifestation of a

cold war on the home front, often wondering what they did wrong. My husband, a PhD in Applied Mathematics, told me in the early stages of our marriage, "If you want me to do something, why don't you just tell me?" To which I huffed, "If I had to tell you, it shows that you didn't even care enough to notice!" He looked very bewildered after this exchange while I simmered away at how insensitive men were. A gendered perspective lends a seemingly objective situation to differential interpretations. The best way to over come this is to promote better communication channels, and equip married couples with effective communication skills. Romantic love is an attractive imagery for marriage, but its intrinsic expectations also make it somewhat illusive in the bustle of everyday life. Thus, it is imperative that married couples be equipped with learning the language of love—to recognize and express manifestations of what love means to each other as they grow together through the marital journey. And they must be mindful that demands of the couple relationship as they journey from courtship through to parenthood will vary, and that marriage at mid-life may require skill-sets that may not serve quite as well in the active ageing years. So, married couples must allow themselves that time to learn about each other, and to grow in sync together.

Given the significance of normative definitions, it is critical in contemporary marriage that we learn to overtly affirm our life partners. The absence of intense marital conflict without the presence of positive affirmations may not be sufficient to sustain marriages. This is particular critical where we expect marriage to provide fulfilment at an emotive level, and being married promises the partnership of a soul-mate who would affirm us and provide social and psychological support. As change in expectations of marriage stems from change in women's social status, it is not surprising that wives need more positive affirmation from marriage than husbands (Gottman and Levenson 2000). Herein lays the paradox, for men are generally socialized to be less expressive than women.

Perhaps the most important concern for families in contemporary society is having effective work-family balance. With the increase in the number of dual-earner family structures, we see the demands of paid work imposing on family commitment. Most are caught in a catch-22 situation: paid work in contemporary society demands 24–7 commitment from their employees as our increasingly borderless economy that stretches over 3 time zones, requires that employees are ever ready to answer the call of duty. Concurrently, the ideology of family in con-

temporary society also demands that a good husband/wife displays total commitment to the family, and that a good father/mother be available for their children 24–7. So how can we be 100% committed to two masters? The current statistics on marriage and fertility show us clearly that it is not possible. Something has to give, and unfortunately, because returns from investment in the family are not immediate and intrinsic in nature, many are choosing career advancements over family. Age at first marriage has risen, with proportions of singles on the rise; fertility is at its all-time low, with many opting for childless marriages. Unless we can successfully arrest these developments, Singapore will face serious problems in recruiting enough for the next generation of its labour force.

William Goode wrote, "It is through the family that the society is able to elicit from the individual his necessary contribution. The family, in turn, can continue to exist only if it is supported by the larger society" (1964:3). Therefore, for Singapore to continue to thrive and capitalize on the tremendous opportunities of our global geopolitical position, we must first ensure that our social order continues to facilitate family life.

Indeed, the second critical point for marital dissolution is when the marriage is mature. As the couple ages, multiple demands that dominate their everyday life begin to taper off as career demands subside and children become independent young adults. Suddenly, as the dust settles from the fervour of meeting multiple obligations, the older married couple find themselves alone—and unable to relate to each other.

Much has been written about the "empty nest" syndrome (see Hiedemann et al. 1998). In our pro-natalist society, young parents—particularly mothers—tend to focus their attention on childrearing. The child-centered marriage is often confounded with disputes arising from an unequal division of domestic labour. Because the overload on women at home is such a widespread phenomenon, and its prevalence is normalized by popular culture where the "lazy-husband & overworked-wife" imagery is often the focus of sitcoms beamed into our living rooms every evening, men often fail to take the disgruntle and unhappiness expressed by their wives, seriously. Many tend to accept this unequal distribution of work at home because they embrace the belief that men's primary role is that of breadwinner. However, as more women thrive in the work place, and the proportion of working wives who earn as much or more than their husbands increases (Department of Statistics 2006b), this inequality may result in deep-seated resentment in women

which can weaken the marriage. This, together with the demands of the global nature of work, will tear couples apart and threaten the stability of their union.

It is of utmost urgency that we resolve these contradictions in our social order, and facilitate married couples to achieve equilibrium in their many aspirations and obligations that our society imposes.

5.5.2   *Healing the "Broken"*

To move away from blaming the victim, we must appreciate that divorce is not immoral or a rejection of marriage; rather, as Shumway sums succinctly, "Individuals do not divorce because they are more promiscuous or irresponsible than their forbearers were; they divorce because the social role of marriage has changed, as have expectations of personal happiness and development." (2003:226). Regardless of our perspective on divorce, the fact remains that divorce rates have consistently inched up, and there are now large numbers of individuals who are living their lives outside of failed marriages. And if they fail to adjust and integrate into the community, we risk an escalation of social problems, especially those involving children of single-parent families.

While we may argue that divorce is an individual choice and choose to focus positively on the reconstitution process, it is difficult to dismiss its negative effects on children who have to suffer the consequences of coping with a single-parent family within a larger social order that assumes and supports the 2-parent family as norm. A move away from negative labelling alone is insufficient; we have to take pro-active measures to ensure that children whose parents have divorced receive adequate support to help them fit into the mainstream normative social order. Concerns that proactive measures to support divorced families may send wrong signals that divorce is condoned should be balanced by concerns for the innocent children, who need to move on.

While family policies tend to focus on normal intact families, they must now be forward-looking and must remain relevant to social concerns of our everyday life. We have to acknowledge that one-parent families are not as well-equipped with resources compared to most two-parent families. In our daily rhetoric, the normal family ideology often surfaces to police single-parent families as deviant and dysfunctional. We must be mindful, especially in the presence of vulnerable children, that such rhetoric does not result in self-fulfilling prophesies.

The next important research for Singapore in our understanding of divorce as a social phenomenon is that of post-divorce adjustment. As the incidence of divorce here is relatively low compared to global statistics, it also means that divorcees and children of divorced families remain a minority. A study on post-divorce experiences will be essential to appreciate how this often-silent minority fits into the larger social order where intact families are the norm, and understand the issues and difficulties with post-divorce adjustment.

5.6   The Future of Marriage and the Family

Although age at first marriage in Singapore has been inching up each year, surveys on attitude towards marriage and the family consistently report that marriage remains an important life goal for young adults in Singapore (see Chan 2002; Quah 1999, 1998). While official statistics on cohabitation in Singapore is not available, given the conservative culture that continues to prevail and more important, the high cost of home ownership and limited affordable housing options for unmarried couples, it is safe to estimate that cohabitation remains the choice option for the minority. And we do not expect these trends to change in the near future.

Gillis (2004) observed that while global trends on delay marriage suggest that fewer people live in conventional marital unions, more people live by the conjugal ideal. The symbolic standing of marriage "as other relations have come to be seen as incapable of perfectibility, the conjugal has become the repository of powerful utopian desires" (Gillis 2004:989). Similarly, Cherlin (2004) mused, "Why so many people are marrying, or planning to marry, when cohabitation and single parenthood are widely acceptable options" (p. 854).

So why does marriage remain so alluring? I think the much has to do with ideology governing modern marriage, primarily the promise of commitment and the lure of romantic love. While cohabitation is but a private commitment between two individuals—and therefore, can be easily broken as long as one party reneges on agreed on principles, marriage is a public commitment that is usually expressed in the company of significant others, socially and legally binding, and promises a life-long relationship. In short, the major benefit of marriage over cohabitation is enforceable trust (Cherlin 2004:854). Marriage in

contemporary society now serves as a marker of prestige and the capstone of adulthood, because of the high esteem granted to the ideals marriage represents. The paradox of these expectations is noteworthy; while many marriages break down because of unmet expectations, it is also these very same expectations that continue to make marriage attractive—even to those who have divorced. As Coontz lamented, "The origins of our modern divorce patterns lie in the invention of the same values that eventually elevated the marital relationship above all other personal and familial commitments...both the role of divorce in modern societies and its relatively high occurrence flow from the same development that made good marriages so much more central to people's happiness than through most of the past, and deterioration of a marital relationship so much more traumatic: the very non-traditional idea that marriage should be the most powerful commitment in people's lives" (2007:9).

The most illusive of all is the expectation of romantic love. It is hailed as the foundation of all modern marriages, yet even the most earnest believer would find it hard to validate its presence. Amato conceptualized romantic love to involve notions of commitment, sacrifice, and forgiveness (2007:307). Just as the absence of conflict is argued to be an insufficient criterion for sustaining a marriage, the presence of conflict and poor relations also do not necessarily lead to divorce—especially when the couple have strong feelings of affection for each other. For when you marry for love, you are also likely to be sustained by love even in the presence of other adversities.

Perhaps the key to understanding the effects of love—and the ties that will bind a marriage till death do part—is in the appreciation of marital commitment. Commitment is a positive process and not an obligation; it entails a sense of optimism about the future of the relationship, and predisposes one to stay in the relationship even in the face of adversity and where there are structural barriers to leaving. As Amato succinctly noted, "Strong feelings of love lead people to overlook their partner's faults and focus on their partner's virtues. Feelings of love also lead people to attribute their spouses' bad behaviour to external and uncontrollable causes rather then to internal and controllable causes" (2007:307). Conversely, in the absence of strong attraction to each other, even the presence of barriers to divorce (like social stigma or having dependent children) fail to keep unhappy marriages intact (Previti and Amato 2003).

Therefore, I end this discourse on divorce on an optimistic note. For the new expectations we place in marriage—that of love and life-long commitment, will likely serve to sustain marriages even in the presence of challenges. As the state continues to promote marriage through pro-natalistic family policies, these expectations of marriage are likely to be perpetuated. Embracing a unique view of marriage, I see divorce as a serious attempt to find true love and happiness. And we will continue to believe that marriage holds the key to a pure relationship.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1A—QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CONTROL GROUP (MARRIED RESPONDENTS)

Dear Sir/Madam

This study was commissioned to help us understand what makes marriages work, and highlight the factors that help sustain marriages. There are so many factors in our everyday life that affects how we perceive marriage and our families. As our society strongly encourages people to get married, it is important that we conduct a study that will show what is involved in sustaining marriages.

Please be assured that all findings are strictly confidential, and you will NEVER be identified by name. As this is a large-scale study, we are only interested in highlighting trends, and not individual characteristics. To make this a successful and accurate study, it is important that every individual who has been randomly selected, participates in the study.

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. At the end of the study, we will provide you with an executive summary of the findings. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions or comments.

With best wishes

Paulin Straughan
Associate Professor and Principal Investigator

Thank you for participating in our survey. The questionnaire consists of 6 related sections, with each section focusing on different aspects of marriage and the family. **Please be assured that all responses are treated with strict confidentiality.**

Section A: Gender Roles

The first section deals with our perception of gender roles.

1. Listed below are some statements about what men and women are expected to do. We are interested in finding out what your opinion is on these issues. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements by **circling the most appropriate number**. We are interested in your opinion; there are no right or wrong answers.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. It is better for the husband to be the breadwinner and the wife to be the homemaker	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed	1	2	3	4	dk
c. Ideally, the mother should take care of her children full-time	1	2	3	4	dk
d. No matter how hard they try, men will never be good at housework	1	2	3	4	dk
e. Women are too emotionally inclined to make good employees	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Even if the wife works, her job should be supplementary to her husband's	1	2	3	4	dk
g. A good wife is one who takes good care of her husband, her children, and her home	1	2	3	4	dk
h. A good husband is one who is able to provide well for his family financially	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
i. If both the wife as well as husband are employed, the wife's job is just as important as the husband's job	1	2	3	4	dk
j. It is perfectly fine if a wife works and her husband stays home to take care of the children	1	2	3	4	dk

2. In your opinion, does your spouse agree with the opinions that you have expressed above on men's and women's roles?
    1 STRONGLY AGREE
    2 AGREE
    3 DISAGREE
    4 STRONGLY DISAGREE

Section B: Courtship & Marriage

We would like to find out a little more about your courtship and marriage. Please be assured that all your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

3. How did you meet your spouse?
    1 THROUGH FRIENDS
    2 AT WORK
    3 THROUGH FAMILY MEMBERS
    4 MATCH-MADE
    5 AT SCHOOL
    6 Other. Please specify _____

4. How long did you go out on dates with your spouse before you got married?
    _____ YEARS

5. In which year were you married?
    YEAR _____

6. Listed below are some of the reasons why people get married. Please rank the top 3 reasons why **_you_** decided to get married, using 1 to indicate the most important reason.

Reasons for Marriage	**Rank (_1 = Most important_)**
ROMANTIC LOVE	
ECONOMIC SECURITY	
FAMILY PRESSURE	
PEER PRESSURE	
TO START A FAMILY	
TO APPLY FOR HDB FLAT	
Other reasons. Please specify:	

7. Were your parents/family supportive of your marriage to your spouse?
    1 YES
    2 NO
    3 DON'T KNOW

8. Were your spouse's parents/family supportive of your marriage?
    1 YES
    2 NO
    3 DON'T KNOW

9. Can you please tell us who is usually responsible for the following tasks in your household. Please tick **[√]** the most appropriate category. Tick NA if the task is not applicable in your case.

TASKS	Mostly Me	Mostly My Ex-Spouse	Shared Equally Between Spouse & I	Maid	Other. Please specify:	NA
Assign chores						
Feed young children						
Bathe young children						
Take children to/ from school						
Take children to additional classes (e.g. music, tuition)						
Discipline children						
Supervise children's homework						
Take children to doctor/dentist						
Stay home with sick children						
Do marketing/ grocery shopping						
Cook						
Wash up after meals						
Tidy the home						
Do laundry						
Supervise maid						
Do household repairs						
Gardening						
Wash the car						
Pay bills						

10. Are you happy with this arrangement of division of household labour?

    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
    5 DON'T KNOW

11. The following are some statements some people have made regarding their marriage. Indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the statements by **circling the most appropriate number**. We are only interested in your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers, and all responses are kept strictly confidential.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. I know what my spouse expects of me in our marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
b. I worry a lot about my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
c. If I could start all over again, I would marry someone other than my present spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
d. I can always trust my spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
e. My life would seem empty without my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Ever since I got married, I lost my personal freedom	1	2	3	4	dk
g. My marriage has a bad effect on my health	1	2	3	4	dk
h. I become upset, angry, or irritable because of things that occur in my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
i. I feel competent and fully able to handle my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
j. I expect my marriage to give me increasing satisfaction the longer it continues	1	2	3	4	dk
k. I must look outside my marriage for those things that make life worthwhile and interesting	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
l. I have definite difficulty confiding in my spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
m. Most of the time, my spouse understands the way I feel	1	2	3	4	dk
n. I am definitely satisfied with my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk

12. In every marriage or relationship, there are always arguments and disagreements. Below are some ways in which people deal with conflict. Please indicate by circling the appropriate number how often you would use the following ways to deal with conflict in your marriage.

1	2	3	4	dk
All the Time	**Sometimes**	**Seldom**	**Never**	**Don't know**

When I get angry with my spouse, I would:

a. Talk about the problem with my spouse calmly	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Get angry with my spouse and shout at him/her	1	2	3	4	dk
c. Ignore my spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
d. Expect my spouse to talk to me first as he/she is the cause of the problem	1	2	3	4	dk
e. Feel very hurt and angry	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Talk to other people about it	1	2	3	4	dk

When my spouse gets angry with me, he/she would:

g. Talk about the problem with me calmly	1	2	3	4	dk
h. Get angry with me and shout at me	1	2	3	4	dk
i. Ignore me	1	2	3	4	dk
j. Expect me to talk to him/her first as my spouse believes that I am the cause of the problem	1	2	3	4	dk
k. Feel very hurt and angry	1	2	3	4	dk
l. Talk to other people about it	1	2	3	4	dk

13. Overall, how would you rate your ability to deal with conflict?
    1 VERY WELL
    2 WELL
    3 NOT WELL
    4 NOT WELL AT ALL
    5 Don't Know

14. Do you have any children?
    1 NO → Please skip SECTION D, Question 20 on Page 9
    2 YES → Please continue with SECTION C, Question 15

Section C: Parenthood & Marriage

In this section, we would like to find out more about your children, and your role as a parent.

15. How many children do you have?
    NUMBER OF CHILDREN _____

In what year were your children born?

Children	Year of Birth	Gender (please circle)
CHILD 1		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 2		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 3		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 4		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 5		FEMALE / MALE

16. Are you happy with the number of children you now have?
    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
    5 NO OPINION

17. If you had your way, how many children would you like?
    1 MORE
    2 SAME AS NOW
    3 FEWER
    4 NO OPINION

18. Please think back to when your first child was born.
    a. Did you plan to have your first child?
       1 YES
       2 NO, BUT I WAS HAPPY ANYWAY
       3 NO, I SHOULD HAVE WAITED
       4 OTHER. Please specify _____
    b. Did you feel prepared for parenthood when you had your first child?
       1 YES
       2 NO

19. Below are some commonly expressed sentiments about parenthood. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with them by **circling the most appropriate number**.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. I know what parenthood demands, and I am prepared for it.	1	2	3	4	dk
b. In my opinion, I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
c. I believe my spouse thinks I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
d. No matter how hard I try, I will never be a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
e. My life would seem empty without my children.	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Ever since I became a parent, I lost my personal freedom	1	2	3	4	dk
g. Being a parent has a bad effect on my health	1	2	3	4	dk

APPENDICES

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
h. I become upset, angry, or irritable because of things that my children do	1	2	3	4	dk
i. I feel competent and fully able to handle my responsibilities as a parent	1	2	3	4	dk
j. If I can start over again, I will choose not to have children	1	2	3	4	dk
k. My spouse is a better parent than I	1	2	3	4	dk
l. I am the one who bears all the responsibility for my children in my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk

Section D: Perceptions of Marriage

20. The following are some common sentiments that have been expressed about marriage and divorce. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the statements by **circling the most appropriate number**.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. Marriage is one of the most important life goals.	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Marriage must be a life-long commitment; no matter what happens, we must never dissolve a marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
c. People respect you more if they know you are married.	1	2	3	4	dk
d. In our society, if you are not married by a certain age, people think there's something wrong with you.	1	2	3	4	dk
e. The happiest people in the world are those who are married.	1	2	3	4	dk
f. We must stay married even if we are not happy with our spouse.	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
g. In our society, divorce is still not socially acceptable.	1	2	3	4	dk
h. It's better to divorce that to stay in an unhappy marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
i. It's better to stay married even if you are unhappy because things may always improve.	1	2	3	4	dk
j. It is hard for a woman who is divorced to remarry.	1	2	3	4	dk
k. It is hard for a man who is divorced to remarry.	1	2	3	4	dk
l. You must never divorce if you have children.	1	2	3	4	dk
m. Divorce is the solution to an unhappy marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
n. Children make a marriage more meaningful.	1	2	3	4	dk
o. A marriage without children is an empty marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
p. Parenthood is one of the most important life goals.	1	2	3	4	dk
q. A marriage is not complete unless you have children.	1	2	3	4	dk

Section E: Work & Family

We would like to find out more about you and your spouse's work patterns. Please tick [√] the most appropriate answer category. Please indicate NOT APPLICABLE (NA) in the respective boxes if you or your spouse do not work.

21. On an average work day/week, how much time do you/your spouse spend at work?

	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
HOURS SPENT AT WORK PER DAY		
HOURS SPENT AT WORK PER WEEK		

22. In an average week, how often do you/your spouse have to do overtime i.e., work late?

FREQUENCY	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
Every day		
About 5–6 days a week		
About 3–4 days a week		
About 1–2 days a week		
Seldom/Never		
Not Applicable		

23. How often do you/your spouse bring work home to complete?

FREQUENCY	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
Every day		
About 5–6 days a week		
About 3–4 days a week		
About 1–2 days a week		
Seldom/Never		
Not Applicable		

24. Do you or your spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?
   1 YES. ***Please continue with QUESTION 25 on Page 11***
   2 NO. ***Please go to SECTION F on Page 12***

25. On average, how many overseas business trips do you/your spouse have to make **in a year**?

	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
NUMBER OF BUSINESS TRIPS		
NOT APPLICABLE		

26. On average, how long are your business trips?

	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
AVERAGE LENGTH OF BUSINESS TRIPS (in days)	_____ DAYS	_____ DAYS

Questions 27–30 are for respondents whose spouse has to travel overseas on business. If your spouse does not have to travel overseas on business, please skip to SECTION F, Question 31 on Page 12.

27. How do you feel about your spouse's business trips?
    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
    5 NO EFFECT

28. Do you usually accompany your spouse on these trips?
    1 ALL THE TIME
    2 MOST OF THE TIME
    3 SOME OF THE TIME
    4 SELDOM
    5 NEVER

29. Who takes over your spouse's responsibilities at home when he/she is away on business trips?
    1 MYSELF
    2 MAID
    3 OTHER. PLEASE SPECIFY: _____
    4 NO ONE

30. Are you happy with the above arrangements?
    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL

Section F: Leisure & Family

31. In an average week, how much leisure time do you have?
    _____ HOURS PER WEEK

32. On average, how much of your leisure time is spent with your family?
    _____ % OF LEISURE TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY

33. Do you talk to your spouse about things that are important to you?
    1 YES, ALL THE TIME
    2 MOST OF THE TIME
    3 SOMETIMES
    4 NO

34. How often do you take family vacations together?
    1 EVERY YEAR
    2 ONCE IN A FEW YEARS
    3 NEVER

Section G: Background

We need to find out a little about your background to help us in our analysis. This information is not used to identify individuals, but only to compare the responses of different groups of people.

35. In which year were you born?

19			

36. In which year was your spouse born?

19			

37. Please indicate you/your spouse's religion with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Buddhism		
Chinese traditional beliefs/Taoism		
Islam		
Hinduism		
Sikhism		
Roman Catholic		
Christianity		
No Religion		
Other. Please specify.		

38. Please indicate you/your spouse's highest educational qualification with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
No formal qualification/Lower primary		
Primary		
Lower Secondary		
Secondary		
Upper Secondary		
Polytechnic Diploma		
Other Diploma and Professional Qualification		
University		
Other. Please specify:		

39. Please indicate you/your spouse's ethnic background (as specified in the identity card) with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

ETHNIC BACKGROUND	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Chinese		
Indian		
Malay		
Other		

40. Please indicate you/your spouse's citizenship with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

CITIZENSHIP	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Singapore Citizen		
Permanent Resident (PR)		
Non Resident. Please specify citizenship.		

41. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your current gross monthly **personal** income.

Below $1,000		$5,000–$5,999	
$1,000–$1,499		$6,000–$6,999	
$1,500–$1,999		$7,000–$7,999	
$2,000–$2,499		$8,000–$8,999	
$2,500–$2,999		$9,000–$9,999	
$3,000–$3,999		$10,000 & over	
$4,000–$4,999		N.A	

42. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your gross monthly combined **household** income.

Below $500		$4,000–$4,499	
$500–$999		$4,500–$4,999	
$1,000–$1,499		$5,000–$5,999	
$1,500–$1,999		$6,000–$6,999	
$2,000–$2,499		$7,000–$7,999	
$2,500–$2,999		$8,000–$8,999	
$3,000–$3,499		$9,000–$9,999	
$3,500–$3,999		$10,000 & over	

43. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your current residence.

HOUSING TYPE	
HDB 3-room or smaller	
HDB 4-room or bigger	
Private apartment/condominium	
Landed property	
Other. Please specify.	

45. What is the marital status of your parents?
    1 MARRIED
    2 SEPARATED
    3 DIVORCED

46. What is marital status of your spouse's parents?
    1 MARRIED
    2 SEPARATED
    3 DIVORCED

47. When you have problems with your spouse, who do you normally turn to for help?
    1 OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS
    2 FRIENDS
    3 MARRIAGE COUNSELLORS
    4 RELIGIOUS HELP
    5 OTHERS (please specify_____)

48. When you got married, how did you prepare for marriage? Please circle all relevant choices.
    1 ATTENDED RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE COUNSELING
    2 ATTENDED NON-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE COUNSELING
    3 TALKED TO FAMILY MEMBERS
    4 TALKED TO FRIENDS
    5 DID NOT PREPARE
    6 OTHER PREPARATION. Please specify

    _____

49. What would you say is the most difficult phase of your marriage?
    1 THE FIRST YEAR
    2 WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE BORN
    3 OTHER. Please specify.

50. In your opinion, have any of the following programmes helped you to sustain your marriage?

	Please circle the appropriate answer	
		If "YES", were the sessions conducted by religious or non-religious organizations?
a. Pre-marriage counseling	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
b. Counseling during marriage	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
c. Parenting classes	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
d. Other. Please specify:		

We have come to the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your time and your cooperation.

APPENDIX 1B—QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY GROUP (DIVORCED GROUP)

Dear Sir/Madam

This study was commissioned to help us understand what makes marriages work, and highlight the factors that cause marriages to break-down. We understand that divorce is not an easy topic to talk about, and it may be painful for you to think about your previous marriage and your relationship with your ex-spouse. However, it is important for us to study this topic. In a society, which strongly encourages people to get married, we must also be responsible and alert those who are about to contemplate getting married that marriage requires hard work.

The questionnaire you are about to fill in requires you to think about your previous marriage. We understand that you may have difficulties recalling some events, and we will appreciate it if you can give us your best recollection and complete all the relevant sections.

Please be assured that all findings are strictly confidential, and you will NEVER be identified by name. As this is a large-scale study, we are only interested in highlighting trends, and not individual characteristics. To make this a successful and accurate study, it is important that every individual who has been randomly selected participates in the study.

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. At the end of the study, we will provide you with an executive summary of the findings. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions or comments.

With best wishes

Paulin Straughan
Associate Professor and Principal Investigator

Thank you for participating in our survey. The questionnaire consists of 6 related sections, with each section focusing on different aspects of marriage and the family. **Please be assured that all responses are treated with strict confidentiality**.

Section A: Gender Roles

The first section deals with our perception of gender roles.

1. Listed below are some statements about what men and women are expected to do. We are interested in finding out what your opinion is on these issues. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the following statements by **circling the most appropriate number**. We are interested in your opinion; there are no right or wrong answers.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. It is better for the husband to be the breadwinner and the wife to be the homemaker	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed	1	2	3	4	dk
c. Ideally, the mother should take care of her children full-time	1	2	3	4	dk
d. No matter how hard they try, men will never be good at housework	1	2	3	4	dk
e. Women are too emotionally inclined to make good employees	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Even if the wife works, her job should be supplementary to her husband's	1	2	3	4	dk
g. A good wife is one who takes good care of her husband, her children, and her home	1	2	3	4	dk
h. A good husband is one who is able to provide well for his family financially	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*conts.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
i. If both the wife as well as husband are employed, the wife's job is just as important as the husband's job	1	2	3	4	dk
j. It is perfectly fine if a wife works and her husband stays home to take care of the children	1	2	3	4	dk

2. In your opinion, did your ex-spouse agree with the opinions that you have expressed above on men's and women's roles?
    1 STRONGLY AGREE
    2 AGREE
    3 DISAGREE
    4 STRONGLY DISAGREE

Section B: Courtship & Marriage

We would like to find out a little more about your courtship and marriage with your ex-spouse. Please be assured that all your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

3. How did you meet your ex-spouse?
    1 THROUGH FRIENDS
    2 AT WORK
    3 THROUGH FAMILY MEMBERS
    4 MATCH-MADE
    5 AT SCHOOL
    6 Other. Please specify _____

4. How long did you go out on dates with your ex-spouse before you got married?
    _____ YEARS

5. In which year were you married?
    YEAR _____

6. Listed below are some of the reasons why people get married. Please rank the top 3 reasons why **you** decided to get married, using 1 to indicate the most important reason.

Reasons for Marriage	Rank (*1 = Most important*)
ROMANTIC LOVE	
ECONOMIC SECURITY	
FAMILY PRESSURE	
PEER PRESSURE	
TO START A FAMILY	
TO APPLY FOR HDB FLAT	
Other reasons. Please specify:	

7. Were your parents/family supportive of your marriage to your ex-spouse?
    1 YES
    2 NO
    3 DON'T KNOW

8. Were your ex-spouse's parents/family supportive of your marriage?
    1 YES
    2 NO
    3 DON'T KNOW

9. Can you please tell us who was usually responsible for the following tasks in your household before your divorce. Please tick **[√]** the most appropriate category. Tick NA if the task is not applicable in your case.

TASKS	Mostly Me	Mostly My Ex-Spouse	Shared Equally Between Ex-Spouse & I	Maid	Other. Please specify:	NA
Assign chores						
Feed young children						
Bathe young children						
Take children to/from school						
Take children to additional classes (e.g. music, tuition)						
Discipline children						
Supervise children's homework						
Take children to doctor/dentist						
Stay home with sick children						
Do marketing/grocery shopping						
Cook						
Wash up after meals						
Tidy the home						
Do laundry						
Supervise maid						
Do household repairs						
Gardening						
Wash the car						
Pay bills						

10. Were you happy with this arrangement of division of household labour?

  1 VERY HAPPY
  2 HAPPY
  3 NOT HAPPY
  4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
  5 DON'T KNOW

11. The following are some statements some people have made regarding their marriage. Please think about your previous marriage. Indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the statements by **circling the most appropriate number**. We are only interested in your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers, and all responses are kept strictly confidential.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. I knew what my ex-spouse expected of me in our marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
b. I worried a lot about my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
c. If I could start all over again, I would marry someone other than my ex-spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
d. I could always trust my ex-spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
e. My life seems empty without my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Ever since I got married, I lost my personal freedom	1	2	3	4	dk
g. My marriage had a bad effect on my health	1	2	3	4	dk
h. I became upset, angry, or irritable because of things that occurred in my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
i. I had felt competent and fully able to handle my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk
j. I expected my marriage to give me increasing satisfaction the longer it continued	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*conts.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
k. I had to look outside my marriage for those things that make life worthwhile and interesting.	1	2	3	4	dk
l. I had definite difficulty confiding in my ex-spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
m. Most of the time, my ex-spouse understood the way I felt	1	2	3	4	Dk

12. In every marriage or relationship, there are always arguments and disagreements. Below are some ways in which people deal with conflict. Please indicate by circling the appropriate number how often you would use the following ways to deal with conflict in your previous marriage.

1	2	3	4	dk
All the Time	**Sometimes**	**Seldom**	**Never**	**Don't know**

When I got angry with my ex-spouse, I would:

a. Talk about the problem with my ex-spouse calmly	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Get angry with my ex-spouse and shout at him/her	1	2	3	4	dk
c. Ignore my ex-spouse	1	2	3	4	dk
d. Expect my ex-spouse to talk to me first as he/she is the cause of the problem	1	2	3	4	dk
e. Feel very hurt and angry	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Talk to other people about it	1	2	3	4	dk

When my ex-spouse gets angry with me, he/she would:

g. Talk about the problem with me calmly	1	2	3	4	dk
h. Get angry with me and shout at me	1	2	3	4	dk
i. Ignore me	1	2	3	4	dk
j. Expect me to talk to him/her first as my ex-spouse believes that I am the cause of the problem	1	2	3	4	dk
k. Feel very hurt and angry	1	2	3	4	dk
l. Talk to other people about it	1	2	3	4	dk

13. Overall, how would you rate your ability to deal with conflict?
    1 VERY WELL
    2 WELL
    3 NOT WELL
    4 NOT WELL AT ALL
    5 Don't Know

14. Do you have any children?
    1 NO → Please skip SECTION D, Question 20 on Page x
    2 YES → Please continue with SECTION C, Question 15

Section C: Parenthood & Marriage

In this section, we would like to find out more about your children, and your role as a parent.

15. How many children do you have?
    NUMBER OF CHILDREN ＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿

In what year were your children born?

Children	Year of Birth	Gender (please circle)
CHILD 1		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 2		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 3		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 4		FEMALE / MALE
CHILD 5		FEMALE / MALE

16. Are you happy with the number of children you now have?
    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
    5 NO OPINION

17. If you had your way, how many children would you like?
    1 MORE
    2 SAME AS NOW
    3 FEWER
    4 NO OPINION

18. Please think back to when your first child was born.
    a. Did you plan to have your first child?
        1 YES
        2 NO, BUT I WAS HAPPY ANYWAY
        3 NO, I SHOULD HAVE WAITED
        4 OTHER. Pls specify _____
    b. Did you feel prepared for parenthood when you had your first child?
        1 YES
        2 NO

19. Below are some commonly expressed sentiments about parenthood. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with them by **circling the most appropriate number**.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. I know what parenthood demands, and I am prepared for it.	1	2	3	4	dk
b. In my opinion, I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
c. I believe my ex-spouse thinks I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
d. No matter how hard I try, I will never be a good parent.	1	2	3	4	dk
e. My life would seem empty without my children.	1	2	3	4	dk
f. Ever since I became a parent, I lost my personal freedom	1	2	3	4	dk
g. Being a parent has a bad effect on my health	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
h. I become upset, angry, or irritable because of things that my children do	1	2	3	4	dk
i. I feel competent and fully able to handle my responsibilities as a parent	1	2	3	4	dk
j. If I can start over again, I will choose not to have children	1	2	3	4	dk
k. My ex-spouse is a better parent than I	1	2	3	4	dk
l. I am the one who bears all the responsibility for my children in my marriage	1	2	3	4	dk

Section D: Perceptions of Marriage

20. The following are some common sentiments that have been expressed about marriage and divorce. Please indicate the extent to which you agree/disagree with the statements by **circling the most appropriate number**.

1	2	3	4	dk
Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Don't know**

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
a. Marriage is one of the most important life goals.	1	2	3	4	dk
b. Marriage must be a life-long commitment; no matter what happens, we must never dissolve a marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
c. People respect you more if they know you are married.	1	2	3	4	dk
d. In our society, if you are not married by a certain age, people think there's something wrong with you.	1	2	3	4	dk
e. The happiest people in the world are those who are married.	1	2	3	4	dk
f. We must stay married even if we are not happy with our spouse.	1	2	3	4	dk
g. In our society, divorce is still not socially acceptable.	1	2	3	4	dk

Table (*cont.*)

STATEMENTS	SA	A	D	SD	
h. It's better to divorce that to stay in an unhappy marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
i. It's better to stay married even if you are unhappy because things may always improve.	1	2	3	4	dk
j. It is hard for a woman who is divorced to remarry.	1	2	3	4	dk
k. It is hard for a man who is divorced to remarry.	1	2	3	4	dk
l. You must never divorce if you have children.	1	2	3	4	dk
m. Divorce is the solution to an unhappy marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
n. Children make a marriage more meaningful.	1	2	3	4	dk
o. A marriage without children is an empty marriage.	1	2	3	4	dk
p. Parenthood is one of the most important life goals.	1	2	3	4	dk
q. A marriage is not complete unless you have children.	1	2	3	4	dk

Section E: Work & Family

We would like to find out more about you and your ex-spouse's work patterns when you were still married. Please tick [√] the most appropriate answer category. Please indicate NOT APPLICABLE (NA) in the respective boxes if you or your ex-spouse did not work.

21. On an average work day/week, how much time did you/your ex-spouse spend at work?

	YOURSELF	YOUR EX-SPOUSE
HOURS SPENT AT WORK PER DAY		
HOURS SPENT AT WORK PER WEEK		

22. In an average week, how often did you/your ex-spouse have to do overtime i.e., work late?

FREQUENCY	YOURSELF	YOUR EX-SPOUSE
Every day		
About 5–6 days a week		
About 3–4 days a week		
About 1–2 days a week		
Seldom/Never		
Not Applicable		

23. How often did you/your ex-spouse bring work home to complete?

FREQUENCY	YOURSELF	YOUR EX-SPOUSE
Every day		
About 5–6 days a week		
About 3–4 days a week		
About 1–2 days a week		
Seldom/Never		
Not Applicable		

24. Did you or your ex-spouse have to travel out of the country for work-related business?

    1 YES
    2 NO. ***Please go to SECTION F on Page x***

25. On average, how many overseas business trips did you/your spouse have to make **in a year**?

	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
NUMBER OF BUSINESS TRIPS		
NOT APPLICABLE		

26. On average, how long are your business trips?

	YOURSELF	YOUR SPOUSE
AVERAGE LENGTH OF BUSINESS TRIPS (in days)	_____ DAYS	_____ DAYS

Questions 27–30 are for respondents whose ex-spouse had to travel overseas on business. If your ex-spouse did not have to travel overseas on business, please skip to SECTION F, Question 31 on Page x.

27. How did you feel about your ex-spouse's business trips?
    1 VERY HAPPY
    2 HAPPY
    3 NOT HAPPY
    4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL
    5 NO EFFECT

28. Did you usually accompany your ex-spouse on these trips?
    1 ALL THE TIME
    2 MOST OF THE TIME
    3 SOME OF THE TIME
    4 SELDOM
    5 NEVER

29. Who took over your ex-spouse's responsibilities at home when he/she was away on business trips?
    1 MYSELF
    2 MAID
    3 OTHER. PLEASE SPECIFY: _____
    4 NO ONE

30. Were you happy with the above arrangements?
     1 VERY HAPPY
     2 HAPPY
     3 NOT HAPPY
     4 NOT HAPPY AT ALL

Section F: Leisure & Family

31. In an average week, how much leisure time did you have when you were married?

_____ HOURS PER WEEK

32. On average, how much of your leisure time was spent with your family?

_____ % OF LEISURE TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY

33. Did you talk to your spouse about things that were important to you?
     1 YES, ALL THE TIME
     2 MOST OF THE TIME
     3 SOMETIMES
     4 NO

34. How often did you take family vacations together when you were married?
     1 EVERY YEAR
     2 ONCE IN A FEW YEARS
     3 NEVER

Section G: Background

We need to find out a little about your background to help us in our analysis. This information is not used to identify individuals, but only to compare the responses of different groups of people.

35. In which year were you born?

19			

36. In which year was your ex-spouse born?

19			

37. Please indicate you/your ex-spouse's religion with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Buddhism		
Chinese traditional beliefs/Taoism		
Islam		
Hinduism		
Sikhism		
Roman Catholic		
Christianity		
No Religion		
Other. Pls specify.		

38. Please indicate you/your ex-spouse's highest educational qualification with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
No formal qualification/Lower primary		
Primary		
Lower Secondary		
Secondary		
Upper Secondary		
Polytechnic Diploma		
Other Diploma and Professional Qualification		
University		
Other. Please specify:		

39. Please indicate you/your ex-spouse's ethnic background (as specified in the identity card) with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

ETHNIC BACKGROUND	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Chinese		
Indian		
Malay		
Other		

40. Please indicate you/your ex-spouse's citizenship with a tick **[√]** in the appropriate category.

CITIZENSHIP	YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
Singapore Citizen		
Permanent Resident (PR)		
Non Resident. Please specify citizenship.		

41. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your current gross monthly **personal** income.

Below $1,000		$5,000–$5,999	
$1,000–$1,499		$6,000–$6,999	
$1,500–$1,999		$7,000–$7,999	
$2,000–$2,499		$8,000–$8,999	
$2,500–$2,999		$9,000–$9,999	
$3,000–$3,999		$10,000 & over	
$4,000–$4,999		N.A	

42. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your gross monthly combined **household** income when you were married.

Below $500		$4,000–$4,499	
$500–$999		$4,500–$4,999	
$1,000–$1,499		$5,000–$5,999	
$1,500–$1,999		$6,000–$6,999	
$2,000–$2,499		$7,000–$7,999	
$2,500–$2,999		$8,000–$8,999	
$3,000–$3,499		$9,000–$9,999	
$3,500–$3,999		$10,000 & over	

43. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your current residence.

HOUSING TYPE	
HDB 3-room or smaller	
HDB 4-room or bigger	
Private apartment/condominium	
Landed property	
Other. Please specify.	

44. Please tick **[√]** the category that best describes your residence when you were married.

HOUSING TYPE	
HDB 3-room or smaller	
HDB 4-room or bigger	
Private apartment/condominium	
Landed property	
Other. Please specify.	

45. What is the marital status of your parents?
    1 MARRIED
    2 SEPARATED
    3 DIVORCED

46. What is marital status of your ex-spouse's parents?
    1 MARRIED
    2 SEPARATED
    3 DIVORCED

47. When you had problems with your spouse, who did you normally turn to for help?
    1 OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS
    2 FRIENDS
    3 MARRIAGE COUNSELLORS
    4 RELIGIOUS HELP
    5 OTHERS (pls specify_____)

48. When you got married, how did you prepare for marriage? Please circle all relevant choices.
    1 ATTENDED RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE COUNSELING
    2 ATTENDED NON-RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE COUNSELING
    3 TALKED TO FAMILY MEMBERS
    4 TALKED TO FRIENDS
    6 DID NOT PREPARE
    7 OTHER PREPARATION. Please specify
    _____

49. What would you say was the most difficult phase of your marriage?
    1 THE FIRST YEAR
    2 WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE BORN
    3 OTHER. Please specify.

50. The following are common reasons cited by couples why their marriage dissolved. What would you say were the main reasons your marriage broke down? You can indicate as many reasons as applicable, and rank them according to their importance. Please rank the most important reason as "1".

REASONS FOR MARITAL BREAKDOWN	Tick **[√]** if applicable	Rank applicable reasons *"1" = **Most important***
Unable to communicate with each other		
Problem with in-laws		
Problem with children		
Financial problems		
No common interest		
Differences in values		
Differences in life goals/ priorities		
Religious differences		
Spouse abuse		
Alcohol abuse		
Adultery		
Other. Pls. Specify:		

51. In your opinion, did any of the following programmes help you to sustain your marriage?

	Please circle the appropriate answer	
		If "YES", were the sessions conducted by religious or non-religious organizations?
a. Pre-marriage counseling	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
b. Counseling during marriage	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
c. Parenting classes	YES / NO	RELIGIOUS / NON-RELIGIOUS
d. Other. Please specify:		

52. Would you consider getting married again in the near future?
     1 DEFINITELY NO
     2 MAYBE
     3 DEFINITELY YES
     4 NO OPINION

We have come to the end of the survey. Thank you very much for your time and your cooperation.

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INDEX