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<th>Women and the media in Singapore</th>
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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Chopard, Kathleen M.</td>
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Women And The Media In Singapore

By

Kathleen M Chopard
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Introduction

Singapore is a nation state with a population of 2.5 million of which women form 49% of the total population. For every 1,000 females there are 1,038 males.\(^1\) The population of Singapore is heterogeneous comprising Chinese 76.4%, Malays 14.9%, Indians 6.4%, others 2.3%.\(^2\)

All children receive free, compulsory primary education and with the expanding educational opportunities girls and young women have been able to improve their standing in society. Today although women perform better than men in the '0' level examinations, far fewer women go on to tertiary education. They account for about 33% of university graduates. This, however, is a great improvement over figures 20 years ago.

The historical conditions responsible for the traditional attitudes towards women no longer exist. This is mainly a result of the state of Singapore's economic progress, the availability of education for all, the changing attitude of parents towards educating daughters, the aspirations of women themselves.

Although it is clear that in the last 25 years women have made great advances in education and employment, Dr Aline Wong, MP says that "there are still some very real obstacles to women."\(^3\)

There is no legal barrier to women entering any kind of job, but they are still concentrated in the lower-skilled, lower-paid so called pink collar jobs.


* This is a preliminary paper. A lot of the statistics are not available or have not been compiled by the various media organisations in time for the presentation of this paper.

To facilitate easy discussion the paper has been divided in the various sessions as indicated in the programme.
Women and the Media in Singapore,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stenographers and typists</td>
<td>94.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Operators</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacists</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashiers</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Assistants</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarians Archivists and Curator</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing Machine Operators</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers (all levels)</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical equipment - component assembly</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 1: Women as a proportion of all persons employed in "pink collar" jobs.  

Figure 1 clearly shows that the bulk of women that are working are concentrated in what has been referred to as 'pink collar' jobs. These are the jobs traditionally associated with women not only in developing, but in the developed countries as well.

In the past, women who attended university chose to study arts, the social sciences, and other science subjects. Over the last ten years, however, more women have been taking up law, accountancy, business administration, architecture. However, the government has put a 30% quota on the number of women doing medicine on the basis that many leave the profession after getting married. (Fig 2)

Although great strides have been made and many women have seen education as a means of upward social mobility, they still have a long way to go in terms of filling positions on the top of the corporate ladder. According to a Human Resource Development Manager, women tend to do well in professions but general management is a different matter, it involves hard finance, strategies, business sense, etc. Here our women do not fare so well in general. They are generally not trained sufficiently in this area.

Women and the Media in Singapore,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Doctors</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects and Town Planner</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>43.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers in the Private Sector</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountants</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government administrators</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economists</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 2: Women as a proportion of all persons employed in the professions.

ACCESS OF WOMEN TO JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION EDUCATION

Because Singapore doesn't offer a degree course in journalism, journalists are drawn from different disciplines - Law, Education, Pharmacy, Political Sciences and the Arts. Often journalism is not their first choice, it's something people drift into later in life.

The reason given as to why there is no formal university course in journalism lies in the belief that there are insufficient organisations to absorb the graduates. Basically two organisations, The Straits Times Press (STP) and the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) are seen as the only organisations that could absorb journalism graduates.

It could be argued however, that if a broad-based media course offering journalism, advertising, Public Relations, etc. were offered, STP and SBC could draw upon these graduates rather than follow the current practise of recruiting people from different disciplines. Also advertising agencies and Public Relations firms won't have to conduct their own courses. Clearly there is a need for such a broad-based course.

At present STP and SBC conduct in-house courses for their recruits to prepare them for careers in the print and broadcast media. The School of Journalism (SOJ) of the STP begins by putting recruits through a formal training programme consisting of 19 weeks - 5 days a week, 8 hours a day. The basic course is spread over two years. The lectures at the SOJ's tracking of a recruit's performance begins from the first day, progress and potential is monitored and the journalist will be informed of his/her strengths, weaknesses, progress every three months over a two-year period.

Over the past 10 years, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of women entering the field of journalism. One reason for this is obviously the improvement of educational opportunities for women, another is National Service for men. When National Service was first introduced, STP has to accept a large number of women to fill various posts. Whatever the reason, an irreversible trend has been set, women are finding their niche in media organisations because they have proven themselves good at their job.
Access of Women to Journalism and Communication Education

The Head of the School of Journalism said that between 1980 - 1986 there had been an increase of women wanting to enter journalism. There is no quota system, hiring journalists is done on merit irrespective of sex. "Generally," observed the Head of the SOJ, "women journalist are more forceful, aggressive, confident, they are more vocal than men. Of course, if you get a good man, he'll be very, very good."

Other Areas of Communication Education

In 1975, the then Nanyang University began offering a degree course in Mass Communication, thus bringing communication education to university level. It was discontinued when Nanyang University and the University of Singapore merged to form the National University of Singapore in 1980.

Because of this several agencies besides SBC and STP find it necessary to offer courses in several media areas.

Singapore Educational Media conducts short-term in-service courses mainly for teachers, both male and female. These courses concentrate on producing and scripting educational television programmes. Several promising teachers who have permanently joined this division of the Ministry of Education have been sent abroad for training (actual figures are not available at the moment).

The Association of Accredited Advertising Agents (4As) organises an all-round basic training course for advertising personnel. Its curriculum includes:

1. Introduction to Advertising
2. Media
3. Marketing Economics
4. Advertising Psychology
5. Printing and Production
6. Advertising Design and Presentation
7. Copywriting
8. Audio Visual Production
Access of Women to Journalism and Communication Education

Training is divided into three stages - elementary, intermediate and final. There is one exam for every stage, the entire course has to be completed within a period of five years. Students have the option of participating in either a part-time or full-time course. Successful candidates are awarded a Diploma which is generally recognised by advertising agencies.

The 4As recently confirmed that there has been an increasing number of women entering the advertising field. At present there are more women than men in the basic advertising courses.

General Public Relations courses are run by commercial schools. Most of these prepare students for external examinations, from London such as Communication, Advertising and Marketing (CAM) Certificate. The Institute of Public Relations of Singapore (IPRS) from time to time organises courses. Most of these courses have a majority of women participants.
THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA*

There has been a tremendous improvement in the status of women in the media. This can be largely attributed to the Singapore Government's pledge in 1959 to create a society in which women were "free from exploitation" and have equal rights and opportunities.

Another government revolutionary move was the Bill passed in 1962, recognising the principle of equal pay for equal work in the civil service. By 1975, the government abolished the separate salary scales for men and women.

Over the last 10 years, there has been a less obvious gap between the salaries of men and women in the media. In government agencies, men might start with two increments above a woman, but this evened out because women enter the job market two years ahead of men because men have had to complete their National Service before entering the job market.

The above, together with better education opportunities and the changing attitudes of parents who are more willing to give their daughters a better education have contributed to improving the status of women in all fields including the media.

In journalism, there is no discrimination between men and women. They share equal status. There is no quota system, hiring of journalists is done on merit and qualifications, irrespective of sex. Interviews with heads of departments reveal that there is no difference on recruitment procedures, salary scales, promotion exercises or the treatment of women on the job. In the newsroom for example sex doesn't make one bit of difference, no allowance is made in terms of shifts, degrees of difficulty in jobs, areas of specialisation. There have been for example, successive girls working on the crime desk, the political desk and the sports desk.

In fact, according to a senior expat journalist, women in Singapore could be said to enjoy a higher status than female journalists in London where often women cover traditional areas — food, fashion and features. Here there is equality; it is even acknowledge that women do very well in the areas that used to be

* The data for this section was obtained through interviews with practising journalist.
The Status of Women in the Media

male domains, areas like the crime beat, the political desk and sports. Sometimes being a women can even be an added advantage. They tend to deal well with policemen and hospital personnel for example.

In Singapore, there are no hard and fast rules, journalists do what they are good at, men do fashion and food, traditional female domains. The reason for these easy cross-overs could be attributed to the fact that unlike the more developed countries, senior management comprise younger people in their 40s who haven't grown up in a conservative environment. (See Fig 3)

In the media, both men and women have equal opportunities for advancement. There is nothing to stop women rising to the very top of the profession. The General Manager of the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) is a woman. The Directors of TV Programmes and Commercial Operations are women. Public Relations and Programme Acquisition and Scheduling of SBC are also headed by women.

In The Straits Times Press, there are women Assistant Editors, Deputy Editors, Sub-Editors and Editors and an Executive Editor. According to these women rising up the corporate ladder is possible, "a women is only limited by her own ambition." One woman editor admitted that many good women journalists are held back not because of a lack of ability but because of home commitments. Men stay in journalism for 25--30 years and so rise to the top, few women remain so long, and those who have, both in broadcasting and the print media, have often risen to the top of their professions.

A male journalist agreed that it took him 20 years to make Associate Editor. He added that none of the women who were practising journalists 20 years ago were still in the newsroom. This probably accounts for the fact that there are no women Associate Editors or Editors in the newsroom.

There are more women journalists in the newsroom than men. Fig 4 illustrates that women are found in almost every area except racing which remains a male preserve.
The Status of Women in the Media

The criteria for evaluating the performance of women in journalism is exactly the same for both sexes. This was stressed by both males and females at management and decision-making levels.

In Table 1 we see that the English newspapers tend to be less conservative than the Chinese and Malay newspapers. This need not be the result of management policies, it could be because of the fewer number of female journalist on these papers.

Although men outstrip women in middle-management areas, females can be said to hold their own in certain areas. On the Sunday Times there are 16 female journalists and 5 males. There are 17 female sub-editors and 32 males. Again length of service must be borne in mind when these figures are studied.

In advertising women have made great headway. Ad women have been described by the media as an emerging force. There are women who own their own advertising agencies. Today there are women creative directors, accounts directors, media directors. They are becoming more visible especially over the last five years. It is also widely acknowledged that women in Singapore “speak and write better than the men.”

Women are also highly visible in the Public Relations arena especially in the hotel industry, banks and the airlines.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>No of Males</th>
<th>No of Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Summary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around the World</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around ASEAN</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Across the Causeway</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local News/Current Affairs</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual Page</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forum Page</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timesdollar</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timesport</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig.3: Distribution of Journalists Covering the Various Desk in STP.
### Fig 4: Ratio of Men and Women in the Newsroom of STP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Newspool</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ECU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Forum Page</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Foreign Desk</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Comment/Perspective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Racing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Regional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Timesdollar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sports</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Section 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bilingual Pages</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Board of Directors</td>
<td>6 (Male)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Newspaper Committee</td>
<td>15 (Male) 4 (Female)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Newspaper</td>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>Middle Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straits Times</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Minggu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin Min</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research &amp; Information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Male/Female Ratios at Management Level
THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF WOMEN IN THE DIFFERENT MEDIA

In journalism media professionals say that women aspiring to move into the media should possess a degree. But if an individual is very good with a proven track record then she may be employed even if she doesn't have a degree.

New entrants into the profession need to be competent in grammar, they need to have competent interview skills and be able to relate to the interviewees.

The School of Journalism (SOJ) in the course of the 2-year programme prepares journalists for their jobs. The Head of the school said that recruits in Singapore have a better grounding in grammar and had higher language standards than their counterparts in the U.K.

Journalists here are given training in both face-to-face and telephone interview techniques. They fared well in these areas. They fell short in the area of total commitment to the profession. The head of the SOJ said that in the U.K. and the States journalism was seen as a glamorous career, there was a very high degree of commitment, total dedication. It was an automatic choice. In Singapore it was often a second choice, with people turning to journalism later in life, after having pursued a first career.

It has been noted that journalists in Singapore used to lack a sound grounding in general knowledge of the region and Singapore. Over the last five years recruits have come into media organisations better equipped with knowledge about the region as well as a better world view. The new emphasis of the school curriculum could be responsible for this.

Local journalists are competent writers, they write in a businesslike manner. However the use of language may sometimes be sterile, lacking in mood, it is workman-like. This is the view of senior journalists who say that there is difficulty in finding people to write mood pieces - pieces that are light, rich. This of course they agree is not something you can teach, you can only expose people to this sort of writing. There are not many personality or character writers either.
In journalism in-service courses or foreign attachments are available for mid-level journalists.

In the field of advertising and Public Relations, training is given in areas that call for specialised skills - copywriting, photography. It has been noted that women in Singapore make better copywriters than men. If agencies have links abroad, they arrange for an exchange of personnel so a female copywriter could be sent to Australia and her counterpart could be assigned here.

A women media manager said that local women do well in professions but if they are to make it into the management class they would have to equip themselves with a high degree of management skills. Perhaps more could be done in this area to ensure that women move up to higher positions in the media hierarchies.

The women who have made it to the top of their fields say that they have had to make many personal sacrifices - work late hours, accept attachments abroad, accept any assignment. Because they are competing with men in what used to be a man's world, they feel they have to continually prove themselves.

The top men in management say that when a woman is good she is exceptional be it in PR, journalism or advertising.

Because it is agreed that more women in Singapore are capable of moving up to higher positions in the media hierarchies, communication education should be geared to focusing on areas where help should be given. It is unfortunate that there is no formal training, in term of a degree in media. The in-service courses and short training stints available cannot compare with formal education.
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED MEDIA MATERIALS REFLECTING
PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Women in Advertisements

The National Productivity Board (NPB) task force on working women have recommended that television commercials should stop stereotyping women's role as mothers and homemakers. The Report stated that the mass media should diminish society's traditional image of the women as mother and housewife, and promote her contribution to the nation as a working woman.

It went on to suggest that television programmes and newspaper articles feature successful working mothers and husbands who help with the housework. The Report criticised commercials which "perpetuated employers' and the general public's belief (about women)." Men are usually portrayed as coming home tired after a day at the office; women tend sick children, wash clothes and are tea-makers.

Advertising agencies and product executives were interviewed by The Straits Times and they said that advertising tends to reflect life and life is determined by market research. Although some agreed that women should not be stereotyped, they had to admit that commercials had to conform with market research findings.

In recent years a few advertising companies have admitted that there may be some merit in showing men as helpers in the home, but they point out that they can't see them replacing women completely in ads.

It is felt that although it is acceptable to show a man accompanying his wife to the supermarket to buy soap powder, it had to be the woman who puts the soap powder into the washing machine. Advertising agencies insist that ads have to be credible and market research reveals that selecting soap powder, for example, is generally done by women, and in Singapore washing is usually done by women, few men do it, so ads have to reflect this, or as one Managing Director of an Ad agency said, "it will be wasting everyone's time."

With regard to the NPB Report - most ad agencies felt that it was not their task to change attitudes but to promote and sell products. If attitudes change and this is reflected in market research, then ads will change accordingly.
Content Analysis of Selected Media Materials Reflecting Portrayal of Women in the Media

Exploitation of Women in Ads

Senior women in the media felt that they could do little to change the portrayal of their own sex in the various media. Traditionally women were used in all sorts of ads - car, electrical equipment, liquor ads, usually capitalised on the female form. (See Fig 5). A slinky girl in a long gown stand next to the car with text like 'She really knows how to give you a good time.' One was never quite sure if this referred to the car or the girl.

A selection of ads from local newspapers and magazines show that although women still feature prominently in ads, the sex element is toned down to some extent except in holiday ads. (See Fig 6) It will be noticed that these are foreign ads placed in local papers however.

The ad that has, over the last 10 years, been hailed as being responsible for the success of Singapore Airlines is the world famous Singapore Girl Ad. It was a soft sell approach. Many women in Singapore are unhappy with the image the ad has projected. Some say that they make local girls appear subservient, soft. Why can't they show them as efficient, good at their job "instead of having them romping about wheat fields," said Lena Lim, president of AWARE, a recently formed woman's organisation. (See Fig 7)

This ad was so successful that the Post Office Savings Bank followed and started featuring females a part of their ad campaigns. Citibank, one of America's bigger banks does the same. Women ask what have these pretty young things to do with security, good services, satisfactory interest rates. Bank spokesmen agree that the idea is to project the friendly girl-next-door image. (See Fig 8).

Many women in the media who were asked whether they detected a change in advertising presentation said that over the last two years there had been a few ads that focused on family life. They showed the whole family together. (See Fig 9).

Female newsreaders on SBC say that the image they seek to project to the public is a business-like yet approachable one. They feel that selecting conservative clothes and hairstyles make them more credible. Media personnel who were questioned about this agreed with the newsreaders.
Portrayal of Women in News Photos

Professor Elliot Parker did a content analysis of the four language newspapers - English, Chinese, Malay, Tamil. It categorised news photos of women according to role portrayal.

Men still dominate although women professional and sports figures are well represented. The large majority of women are still portrayed as entertainers and are found on the entertainment page.

In general the portrayal of women does not reflect the position women occupy in Singapore. There is a general tendency, as noted in the NPB Task Force Report, to portray women in traditional roles.

The claim that Singapore is a technocratic meritocracy is borne out by the number of stories of both men and women portrayed as professionals. One possible reason for this could be that there are three times as many medical doctors, eight times as many dentists and five times as many female laywers in Singapore as there are in the U.S.

Over the years more women are interviewed because they have achieved success and not because they were the wives of prominent politicians or businessmen. Portraits and Profiles of women in the fields of banking, medicine, law, writing, art and music are becoming more frequent.

Women in Local Magazines

The growing number of women's magazines over the last ten years are also giving women their fair share of the limelight.

Three women's magazines who have women editors were content analysed. All devoted the most number of pages to fashion. In magazines like Female and Her World glossy advertisements took up about a quarter of the magazine this is necessary if costs are to be kept down.
All three magazines devoted about equal space to recipes, grooming and advice given to women by women. There are also sections on career guidance, health and nutrition. Unlike in the past when men were featured, now women are portrayed giving medical advice for example. Over the last five years Her World in particular has shown its growing awareness that more women are becoming career women. There appears to be a conscious move away from the hitherto concentration on articles aimed at homemakers. Career women are interviewed, portraits and profiles are consistently done of women in the various professions. Instead of focussing primarily on how spots are removed, food preserved and lint taken off clothes, today's magazines feature articles on stress and the career women, how to handle your career with proficiency; the need for exercise and diets for working women. Working women are given advice on how to achieve job satisfaction a healthy balance between home and the office. It might be pertinent to note that all this is written by women for women.
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WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

A. Women in Media Organizations:

1. How many women are in the media organization under study? How many are in executive positions? in supervisory or middle-management positions? in the rank and file?

2. What are the career opportunities for women in the media organization? What training opportunities are afforded women to ensure their transition to upper level positions in the organization?

3. Is there a difference in the hiring rates of men and women starting out with the organization?

4. Is there a quota system (like tokenism) that allots a certain number and range of positions open to women?

5. What are the criteria for evaluating the performance of women in the organization? Are the criteria the same for men and women?

6. How long does it take for a woman, normally, to be promoted to a supervisory or management position? How does it compare with men?

B. Media or Communication Education for Women:

1. Are there schools of media or mass communication that accept women? What are the criteria for admission? Are the criteria the same for men and women? Are there admission quotas for men and women?

2. Are there women faculty members in the school? What are their professional backgrounds? Are they academics or practitioners in the media?

3. Who are the heads/administrators of the school? Any woman administrator?

C. Portrayal of Women in the Media

1. How do the women professionals/practitioners in the media see the portrayal of their own sex in the various media, i.e., newspapers, magazines, radio, television, movies, etc? Do they see the portrayal as positive or negative? What are some examples of this portrayal of women?

2. Do the women professionals/practitioners in the various media have anything to do with the development and/or reinforcement of these portrayals?

3. Are there women's groups who are involved in media awareness activities, including assessment of women portrayals in the media? What are they doing about the negative portrayals of women in the different media?
4. Some issues: Singapore Girl/SIA Ad - selling the girl or selling the airlines? Kentucky Fried Chicken Ad - working mother, responsible father preparing dinner for children. The Great Marriage Debate. Polygamy as an alternative to promote population growth in Singapore.

-- Prepared by Dr Victor Valbuena