



## **Gender Equality in Singapore: An Action Plan for Progress**

**Thursday, 3 June 2021**

PANEL II  
Home is Where the Work is

**SPEAKER**

# Professor Paulin Straughan

Dean of Students &  
Professor of Sociology (Practice)  
School of Social Sciences  
Singapore Management University

# Home is Where the Work is – Division of Domestic Labour

Paulin Straughan  
Sociology@SMU

# Division of Domestic Labour – Childcare

<https://www.strategygroup.gov.sg/media-centre/press-releases/article/details/key-findings-from-marriage-and-parenthood-survey-2016>

	Stay home with sick child		Feed young child		Bathe young child	
	2016	2012	2016	2012	2016	2012
Mostly wife	54%	58%	48%	49%	45%	46%
Mostly husband	5%	4%	3%	2%	6%	5%
Shared equally between wife & husband	35%	32%	29%	24%	29%	23%
FDW	3%	2%	13%	15%	15%	16%
Others	3%	5%	6%	11%	5%	11%

# Who's Doing Family?

- Consistently, findings show that women do more at home than their husbands – regardless of women's work status
- **Paradoxical contentment of wives** – though overloaded at home, consistently high satisfaction with division of domestic labour – *why?*
- It is not gender differentiation that matters → it is the differential valuation of contributions that is problematic

# Rationalizing the Irrational

*Major 1993; Thompson 1991*

- **Gender difference in comparison standards** – women compare with other women
- Internalized norms – **gender ideology at play**
- **Feasibility comparisons** – attractions of alternative arrangements. Social acceptability of *Mr Mom*?
- **Self-comparisons** – women compare workload to that of full-time homemakers
- Perception of entitlement based on communal relationship (significance of others' needs), not exchange relationship (significance of others' inputs)

# The Dual-Sphere Ideology – Rendering Women's Work Invisible

- Lopata (1993):

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

# Consequences of Dual-Sphere Ideology on Dual Career Family

- Devaluation of women's domestic work → asymmetrical foray into the opposite gender's domain
- Battle between career and family demands = central marital tension
- Wives' income often viewed as supplementary
- Creation of an intermediary area of supplementary labour



## *Consequences of Dual-Sphere Ideology*

- Little formal support for dual-career couples with children, especially young children
- Delay marriage
- Reduce fertility
- Childless by choice
- Single by choice

# Render Visible Domestic Responsibilities

- Singapore pro-family policies – maternity & paternity leave, parent leave for childcare, eldercare leave
- Promoting work-life balance, flexi work options
- Institutional support for childcare and eldercare endeavors

# Covid-19 WFH

- Blurring of private-public space → consequences?
- Positive → change in organisational culture (reduce reliance on face time, promote trust in employee, enhance inter-personal relations in work team)
- Negative → poor work-life balance (unrealistic KPIs, poor team work)