Enhancing the achievement potential of the next generation: A sociological perspective and some recommendations

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What’s the Story? (1)

- Need for ‘resilience’:
  - How can families withstand and recover in times of adversity?
  - How can families transcend their circumstances and make the best out of what they have?

- Assigning blame to individual’s lack of motivation and aspiration for their resulting socioeconomic status obscure:
  - individual’s ability to make sound decisions that can benefit themselves and their children
  - the sociocultural forces at play.

- BUT, individuals, of a sound mind, as moral beings, have agency, capable of making decisions that benefit themselves and their children.
What’s the Story? (2)

• Why does class and stratification matter?
• How do sociologists make sense of social stratification?
  – Achieving the 3 P’s (prestige, privilege, and power)
  – Processes of social mobility
What’s the Story? (3)

• What’s happening now?
  – Emergence of concept of “multiple pathways to success”
  – **WHICH MEANS** Singaporeans can leverage on various strengths to achieve social mobility
  – **IF** academic and intellectual ability no longer solely define meanings of ‘success’

• Social mobility becomes more accessible.

• Why does inequality persist?
Consider the unequal relative mobility between different ethnic categories
– absolute versus relative social mobility

How are social mobility and inequality related?

This presentation seeks to provide a sociological perspective on class and inequality and its implications for resilience and risk in Malay/Muslim families.
What’s the Story? (5)

• Findings from *Class and Social Orientations* (2015)

• Study focuses on key aspects of social and political orientations of Singaporeans: ingredients for success, social mobility, welfare, satisfaction, happiness and etc.

• Sample size:
  – 2,700 Singapore citizens aged 15 through 74
  – Under-sampling of majority Chinese and over-sampling of minority ethnic groups to ensure sufficient number of cases for sub-group analysis
What’s the Story? (6):

All races see better inter-generational education attainment, but tertiary education is a concern for Malay families.

Table 1: Education of Dad and Child (aged 25 or older) by Race (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dad</th>
<th></th>
<th>Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pri</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sec</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Sec</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dip</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deg</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Class and Social Orientations, 2015
What’s the Story? (7):
Explaining the unequal outcomes

• From the crude data, can we infer that Malays are not doing as well as other Singaporeans?
• If so, why?
• Moving beyond ‘cultural deficit theory’; not assigning blame to individuals and their ethnicity.
• Explaining unequal outcomes: unequal starting points (in terms of economic, social and cultural capital); ‘market situation’ (Weber).
What’s the Story? (8):
Factors such as education and diligence are high priorities for Malay families

Table 2: Ingredients for Success (mean score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>Sig or ns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luck</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>sig.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale 1-6, where 1=hi and 6=low

Source: *Class and Social Orientations*, 2015
What’s the Story? (9):
All races believe there is opportunity and have similar outlook

Table 3: Opportunity and Planning (mean score)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>Sig or ns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore, Land of Opportunity</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise to plan for future</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>sig.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scale 1-3, where 1=lo and 3=hi

Source: Class and Social Orientations, 2015
What’s the Story? (10):
Good self-perception of class position

Table 4: Subjective Class (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Class and Social Orientations, 2015
What’s the Story? (11):
What about these findings?

• Malays/Muslims are not that different from the Chinese and the Indians.
• They share similar aspirations as other ethnic groups; have similar outlook/values
  – They know what it takes to do well
  – They think of Singapore as a land of opportunity
  – They perceive themselves as doing quite well
• So what’s missing?
What have we learned from the presentations of previous years, and a recent article in Time magazine?

- Caroline Brassard (2015): low income families are vulnerable, need help from community and agencies, and more financial support, especially from the state.
- Mathew Mathews (2015): low income families need social support, mentoring, and role models.
- Both highlight the importance of social networks, producing both bonding and bridging capital.

Sources:
Living on a Tight Budget in Singapore: A Qualitative Study of 25 Malay/Muslim Low-income Households, 2015
Empowering Low-income Families: Documenting the Contributions of Family Excellence Circles, 2015
All the children did well in life.

Their background?

Involved parents = nurturing.

Saw college as achievable, even inevitable = goal-setting.

Not neglected. Not in abject want = not rich, but sufficient resources and opportunities.

Parents were migrants = drive, focused.

Parents were educators = effective parenting.

Parents were activists = take charge, take action.
So what’s missing?

The sociocultural level

- Poor starting points: lack of and unequal resources and opportunities; spectre of parentocracy
- Discrimination and Market discrimination
- Lack of bridging capital (high status contacts)

Individual level

- Low motivation
- Lack self-confidence and aspirations
- Poor environment and child rearing practices

Misfortune, illness, death

Bad decisions, irresponsible actions
Recommendations

• Education system: identify and nurture strengths, ability, aptitude; consider learning pace and style; affirming.

• Goal setting, moderately challenging.

• Make “different pathways to success” a reality.

• Going further upstream: planning for future-ready children. Children don’t choose to be born. Child-centric.

• Meritocracy is fine, we can’t fight parentocracy, we must equalize opportunity for all children, even if their parents are undeserving of support.

• Good quality research on (1) values and attitudes, family structure and cohesion, child rearing practices, (2) discrimination.
Thank You