



ENGAGING HEARTS & MINDS

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

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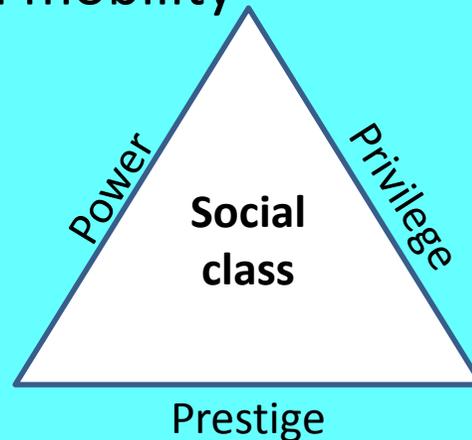


What's the Story? (1)

- 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?

What's the Story? (4)

- 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 (%)

	Dad			Child		
	C	M	I	C	M	I
Pri	62	52	46	25	23	19
Sec	26	38	35	30	39	38
Post-Sec	4	5	8	8	20	13
Dip	3	3	5	17	13	15
Deg	5	1	7	21	6	16

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)

	C	M	I	Sig or ns
Ability	2.69	2.74	2.83	ns
Education	2.04	1.53	1.62	sig.
Diligence	2.96	2.50	2.47	sig.
Connections	3.78	3.90	3.97	ns
Luck	4.65	4.96	4.99	sig.
Family background	4.68	5.32	5.09	sig.

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

What's the Story? (9):

All races believe there is opportunity and have similar outlook

Table 3: Opportunity and Planning (mean score)

	C	M	I	Sig or ns
Singapore, Land of Opportunity	2.44	2.42	2.41	Sig.
Wise to plan for future	1.87	1.73	1.81	sig.

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

What's the Story? (10): Good self-perception of class position

Table 4: Subjective Class (%)

	C	M	I
Upper Class	0.7	1.3	1.8
Middle Class	37	46	53
Working Class	56	44	36
Lower	6	9	9

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

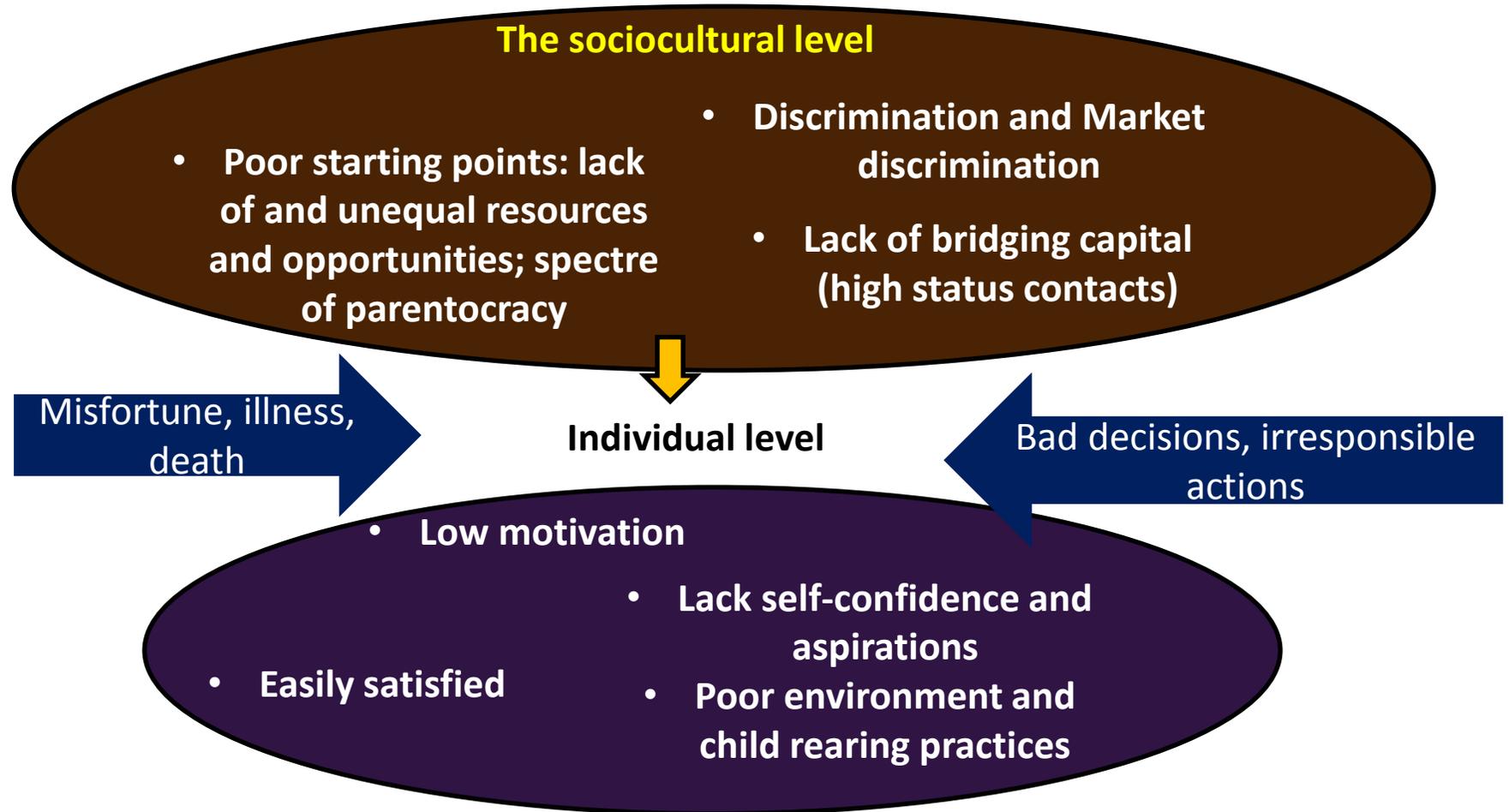
Time (Sep 5, 2016)

“Ordinary Families. Extraordinary Kids”

- 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?



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.



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