

THE ROLE OF *THE STRAITS TIMES* IN SUPPORT
OF MARRIAGE PLANNING IN SINGAPORE

By

ANNETTE JOHANNES AW S.C.

Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1991

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
December, 1991

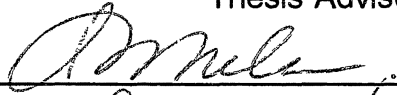
Shalin
1941
A983r

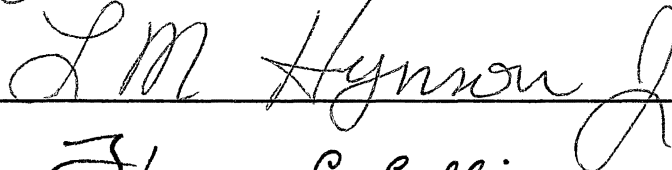
THE ROLE OF *THE STRAITS TIMES* IN SUPPORT
OF MARRIAGE PLANNING IN SINGAPORE

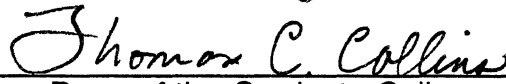
Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser







Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincerest appreciation and respect to my adviser, Dr. Charles Fleming, for his drilling guidance, suggestions, inspiration, patience, dedication and encouragement throughout this study and my graduate program.

Also, thanks to Dr. Marlan Nelson and Dr. Larry Hynson for serving on my graduate committee. Their suggestions and support were helpful during the course of this study.

Acknowledgments are also extended to Dr. Eddie Kuo, Head, Communication Department, National University of Singapore; Mrs. Susan Chan, Assistant Director, Social Development Unit, Singapore; and all who provided me with the data needed for this study.

My eternal gratitude is expressed to Mr. Lee Seng Gee for his moral and financial support which made my study in the United States of America possible. Grateful appreciation also is extended to Mrs. Kerima Siong, who gave me moral support, love and care while I was pursuing my dream. I am also grateful to Miss Nina Sachdeva, my former teacher; and Nath, her father, for their support and encouragement. And I appreciate my friend, Christopher Tan, for his understanding and confidence in me. Last, but not least, appreciation is extended to Mr. and Mrs. Hon-Shiang Lau, Cheah Seng-Cheong, Kang Joo-Chian, Jolene Yong, Susan Tomlinson, family members and friends, for their encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
General	1
Background	2
Statement of the Problem	8
Purpose of Study.....	8
Significance of Study	9
Theoretical Framework	9
Methodology	10
Limitations	11
Outline of Study.....	11
II. AN OVERVIEW	12
General	12
Chronology of Events Concerning Social Development Unit.....	12
Establishment of the Social Development Unit.....	12
Theories Applicable to this Study	22
Nation-building Theory	22
Social Responsibility Theory	23
State-Regulated Campaigns in Singapore.....	24
Similar Programs of Other Nations.....	28
United States of America.....	29
Soviet Union	29
India.....	30
South Korea.....	30
Japan.....	30
China.....	31
III. METHODOLOGY.....	32
Introduction	32
Research Questions	33
Sources of Information	33
Textual Analysis	33
Field Work.....	35
Data Collection.....	35

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS	37
Introduction.....	37
<i>The Straits Times</i>	37
1. Stabilization.....	38
2. Priority-Setting.....	40
3. Changing Opinions	41
4. Limiting Options	42
Interviews.....	43
Interviewee #1	44
Interviewee #2	45
Interviewee #3	46
Interviewee #4	46
Interviewee #5	47
Interviewee #6	48
Interviewee #7	48
Interviewee #8	49
Interviewee #9	49
Interviewee #10.....	50
Personal Observation.....	51
V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	53
Summary	53
Conclusions	55
Recommendations for Future Research	56
Concluding Comment	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	58
APPENDIX - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	61

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Percentage of Marriages Under the Women's Charter, 1983-1985—By Educational Qualifications of Grooms	5
2. Projection of the Singles Population	6
3. Reasons Given by Singaporean Male and Female College Graduates for Delaying Marriage, 1984.....	14
4. Categories and Descriptions of Activities Offered by SDU, 1991.....	18
5. SDU Membership Status, by Year and Sex, January 1985-March 1991.....	20
6. Number of Marriages Between SDU Members, January 1985-March 1991.....	21
7. The Number of Female Sterilizations, 1970-1973.....	26
8. Fertility Rates for the Period 1970-1973.....	26

FIGURE

Figure	Page
1. Percentage of Graduate Men to Graduate Women in the Various Age Group, 1984.....	4

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General

The Republic of Singapore is situated 1 degree north of the equator and consists of 626.4 square kilometers. Population density is 4,287 persons per square kilometer. This tropical island has a population of about 2.9 million. It is a multi-ethnic society, consisting of about 77 percent Chinese, 15 percent Malay, 6 percent Indians, and 2 percent "others."

"Responding to the need of the linguistically diversified population, and in support of the government policy of multilingualism, mass media in Singapore provide their services in several languages" (Kuo, 1990, p. 4). However, to prevent a substantial overlap in content between newspapers published in different languages, all newspapers in Singapore are published by one monolithic company.

As a young nation, Singapore's mass media play an important role in the country's nation-building and social development and in the daily life of Singaporeans. Singaporeans are active media users, and due to the media's ability to reach and influence the population, the government has provided guiding principles to the media.

There are "two primary government communication policies" (Kuo, 1990, p. 6). First, the media must not mislead the population into doing things against

the "public interest," as defined by the government. Second, the mass media must be mobilized to support government policies for nation-building.

In the name of nation-building, the government has been able to obtain almost total support from the mass media for the promotion and implementation of government policies.

Background

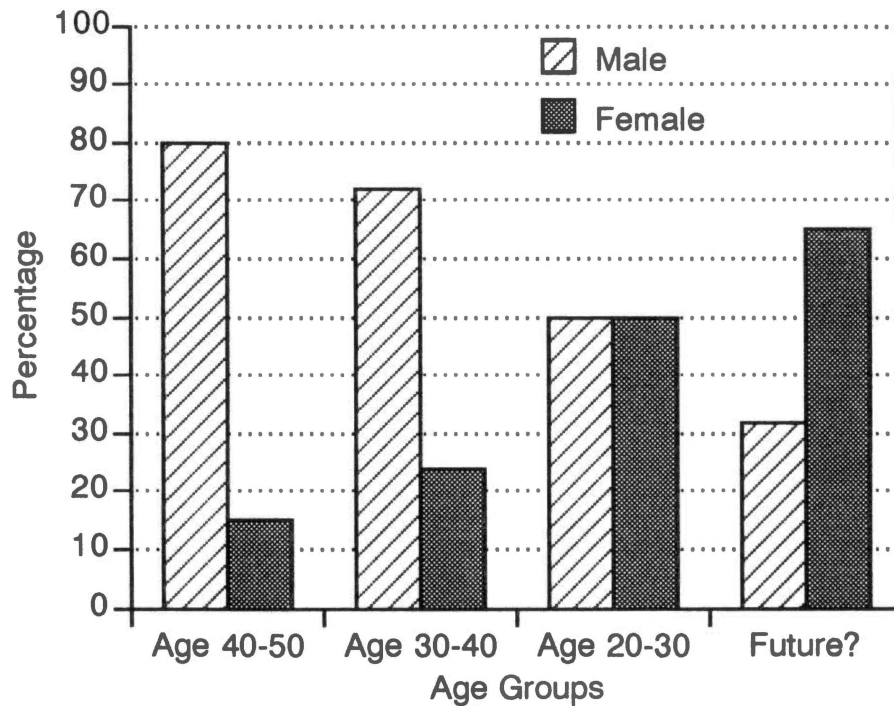
At the end of the Second World War, Singapore had fewer than one million people; by the mid 1960s, the population had doubled. So, the government launched the "Stop at Two Children" campaign in 1972. To ensure the success of the campaign, maternity leave and the right to use compulsory health insurance were withdrawn for third or subsequent births and, in 1969, abortion and sterilization were legalized.

The campaign was successful, but it worked rather too well for the government's liking. "Not only has the birth rate fallen so that the population is not replacing itself, but it is falling most among those assumed by Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister of Singapore, to be the best and the brightest" (*The Economist*, November 22, 1986, p. 15).

While the government was concerned about the genetic talent pool, the 1980 census revealed that an increasing percentage of college graduate women remain unmarried as college graduate men continued to marry less educated wives.

As can be seen in Figure 1, 15 percent of women college graduates remain single in the 40-and-above age group though there are four male graduates to every female graduate. Despite there being three times as many

male graduates, 24 percent of the women graduates remain single in the 30-40 age group.



Source: Department of Statistics (1984)

Figure 1. Percentage of Graduate Men to Graduate Women in the Various Age Groups

In the 20-30 age group, the ratio has narrowed to 1:1, and could go more in favor of women as in 1983 the National University of Singapore admitted 2,200 women compared to 1,200 men. If the marriage pattern continues, there will be more single women graduates, many of whom will be single not of their own choice.

Current marriage preferences are indicated in Table I. Table II showed the results of the singles population based on the current trend.

The reasons for this situation may be as follows:

1. A large proportion of graduate men continue to marry less educated women. Graduate men shy away from graduate women due to the Asian culture. Men are supposed to be the initiators and the breadwinners, hence, men feel more comfortable with less educated wives. It may also be due to the lack of opportunities for men and women to interact, both on campus and after leaving the university.
2. Graduate women's concern with other priorities such as their careers tend to make them be seen as less caring and supportive partners.
3. The drop in the number of men entering college was due to 63 percent of the male high school graduates opting to go to the polytechnic school instead of entering junior colleges/pre-university classes.
4. Singaporean industry has segregated the sexes: men are in the engineering and technical professions; women are in the teaching and accountancy professions. Thus, when a graduate leaves the university for a profession, he or she will have few opportunities on the job to meet members of the opposite sex.

To resolve these problems and avoid a future where "levels of competency will decline, our economy will falter, our administration will suffer, and society will decline" (*The New York Times*, July 11, 1988, p. 11), the government offered a package of incentives to single graduates to adopt the policy of having two or more children in 1984. These included tax rebates, childcare subsidies and priorities in school admissions and in getting government-subsidized housing.

TABLE I
 PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES UNDER THE WOMEN'S
 CHARTER, 1983-1985 — BY EDUCATIONAL
 QUALIFICATIONS OF GROOMS

Qualification of Grooms	Year	Qualification of Brides		
		Higher Than Grooms	Equal To Grooms	Lower Than Grooms
Tertiary (College)	1985	—	45.7	54.3
	1984	—	41.7	58.3
	1983	—	37.6	62.4
Upper Secondary	1985	5.2	32.2	62.6
	1984	4.4	32.1	63.5
	1983	4.9	29.6	65.5
Secondary	1985	12.1	60.1	27.8
	1984	12.0	60.8	27.2
	1983	11.4	58.9	29.7
Primary	1985	31.1	41.0	27.9
	1984	31.6	40.7	27.7
	1983	15.8	53.1	31.1
No Qualifications	1985	44.2	55.8	—
	1984	42.8	57.2	—
	1983	39.6	60.4	—

Source: Department of Statistics (1985).

TABLE II
PROJECTION OF THE SINGLES POPULATION

Educational Level	Number of Males or Females	Single Males		Single Females	
		Number	%	Number	%
Tertiary	2,500	130	5	1,020	41
Upper Secondary	4,750	240	5	1,380	29
Secondary	11,250	560	5	300	3
Primary and Lower	6,500	1,970	38	200	3
Total	25,000	2,900	12	2,900	12

Source: Department of Statistics (1985).

In January 1984, in an effort to increase the opportunities for college graduates to meet members of the opposite sex and socialize, a Social Development Unit (SDU) was set up in the Ministry of Finance. Initially SDU quietly organized educational seminars at holiday resorts and special briefings on the importance of marriage and child bearing for single graduate workers in various government statutory organizations.

Initially, SDU catered only to university graduates. Nevertheless, in response to calls to extend its activities to non-graduates, it took in non-graduates in October 1985, and SDU was swamped with people waiting to join its activities. Hence, a parallel Social Development Section (SDS) was set up to relieve pressure on SDU. Currently SDU caters only to single graduates, and SDS caters to the non-graduates.

In the beginning, the government's involvement in matchmaking was criticized. The government repeatedly had been "accused of paternalistic behavior and of interfering in the private lives of its citizens" (*Asia Magazine*, November 30, 1986, p. 10).

Officials of SDU, on the other hand, insisted that they merely wanted to "create an awareness of the high incidence of singlehood among graduate women and to bring about a change of attitude toward marriage" (*Goodwood Journal*, 2nd Quarter, 1987, p. 13).

Since the establishment of SDU in 1984, the press was expected to assume its obligation of social responsibility—to help in nation-building by "agreeing to a one-year moratorium on all news of SDU" (*Asia Week*, April 22, 1988, p. 40). The purpose of the moratorium was to let SDU develop without public attention and criticism.

According to Mrs. Susan Chan, deputy director of SDU, "SDU has been operating covertly for a year—due to the fear that publicity would embarrass the participants."

As Singapore developed as a nation, the mass media evolved around the concept of nation-building, of practicing "self-restraint, especially on controversial issues, for the sake of national unity" (The Mass Media, 1991, p. 306). Thus, it was considered "a right move for the newspaper to play their part by helping to keep names and pictures of the people involved off their pages. This is necessary as the effort deserves understanding and time in order to succeed" (*The Singapore Monitor*, March 8, 1985, p. 15).

Since the end of the moratorium in 1985, with the help of extensive positive press coverage, SDU managed to gain respect and acceptance in a nation where arranged marriages are not commonplace.

Statement of the Problem

The Singapore government has often taken a direct role as "father" among its population. Whenever Singapore has a problem, there is often a campaign launched by the government to deal with it. It is valuable to understand the use of the print media by the Singapore government in its promotional campaigns. The problem this study will address is the lack of information about the role of the press in Singapore's nation-building program that attempts to bring about marriages among college graduates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of news media as a nation-building tool in support of the government's promotional campaign of

getting single college graduates to get married and have children—"at least two. Better three. Four if you can afford it" (*The Economist*, November 22, 1986, p. 15). However, this study focuses on only one of the government's campaigns, the development and performance of SDU.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

How did single college graduates who regarded SDU resentfully as an intrusion into their personal lives come to accept SDU?

How have the media been used positively to affect public perceptions of and attitudes toward SDU and its goal of bringing about marriages?

Significance of Study

From this research, it may be possible to better understand how most campaigns and policies have been implemented successfully in Singapore through the partnership of government and media.

This research may also provide some insight into the mass communication system in Singapore—"one that has been cast by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in a nation-building role directed by the party-cum-government itself, a role whereby whether freedom of the press exists is no longer a topic of debate" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 11, 1988, p. 38).

Theoretical Framework

According to the then Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, the role of the news media was "to support the government in economic development and nation-building" (Tan, 1990, p. 5).

The two theories of press behavior that appear to fit the media in Singapore are the social responsibility and developmental or nation-building theories.

Under the social responsibility theory, "the press must raise conflict to the plane of discussion as well as serving the function of informing, entertaining, and selling" (*Communication Theories*, 1987, p. 214). However, it is also necessary to recognize that the media must "assume a responsibility like that of educators in stating and clarifying the ideals toward which the community should strive" (Leigh, 1947, p. 28).

Under the nation-building or developmental theory, "the press practices self-restraint, especially on controversial issues for the sake of national unity" (*The Mass Media*, 1991, p. 306).

Singapore is a young nation and its policies evolved around the concept of nation-building. The SDU was formed for the purpose of promoting economic and social growth. Hence, the press is expected to do its part.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used in this study. The research is a case study of the role of the mass media in the promotion and progress of SDU. Surveys in the form of interviews were conducted with members and non-members of SDU. Information obtained through library research, newspapers articles, government documents, published and unpublished theses, is also included.

Limitations

Provision of mass media content in several languages is necessary in Singapore due to its ethnically diversified population. Though newspapers in different languages do differ in content, there is a substantial overlap in content among papers. This is due to the fact that all newspapers in Singapore are published by one monolithic company. Thus, this study was limited only to one English daily newspaper in Singapore.

The news media coverage of SDU is limited to the local context and within a particular timeframe. Hence, it should not be assumed that coverage of this single program is typical of other language newspapers, or that coverage of this event is typical of media coverage of other events.

Outline of Study

Chapter II reviews relevant research literature and discusses communication theories.

Chapter III explains the methodology of this study.

Chapter IV presents the findings and analysis of the research findings.

Chapter V summarizes the research and findings, and submits conclusions and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER II

AN OVERVIEW

General

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section describes the establishment and functioning of Social Development Unit (SDU). The second section provides an overview of theories applicable to this study. The third section contains examples of state regulated campaigns in Singapore, the fourth section reviews literature applicable to this study, and the fifth section discusses government promotional campaigns in other nations.

Chronology of Events Concerning

Social Development Unit

January, 1984: SDU established by the Ministry of Finance.

January, 1984: Moratorium on news coverage of SDU.

January, 1985: Moratorium on news coverage of SDU lifted.

Establishment of the Social Development Unit

As Singapore progresses toward economic and academic achievements, the social customs and beliefs seem to lag. With progress, not only the men, but also the women are pursuing higher education. However, as "young women tend to concentrate on getting their degrees and making their mark in the world, they miss or overlook marriage and a family" (The Need for

Social Development in Singapore, 1991, p. 9). The reasons given by Singaporean male and female college graduates for delaying marriages are given in Table III.

In 1980, a census among Singapore's college graduates revealed that 15 percent of graduate women 40 years old and older were still single, although there were four times as many college graduate men as women. Moreover, among college graduate women between 30 and 40 years old, 24 percent were single, although there were three times as many college graduate men. This census sparked the "Great Marriage Debate" which was the topic of the 1983 National Day rally speech given by the Prime Minister of Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew, then Prime Minister of Singapore, expressed concern by saying Singapore would end with a smaller pool of talent if "the less-educated who are unable to provide strong support at home for a child's development, continue to have large families; and on the other hand, if the graduate women continue to remain single or merely have one child" (*The Straits Times*, June 3, 1984, p. 3).

Nevertheless, "Mr. Lee Kuan Yew did not say that the poor should not have children but rather the educated are in a better position to provide the necessary environment for children to make the grade" (*The Straits Times*, August 22, 1983, p. 26).

The government said it was not concerned with genetics but with the pattern of procreation (meaning the rich and educated are having fewer children than the poor and ill-educated).

Singapore's planners were also concerned with the size of the shrinking population. By 1975, "the reproduction rate of Singaporeans had plummeted by half—the success of the family policy experiment in 1972, whereby the

TABLE III
 REASONS GIVEN BY SINGAPOREAN MALE AND
 FEMALE COLLEGE GRADUATES FOR
 DELAYING MARRIAGE, 1984

	Male	Female
Difficulty of finding a suitable partner	22%	23%
Lack of opportunities for meeting potential partner	19	20
Enjoyment of independence	11	12
Difficulty of owning a home	7	3
Career advancement	5	4
Other reasons, such as, Children burden, unhappy experiences with boy/girl friends, marriage has lost meaning, other personal reasons	4	4
Necessity to support parents/siblings	2	1
No response	30	33
Total	100%	100%

Source: Department of Statistics. Survey on Value and Costs of Marriage (Graduates), 1984.

natural zero-population-growth point was reached. By 1980, Singapore wasn't reproducing itself at replacement level" (*Parenting*, November, 1987, p. 70).

The shrinking population in Singapore created a problem that "would mean a drop in the tax base to support the elderly, as well as a lack of recruits for the armed forces" (*The New York Times*, 1988, p. 11). However, the government realized that the problem of a shrinking population and increased single college graduates would not correct itself. Hence, the government decided to take a direct role as a matchmaker. In an effort to "play Cupid," a special task force called the Social Development Unit (SDU) was formed by the government in January 1984.

The first director of SDU was Dr. Eileen Aw. According to Dr. Eileen Aw, her job was "to provoke an epidemic of marriages and an avalanche of infants" (*Parenting*, November 1987, p. 70). However, the objectives of SDU were:

1. To increase single college graduates' awareness of the high incidence of singlehood among graduate women and to emphasize the importance of marriage.
2. To provide the opportunities for male and female single college graduates to meet one another.
3. To bring about a change of attitude of men toward the choice of a spouse, that is, to accept a spouse of equal educational background.

In hopes of correcting the lopsided pattern of procreation, besides setting up SDU, the government offered a variety of incentives. From June 1, 1984, the government announced that it "would pay S\$10,000 (US\$4,762) to less-educated and low-income young mothers under the age of 30 if they volunteered for sterilization after their first or second child" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 21, 1984, p. 31). This cash offer was to be paid into the

individual's central Provident Fund (CPF), a mandatory saving scheme, and could be used only to buy an apartment built by the state-owned Housing and Development Board (HDB). This offer was irresistible because in the crowded island nation of Singapore, more than 70 percent of the people live in HDB estates, and there is a long waiting list of buyers. Moreover, for young married couples, this cash offer was more than enough to cover the initial deposit for a small state-owned apartment.

Nevertheless, only those families in which neither spouse had completed high school and had a family income of not more than \$1,500 a month were eligible for the cash offer.

After receiving the cash grant, if a family had a third child, the penalty was the repayment of the sum, with 10 percent interest compounded annually. The fees would be higher for delivery of a couple's third and fourth child at the government's lower-class maternity wards.

While the poor were enticed to reproduce less, the better educated were given greater concessions to reproduce more. Children of mothers who hold university degrees have higher priority in admissions to Singapore's elite schools. Mothers who had at least five passes at the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level, which was the required national examination for entering college, were offered tax concessions for up to three children.

Besides offering a variety of incentives, official teams from Singapore were sent to Japan to study Japanese computer match-making. Dating services in the West also have been scrutinized. To further promote the get-married crusade, high schools and polytechnic schools began holding optional seminars to enhance the value of marriage and family.

In an attempt to curb preconceived negative notions of SDU, for the initial year SDU "eschews all publicity—the pliant local press has been instructed to

keep the SDU off its pages" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 21, 1984, p. 32).

Nevertheless, through letters of invitation, hundreds of single college graduate employees from various government departments and statutory bodies had been exposed to SDU's activities.

To further initiate and facilitate mechanisms to enable single graduates to meet and interact with one another, the SDU team would visit the government departments and statutory bodies to present a pre-recorded panel discussion. "On the panel are Sim Kee Boon, head of the civil service; Dr. Eileen Aw, health physician at the National University of Singapore, and Dr. Ailine Wong, from the university's Department of Sociology. The audiences of the recorded panel discussion appear to have been a carefully chosen mix of young bureaucrats who question the panelists about marriage and family" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 21, 1984, p. 32).

After the video presentation, the SDU official would answer any questions. Then the single college graduates were given an 11-page questionnaire. The survey dealt with personal, general, family and financial information. It also covered details of personal preferences for a potential spouse. Those who were engaged or going steady were exempted.

Armed with the responses from these questionnaires, the SDU offered a wide range of activities as shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV
CATEGORIES AND DESCRIPTIONS
OF ACTIVITIES OFFERED
BY SDU, 1991

Categories of Activities	Description
1. Computer Matchmaking	For those looking for a spouse. Members need to pay an administrative fee for a renewable membership of five years. A counsellor-in-charge interviews the prospective member before his or her personal data are fed into the computer.
2. Workshops	These last two to three days and are held in Malaysia or the nearby Indonesian Islands. Members go through an interactive program and at the same time enjoy local trips.
a. Overseas Weekend Workshops	
b. Weekend Workshops	These are held locally for the convenience of members working in the private sector and combine a training program with an overnight stay in a local hotel.
3. Weekend Stays	These involve an overnight stay in a hotel, chalet or campsite and a light program of fun and games.
4. Outdoor Activities	Included telematches, picnics, orienteering, relay races, treasure hunts, car rallies, etc.
5. Self improvement/Hobby Courses	Topics covered include social dancing, communications, interior design, photography, language, etc.
6. Sports and Games	Coaching or practice sessions in tennis, squash, badminton, ice-skating, wind-surfing, horse-riding, snooker, etc.
7. Tours	Short trips to Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and places of touristic interest.
8. Socials	Weekend rendezvous such as tea-dances, tea-talks, theme parties, dinners, karaoke sessions, etc.

Source: Department of the Social Development Unit (1991)

Booklet: The need for Social Development Unit.

To establish an open communication channel with its members, SDU publishes a quarterly magazine called *Link*.

In this magazine, besides the schedule of activities organized for the members, there also are articles on the concerns of the singles.

In addition to the articles, the magazine "carries an application form for SDU membership and also a form on which the singles can tick off activities they want to take part in—from dinners to workshops" (*The Straits Times*, June 4, 1987, p. 1).

The magazine also carries facts and figures, as shown in Table V, of SDU membership status, by year and sex to inform its members about the increased number of memberships. The greater number of female members compared with male members may be due to "status incongruity" in that Asian males have traditionally married women of lower status, while this has been less acceptable for Asian women. Table VI shows the number of marriages between SDU members as published in the magazine. Furthermore, it also carries advertisements from banks, hotels and travel agents.

To help publicize SDU's message of "if you wish to have a family, don't leave it until too late," the media spread the word that the SDU "is successful in getting people married" (*The Need for Social Development in Singapore*, 1991, p. 14).

TABLE V
SDU MEMBERSHIP STATUS, BY YEAR & SEX,
JANUARY 1985-MARCH 1991

Year	Males	Percent of Total	Females	Percent of Total	Total Cumulative
1985	560	42.4	760	57.6	1,320
1986	1,648	47.9	1,793	52.1	3,441
1987	2,862	4.0	3,218	53.0	6,080
1988	3,730	47.0	4,221	53.0	7,951
1989	4,411	46.1	5,148	53.9	9,559
1990	5,028	46.1	5,883	53.9	10,911
March 1991	5,024	45.9	5,921	54.1	10,945

Source: Department of Social Development Unit.

Note: SDU facts and figures current as of 31 March 1991.

TABLE VI
NUMBER OF MARRIAGES BETWEEN SDU MEMBERS,
JANUARY 1985-MARCH 1991

Year	Cumulative Total
1985	91
1986	111
1987	209
1988	214
1989	239
1990	253
Jan - Mar 1991	76
Cumulative Total	1,193

Source: Department of Social Development Unit.

Note: SDU facts and figures current as of 31 March 1991.

Theories Applicable to This Study

The mass media in Singapore "have expanded and audiences proliferated as people have achieved higher incomes, better education, higher literacy rates, and increased leisure time" (*Journalism Quarterly*, Volume. 66, No. 4, 1989, p. 822).

Nevertheless, many foreign journalists considered the press in Singapore as "applied propaganda, private industry; and government service" (Selvan, 1990, p.105).

But, the role of mass media in Singapore according to Singapore's Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, is such that the media

can help to present Singapore's problems simply and clearly and then explain how if the media support certain programmes and policies, these problem can be solved. More importantly, we want the mass media to reinforce, not to undermine, the cultural value and social attitudes being inculcated in our schools and universities. The mass media can create a mood in which people become keen to acquire the knowledge, skills and disciplines of advanced countries. Without these, we can never hope to raise the standard of living of our people (Singapore: The Ultimate Island, 1990, p. 108).

The two rationales for the mass media systems in Singapore are the nation-building and social responsibility theories.

Nation-building Theory

Since its independence in 1965, Singapore has strived to make its own identity. In this process, Singapore has evolved itself in nation-building programs.

Under the nation-building or developmental theory, the press practices "self-restraint, especially on controversial issues, for the sake of national unity" (The Mass Media, 1991, p. 306).

Due to the press' ability to influence, its accessibility to the population, and with so much happening locally, regionally and internationally every day, "newspapers function as the best conduit to convey announcements and events to the public" (Tan, 1990, p. 14).

Thus, all media, but newspapers in particular, have been urged by the government of Singapore to be supportive of the nation-building process.

In the name of nation-building, the government has exerted strong influence directly and indirectly on the operation of the mass media. And "for almost two decades since the early 1970s, the government has been able to draw almost total support from the mass media, and indeed all existing social organizational networks, for the promotion and implementation of government policies" (Kuo, 1990, p.7).

At the same time, the media's social responsibility role has not been neglected.

Social Responsibility Theory

Under the social responsibility theory, "the press must raise conflict to the plane of discussion as well as serving the function of informing, entertaining, and selling" (Communication Theories, 1987, p. 214).

In an attempt to maintain a reasonable standard of professionalism, the local dailies "uphold a vital political role to explain and analyze to readers what the leadership and concomitant government institutions are doing" (Tan, 1990, p. 11).

In trying to fulfill its social responsibility of disseminating honest, balanced, and impartial information, the press also tries "to educate the public

by actively promoting open discussion of ideas, opinions, principles and values which contribute to policy-making" (Tan, 1990, p. 11).

To further fulfill its obligatory function to society, the press "would also complement its team of journalists by inviting respected luminaries such as retired politicians, senior civil servants and chief executives to contribute to its commentaries" (Tan, 1990, p. 14).

Over the years, according to Tan, the press has managed to fulfill its social responsibility and yet be supportive of the government's promotional campaigns. With the support of the government by the press, Singapore has continued to remain stable and secure (Tan, 1990, p. 19).

State-Regulated Campaigns in Singapore

The main foundation of the nation-building program in Singapore is the promotion of economic growth. The rationale for having a developmental policy is "based on two important factors: the immigrant nature of the population, and the fact that Singapore's survival depended on its ability to globalize with the world as its market and hinterland" (Kuo and Chen, 1983, p. 46).

In the name of fulfilling national objectives, the press is generally very supportive of government developmental campaigns. The press frequently carried news articles, feature stories, and press releases about government campaigns. Events such as public speeches and exhibitions were often given advance notice. During the campaign period, editorial comments were printed in support of the promotional activities.

To ensure national publicity, all types of communication networks such as television, radio, and newspapers were used. The type of printed media that

were used included pamphlets, brochures, and handbooks. Seminars or public talks were also given.

In the interests of economic development, the government conducted national promotional campaigns on matters such as the following:

1. Population Control and Limitation of Families to Two Children.

The National Family Planning and Population Program of 1972 used incentives and deterrents to curb exploding birth rates. The "Stop-At-Two" message appealed to parents to provide a richer, better material life for their offsprings. Several other measures also helped swing the parents to favor small families. They included higher government hospital delivery fees with each additional child beyond two, post-delivery counseling on contraception methods, abolition of paid maternity leave after two children, and priority primary school admission for children who had at least one parent sterilized.

To enhance an ideal Singapore family—small, well- educated and well-housed—the mass media published advertisements proclaiming the virtues of the "Two is Enough" campaign.

This campaign was successful. Table VII below shows the number of female sterilizations performed during the period 1970 to 1973.

The idea of having two or fewer children was gradually accepted as evidenced by a drop in the total fertility rate. The fertility rates during the period 1970 to 1973 are shown in Table VIII.

TABLE VII
THE NUMBER OF FEMALE STERILIZATIONS,
1970-1973

Year	Female Sterilization
1970	2,321
1971	3,871
1972	5,842
1973	8,964

Source: Saw, Population Control for Zero growth in Singapore, 1974.

TABLE VIII
FERTILITY RATES FOR THE PERIOD
1970-1973

Year	Total Fertility Rate
1970	1.75
1971	1.70
1972	1.68
1973	1.62

Note: The rate is the average number of children per woman.

Source: Saw, Population Control for Zero growth in Singapore, 1974.

2. Speak Mandarin Campaign.

Lee Kuan Yew, then the Prime Minister of Singapore, launched the "Speak More Mandarin, Use Less Dialects Campaign" in September 1979. This campaign was intended to replace Singapore's numerous dialects with Mandarin. The aim was to enable Singaporean school children to master two languages: English and Mandarin.

To further promote Mandarin as a common linking language for all the Chinese groups, the government-controlled mass media give their support by publishing articles "enhancing the need for greater cohesion among the various dialect groups" (Chew and Lee 1991, p. 283).

This campaign was fairly successful, according to Chew and Lee, in that the younger generation of Chinese Singaporeans tend to speak more Mandarin than dialects (Chew and Lee, 1991, p. 283).

3. Anti-smoking Drive.

Change your lifestyle

Make a solemn vow

Clear your lungs and feel much fitter

Stop that smoking now!

This lively, folksy song entitled "Change Your Lifestyle" kicked off the government's Anti-Smoking Campaign in 1979. The government's determination to curb cigarette smoking gave rise to several harsh laws, such as:

- a. Smoking was prohibited in all public vehicles. Anyone caught smoking was liable to fines of up to 500 Singapore dollars.
- b. Doctors and hospital staff were prohibited to smoke in wards and areas for patients.

- c. Government employees were not allowed to smoke in offices where they dealt with the public.
- d. Teachers were not allowed to smoke anywhere in the schools except in the faculty rooms.
- e. Pupils would be punished if caught smoking within school grounds.
- f. Taxi drivers were not allowed to smoke while driving with passengers. A fine of up to 400 Singapore dollars would be levied on those caught in the act.
- g. Smoking was not allowed in closed auditoriums, theaters, cinemas, and public elevators. Violators were liable to fines of up to 500 Singapore dollars.
- h. Food vendors were forbidden to smoke while handling their wares.

In May 1971, cigarette advertising was prohibited in the print media.

To reinforce the message of anti-smoking, the mass media were used extensively. There were many articles presenting figures on cigarette consumption in Singapore coupled with its adverse effects.

Similar Programs of Other Nations

Singapore is not the only country with a large number of single graduates. Singapore also is not unique in promoting match-making among potential mates through units similar to SDU. In other countries, many dating services, and single bars are expanding nationally, via either company-owned branches or franchises. Some examples of similar matchmaking services are as follows.

United States of America

The singles market in the United States consists of 60 million adults 18 years and older (56% female, 44% male), most of whom are under 40. The singles either seek help from matchmaking services or through personal advertisements. In America, "marriage brokers are often regarded as the last resort of the truly desperate" (*Fortune*, 1985, p. 100).

The reason single Americans seek help in finding mates is that "they are just too busy ... working 60 to 80 hours a week, there is very little time to go out hunting" (*Time*, November 28, 1988, volume 132, p. 14).

For those people in rural regions, finding a wife and starting a family is difficult because "the ladies go off to the cities to find jobs and the fellows stay home to run the farms ... and with all the chores and responsibilities, it's hard for a person on the farm to find the time to go around looking for a date" (*The New York Times*, July 11, 1988, volume 137, p. 1).

While the United States has no comparable program to SDU, many of the problems experienced by educated, marriageable Singaporean women can be found among various ethnic groups in the United States.

Soviet Union

"Falling birth rates and rising divorce rates in the western Soviet Union have prompted the Moscow City Council to run a marriage bureau, to which lonely-hearts come to find mates in a 5,000-name card file" (*The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 1990, p. A13).

In some parts of Soviet Central Asia and the Transcaucasia region, arranged marriages still exist. However, as women outnumber men by a ratio of

3 to 2 (*The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 1990, p. A13), private marriage agencies help their female clients seek partners in the faraway west.

India

For generations, marriages in India often were arranged through a network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. However, "the traditional ways of finding a match are becoming increasingly different because the joint family is breaking up" (*The Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 1990, volume 82, p. 8). Recently, in major cities, newspaper advertisements and computer services have become key tools in the matchmaking process.

South Korea

Marriage brokering is one of Korean society's oldest professions. A licensed marriage brokering firm is a private business. However, "the fees for arranging a marriage are controlled by the government" (*The Washington Post*, November 27, 1989, volume 112, p. 11).

South Korea's concern with status can be seen in the still-solid position of arranged marriages. Many parents and their children would use marriages to solidify or improve their position on the social ladder.

Japan

Japanese women in the 20-to-30 age group are becoming more particular about their mates as "men outnumber women 9.3 million to nine million" (*Fortune*, February 18, 1990, volume 111, p. 98). Professional matchmakers are common in Japan, however, and putting an advertisement in a magazine looking for a spouse is a common practice in Japan.

China

In May 1950, China promulgated its first Marriage Law in an attempt to curb population growth. Under this Marriage Law, the minimum legal marriage age "was raised from 18 to 20 for females and 20 to 22 for males" (The Legislative Affairs Commission of NPC, 1987, p. 185). This national policy helped delay marriage.

In old China, there often were vast differences in marriage ages—"very old husbands with young wives was a common feature; adult daughters-in-law taken into a patriarchal family would often wait for the child-husband to grow up" (Quah, 1991, p. 179). With the implementation of this national policy, "the age difference was less with couples, and more couples would have same educational backgrounds and cultural accomplishment" (Quah, 1991, p. 179).

In 1987, a study showed that bachelors outnumbered single women by 10 million in the 29-to-49 years age group. It was said that the serious imbalance in the ratio of men to women in China will worsen over the next 20 years. Hence, "China is rapidly moving away from traditional arranged marriages and blushing brides" (*The Washington Post*, February 1, 1988, volume 111, p. 1). The women, especially those in the cities, demand more from their mates. Personal advertisements stress the importance of education, job security and height in a husband.

There is a basic similarity among the various national programs in support of marriage, and that is the problem of finding suitable mates. The difference is that some of the governments do not use the media as their partner in promoting national campaigns.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of news media as a nation-building tool in support of a government of Singapore promotional campaign. This study focused on one particular government promotional campaign — the campaign of getting single college graduates to get married and have children: "at least two. Better three. Five if you can afford it" (*The Economist*, November 22, 1986, p. 15).

This study used qualitative research methods as "qualitative research attends to the world closely" (Pauly, Number 125, February 1991, p. 1). Qualitative research also "offers richly descriptive reports of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events display how things are put together into frameworks" (Hakin, 1987, p. 26).

In particular, the case study was the research design used in this study. The case study method was used as it is "the most flexible of all research designs and it offers the strength of experimental research within natural settings" (Hakin, 1987, p. 61).

This case study included studies of *The Straits Times*, one of the English dailies in Singapore, and the establishment and development of one of the

government's promotional campaigns centering around the Social Development Unit.

Evidence was gathered through the combination of qualitative textual analysis and field work. Textual analysis included content analysis of the printed text of *The Straits Times*, other newspapers and magazines articles, such as *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, Singaporean government and SDU documents. Field work included interviews and personal observation.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

How did single college graduates come to accept SDU?

How have the media been used to positively affect public perceptions of the attitudes toward SDU and its goal of bringing about marriages?

Sources of Information

Textual Analysis

As this study investigated an event, reliance was on written and printed texts as sources of information. The textual analysis included the content analysis of *The Straits Times*, other newspapers and magazines, the government and SDU documents.

Singapore is a multi-racial country, and in response to the need of the linguistically and ethnically diversified population, the mass media in Singapore provide their services in four languages. Of the eight daily newspapers printed in Singapore, there are three each in English and Chinese, and one each in Malay and Tamil.

Although newspapers in different languages "differ in content, each catering more to the ethnic/cultural interests and tastes of the readers... there is a substantial overlap in content between newspapers published in different languages" (Kuo, 1990, p. 6). This is compounded by the fact that all newspapers in Singapore are published by one monolithic company.

As a bi-literate reader gains only "marginally information-wise in reading two or more newspapers published in Singapore" (Kuo, 1990, p. 6), focus of this study was on the English language *Straits Times* as it has the largest circulation and it is serious and informative in its coverage.

All the *Straits Times* articles on SDU that were found at the *Straits Times* Library, SDU Library, National University of Singapore Library and National Library of Singapore were used in the content analysis.

The content analysis of the *Straits Times* focused on articles published during the period August 1983 to May 1991. There were about 300 articles related to the SDU program.

Besides the qualitative content analysis of the *Straits Times* in Singapore, content analysis was done of other newspapers and magazines. They included local and foreign publications obtained from the Oklahoma State University Edmon Low Library, the National University of Singapore Library and the National Library of Singapore. These periodicals are identified in "Sources Consulted" at the end of the study.

Apart from the articles from magazines and newspapers, content analysis was done on government and SDU documents. Government documents are used for statistical data on the fertility rate, population census, and other survey results related to the establishment and development of SDU. SDU documents such as pamphlets, press releases and publications (LINK) were used to further comprehend the organization's function and activities.

Field work

To gather further information, field work consisting of interviews and personal observation was done.

To allow for emphasis on detail and depth of information, only a small number of interviewees was involved. Interviews were conducted with several newspaper editors who asked not to be identified, the SDU assistant director, Mrs. Susan Chan, fifteen present SDU members, twelve former SDU members, and twelve non-SDU members. However, to eliminate duplicate responses only ten interviews are reported in the next chapter.

Interviews were conducted to "find out how individuals' perspectives change in response to some experience or event in their lives... and to provide enough freedom for respondents to steer the conversation, that is, to bring in all sorts of tangential matters which have a bearing on the main subject" (Hakin, 1987, p. 26).

Personal experience heightens a researcher's feel for the subject. Hence, to obtain first-hand information, personal observation was conducted at two SDU functions. Permission for personal observation of the SDU function had been granted by the organizer of the activities and the staff of SDU.

Data Collection

Data collection for this research began in January 1991. The articles reviewed on SDU from newspapers and magazines were located at the Oklahoma State University library.

In March 1991, the researcher obtained a few copies of the SDU publication, *Link*. Around this time, appointments were made for the interviews to be held in May 1991.

From May to August 1991, the researcher returned to Singapore to do the field work — interviews and personal observation. During this period of time, more information was obtained from the National Library of Singapore, National University of Singapore Library, the SDU Library and the *Straits Times* Library.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of the case-study design method of the qualitative research are presented in this chapter in three sections. The first section will present *The Straits Times* portrayal of SDU. The second section presents the results of interviews, while the third section presents the results of personal observation.

The Straits Times

After Singapore gained its independence in 1965, government leaders began to put more emphasis on the positive role of the national communication network in national development. According to Jek Yeun Thong, then Minister for Culture, in "our modernization process ... the mass media come into play an essential role" (Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Volume 27, 1968, Column 190-191).

The role of the mass media according to then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew was to "help present Singapore's problems simply and clearly and then explain how these problems can be solved" (*The Mirror*, June 14, 1971, p. 4).

In support of national promotional campaigns, such as SDU, *The Straits Times* provided news coverage of programs such as forums, panel discussions and activities related to the campaigns. To further create awareness, *The Straits Times* frequently carried news articles, press releases, and feature

stories, and gave advance notice of events such as public speeches and exhibits connected with the campaigns.

Nevertheless, in the case of SDU, *The Straits Times* agreed "to a one-year moratorium on all news of SDU" (*Asia Week*, April 22, 1988, p. 40). Thus, in 1984, *The Straits Times* merely carried articles that stressed the need for the establishment of SDU. All activities involving SDU were not reported. This was done to allow SDU to develop without public attention and criticism.

In 1985, after the moratorium was lifted, *The Straits Times* became actively involved in promoting SDU, and linking theory is a useful model to understand *The Straits Times'* efforts to create public awareness and acceptance of SDU.

Linking theory is "the key to the media effects on public opinion, it is an anchor for audience memory which arises from the media's repetitive linking" (Paletz and Entman, 1981, p. 188).

Under linking theory, there are four functions where the public is linked with positive aspects of the establishment and development of SDU. Through the print media's use of the linking theory, the media can have four types of effects on public opinions of SDU.

1. Stabilization

The media can stabilize perceptions and, therefore, opinions by correcting stereotyped conceptions of government activities and promotional campaigns.

On March 14, 1985, after the lifting of the news moratorium, had an article that said SDU was a necessary catalyst. In this article titled "A Necessary Catalyst," *The Straits Times* told its readers that "matchmaking is not a

controversial subject but some people need assistance to find a partner." The article sought to reinforce the objectives of SDU, and explained the need for the government to "play Cupid" in that "given the limited opportunities for social interaction in a career-minded community, there is a case for official intervention."

On March 24, 1985, *The Straits Times* carried an article titled "Pre-Conceived Notions About the SDU Gatherings." In this article, the public was told to have a more "open-minded approach when it comes to making friends." It also tried to correct pre-conceived notions about SDU activities. Many Singaporeans had pre-conceived notions such as those who attended SDU activities were those who could not find their own spouse and in this desperate situation, they needed the government to be the match-maker. Thus, in an attempt to curb pre-conceived negative notions of SDU, for the initial year, "the pliant local press has been instructed to keep the SDU off its pages" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 21, 1984, p. 32).

On May 6, 1989, *The Straits Times* published an article quoting Dr. Seet Ai Mee, a member of parliament, that "match-making is not outdated." In this article, the government-controlled *Straits Times* tried to correct the stereotyped thinking of the typical Asians that marriage is a matter best resolved by the individual. The article emphasized the success of SDU by revealing that "4,000 marriages of members or non-members have been registered."

The Straits Times carried these articles not merely to create awareness of SDU, but mainly to stabilize stereotyped conceptions. These articles reinforced the need for the government promotional campaigns and the need to inform the public that getting the government's help in finding a friend and hopefully a spouse is not something to be ashamed of.

2. Priority-Setting

The priorities of the news communicated by the media structure readers' perceptions of the importance of an issue or event — agenda setting.

Under this concept, *The Straits Times* devoted much attention to the results of the establishment of SDU.

On October 13, 1985, an article titled "1,000 Callers Make It A Hot Line to Cupid" was carried by *The Straits Times*. This article said "1,000 people with marriage in mind had called to leave their particulars and their educational qualifications." It also highlighted SDU's new match-making exercise coming up in January 1986.

The Straits Times published an article titled "Family And Career Go Hand in Hand in late 1988." This article on December 12, 1988, was an attempt to tell career-minded single women that marriage, family and career can go hand in hand.

On April 25, 1989, *The Straits Times* directed the public's attention to the success of SDU by publishing an article that said "more SDU members are tying the knot," and "more young professionals are getting married through activities organized by the Social Development Unit."

Articles on couples getting married through the SDU were frequent. This effort may have been to direct the public's attention to the successes of SDU and create acceptance of the organization as one that produces beneficial results.

As these articles were frequent, it supported "priority-setting" as it reminded the public of SDU's importance. The beneficial results often were highlighted to inform the public that many people realized its importance and had accepted SDU.

3. Changing Opinions

A survey in 1987 of 3,000 pre-university students found that "45 percent of the boys and 45 percent of the girls said they did not want to get married" (*The Straits Times*, December 20, 1988, p. 2). From this survey, the attitude of the young was that "they don't think marriage is such a great thing ... and don't think SDU has the medicine to cure the problem." Thus, *The Straits Times* tried to change negative notions of marriage and SDU.

The media, being powerful communication tools, are capable of changing opinions. This was usually done by the way articles were linked to positive symbols. Articles that emphasized the goodness of marriage and how much people have gained through joining SDU were highlighted.

On December 30, 1988, the article "Couple To Do For Friends What SDU Did For Them" was published. This feature story was on Richard Tan, a civil servant, and Huang Shuo Mei, an assistant manager in a statutory board. It highlighted their wedding celebration showing their invitation cards which had "slogans and campaign symbols printed on them." The couple said that they have plans to be involved in SDU activities in bringing singles together after this wedding.

To this end, *The Straits Times* carried articles such as "Government Cupid Gains Respect," "The Days of SDU Put-Downs Are Over" and "SDU Losing Stigma Attached to It." These articles said SDU was no longer known as a "matchmaking unit for the single, desperate and unwanted" (*The Sunday Times*, December 18, 1988 p. 8).

To further stress the acceptance and success of SDU, on March 6, 1985, an article appeared that claimed "government's matchmaking scheme a success." In this article, the objectives of SDU were reinforced.

The Straits Times highlighted such articles to let the public know that SDU was accepted and thus the press was able to change the negative opinions attached to SDU to more positive ones.

4. Limiting Options

Most people usually respond to what is reported in the media. As significantly different stories and themes encourage different responses, *The Straits Times* carried stories that provided positive coverage of SDU as well as of the problems of unmarried people in other countries.

On November 11, 1989, an article on "Single Women in Malaysia are also having problems finding suitable partners" was published. On June 7, 1990, *The Straits Time* carried the article titled "Too Few Women In China, So Millions Of Men Still Single." In this article, it was emphasized that "the serious imbalance in the ratio of men to women in China would worsen over the next twenty years." These articles highlighted the plight of single adults in other countries. These articles may well have been intended to help Singaporeans see the need for SDU.

In partial fulfillment of its social responsibility, *The Straits Times* had a forum page where the public could voice their comments. However, it is difficult to know if these articles are public or editorial comments as the articles could be letters from the public or comments from the editors or government officials. Moreover, only a few articles with negative themes about SDU activities were published. Articles such as "Tea Dances Lose Appeal For Some Single Grads" were published on February 15, 1988. This article reported that attractive women were sought after for dances while less attractive and older women

were left in their seats. Nevertheless, other types of activities were highlighted in the article to show how SDU tried to rectify the problem.

Another article titled "Tea Dance Picture Riles Members Of Matchmaking Firm" was published on December 20, 1990. This article highlighted the breach of confidentiality of a private matchmaking firm and reinforced SDU's promise involving confidentiality.

By carrying articles highlighting other countries' singles' plight, *The Straits Times* supported the "limiting options" concept, as these articles encouraged single people to take advantage of what SDU can offer.

On the other hand, by carrying articles highlighting public comments, the press encouraged the public to voice how it felt about SDU and its activities. With this feedback, SDU could improve its programs.

Interviews

One of the sources of information for this case study was interviews that helped gather information about public perception and acceptance of SDU. The interviews were done in Singapore from June to August 1991. To eliminate duplicate responses ten interviews were reported. Three, two males and a female, were members of SDU; three, two females and a male, were non-members; one female newspaper editor; and the other three, two males and a female, were university students.

These people were interviewed by the researcher about what they thought of SDU. However, for the purpose of confidentiality as requested by the interviewees, their names were withheld. A list of the questions asked during the personal interviews is in Appendix A.

Interviewee #1

Interviewee number one is in her thirties, and she is an editor of a local daily newspaper. She is single but has a boyfriend who is not an SDU member. She is not a member of SDU although she is eligible.

In reply to questions on SDU, "I think it is good that the government leaders create the opportunities for people to socialize but it would be better if it is done subtly, such as holding functions for the singles but do not announce that it is for singles to find a spouse. I also think that the establishment of the SDU will create a class among the people, that is, a class distinction between the graduates and non-graduates. I am not an SDU member, though I am eligible, not merely because I am busy but also because I don't want to feel I need help in finding a spouse now."

In reply to questions about *The Straits Times* coverage of SDU, "I think the media coverage has enabled the public to accept SDU better. However, I think the success rate claimed by SDU is not totally true. Many couples who got married have known each other before being an SDU member. Some couples became SDU members to take advantage of the cheap SDU activities and when they finally decided to get married, they were considered an SDU success. I think *The Straits Times* should have coverage of couples who had bad experiences at SDU, too. This would be healthy as people can learn from others' mistakes."

In general, interviewee number one considered the activities of SDU an opportunity for those who are sincere in finding a friend or a spouse.

Interviewee #2

Interviewee number two is 29 years old. He is a graduate of an American university. He is single, a member of SDU and presently has a girlfriend who is not an SDU member.

"I joined SDU when I came back from America. When I was a student, I spent much time alone studying. Back in Singapore as an engineer, I hardly had a chance to meet the opposite sex. I joined SDU along with a few friends. I learned about SDU from the talk-show on television, the announcements on the radio and the articles in the newspapers. I accepted the existence of SDU after reading several articles on SDU. The success rate of SDU quoted in *The Straits Times* has helped my family and friends to accept me being an SDU member.

"Presently, I can say I am an SDU member and some of my friends even asked me how to become a member. It is not a taboo anymore. Moreover, SDU activities are interesting and cheap. Presently, I have a girlfriend who is not an SDU member but I know her because her sister is an SDU member. We met when we went on an outing on our own. Thus, it pays to be an SDU member, sometimes you can find your spouse from there, but sometimes you can find a spouse who is a relative of an SDU member.

"As for the media coverage, it's the typical Singaporean style... always a mouthpiece of our government. However, in this case, it's good for me as the publicity on SDU enabled me to participate in the activities without being laughed at."

Interviewee #3

Interviewee number three is in her thirties. She is a member of SDU. She has a fiance now but he is not an SDU member.

"As I am in the civil service, I received the SDU newsletters and so I'm a member. However, I have not joined their activities. I am too busy and I don't like people to think I am out to look for 'Mr. Right.' Moreover, there are not many Indians at these SDU activities.

"As for the media coverage, I think *The Straits Times* attempts to stabilize pre-conceived notions of SDU very successfully. Many of my colleagues participated in SDU activities. With so much positive coverage, it is alright to say one is a member now. With acceptance, many SDU members are able to be more involved in SDU activities without being laughed at.

"Therefore, for those couples who are sincere in finding a spouse, this is an opportunity. However, I think more forums should be published. I am sure there were bad events such as cheating that have happened. Articles like these can help new members look out for people who are insincere."

Interviewee #4

Interviewee number four is in his late twenties. He is an SDU member. He is single and does not have a girlfriend.

"I joined SDU when I knew I was eligible because it is a cheap way to travel and socialize. I am not attached yet as I'm still enjoying my freedom. However, it is great to meet more persons of the opposite sex at the SDU functions. As for the media coverage, I think it is very positive and it helps. In fact, I met a lot of my ex-school mates at SDU. Positive coverage has enabled

people to put aside their shyness and to come forward to recognize the need for such an opportunity to meet persons of the opposite sex.

"Nevertheless, I think the media should have more coverage — covering both positive and negative aspects of SDU. The present positive coverage by the media is not healthy as the public is not aware of the nasty things that have happened such as females who are not sincere but are there for fun and not for commitment. I remember calling a female SDU member out for a date but she said she was attached already. Thus, I questioned her presence at the SDU activities. Articles on such cases can help couples curb unnecessary rejections."

Interviewee #5

Interviewee number five is twenty-six years old. She is not an SDU member. She is single.

"I decided not to join SDU although some of my friends are members. This is because I felt embarrassed or I don't want to feel that I can't get a boyfriend on my own. Moreover, I don't want to feel the pressure of having to get attached or find a boyfriend after joining SDU. As for the media coverage, I think it's just a mouthpiece of the government. Thus, it's just positive coverage. However, I think it's good, especially for those who have the courage to join SDU as positive media coverage of SDU has helped them to be accepted socially by the public."

Interviewee #6

Interviewee number six is twenty-five years old. He is a new graduate from the National University of Singapore. He is single but not a member of SDU.

"I think I'm still young and I think I'm capable of finding a partner. Moreover, I feel that SDU has created segregation and I am against it. However, I think the establishment of SDU is healthy for those who lack the opportunity to meet the opposite sex, but I know a lot of people have misused it. Some of my friends just took advantage of the subsidized tours but were already attached. As for media coverage, I think it is positive. But, for those sincere people who want the opportunity to socialize, positive coverage has enabled their participation in SDU to be accepted by their relatives, friends and family members."

Interviewee #7

Interviewee number seven is not an SDU member. She is twenty-three years old, and not eligible to be an SDU member but has a boyfriend who is an SDU member.

"I am not an SDU member as I am not a college graduate. I think the establishment of SDU is good but I dislike the segregation. Although I am a non-graduate, I have established myself. I am an assistant manager, and I would like to have a graduate boy-friend. But, SDU activities cater only to the graduates. Anyway, now I have a boy-friend. He is an SDU member. I met him when my sister, who is an SDU member, brought me along with her to a private outing. As for the media coverage, it helped those who are members. Presently, SDU members are not looked upon as desperate and members

need not be reluctant to say publicly that they are attending an SDU function. But, I think more articles should be published on how couples feel about the SDU activities."

Interviewee #8

Interviewee number eight is a final year student at a British University. She is twenty-one and is single.

"I don't want to join SDU although I can qualify to be a member next year. It is because I want to build up my career first. Moreover, I think the government should leave us alone, what SDU is doing is ridiculous. In England, we have a lot of opportunities to socialize. However, international students usually put all their time into studying. But, I don't want to feel desperate and to feel the pressure to be attached now. I think I would rather let nature takes its course. As for the media coverage, the media in Singapore have often been supportive of national campaigns. I think it is good as the public can accept the campaigns better. The media's agenda-setting method not only helps to create awareness but more importantly, it also helps to gain acceptance. Nevertheless, I would like to see more articles on how SDU and non-SDU members feel about its activities after its inception for several years."

Interviewee #9

Interviewee number nine is a third-year student at the National University of Singapore. He is single and not a member of SDU.

"When I graduate I will not join the SDU even though I'm still single. I have received SDU invitation to be a member, but I think finding a partner is an individual's choice and I don't need any help, not from the government — it's an

intrusion. Moreover, I think the taxpayers' money should be spent on other important things. As for the media coverage, it's positive. However, I think the press should be more objective, that is, to have both positive and negative coverage. I understand the need for the print media to support the national campaign, but all positive coverage does not present the truth. Thus, I feel cheated not knowing the whole truth about SDU and its activities."

Interviewee #10

Interviewee number ten is a final year student at an Australian university. He has a girlfriend but neither of them is an SDU member.

"I will join SDU when I return to Singapore. I will persuade my girlfriend to join, too. The activities are cheap. Nobody will know that we are a couple already. As for the media coverage, it is good to promote national campaigns and it helps to create awareness and acceptance."

Of the remaining twenty-nine interviewees, twenty-one of them considered the establishment of SDU a great opportunity for single graduates to find a spouse. Out of these twenty-one interviewees, fifteen of them considered *The Straits Times* coverage very encouraging as it helped them to overcome their shyness and changed their pre-conceived notions. Six of the interviewees preferred more objective coverage rather than just positive coverage.

Eight of the remaining interviewees had no opinions on the existence of SDU. They do not want to be a member though they were eligible. All of them thought that *The Straits Times* had been biased in its coverage, and the government had intervened in their private lives.

Personal Observation

For the purposes of interviewing some SDU members and to observe SDU members at an SDU function, the researcher observed two SDU activities.

As SDU activities are mainly for SDU members, the researcher was allowed to observe on two occasions only and was not allowed to interview the members at the events or to take any photographs.

Both functions observed were social dances. There were seventeen males and eighteen females at both functions. Most of them were in the age groups 20 to 35. Most of the members are non-dancers.

This was their third and fourth dance practice. By now, most of them knew each other by side. Moreover, every week, the dancers changed their dance partners in an attempt to allow the members to get to know each other.

The sessions lasted an hour each and some of the members tried very hard to learn the steps. Some of the members were trying to strike up a conversation. There was one young man who keep combing his hair every fifteen minutes and in between dancing, obviously trying to look good.

When it was time to change partners, it is obvious that some members were trying to make special choices, that is, to dance with the better-looking members.

Some of the members seemed to enjoy themselves dancing while some seemed to seek conversation.

At 8:45 p.m. the sessions were over. The researcher attempted to meet some of the members and to arrange interviews, but most members left as soon as the dance was over. Most members either left alone or with friends of the same sex.

From the researcher's observation, most of the members were still shy about being a member, and still wanted to remain unknown.

Thus, articles on such activities should be covered by *The Straits Times*, though withholding names of the participants might be appropriate. Such articles can inform the public more about the activities and to highlight the shyness problems faced by the members. Such articles can also help members understand one another's fear yet teach them how to cope with it. Articles on how the members feel on such activities can be helpful as they serve as feedback to organizers and other members.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

In response to a 1980 census of Singapore's population, it was reported that "Singapore wasn't reproducing itself at replacement level" (*Parenting*, November, 1987, p. 70) and there was an increasing percentage of college graduate women remaining unmarried.

Based on the census report, the government predicted that "Levels of competence will decline, our economy will falter, our administration will suffer, and society will decline" (*The New York Times*, July 11, 1988, p. 11).

To solve the population problem, the government offered incentives such as tax rebates, childcare subsidies and priorities in school admissions and priority in getting government-subsidized housing so single graduates would have two or more children. To increase the opportunities for college graduates to meet persons of the opposite sex, a government-sponsored organization, the Social Development Unit was established.

This research was undertaken to examine how the government which had been "repeatedly accused of paternalistic behavior and of interfering in the private lives of its citizens" (*Asia Magazine*, November 30, 1986, p. 10) used the full support of the print media in promoting the Social Development Unit and its activities.

To conduct this study, qualitative research methods were used. Data collection included interviews with members, non-members and staff of SDU, as well as observation of SDU activities.

A content analysis of *The Straits Times* articles on SDU was also conducted. Government documents and other newspapers and magazines such as *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* were also analyzed.

To explain the media's role in the campaign, two mass communication theories, nation-building theory and social responsibility theory of the press, were considered.

The first theory, the nation-building theory reminded the press to "practice self-restraint ... for the sake of national unity" (The Mass Media, 1991, p. 306).

In this particular campaign, the press agreed not to publish any news on SDU for the initial year. Along with its open support of SDU, this showed that the press had contributed to its national obligation in supporting national unity and national goals, that is, increasing population.

Under the second theory, the social responsibility theory of the press, "the press must raise conflict to the plane of discussion as well as serving the function of informing, entertaining, and selling" (Communication Theories, 1987, p. 214). However, it must not ignore its "responsibility like that of educators in stating and clarifying the ideals toward which the community should strive" (Leigh, 1947, p. 28).

To fulfill its responsibility to society, the press had many articles strongly supporting the establishment of and the activities of SDU, and also had a forum page where the public could voice its opinion regarding the government's campaign.

The following were the research questions which prompted this study:

a. How did single college graduates who regarded SDU resentfully as an intrusion into their personal lives come to accept SDU? With the media's positive coverage, the single college graduates have come to recognize the need for the establishment of SDU and also come to accept its existence.

b. How have the media been used to positively affect public perceptions of and attitudes toward SDU and its goal of bringing about marriages? By serving as the government's partner in the promotional campaigns, the media fulfilled its responsibilities by carrying positive articles on SDU. The positive coverage on SDU has positively affected public perception of and attitudes toward SDU.

Conclusions

With respect to *The Straits Times* coverage of SDU, the results showed that *The Straits Times* carried mostly positive articles. The findings also indicated that news articles in *The Straits Times* exhibited a degree of bias. The techniques used by *The Straits Times* can be explained by Paletz's linking theory :

1. *The Straits Times* stabilized positive pre-conceived notions and changed negative notions of SDU by mixing opinions with facts. It used subjective analyses of statements by various prominent figures in Singapore to correct stereotyped conceptions of government activities and promotional campaigns.
2. *The Straits Times* applied the priority-setting method to opinion manipulation by printing interviews of couples who got married after joining SDU, thus to represent the opinions of the majority of SDU members.

3. *The Straits Times* applied the changing opinions method by linking the past negative attitudes with the present acceptance and respect toward SDU.
4. *The Straits Times* applied the limiting options method by comparing what SDU can offer with other single problems in other countries as well as highlighting negative occurrences involving private matchmaking firms.

The present role of the media as a nation-building tool in support of national campaigns is thus effective in creating awareness and acceptance. However, as suggested by most interviewees, the media should not ignore its social responsibility in carrying articles that present the truth such as those that provide an insight into the activities of SDU.

Moreover, the press could lose its credibility if the public feels that it is a mere mouthpiece of the government by carrying mostly positive articles about the establishment and activities of SDU.

Nevertheless, in the case of SDU, the nation-building theory and social responsibility theory are really the same for the press. Both the theories bind the press in "responsibility like that of educators in stating and clarifying the ideals toward which the community should strive" (Leigh, 1947, p. 28). "Nation-building" and "social responsibility" as roles of the press coincide in developing nations when the responsibility of the press is to further national goals.

Recommendations for Future Research

A more comprehensive, quantitative media analysis of the government's promotional campaign is recommended for further research.

Further research can be conducted to look into electronic media as well as print media coverage of Singapore's national campaigns. Also, researchers

could compare English-language and non-English newspapers coverage of Singapore's promotional campaigns.

It would be interesting to examine other media such as posters, booklets and speakers regarding the establishment and activities of Singapore's national campaigns. Furthermore, researchers could examine the media's and the government's roles in other promotional campaigns, and evaluate the success of those campaigns.

Quantitative analysis of bias in government news articles dealing with government programs also is recommended for future research.

Concluding Comment

In conclusion, it shows *The Straits Times* has combined its nation-building and social responsibility theories of the press to further national development goals. Therefore, with almost total support from the press, Singapore's promotional campaigns are often implemented successfully.

Thus, in the name of "nation-building" the government used the media to dictate the agenda for the Singaporean people. The accurate presentation of reality and avoidance of disinformation seemed to be overshadowed by the government's motivation to develop the nation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baig, Edward C. "Making Money Helping Singles Mingle." *Fortune*. February 18, 1985. pp. 98-103.
- Brand, David. "Make Me a Perfect Match." *Time*. v. 132. November 28, 1988, pp. 14-16.
- Chew, Ernest C.T. and Lee, Edwin. *A History of Singapore*. Singapore: Oxford University Press. 1991.
- Cozby, Paul C.; Wordon, Patricia E. and Kee, Daniel W. *Research Methods in Human Development*. Mt. View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co. 1989.
- "Communication Research Needs in Asia." Paper prepared for the seminar by AMIC and Sociology Department. National University of Singapore. Singapore. September 18, 1990. p. 4.
- Davie, Sandra. "Family and Career Go Hand in Hand, Singles to be Told." *The Straits Times*. December 12, 1988. p. 22.
- Davie, Sandra. "Couple To Do for Friends What SDU DID for Them." *The Straits Times*. December 30, 1988. p. 12.
- "Government Cupid Gains Respect." *Asia Week*. April 22, 1988. pp. 40-41.
- Hatchten, William A. "Media Development Without Press Freedom: Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore." *Journalism Quarterly*. v. 66. November 4, 1989. pp. 822-827.
- Hakim, Catherine. *Research Design*, Worcester, London: Allen and Union Publishing Ltd. 1987.
- Hartman, Susan, "Arranged Marriages Live On." *The New York Times*. August 10, 1988. pp. 10-11.
- Hudson, Richard L. "Valentine Videos Seek Western Beaus For Russian Brides." *The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 1990. pp. A13-A15.
- "In India Marriage Made by Computer." *The Christian Science Monitor*. v. 82. February 8, 1990. pp. 8-9.

- Kong, Sook Chin. "Singles Get Classy Magazine to Keep Them in Touch." *The Straits Times*. January 4, 1987, p. 4.
- Kulkarni, U.G. "Some are more equal." *Far Eastern Economics Review*. June 21, 1984. pp. 31-32.
- Kuo, Eddie, C.Y. and Chen, Peter, S.S. *Communication Policy and Planning in Singapore*. Thetford Norfolk: Kegan Paul International Publishing Co. 1983.
- Lee, Mary. "All the news that is fit to read in Singapore." *Far Eastern Economics Review*. August 11, 1988. p. 38.
- Leigh, Robert, D. *A Free and Responsible Press*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1947.
- Maass, Peter. "South Korea's Corporate Cupid." *The Washington Post*. v. 112. November 27, 1989. pp. 2-7.
- "Mail-order bride trade banned in Philippines." *The Straits Times*. June 15, 1990. p. 10.
- "Matchmaking, part of Asian tradition." *The Science Monitor*. March 8, 1985. p. 15.
- Marshall, Catherine. *Designing Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishing Ltd. 1989.
- Motfat, Susan. "Real Estate's Role as Tokyo Cupid." *Fortune*. v. 122. December 17, 1990. p. 12.
- Mydans, Seth. "How to Marry Up, and Avoid the Frogs and Nerds." *The New York Times*. v. 137. July 11, 1988. p. 11.
- Paletz, David L. and Entman, Robert M. *Media, Power, Politics*. London: The Free Press. 1981.
- Pauly, John J. "A Better Guide to Doing Qualitative Research in Mass Communication." *Journalism Monographs*. No. 125. February, 1991. p. 12.
- Perera, Audrey. "1,000 Callers Make It a Hot Line to Cupid." *The Straits Times*. October 13, 1985. p. 3.
- Peters, Ann. "Love Me, Love My Diploma." *Asia Magazine*. November 30, 1986. pp. 9-13.
- "PM: Watch this trend." *The Straits Times*. August 22, 1983. p. 26.

- Quah, Jon S.t. *In Search of Singapore National Values*. Singapore: Times Academic Press. 1990.
- Rajaram, Chitra. "Young Face Marriage-Phobia." *The Straits Times*. December 20, 1988. p. 2.
- Selvan, T.S. *Singapore: The Ultimate Island*. Singapore: Freeway Books. 1990.
- Severin, Werner J. and Tarkard, James W. Jr. *Communication Theories*. New York: Longman Inc. 1988.
- Southerland, Daniel. "Modern Matchmakers in China: Advertisements." *The Washington Post*. v. 111. February 1, 1988. p. 10.
- "Servicing Singapore's Singles." *Goodwood Journal*. 2nd Quarter. 1987. pp. 12-17.
- Tan, Teng Lang. "The Singapore Press: Freedom, Responsibility and Credibility." *Times Academic Press*. November 3, 1990.
- "The Great Marriage Debate Spawns School Priority System and Tax Units." *The Straits Times*. June 3, 1984, pp. 3-4.
- "The Laws of the People's Republic of China." The Legislative Affairs Commission of National People's Congress of People's Republic of China. Beijing, China: Foreign Language Press. 1987. p. 185.
- "Too Few Women in China, So Millions of Men Still Single." *The Straits Times*. June 7, 1990. p. 6.
- Vivian, Frank. "Vanishing Families." *Parenting*, November 1987. pp. 69-73.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Information

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Qualification
5. SDU Member?
6. Eligible to be SDU member
7. Do you have a boy/girl friend now?
8. If you have one, is he/she an SDU member?

Questions on SDU

1. What do you think of SDU?
2. If you are a member, when did you join?
3. If you are a member, what activities do you participate in?
4. How did you learn about SDU?

Questions on Media Coverage

1. Do you read *The Strait Times*?
2. If yes, what do you think of *The Strait Times* coverage of SDU?

VITA

Annette Johannes Aw S.C.

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE ROLE OF *THE STRAITS TIMES* IN SUPPORT OF MARRIAGE
PLANNING IN SINGAPORE

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Personal Data: Daughter of Aw Boon Wah and Lee Chin Lin.

Education: Received the Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism from
Oklahoma State University in May, 1991; completed requirements
for Master of Science degree at Oklahoma State University in
December, 1991.