HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE CURRENT REPRESENTATIONS OF FAMILY WITHIN SOCIETY



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A PORTFOLIO BY

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#1 CHILDLESS FAMILY



This photo illustrated the issue of childless families. The spouse in the picture is a family photo from a US family. They choose to pet a dog instead of raising a child. They treat the dog as their child and take it as their cohort family member. It was taken by a reporter for reporting the news on childless families. The spouses in the picture was the interviewees of the news.

Change in family form

According to the data collected from the United Nations, there is a significant decline in the global fertility rate, the global fertility rate (live birth per woman) has dropped by 0.7 (live birth per woman) from 1990 to 2019. The region with the highest fertility rate, sub-Saharan Africa, has also recorded a drop of 1.7 (live birth per woman). At the same time, it was found that the use of contraceptives increased worldwide, both regarding the diversity of contraception methods and the rate of using them. It showed the correlation between contraception and fertility rate. After reviewing the research and studies on contemporary families, it could be concluded that the fall in fertility is a human cause, or it can be put in marital adults are avoiding the next generation on purpose. The reason led to this change could be explained by various social reasons. It could be explained by individualism and social structures (Fiori et al., 2017).

Individualism

Also, with the rise of individualism, people focus more on self-identity and life decisions were made based on personal preferences and individual drive. With more equalized gender equality, more women entered the labor market after the second world war and the family model of “male-breadwinner, female-homemaker” become more uncommon. It is uneasy to manage both work and childcare at the same time since both tasks are time and energy-consuming. There is an increase in women choosing to focus on a career path instead of being homecare as they do not want to spend extra time and attention on childbearing. In addition, individualism might also lead to late marriage since people want to live at their own pace and planned marriage more cautiously, they wanted to ‘settle down’ later so they get married late.

Late marriage might lead to health problems during maternity. According to the data provided by the world health organization in 2017, there were 295 000 women suffered from maternal mortality in the world, which was unexpectedly high. Higher age even intensifies the risk for a woman to give birth. Therefore, there might be a rise in childless families due to the rise of late marriage.

Economic factor

Over time, family size has been decreasing and childless families are the new trend in contemporary society. William J. Goode (1963) explained the reduction of sizes in families might be a result of the change in economic structure. Most people run on family business before industrialization. People work for what their families are working for and pass the business to the next generation. Offspring was considered a potential labour force for families. Industrialization and urbanization reduced the drive for married couples to reproduce. Due to industrialization and urbanization, job diversity increased in the labour market, as well as social mobility. Family businesses or family-run companies will be less dominant. There will be less influence on extended families.

Other than the change in economic structure, financial status also determines the drive for married couples to reproduce. Raising a child is uneasy financially. Some families are not lucky enough to raise a child because childcare is unaffordable for them, given the fact that the cost of childcaring is increasing in which childcaring cost occupied 60 percent of living cost for full-time working parents, which increased by 20 percent when compared to 2012 (Hirsch and Stone, 2022). When unpaid family care is not available for some families, they have to bear the cost of education, transportation, and other living expenses to maintain a basic living standard. When married couples wanted to maintain a higher living standard, they might want to give up on reproduction.

Deinstitutionalization of family?
Childlessness is a new trend of family structure. Yet, there are critiques on such family structures as family plays a crucial role in socialization from a Functionalism perspective. Families act as a basis for society as they connect people with close relationships to society. The progress of reproduction in families allows society to work sustainably. When people remain childless, the linkage between family and society will break because the role of socialization played in families will disappear. For instance, the heritage of culture and tradition, and posterity will disappear due to childlessness. The functions of families in society will become muddled and deinstitutionalize families. There are media reports on childless issues in society. Some of them like the news attached above would bring out the insights of childless families and let people understand their decision and concerns. The media allow society to understand the change in contemporary society and try to speak for different types of families, and allow us to see things from a different perspective.

#2 SAME SEX FAMILY



Another significant change for contemporary families is the increase of same-sex couple families. This is captured from an American drama called Sex Education. Jackson (the one holding the chopsticks with long pink sleeves) was one of the main characters, who was raised in a same-sex family as his biological mum re-married to a female.

Destigmatization of child adoption

Child adoption has been a stigmatized label for families since it was not a 'traditional family' (Farr & Vázquez, 2020). The ideology of family has been structured to a picture of a heterosexual couple with a son and a daughter. Therefore, child adoption was judged due to a lack of kinship. The legitimacy and recognition of families which are unmatched by the traditional family would be questioned as well. Other than stigmatization for the parents, adopted children might also be labelled (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). However, there are more studies and research done on evaluating the issue of child adoption. It is found that child adoption not only saves a life but can also help couples who wanted to have children but are incapable due to physical and biological constraints like age, sex and fertility. Nowadays, child adoption is getting more acceptable, including social acceptance, especially the understanding from extended family and siblings, and the community.

Same-sex parents VS heterosexual parents

Since same-sex families are not aligned with the ideology of traditional family structure. Also, same-sex marriage has been opposed by certain religious groups and conservative places like Northern Ireland and China. They strongly believe that same-sex families deinstitutionalize and unstable families and marriages in society. Therefore, childcare and parenting might be more stressful for same-sex parents as they are stigmatized to be different and incapable to raise a child the same as heterosexual parents do. Yet, it was found that the children's outcome from same-sex families and different-sex families has no significant difference, in terms of physical health, mental health, behaviour, and learning behaviour, while same-sex families faced more stress in parenting when compared to heterosexual parents (Bos et al., 2016). Children's outcomes are highly affected by parenting. Same-sex parenting might face challenges. Negative outcomes in same-sex families could be explained by the social stigma of same-sex parents. For example, according to the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study in 1986, there were 41% of adolescent adoptees had experienced stigmatization by their parent's sexual orientation. Also, lesbian parents were found to be stressed in adjusting their parenting method and evaluating their own parental quality in a homophobic society (Bos et al., 2016).

#3 CHANGE IN FAMILY GENDER ROLE



The above graphic was promotional material for a popular Korean variety show called 'The return of Superman'. It was a reality show filming the life of family groups and focusing on childcaring and portraying family relationships in Korean families. One of the highlights of the show was the father-children interaction. As the graphic showed, the family pictures only included fathers inside as the context of the show was filming the way how fathers taking care of their children.

Gender role

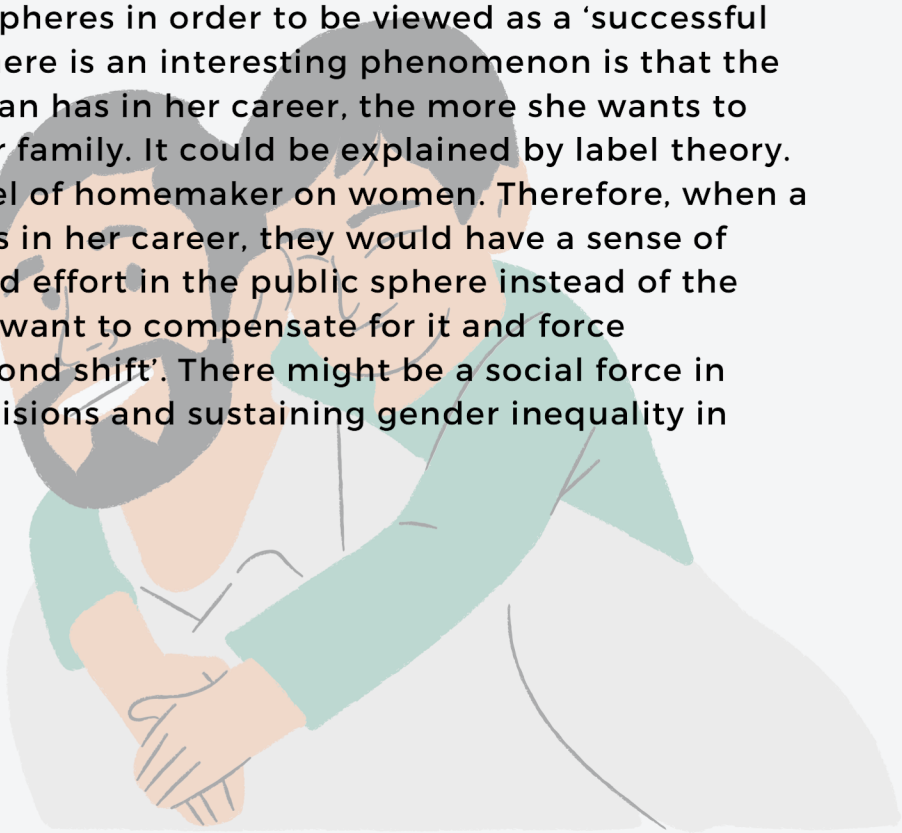
'Male breadwinner, female homemaker' has been a universal model that is embedded in most people's minds. From a historical perspective, the gender role in the family was obvious and the division of labour was clearly stated by the model. with the rise of industrialization, there are more women entering the labour market and more men take part in the domestic work in the family. Egalitarian families have been more common in contemporary society. Although with the rise of egalitarian families, gender inequality in the family sphere remains unequal. On one hand, women are forced to engage in the 'second shift' in dual-earner families, which means women are still assumed to fully responded to take care of the family while they got a job. On the other hand, men are assumed to be housework-blind and their quality in childcaring and homemaking is being questioned. There is prejudice against males that they are believed to be unable to be good homemakers as a woman. The gender stereotype on the incompetence of men in completing domestic tasks including housework and caregiving.

Media perspective in family gender role

The return of supermen was trying to clear the stereotype of the gender role of the family in traditional concepts. They invited the families to expose their family life and make it a reality show. The crew would ask the mothers to 'take a break' from childcaring and shoot the way how the dads interact with their kids. The show is humorous and interesting when the fathers were difficult and unable to deal with the family tasks, especially when they panic and make careless mistakes. Not only recorded the growth of the children, but also the improvement of the fathers in caregiving and taking care of the family. The idea of the show raises public awareness of males in participating domestic tasks because parenting, childcaring, and housework are usually perceived as women's tasks.

What are women facing now?

When the show was related back to reality, the main character (the fathers) in the show was what contemporary females are facing. Females are expected to take part in both spheres in order to be viewed as a 'successful mom' or pass the 'standard'. There is an interesting phenomenon is that the better the achievement a woman has in her career, the more she wants to contribute to taking care of her family. It could be explained by label theory. Since there was the strong label of homemaker on women. Therefore, when a woman got more achievements in her career, they would have a sense of guilt for sacrificing her time and effort in the public sphere instead of the private sphere. Therefore, they want to compensate for it and force themselves to carry on the 'second shift'. There might be a social force in making women make such decisions and sustaining gender inequality in families.



Cross broader marriage
The photo also illustrates the phenomenon of cross-broader marriage. Cross broader marriage refers to a form of exogamy in which a pair of married couples come from different nationalities. In the graphic, it was obvious that there are some biracial babies. The show does not only film local families but also some international families.

What did the statistics tell us?
Indeed, there was a trend in increasing cross broader marriage and it is a significant phenomenon in developed countries. If we put a lens on Asian countries, especially Korea, there is a huge increase in cross-broader marriage in the 2000s. It is recorded that the percentage of international marriage in marriages in Southern Korea increased from less than 5% to 13.6% from 2001 to 2005, and dropped steadily afterwards (Kim, 2017). The rate of international marriages drop after 2005, when the government restricted immigration restrictions towards incomers. From a sociological perspective, Korean males marrying international wives might be due to mismatching in the local community. Therefore, the increase in international marriages in the early 2000s could be due to lenient migration policies and saturated demand for foreign partners.

Multiculturalism
International marriage in Korea promotes multiculturalism. From the show, we found that cross-broader marriage is a beautiful thing. The babies in international families got cute mixed faces with both the physical traits of eastern and western features. Also, they can receive two different cultures from their parents and learn different languages. The socialization and education progress allows children to increase their awareness of being world citizens and develop their identity. The show portrayed a nice balance between cultural diversity in international marriage, especially the scene of the fathers bringing their children to visit their grandparents. They have close and sweet family times even though there might be a language barrier sometimes. Therefore, international marriage is an ideal marriage from the lens of social media.

The hidden side of cross-broader marriage that the media do not tell us.
Although more international marriages enhanced the cultural diversity in Southern Korea and more multicultural, it brought inequality and poverty issues. Kim (2017) stated that some of the international wives are from less developed countries like Vietnam and Cambodia, and their education level of them are low. Illiteracy and lacking skills made the immigrants hard to find a job and it would be harder for them to get a job without the work training programme provided by the government. Therefore, they are unable to enter the job market which might lead to poverty, as well as marginalization.
We could see that the phenomenon of cross-broader marriage is depend on the ease of the migration policy of the place. Even though mass media is portraying the beauty and perfection of cross-broader marriage, laws and regulations play a crucial role in controlling marriage.

CONCLUSION

No matter how a family structure in contemporary society is different from the ‘ideal family’ form, the media portray the beauty of family in different forms, and all of them look happy and sweet in the photo. The format for media to convey messages and information is diverse. News, video, TV programmes, etc. while everyone can access it quickly and easily. When the media mention the diversity of families, it also creates a channel for the public to discuss it instead of restricting the family culture and making it taboo. When there is public discourse, even though there might be bipolar views, there is a channel for people to express their perspectives and link people with similar minds into groups and support one another. As long as the media open up the social phenomenon to the public, they can influence the public to understand and accept, or even follow. Media could affect the formation of families because they have the power to shape the world, how the public perceives the world was how the media shaped it. Therefore, not only does media influence families in contemporary society, but also how families change affect what media portray to the public.

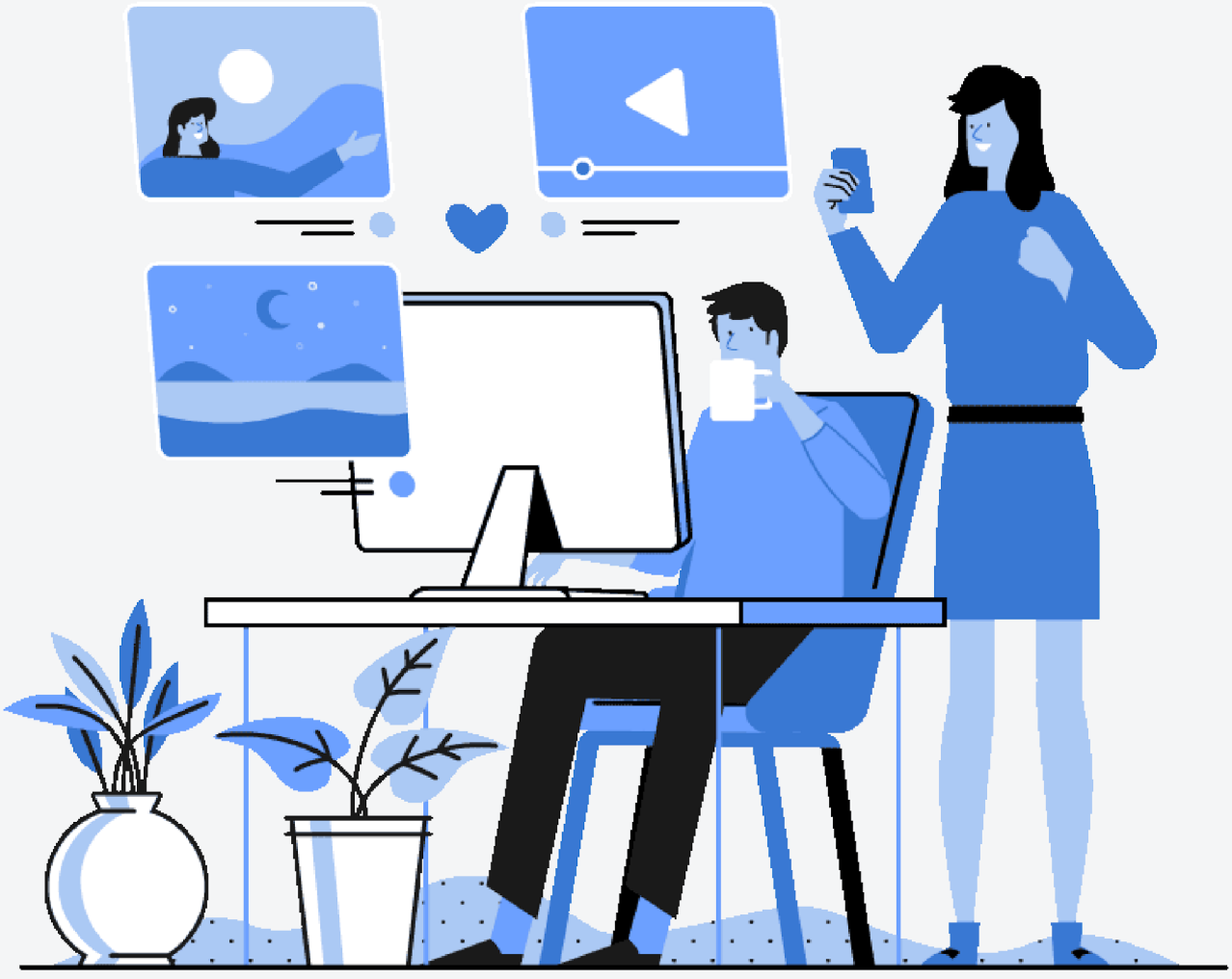


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