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The purpose of this research was to explore expatriate motherhood in Singapore. Forty-seven women completed a questionnaire, seven of whom participated in follow up focus group sessions. The participants provided information about their experiences as expatriate mothers in Singapore.

Focus group findings show that there are supports and challenges unique to expatriate motherhood in Singapore. Supports include: the institutionalization of domestic help, the mild climate and safe city; and expatriate support networks. Challenges are: being a trailing spouse, husband's frequent travel, and trips back home. Findings further show expatriate mothers in Singapore, like many women in the United States, subscribe to an ideology of intensive mothering.

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS AMONG EXPATRIATE
MOTHERS IN SINGAPORE

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

What makes full-time motherhood among expatriate women different from full-time motherhood at home? This is the fundamental question I would like to answer as I explore stay-at-home motherhood among English speaking expatriates in Singapore.

One of the first decisions many new mothers make is about employment after their children's birth. Women might quit their jobs to be full-time mothers or might continue working for pay--either because they need to or simply want to. Most expectant mothers consider their future employment status even before childbirth. It's a conscious choice, made by both mothers and fathers-to-be after considering the pros and cons of mother's employment.

Americans are influenced in their decisions by two schools of thought concerning childrearing. The first is the traditional school of thought that mothers are the best caregivers for children. Traditionalists contend that caregivers other than mothers cannot provide children with the best development opportunities--that the primary caregiver for children should be their mother. Another school of thought is the feminist belief that neither children nor women benefit from twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week supervision by mother. Feminists contend that women who are personally fulfilled will be better mothers than women whose identities are based entirely on their status as mother.

Both the traditional and feminist ideologies are so strongly entrenched that most Americans have very adamant beliefs about what women as mothers “should” do. Some of us think that a woman’s greater obligation is to her children (and husband), and some of us think that a woman’s greater obligation is to herself.

Family research has focused on relationships between children and their mothers especially. Most of this literature addresses how child rearing and children’s outcomes are dependent on mother’s employment status; at-home motherhood away from home has not been studied. In general, comparisons have been made between mothers who are traditional (staying at home full-time) and mothers who are non-traditional (working for pay) in their orientation to motherhood. Other comparisons have been made between mothers who are employed because of necessity and mothers who are unemployed because of affluence. Women whose families need their income have little choice whether to have a paying job; only more affluent, usually married, women may choose.

Expatriate families in Singapore are, for the most part, sufficiently affluent not to need two incomes; women who are spouses of expatriated employees may choose between full-time parenting and employment. However, their ability to choose employment is often hampered by job unavailability. The current labor market in Singapore does not offer as wide a range of employment options for spouses of expatriated employees as in their home countries. Employers are often restricted to hiring only Singaporeans for positions that these expatriate women could fill were they living in their home country. Expatriate packages and typically high salaries allow expatriate spouses in Singapore to parent full time, if they like. Because expatriate

mothers often opt not to be employed, they provide us with an opportunity to study “at home” mothering through the lens of expatriation. Mothers who choose “at home” motherhood in their own country make more of a conscious decision to mother full-time, while expatriate “at home” mothers may just take the easier path of unemployment due to lack of employment opportunities for expatriate spouses in Singapore.

Social support organizations for expatriates in Singapore have been established for nearly every prominently represented nationality, such as the American Association and the British Club. I began with these organizations to establish contacts for recruiting expatriate mothers for my survey and focus groups. The research I conducted describes and explores motherhood among expatriates in Singapore.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Before conducting my own research on expatriate stay-at-home motherhood, I reviewed four related literatures. The motherhood literature I studied was never specific to expatriates; however, it included research on the effects of maternal employment on both mothers and their children, studying women who are economically able to choose between employment and unemployment.

My literature review focuses on four areas. I first examine theories about the impacts of maternal employment on children's development. From the wealth of attention given to this topic, it is clear that development of children and what shapes that development dominated theoretical and methodological interest. Next, I review several theories on social supports for mothering; this literature focuses on traditional mothers who do not work for pay. Then, I examine factors that lead to successful experiences for expatriated employees and their families--research prompted by the high costs of expatriating employees. Finally, I review global perspectives on women's work, because expatriate mothers are unpaid for their work yet they employ domestic helpers to assist them with their work, thus defying both traditional and modern stereotypes of motherhood. Reviewing the research on motherhood, expatriation, and women's work from a global perspective is important for understanding how seemingly simple changes

in mothers' environment (e.g., leaving their home country to live in another country as an expatriate) can lead to complex changes in their mothering experiences.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories attempt to explain a link between mothering and child development. Given the difficulty parents face balancing their roles as protectors and providers, it is not surprising that theories associated with maternal employment and child-rearing focus on role identity and role conflict.

Roles are duties, or expectations, attached to a status. Role theorists assume that behaviors derive from status. For example, a person who has the status of 'parent' will behave differently (i.e., perform different roles) than someone who has a 'non-parent' status. Role theorists would explain that a woman who spends each morning making herself breakfast, bathing, dressing and driving herself to work, does so because she has the status of employee. Alternately, they would explain that a woman who spends each morning making breakfast for her children, bathing them, dressing them and driving them to school does so because she has the status of mother.

Role theory is especially prevalent in the research on maternal outlook and childrearing methods. Yarrow, Scott de Leeuw and Heinig (1962) used role theory to test the impact of maternal employment on child rearing styles, hypothesizing that success and challenge in a woman's other roles (i.e., career) will influence her parenting. Lovell-Troy (1983) used role theory to compare the behaviors of employed wives (e.g., earning an income, working for pay) and full-time housewives (e.g., childcare, cooking, cleaning), hypothesizing that the roles of wives, whether employed or unemployed, are

anomic. Wright (1978) used role theory to explain level of satisfaction based on employment status, finding support for his hypothesis that women who worked for pay were happier than women who did not. Thompson and Ensminger (1989) used role theory to examine the stressors for single mothers (who must assume both mothering and fathering roles), synthesizing role theory and social supports available to mothers, to explore how stress levels for single mothers are contingent on the supports available as they play both 'mom' and 'dad'.

More specifically, role conflict occurs whenever roles across statuses are incompatible. Individuals become aware of the conflict when multiple roles are not performed effectively. For example, working late to finish a project (if one has the status of employee) conflicts with putting children to bed (if one also has the status of parent). Parents face many challenges as they balance family and work obligations; sometimes work demands encroach on family obligations (i.e., work family conflict), whereas sometimes family demands encroach on work obligations (i.e., family work conflict). Women who simultaneously occupy the two statuses of employee and parent feel pulled in two different directions especially because parenting expectations are traditionally higher for women than for men.

Role conflict theory addresses the conflicts faced by women when their roles as parent and as employee interfere with each other. Peterson (1961) used role conflict theory to explain how the challenging dual roles of employed mothers impact mother-daughter relationships, hypothesizing that women who are both mother and employee experience a negative impact on one of the two statuses. Higgins and Duxbury (1992)

also used role conflict theory to understand conflicts that might occur for men in dual-income marriages v. single-income marriages (where wives are not employed).

Attachment theory posits that early social attachments made by infants influence not only their development but also all future relationships, valorizing the bond between infant and primary caregiver. The theory assumes that infants can best attach themselves to one person, someone with whom they have the most contact and experience. For this reason, attachment theorists contend that primary caregivers of infants, especially during the 'formative' first year of life, are extremely important. Attachment theory implies that mothers are primarily responsible for their children's development and future relationships because during their first few months infants are often attached (literally) to their mothers as they receive nourishment.

Relationships between mothers and children are an important focus of the traditionalist argument that mothers should sacrifice personal needs to be full-time caregivers for their children, so attachment theory is often used to study the impacts of maternal employment on children. Attachment guides the research of Belsky and Eggebeen (1991) who assessed the impact of early and full-time maternal employment on young children's social psychological development, hypothesizing that the greatest difference would be seen when comparing children whose mothers were employed against children whose mothers were not.

Socialization theory explains that individuals are taught about values and norms by social agents, such as family members, educators, media, and peers. Children look to others to learn culture and behavior appropriateness and expectations, including ideas

about gender. The expectations for appropriate behavior are developed by both direct and indirect feedback. For example, adults might directly communicate to boys that they “should not” play with dolls because dolls are toys “meant for girls”, or adults may indirectly send this message by not making dolls available to boys.

Socialization theory has also been used to study what mother’s employment teaches children and its impacts on children’s development and attitudes later in life. Powell and Steelman (1982) used socialization theory to explain the effects of maternal employment on sons’ and daughters’ attitudes toward women’s employment; they hypothesized that grown children’s acceptance of women’s work force participation depends on mother’s employment status during early childhood in particular, influencing sons to be more likely to endorse employment for women when they reach adulthood.

Ideologies are another way of explaining women’s behavior toward their children. Women behave according to their preferred ideology about motherhood. Hays (1996) examines popular ‘how to’ manuals on mothering, what women learn from them and how their instruction shapes women as mothers. She argues that dominant ideologies about mothering structure how they explain and thus rationalize their choices. Women who believe that it is better for children when their mothers parent full-time may hope not to work after they have a baby. Women who believe it is better for children when they are exposed to many caring adults may plan to work after having a baby. Women are able to justify their employment status by adopting one ideology or another. If employed, they rationalize the decision by placing higher value on their financial contribution to their

children's lives. If unemployed, they rationalize the decision by placing higher value on their contribution of time to their children's lives.

Functionalism, attributed generally to Durkheim (2001) and more particularly to Parsons (2001), sees society as structured by parts, each of which performs a specific function and makes a unique contribution to the balance of society as a whole. Powell (1982) used the functionalist approach to explain that the family 'system' is impacted by another 'system' – employment, assuming that families are dysfunctional when no one person serves as full-time homemaker. Powell argues that women's employment affects home operations; homes will not be functional if women do not make them. Theories used by these researchers focus on how women's situations impact their happiness, their interactions with children, their children's development and the welfare of their families.

Research Results

Maternal Employment and Mothering

Research results revealed not only the impact of maternal employment and maternal satisfaction on child rearing and motherhood, but also social supports available to mothers and how they impact child-rearing choices as well as satisfaction with motherhood. Results of research addressing expatriation will be reviewed separately. Some research showed that maternal employment did not negatively impact children's development. For example, although research by Belsky (1991) showed that children of employed mothers scored lower on exams, later analysis with a larger sample of National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experience of Youth data led Belsky and Eggebeen (1991) to conclude that early maternal employment does not dramatically affect the

future earning potential of children and that maternal employment does not negatively impact children's social psychological development.

Other researchers reached similar conclusions regarding the weak correlation between maternal employment and child development. Powell's (1961) research confirms that maternal employment does not negatively impact children's development, failing to support the traditionalist argument that employment among middle class mothers harms their children's emotional development. He could not conclude that children of employed middle class mothers were maladjusted or neglected. Furthermore, Powell found no evidence linking maternal employment status and attitudes on child rearing.

These studies did not take into account any changes in employment status or their impacts on children. In addition to confirming minimal negative effects of early maternal employment on children, Parcel and Menaghan (1994) also found that children of mothers who at first stay home, but then return to highly involved jobs might actually be more negatively impacted than if their mothers had never stayed home at all. In addition, these researchers found some positive effects on children's verbal development when mothers stayed at home, but verbal development was delayed for children of mothers who decided to stay home the first few years and then went to work full-time.

Some research suggests that maternal employment does not impact child development primarily; rather, maternal employment influences mostly attitudes of children later in life. For example, Powell and Steelman (1982) explored the impact of maternal employment status on boys' and girls' attitudes toward sex-roles as adults.

They found that support for women's employment as adults is influenced by a mother's employment more for boys than girls.

Researchers study not only the relationship between maternal employment and children's development, but also how maternal employment impacts other aspects of the parent-child relationship. For example, Peterson (1961) researched how maternal employment impacts daughters' perceptions of mothers' control and interest in their daughters. He determined that mothers' employment status, regardless of age of daughter during employment length had no impact on daughters' views toward mother's control and interest; daughters with employed mothers did not perceive that their mothers had less control over or less interest in them than daughters whose mothers were not employed.

Other research shows that maternal employment might impact childrearing when motivation to work is considered. Farel and Dobelstein (1982) found that women who work for reasons of self-fulfillment (that is by personal choice and not because the family needs their income) have better adjusted children than children of mothers who feel socially obligated to stay at home as a primary caregiver. Farel and Dobelstein (1982) advocate for better government childcare initiatives to allow women who want to work to be able to do so.

Yet another consideration in the body of research on maternal employment is maternal education. Yarrow (1962) found that while maternal employment did not relate to child rearing practices, mother's education made a difference. However, their research again found that mothers' reasons for working at home or at a job impacted their

mothering, regardless of maternal education. Mothers who stayed at home because they felt obligated to had greater difficulty in certain areas of childrearing, such as disciplining and discouraging inappropriate behavior by their children.

Maternal employment has also been studied in conjunction with maternal perceptions of children. Alvarez (1985) researched the relationship between maternal employment and mothers' perceptions of their three-year-old children. Once again, Alvarez found that the reasons behind choice of work impact satisfaction. He found that women who returned to work because they wanted to, and not because they needed to financially, were more likely to provide favorable descriptions of their children. Also, women who felt that they were both mothering and working adequately tended to provide more favorable descriptions of their children. Alvarez further found that maternal employment because of need had a negative impact on children, especially daughters. This negative impact was also seen if mothers experienced role conflict.

Because mothers' reasons for working at home or in the work force seem to be so important, it is worth investigating why women work at home or for pay. Mason and Kuhlthau (1989) found that a mother's living situation influences whether or not she views parental care as the ideal childcare option. For example, they studied whether or not mothers living with a male spouse or partner were more likely to view parental care as ideal. They found instead that subscription to traditional gender ideology and attendance at religious services influence a mother's choice to work.

In summary, factors other than maternal employment--such as maternal satisfaction, adequate childcare options, and mothers' motivations for employment, have

as much or even a greater impact as decision to work. The primary influence on children's development is whether the mother is working at what she wants to do. Women who are employed primarily for reasons of personal choice and not for household income needs are happier, and their children are emotionally and developmentally healthier than mothers who work at home to fulfill societal obligations. Mother's satisfaction may have a greater influence on her children's development than her work status.

Confusion about ideal housewifery leads to anomie. Lovell-Troy (1983) applied the concept of anomie¹ as it relates to women who work for pay and women who work at home, suggesting that women suffer from anomie in their inability to identify clear-cut goals and examples of the ideal housewife. Lovell-Troy's research showed that housewifery can be anomic; degree of anomie among women is influenced by size of community, as well as number and ages of their school aged children. He further found that, although it is commonly acknowledged that housewifery is vague and undefined and causes anomie, women are still encouraged to become housewives.

In addition to the role conflicts women confront as mothers and workers, more women (than men) also face the added challenge of balancing marriage with work and parenthood. Higgins and Duxbury (1992) specifically examined conflicts faced by husbands when wives work full-time, compared to husbands whose wives do not work full-time. Their research found that men in dual-career couples are faced with greater work/family conflict than husbands who are sole income providers. These husbands had

¹ Anomie is a sense of not belonging, normlessness or a lack of moral guidance.

more instances when they had to choose between work and family responsibilities. Their findings suggest that husbands fare better if their wives are not employed, experiencing less role conflict when they do not have to share housekeeping responsibilities but have wives who are willing to keep house full-time

Other research comparing dual vs. single income couples focuses on degrees of marital power and equitable resource exchange. Traditionally feminine women often assume subservient positions in a marriage, but Sexton and Perlman's (1989) research examining resource exchange found that women in single-income families, although they perceived themselves as more feminine than women in dual-income families, did not differ from women in dual income couples when marital power was examined. Wives from both single-income and dual-income couples were equally likely to perceive joint decision-making power; unemployed wives did not perceive themselves as having less marital power, or being weaker than employed wives, and neither did their husbands. The only difference found by Sexton and Perlman was that spouses in dual-income couples made more attempts to influence one another during conflict exercises than spouses in single income couples.

The non-traditionalist argument that mothers are better caregivers if they are personally fulfilled has been tested by some research. Wright (1978) tested this argument with data collected from six national studies, finding benefits to both full-time employment and full-time housewifery. He found that many factors other than employment influence women's satisfaction; his data analysis did not support claims that employed women were more personally fulfilled.

Intensive Mothering

Motherhood is demanding and fraught with responsibility. One dominant ideology of motherhood promotes intensive mothers as the only good caregivers. Americans are socialized by media, friends and family to believe that women must be not only mothers, but also super interactive mothers. One consequence of this ideology is that employed women often feel very guilty if they do not sacrifice personal ambitions to be with their children; they get societal messages that they are bad mothers if they do not stay at home. Research has been conducted to explain how these demands and responsibilities impact women.

Hays (1996) focused her research on a cultural contradiction imposed on mothers. She studied mothers' employment and compared women's choices. Motherhood has become a competition for resources. Women are expected to spend more and more time, energy and money on mothering, which leaves them little time or energy to devote to anything else. Mothers are put into a position where they must either try to bridge these two outcomes--intensive mothering and capital gain--or they must forsake one of these two goals so that they can concentrate on only one.

The ideology of intensive mothering was also researched by Hattery (2001). Hattery identifies four classifications of mothers to explain their choices about employment². Conforming women subscribe to traditional ideologies of motherhood where fathers are sole income providers and mothers stay at home with children, despite any economic strain this might cause the family; they are not concerned with standard of

² Hattery (2001) modifies a category system created by Robert Merton (1975) to create these categories.

living or upward mobility. Nonconforming women also are mostly traditional, ultimately concerned with reaching and maintaining middle class standards for their children; however, unlike conforming women, they recognize themselves as potential income earners and value upward mobility. Pragmatist women vacillate between conformist and nonconformist thinking: because they want to provide both intensive mothering and a middle class lifestyle for their children, they constantly weigh employment and childcare options to find the best compromise. Finally, innovative women, like the pragmatists, desire economic stability as well as their positive influence on their children. Innovators search for alternative ways to raise their children while also advancing their financial situation. Like Hays (1996), Hattery observes that although women are expected to balance parenthood and employment, little is done to equalize family workloads between wives and husbands. Hattery also found that, although economic need and childcare options influence her decision, a woman's subscription to traditional beliefs about motherhood is an important predictor of her choosing not to work.

Social Networks

Regardless of employment, social networks are important to the psychological and emotional health of mothers. Thompson and Ensminger (1989) researched social supports for single mothers and how those support groups alleviated stressors. They found that having someone to confide in for emotional support and regular church attendance lowered the stresses of single motherhood

Some research explains how social networks relate to fulfilling a need for mothers. Unger and Powell (1980) found that social support networks offer three main

things to families: access to places for seeking information and references, emotional support, and instrumental support in the form of material goods and services. These researchers found that in times of stress, families much less often sought help from formal organizations designed to help; rather, they sought help from informal social support networks.

Further research finds that it is important for women to choose their own social networks. Bell and Ribbens (1994) conducted research about the social isolation of housewives. They conducted interviews with housewives and asked some of them to keep journals documenting their social interactions. Their research concluded that stay-at-home mothers, while not members of formal social networks (i.e., a group of co-workers), form social groups informally (e.g., children's play groups). Furthermore, they found that these informal groups are both constraining and empowering to stay-at-home mothers. They also suggest that it would be worthwhile to compare the outcomes of women who have fewer choices of social groups with those of women in a greater variety of social groups.

The importance of social supports for mothers was studied in more detail to determine possible links between lack of social support and harm to children. This potentially has implications for expatriate mothers who must establish new social support systems each time they relocate. Moncher (1995) studied single women's isolation and its impact on children in relation to child abuse risk. Moncher studied single mothers to determine what factors contributed to their being more prone to commit child abuse. Moncher's research found that only certain aspects of social isolation increased the risk

to abuse one's children; fewer interactions outside the home in general and interactions with non-supportive people outside the home contributed to an increased risk. He also found that having a loved one to talk to was the most important factor in relation to social isolation and child abuse; individuals who did not have a local friend for support were more likely to commit abuse. Like Bell and Ribbens (1994), Moncher found that social contacts and networks impact mothers in complex ways. He also found that it was important that social contacts for mothers were positive. Their research provides evidence that social support groups chosen by mothers are very important to their happiness and satisfaction.

One additional study looked specifically at the relationship between social support and psychological well-being. Turner (1981) found some correlation between available social support and psychological well-being, although the degree to which the two were linked varied by social class. Turner did not specifically study mothers or parents, and his data cannot be generalized to apply to a larger population. His findings, however, are still relevant to my research as they suggest that lack of social support, possibly experienced by expatriates living away from home, can lead to impaired social psychological well being.

Research on Expatriates

Because much of the research on expatriation is not very sociological, I review it separately. Much of this literature focuses on expatriate adjustment. Many of the studies I reviewed analyzed data collected by the same survey—a questionnaire distributed to families in eight different countries in Europe and Asia (Black 1991).

My review focuses on expatriate adjustment and expatriation among individuals because of spouse's career. Because satisfaction of both spouses is a major indicator of expatriate success³, companies that employ expatriates have funded research about expatriate spouse's happiness with expatriation. Expatriation is an expensive investment for any corporation, so companies are economically motivated to understand what contributes to successful expatriation.

Some of the research suggests that positive expatriate experiences are associated with pre-move initiatives. Black and Gregersen's (1991) research showed the importance of consulting spouses of employees being expatriated. They found that companies which provide pre-departure training for the spouse and seek an opinion from the spouse in discussions of the assignment have higher rates of expatriate success.

Other researchers discovered that both pre and post move variables contribute to expatriate success. Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) confirmed the importance of spousal consultation and also identified additional factors that contribute to a successful expatriate experience--language fluency, international experience, level within the company hierarchy. These researchers found that spouses who became fluent in their host country language had a smoother adjustment. Previous international experience also helped contribute to a successful experience, possibly because expatriates had more realistic expectations for living in a foreign country.

Several factors contribute to expatriate satisfaction. De Cieri, Dowling and Taylor's (1991) and Fisher and Shaw's (1994) studies reinforce previous findings about

³ Expatriate success is defined as fulfilling the assignment and not returning home early.

how spouse's adjustment can influence an expatriate assignment. They found that expatriate spouses are most satisfied when they are allowed to contribute to the expatriate decision and when they acclimate well to their new environment. Expatriate spouses who do not adjust well to their host country do not have a satisfying experience and are more likely to ask their spouse to leave the assignment early. According to De Cireri, Dowling and Taylor (1991), company support (e.g., sponsoring orientation sessions) in the expatriation process was the most important predictor of psychological adjustment for expatriate spouses.

In addition to research on considerations and steps taken prior to moving, other researchers found importance in what happens after expatriation, addressing post-move conditions. For example, Copeland and Norell (2002) studied social support for spouses on international assignments and the impact of social support on their adjustment. They analyzed social support not only in the new country of residence, but also as received from the social network left behind. When email and telephone services are readily available worldwide, it is not difficult for expatriates to keep in close contact with friends and family at home.

Other research findings found a similar recipe for a successful expatriate experience. Copeland and Norell (2002) found that wives who had an easier time adjusting to their new country of residence were more likely to receive support from local support providers⁴ (as opposed to long-distance support providers), have their social

⁴ Their social networks were geographically close, as opposed to networks maintained in their home country which relied only on electronic communication or home visits as a way to keep in touch.

support needs met, and not feel that they had lost friendship networks in their home country. Finally, family cohesiveness--strong ties and support from the family members who accompanied them in the move--promotes successful expatriation.

Expatriation research has relevance to stay-at-home motherhood in Singapore, because it examines the choices available to expatriate mothers, what challenges they experience, and how their motherhood experiences are sometimes positive and sometimes negative. Because most expatriate mothers suspend their employment when they expatriate to Singapore, connection to employment and maternal satisfaction are important to study. Additionally, the research reviewed shows the importance of social supports and how supports enhance the emotional and psychological health of women, which is also important in the context of expatriation--a situation that removes women and their families from their usual social supports.

Literature on Women's Work in Global Perspective

My literature review has addressed thus far domestic work as an unpaid occupation. However, some women get paid for domestic work, which has implications for expatriate mothers and their status as women.

Many women temporarily immigrate to more developed countries (or from rural to urban areas) for employment as domestic helpers. According to Parrenas (2002), media in the Philippines have sensationalized this movement by accusing mothers of abandoning their children. However, many see value in mothers sending their income to their home country. Many of these women's children are cared for by their father or another family member and are not "abandoned", as media suggest. Parrenas emphasizes

that traditional gender roles are being perpetuated by popular media, even as more affluent women delegate some “women’s work” (i.e., housework) to other women to be able to continue providing income for their family.

Domestic workers not only help with housework but also help elevate the status of their women employers. Anderson (2002) writes that middle class women employ domestic help to assume responsibility for the menial work commonly allocated to women (i.e., cooking and cleaning), so that they may be engaged almost exclusively in more exalted work--moral and spiritual support (i.e., advising children, showing affection). Middle class families, not otherwise able to afford full-time domestic help, can as expatriates employ immigrants to perform this work less expensively.

Some Asian cities provide an especially restricted and harsh lifestyle for domestic helpers. Constable (2002) interviewed a number of Filipina workers in Hong Kong to gather information about domestic work there. These women often work very long days with little chance for time away. Domestic workers are often given strict rules and detailed schedules to follow. In many cases, they are paid less than their contract stipulates. They are even sometimes patronized with instruction for dressing, bathing and hair styling.

Domestic workers are employed not only to clean and cook, but also to care for elderly parents. According to Pei-Chia Lan (2002), it has become increasingly common for Taiwanese women to hire migrant domestic workers to care for their aging mothers-in-law. Taiwanese tradition dictates that the eldest son assumes care for his mother; however, because the Taiwanese see caring for the elderly as women’s work,

responsibilities for elder care in fact fall to wives. By hiring caregivers, Taiwanese women manipulate their own status, yet they perpetuate the devaluation of women's work.

Summary Statement: Challenges and Supports

Research findings on maternal employment, reasons for employment, the presence of social support networks and conditions for successful expatriate assignments differ when examined through the lens of expatriate motherhood in Singapore because changing the social environment and conditions in which mothers live may change the experience of mothering. Studying maternal employment, child development, and global women's work in the context of expatriation allows me to contribute to our understanding of motherhood among expatriates.

All women are challenged by motherhood. Role conflict theory suggests that the difficulty of performing equally well as both mother and professional would be the primary challenge to motherhood. Attachment theory suggests that devoting most of one's personal time to children so that they would not form unhealthy attachments with others would be the greatest challenge to motherhood. Socialization theory suggests that positively influencing children would be the primary challenge to motherhood. Structural functional theory suggests that functioning as mother in the family system without functioning in any other system would be the primary challenge to motherhood. Ideologically, women are challenged to meet unrealistic expectations for mothering intensively, or risk the stigma of being a "bad" mother for continuing employment. However, actual research findings show that only personal choice as it relates to

employment really matters in the lives of American mothers. This poses a challenge as women are given messages that whatever choice they make is a bad choice.

Additionally, non-healthy social groups or a lack of appropriate support networks also pose challenges.

Luckily, many women are also socially supported during motherhood. Role conflict theory suggests that spousal sharing of household and parenting responsibilities would primarily support mothers. Attachment theory suggests that mothers would be primarily supported by an ability to stay at home with their children until age three. Socialization theory suggests that surrounding children with positive influences would primarily support mothers. Structural functional theory suggests that mothers would be supported primarily by non-mother functions being accomplished by other means, so that they might concentrate solely on their function as mother. Ideologically, women would be supported by encouragement from the larger society (and not just from family and friends) regarding their choices.

Empirical results show that social networks and freedom to choose how they occupy themselves are important supports during motherhood. In addition to exercising personal choice (e.g., full time employment, at home parenting or a compromise between the two), involvement in decisions impacting the entire family (e.g., the decision to move to another country) also bolsters women's experiences as mothers.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Review of Research Methodology

Overwhelmingly, data about at home mothering and the impact of maternal employment on child rearing have been collected by the methods of interviewing and surveying. While some researchers have collected their own data, other researchers have conducted secondary analysis -- analyzing data collected previously by another research team. Much research has used longitudinal data to measure the impact of maternal employment over time.

Much research on this topic was done by secondary analysis of previously collected data, large research initiatives such as the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY). The GSS is a survey of English speaking, non-institutionalized American adults which has been conducted annually or biannually since 1972. Powell and Steelman (1982) analyzed responses from four GSS measures⁵ to examine the impact of maternal employment on children's view of women in the workplace. Lovell-Troy (1983) also analyzed a specific set of responses from the

⁵ The measures analyzed were agreement or disagreement with: 1. A working woman can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. 2. It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than have one herself. 3. A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works. 4. It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and the family.

GSS to examine anomie among employed wives and housewives⁶. The NLSY is a survey among youth aged 14 to 21, conducted annually since 1979. McCartney (1991) analyzed NLSY data to study maternal employment, refuting earlier findings of Belsky and Eggebeen (1991). Parcel and Menaghan (1994) also analyzed NLSY data to explore the effects of early maternal employment on children.

Secondary analyses were not just conducted with GSS and NLSY data. Wright's (1978) comparative analysis also took into account six national surveys to help draw conclusions about maternal employment. Thompson and Ensminger (1989) also use secondary analysis on data collected by others first in 1967 and then again in 1977 from a population of poor, black mothers or women acting as mothers (i.e., a grandmother raising her grandchildren) in Chicago.

Because most of this research examines the impact of mothers' behaviors on their children's development, both mothers and their children are often surveyed. Peterson (1961), for example, conducted research to measure the impact of maternal employment on mother-daughter relationships by first surveying the mothers of 618 teenage girls, then soliciting responses to a longer questionnaire from their daughters.

Some researchers collected their own data instead. Mocher (1995) used a variety of methods to gauge the impact of social isolation on child-abuse risk. He used a Social

⁶ The items for married women included on the Srole Anomia were: 1. Next to health, money is the most important thing in life. 2. You sometimes can't help wondering whether anything is worthwhile anymore. 3. To make money, there are no right and wrong ways anymore, only easy ways and hard ways. 4. Nowadays, a person has to live pretty much for today and let tomorrow take care of itself. 5. In spite of what some people say, the lot of the average man is getting worse, not better. 6. It's hardly fair to bring a child into the world with the way things look for the future. 7. Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man. 8. These days a person doesn't really know who he can count on. 9. Most people don't really care what happens to the next fellow.

Network scale to evaluate the extent of the mother's social network, a parenting help scale to measure availability of support for the mother, as well as a scale of potential child abuse risk. In addition, this extensive research initiative also included asking mothers to indicate all means by which they solved problems and their methods for discipline (measured with vignettes). Mocher's methodology is much more sophisticated compared to the other research cited in this literature review because he was able to construct his own measures for greater validity. Similarly, Powell (1961) constructed five different measures to more validly determine the relation of maternal employment to family life, including evaluations conducted in each home.

Interviewing has been another popular method for better understanding motherhood. In addition to surveying with a 77-question questionnaire, Hays (1996) interviewed 38 respondents to gather data for her study of mothering ideologies. Hattery (2001) used a survey to select her interview sample.

After reviewing these commonly used research methods, I conclude that data about stay at home motherhood collected from focus groups can enhance the body of research on motherhood and the impact of mother's occupational choices on children, because they may offer a fresh perspective on at home motherhood through the lens of expatriation. Secondary survey data and analysis, however useful for description, are limited in their inability to contact respondents for further data collection or clarification. Richer data are evoked from interviews because the researcher could ask clarification questions. Focus group questions are open-ended, allowing for a wider variety of responses (for example, GSS respondents were asked about current employment status,

but the question was close-ended, and respondents were not probed for what influenced their choice about employment status). Also, focus group discussion is a less artificial environment for data collection than interviewing or surveying; focus groups prompt conversations, eliciting more in-depth information.

Most of the researchers used data that they themselves did not collect, which prohibits in-depth exploration of the specific topics of motherhood, maternal employment and expatriation. Focus groups allow for elaboration on the experiences of motherhood by giving expatriate mothers an opportunity to freely discuss and share their experiences with one another.

For my research, I collected data to describe and explore expatriate motherhood in Singapore. I asked mothers about their experiences as expatriates, because I have an academic motive to broaden the body of research about womanhood, expatriate motherhood and the use of social supports by expatriate families.

Statement on Methodology

In April 2003, I learned that I would be relocating to Singapore on expatriate assignment for my job with the Center for Creative Leadership. I became eager to conduct my thesis research in Singapore. My interests in graduate school have focused on cross-cultural studies of family and gender. My thesis topic emerged from combining these interests.

In June 2003, I made a preliminary trip to Singapore for two weeks to begin working and to find housing. During this time I attended a half-day orientation session designed to acclimate newly arrived expatriates to Singapore. I used a realtor to look for

housing but was unsuccessful at that time. Apartments in Singapore are plentiful, but prices vary greatly depending on location. I wanted to live close to the office but could not find a suitable apartment in my price range. Because I did not want to make such an important decision in haste, I decided that I would wait to lease an apartment after I had relocated.

When I returned to the United States, I had to decide what belongings to move to Singapore and what belongings to place in storage. Because of Singapore's very warm climate year round, there was no need for me to take winter clothes, so I left a trunk of winter clothes for return trips home and stored the rest. I had to find a management company to care for the condominium I own in Greensboro, and I had to find a friend to help with any financial matters which I cannot manage from that distance.

Like others who expatriate, I had long lists of things to accomplish before relocating. Expatriation calls for major adjustments in many areas of life--emotional, financial, and professional. All of these transitions occur in addition to the physical transitions of packing, leaving a familiar place and making a new home.

Fortunately, Singapore is an easy expatriation experience. Most Singaporeans speak English⁷, which is a great support for Westerners new to the country. New residents must be able to ask for directions, navigate public transportation, and seek help in an emergency; all of these tasks are easier if the person relocating speaks the language of their new country. The large population of expatriates in Singapore⁸ also makes adjustment easier. Expatriates usually live in the same neighborhoods so it is also easy to

⁷ English is one of three official languages in Singapore.

⁸ Twenty five percent (one million out of four million) Singapore residents are expatriates.

form friendships informally. Because of the large expatriate population, organizations are in place to systematically help expatriates with the process of orientation to life in Singapore.

It is through some of these organizations that I began to meet people who would later become part of my own social network. I joined Primetime (a professional women's association) and also relied on work colleagues to introduce me to other people in Singapore. I am fortunate that my company contracts with local professionals, so I have been able to become friendly with native Singaporeans as well as expatriates.

In addition to meeting people in Singapore I had to complete my transition by getting myself established in the new place. I lived in a service apartment while waiting for my belongings to be shipped from the United States. I opened a local bank account, investigated the best route from work to home, and explored convenient shopping options. I talked to friends about potential travel destinations and discount travel services. I also participated in another orientation session with a local company to learn more about the culture and traditions of Singapore. Because a large portion of the Singapore population is Chinese, I enrolled for Mandarin lessons.

Through both social and professional interactions while in Singapore I have been introduced to many expatriate mothers. I know expatriate mothers who are employed full-time, who are mothers full-time, and who work both at home and at a job part time. I have only met one other woman who relocated to Singapore for her own career; most expatriate women I know have moved because of their husband's career. Although I do

not have children myself, I have made connections and formed friendships with several expatriate mothers in Singapore.

I gathered preliminary information about expatriate motherhood through many women, including work colleagues, women I met at social gatherings, and friends I met through Primetime. One friend was especially helpful in the distribution of my questionnaire. She is active in several organizations and connected me with people at those organizations. In some instances I actively sought connections with expatriate mothers by explaining that I was conducting thesis research about expatriate motherhood in Singapore, and at other times issues about motherhood were naturally introduced in conversation with other expatriates. In some cases I requested contact information so that I could pursue an interview, but in most cases these women became part of my social network so I maintained a relationship with them anyway.

Sampling Strategy

My data collection consisted of: 1) distribution of a questionnaire to expatriate mothers as a way to solicit descriptive information (Appendix A), and 2) facilitating focus group sessions to explore expatriate motherhood (Appendix B). Focus group participants were recruited based on their affirmative response to the last question on the questionnaire: “Would you be willing to participate in a focus group session to discuss expatriate households in Singapore? If so, please provide your name and contact information.”

Although my primary objective was to qualitatively explore expatriate motherhood, I needed to have a better understanding of my population before facilitating

focus group sessions. Therefore, the survey was used to describe demographically the population of expatriate mothers and provide a base for recruiting focus group participants.

My sample was drawn from several local organizations which cater to expatriate women in Singapore. I received permission to solicit respondents from each organization's membership rosters. These organizations were: Primetime (a professional women's association whose membership includes unemployed women working as mothers as well as mothers employed full-time), the American Women's Society and the British Women's Association.

Primetime posted an announcement and link to the questionnaire on the organization's website. In addition, Primetime sent an email to members asking them to complete the questionnaire. Based on the large number of respondents who listed themselves as members of Primetime (among other organizational memberships in Singapore), the bulk of my sample derives from this organization. Because Primetime's membership is diverse in terms of background, age, and country, I am confident that there was minimal bias in my sample, despite the large number of respondents from this group.

A link to the questionnaire was also sent to members of the British Women's Association and expatriate women working for a relocation organization called Orientations. Other groups to which the questionnaire was distributed include mothers of children in a local expatriate schools, United World College, members active with the American Women's Society of Singapore and the British Women's Association of

Singapore. Some respondents then forwarded the email request to other expatriate mothers they knew in Singapore. This was done without my prompting or knowledge; I did not know until after the links had been forwarded. Apparently, respondents felt that they had other expatriate connections who might not have received the questionnaire otherwise. Their initiative helped to increase my sample size.

Survey

My questionnaire measured characteristics of expatriate mothers in Singapore. Data collected through the use of the questionnaire included: nationality, history of expatriation, number of children, childcare, and willingness to participate in further research.

I used the online survey tool, Survey Monkey, to distribute questionnaires electronically. Survey Monkey allowed me to create a user friendly website link which could be copied and pasted into an email and then sent to potential respondents. Respondents clicked on the web link, which directed them to the online questionnaire. Once they completed and submitted the questionnaires, responses were stored in my Survey Monkey account. Overall, electronic dissemination was useful for distributing the questionnaire to a potentially large, widespread sample.⁹ Because Survey Monkey has a feature which prevents anyone with the same IP address from completing the

⁹ The American Women's Society has a policy against sending non-program related emails to members. As a result, they would not distribute the questionnaire electronically. Because I knew that I was collecting responses from the close-knit expatriate network in addition to expatriates from organization memberships, I decided that distributing paper questionnaires could bias my sample because I would not know if respondents completed the questionnaire more than once. Thus, I did not distribute paper versions of the questionnaire; because most of my potential respondents were able to complete online surveys, I relied solely on electronic questionnaire distribution.

questionnaire twice, I could be certain that each electronic set of responses is unique and no respondents completed the questionnaire more than once¹⁰.

I conducted my survey in compliance with ethical norms. The American Sociological Association's directives are that participating in the research should cause no harm to subjects and that the benefits of the research should outweigh any foreseeable risks. Respondents took no emotional, physical or social risk in completing the questionnaire. Nor did they come to any harm in answering the questions or submitting the questionnaire. The respondent's informed consent to participate was implied by their voluntary completion of the questionnaire. Completion of the questionnaire was not obligatory; respondents could have easily ignored the request to complete the questionnaire without impunity. Finally, I disclosed my identity as a researcher to my respondents. I allowed anonymity (for respondents who wished to provide no contact information), and I guaranteed confidentiality (for respondents who provided information to be contacted for focus group discussion) in the questionnaire's introductory paragraph. Not linking responses to identifying characteristics in my research report will maintain the confidentiality. I applied for and received IRB approval for my project from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro before I began collecting data (Appendix C). Forty six women responded to the questionnaire, and seven of these women participated in a focus group.

¹⁰ Two women contacted me when they had difficulty accessing the questionnaire, but the problems they encountered were with their personal computer system, not with Survey Monkey.

Focus Groups

Exploratory research is best accomplished using qualitative data collection methods, such as interviews, focus groups, or participant observation. I am interested in learning all aspects of expatriate motherhood in Singapore, and collecting qualitative, impressionistic data from a group dynamic allows for emergence in themes I might not have discovered if I were to rely on one-on-one interviewing.

Focus groups helped provide richer, more evocative data. Comments from focus group respondents provoked subsequent comments by other focus group respondents. Respondents spoke out when they agreed or disagreed with the experiences of other focus group members, asked questions of each other, and reported their experiences in depth. Most participants gave thoughtful responses in their comparisons of motherhood as an expatriate and in their own country, although most focus group participants had spent more time as expatriates than not.

The focus groups were demographically homogenous, comprised of English speaking expatriate mothers to minimize inhibition. Focus groups provided participants with a socially homogenous environment where they could feel free to speak openly and liberally about their lives as expatriate mothers in Singapore.

Focus groups, however, have some drawbacks. It is possible that participants constructed their answers to conform to their perceptions of expectations from the other participants. People in focus group sessions often feel the need to adapt themselves to the group, and focus group participants may have let their need to belong with other group members influence their own remarks. Participants might have been more candid and

less normative had I interviewed them one-on-one. Because I wanted to hear the ideas generated by groups of expatriated women, these problems did not outweigh the potential for valuable data.

Following the collection and analysis of the survey data, I identified individuals interested in focus group discussion and contacted them via email or phone to request their participation. Originally, I had planned to conduct six focus group sessions; however, I only received enough interest (from the questionnaire item asking if women were willing to participate in a focus group session) to form two groups. The focus groups were small--three women in the first session, four in the second session. Nine women initially agreed to participate, but two of them ultimately cancelled.

Domestic help is a common topic of discussion among expatriate women, and an important part of expatriate life.¹¹ Focus groups were divided based on amount of domestic help, because this variable distinguishes the experiences of expatriate mothers in Singapore and because having this commonality would make participants more comfortable with one another. One focus group of expatriate mothers had full-time live in domestic helpers; the other focus group did not. Grouping by these categories allowed for the least inhibited and most comfortable communication among focus group participants.

The two sessions were conducted in a conference room of an office that is centrally located in Singapore. The office building itself is located in a well-known area, easily accessible by car, by subway, or on foot. The room where the sessions were

¹¹ Based on prior conversations with expatriate mothers in Singapore, I anticipated that domestic helpers would emerge as a topic of conversation during the focus groups.

conducted was comfortable and private. We were never interrupted. Participants were free to speak openly, without distractions that would inhibit a freely flowing conversation.

The first focus group was comprised of three women--from England, Ireland, and France. The women had a total of eleven children, ranging from three months to eighteen years old¹². All of the women in this first group had full-time live in domestic help at the time of the questionnaire distribution. At the time of our focus group meeting, two still had full-time live in domestic help, and the third had a new helper starting the following week, having had a two-week gap between helpers.

The second focus group was comprised of four women—from Germany, Malaysia and Wales¹³. Two participants were from Germany. The women in the second group had a combination of seven children, ranging in age from three to eighteen years old. These women did not have full-time live in domestic helpers, although one of them had previously.

Neither session required much facilitation. I was able to initiate discussion by asking only one question. Participants conversed without much prompting. Transitions between questions were smooth. Discussion naturally segued from one set of answers to exploring another question.

¹² The three month old attended the focus group session with his mother. Although his presence did not impede the discussion, the baby's noises sometimes made transcription difficult.

¹³ It was fortunate that the two cancellations were for this second focus group session, which was a larger group from the start. Even without the two cancellations, there was adequate participation.

The sessions were audio taped. Audio taping allowed me not only to take notes, but also to transcribe the entire sessions afterwards. Thus, all data were recorded on paper in addition to the cassette tape. Before beginning each session, I asked if anyone objected to my taping and reassured them that the tapes would only be used for my thesis research. To capture as much data from these sessions as possible, I summarized my observations immediately after each session was completed. I then transcribed each session tape and read the transcriptions to detect patterns and themes from the discussions. Closely examining the transcriptions exposed a number of commonalities among expatriate mothers.

I conducted my focus group research using the same high level of ethical integrity, following American Sociological Association's directives. The participant's informed consent was implied by their volunteering to participate in the focus groups. Persons were under no obligation to participate, or even to provide contact information. I clearly disclosed myself as a researcher during my phone calls inviting women to participate in focus group sessions: I informed possible participants that I was conducting research for my Master's thesis. I again introduced myself before starting each focus group session. During my phone calls and before beginning each focus group session, I assured confidentiality to focus group participants verbally, telling them that their identities and responses would not be linked publicly. I also conveyed to participants the importance of respecting this same confidentiality of fellow focus group participants. I asked them to respect one another's privacy so that everyone would feel free to speak candidly about their experience.

I did not reveal my specific research question to participants in an effort to avoid biasing their thinking and responses. I communicated to respondents more generally that I was conducting research on expatriate mothers.

CHAPTER IV

EXPATRIATE MOTHERS IN SINGAPORE

Questionnaire Findings: Description of Expatriate Mothers in Singapore

More survey respondents were from the United States (30.4%) than from any other country. The countries with the next highest representation were France and Germany (at 8.7%). Overall, respondents represented nineteen countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Panama, the Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The average respondent had resided in Singapore for nearly six (5.9) years, ranging from eleven months to over twenty years.

Most respondents (80.4%) had expatriate experiences prior to moving to Singapore. Only about one out of every five (19.6%) respondents had no previous expatriate experience. The average respondent had spent 57.5 months, or nearly five (4.79) years at her previous expatriate assignment. The most frequent expatriate assignment prior to Singapore was Hong Kong (21.6%).

Over half (52.2%) of the respondents reported only two expatriate experiences in addition to their current assignment in Singapore. About one in seven (15.2%) respondents listed four expatriate experiences in total.

Prior expatriate assignments were in the following countries: Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, England, Cambodia, China, Dubai, France, French Indonesia, Germany, Holland, India, Indonesia, Italy, the Ivory Coast, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, and the United States. The average expatriate experience lasted for four years.

Seven of ten (70.0%) respondents participated in organizations (both formally and informally) in their home country. Thirty-four such organizations were identified by respondents. They tended to be churches and church related organizations, school organizations (e.g., parent teacher associations), charities, and professional organizations.

However, in Singapore nearly all (91.3%) respondents are involved with organizations. These organizations include a professional women's organization, friends of the Asian Civilization Museum, school organizations, and associations of the respondent's home country (e.g., the British Association, the American Association, the St. Patrick's Society, and the French Association).

Half (50.0%) of the respondents had more than one child. Approximately one in five (19.6%) respondents had more than two children. Only four out of forty-seven respondents had more than three children. The average child was 7.3 years old, and children's ages ranged from three months to 23 years.

Half of respondents (50.0%) reported that at least one of their children was born in Singapore. Others were born in the following countries: China, France, French Indonesia, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the

Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam.

More than three out of every four (77.5%) respondents reported that they have full-time, live in domestic help. Respondents with no live in nanny or maid were either unemployed, had a part-time babysitter, or had children old enough not to need childcare. Only one respondent listed preschool as her childcare option.

In their home country, nearly three out of every four respondents (75%) had been employed full-time, while 17.5% were employed part-time. A smaller proportion, 7.5% were not employed while raising children. Only about one out of three (30.0%) said that they raised children and worked at the same time. The average respondent who was employed while raising children did so for 3.8 years; these respondents worked between 10 and 50+ hours a week.

In Singapore, however, approximately one out of three (38.5 %) respondents worked full-time, one of five (23.0%) worked part-time, and one out of three (38.5%) were not employed. Less than half of the respondents (38.0%) who worked full-time in their home country work full-time in Singapore. Six times as many respondents (25.0%) are unemployed in Singapore as had been unemployed in their home country. Women who are mothers were less likely to work in Singapore, especially compared to where they used to live.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Variables

	Mean or Proportion	Range
Length of residence in Singapore (years)	5.9	11 mos.-20+ yrs.
Previously an expatriate	.80	-
Respondents with three or more previous expatriate experiences	.15	
Length of residence in previous expatriate assignments (years)	4.0	0-25
Whether involved in groups or organizations in home country	.70	-
Whether involved in groups or organizations in Singapore	.913	-
Age of children	7.3	0-23
Number of children	1.8	1-6
Number of children born in Singapore	.7	
Whether employed full-time in home country	.75	
Number of hours worked if employed part-time (only)	16.6	15-32
Whether employed full-time in Singapore (currently)	.38	-
Number of hours worked if employed part-time in Singapore	19.9	15-35
Whether concurrently employed and raising children in home country	.30	-
Length of time spent both being employed and raising children in home country (years)	3.8	0-15
Hours worked for pay during that time	33.7	10-50+
Whether employing full-time, live in domestic help (N = 47)	.78	-

Expatriate Mothers in Singapore: Challenges and Supports

Expatriate mothers in Singapore revealed their experiences and opinions about life in Singapore during the focus groups. Overall, they stated that living in Singapore was a very positive experience, despite the problems of expatriate life. Their discussions identified challenges and supports to being expatriates in Singapore.

Supports to expatriate motherhood in Singapore include a favorable climate and culture that promotes cleanliness and inhibits crime, the infrastructure for expatriate friendship networks, and availability of domestic help. Challenges include transition, travel, and turnover; home visits; and the stereotype of the trailing spouse.

Challenge: Transition, Turnover and Travel

Moving is an inevitable and regular part of expatriate life as employees are assigned and reassigned to successive posts. The frequent travel necessary for the employee's work creates a challenge for his or her family. A challenge these expatriate spouses face is the challenge of helping themselves and their families adjust to a new culture and country. Children especially have a difficult adjustment to living in a new country.

The women agreed that move timing is very important. Expatriate mothers insisted that it is important to plan their relocation at a time that is best for their children. Women who participated in the focus groups shared ways that they have eased transitions for their children and ultimately for themselves.

For example, most planned for their children to arrive in a new place before the school year started, because, they reasoned, children form friendships and routines at the

beginning of the school year. Mothers perceived that it is difficult for children to integrate themselves into already established groups and routines when arriving in the middle of a school year. One mother related the following experience about moving to Singapore:

I found it a completely different experience moving with a ten and a half year old. Previous to that, I've moved, my son being four and then he was seven. I realized that I've moved at the wrong time. I did not move at the start of the school year. I struggled with that and then unfortunately, he was getting bullied, so he was having an issue. So, there was that all going on before I was even thinking about settling down, and it was a good six months (which it takes anyway) because everybody always says, "give yourself six months". So, that, I think, kind of clouded my whole initial time here.

She felt that it would have been less of a struggle for the family if her son had been able to start the school year with other children who were also new to Singapore. She believed that her own adjustment to Singapore could not occur until her son had adjusted. This mother not only took on the responsibility of helping her child to adjust, she also took on the emotional pain of her son's difficult adjustment. Her assertion that there is a "wrong time" (and thus a right time) to move suggests that she sees her maternal responsibility in moral terms, that there may be wrong and right ways to be a mother.

Mothers in the focus groups felt that the children's integration and happiness was critical to the entire family's adjustment. Having learned a best time to relocate was an important lesson to these women. Another woman also commented on moving during the school year. She said:

We moved here when our son was thirteen and a half and our daughter was eleven. For her it was a little easier, because when we arrived in April, similar to you, we came here and we had a two-week holiday. That made it difficult for them because I didn't really know what was expected in school and things like that. So, they tried to push the whole thing aside and pretend it was not happening. Then school started and school was different. They both suffered a lot of homesickness ... I personally found that hard because my husband and I were very happy to be in Singapore and I found it to be such an exciting place, but when your children are not happy and they are just paining to go back home, it makes it very hard for you to personally really take roots here...

Like the first mother, this mother ties her own happiness to her children's happiness. For her, the best time for the move was based on what she felt was best for her two children, not herself or her husband. She felt that she couldn't enjoy things that she liked about her new life in Singapore, knowing that her children were homesick and "pretending" that they had not moved.

It became clear from their discussions that these women put their children's needs first and their own needs second. One mother said: "But it is as you say, in the end it all comes down to your children and how you sort them." For her, the happiness of the entire family ultimately depends on her children's happiness. Because this mother spoke in the second person, she may have been generalizing her experience to all mothers; perhaps she perceives that all mothers would place their children's happiness above their own.

The women participating in the focus groups felt that it was necessary to quickly form friendships. Establishing friendships quickly seems to be a necessity for two reasons: first, because expatriates depend on friendships for support, and secondly, because expatriate assignments are typically short-term--three to four years. One woman

said: “My son and I finally had something in common: his friends were always leaving, and my friends were always leaving.” The mother and son lost friends so regularly that they realized they could turn to each other to cope with those losses, and that was an additional bond that this woman wanted to forge with her son.

Other expatriate mothers said similar things about their children having difficulty with friendships made in Singapore, where people came and went quickly. As soon as friends become close, one had to move elsewhere. Most of the women participating in the focus groups had moved several times and had become accustomed to making friends quickly but also letting them go quickly when they moved away; they perceived that friendship turnover was harder for their children.

Expatriate friendships create an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it’s very important for expatriates to have a strong friendship network because they rely on one another to provide support normally provided by family. On the other hand, because expatriates move so often, women expressed reluctance to establish especially close bonds with expatriate friends; emotional strain is caused by friendship turnover.

Most expatriate assignments involve extended work hours and frequent travel. Although some of the women in the focus group sessions reported that they had grown accustomed to their husbands’ frequent travel, all of them regarded the long hours and frequent travel as sacrifices made by the entire family.

Work demands and frequent travel were the most common problems associated with expatriate husband’s jobs in Singapore, but they were not the only ones. Women with domestic helpers stated that their husbands did very little to help with housekeeping

in Singapore. One group of women mentioned that (because most expatriates rent their homes in Singapore) husbands had forgotten how to do simple repairs traditionally considered men's work. One woman claimed that her husband hadn't hung a picture in years. Another woman believed that because they had full-time help for cooking, her husband didn't know where things were kept in their kitchen--even after living in the same home for a year or more.

Husband's absence becomes routine to expatriate wives. One participant reported that she and her children had become accustomed to her husband's work related absences. She was displeased that she had gotten used to him being away. She also expressed concern that he spent so much time away that his returns home became 'disruptive,' she said:

I say (to him) 'I want to live with you and not the kids only,' and the thing is sometimes when he is away a lot when he comes back, it disrupts our routine. You know he comes home at eight when I am supposed to put them in bed and rock them for an hour. I've had them the whole day. I want them in bed and to do something else, and so this is what I don't like about him traveling a lot. I get used to life without him, and I have to; otherwise I don't like it when he's not around so much.

This woman had developed a routine where she did not have to depend on her husband's presence. She felt primarily responsible for parenting.

Husbands' travel obviously frustrated these women. On the one hand, the women seemed to miss their husbands when they were gone and felt challenged to manage family responsibilities on their own. On the other hand, because the women had no choice but to adapt to their husband's frequent travel, they established a routine and

lifestyle that did not include husband or father. Because they lived primarily without their husbands, their presence during the week was problematic for their family routine.

Although husbands frequently travel for work, some of the women in the focus groups said that when their husbands were not traveling, they were able to spend more time with their families. Because Singapore is such a small place, commute time to work is minimal. Sometimes this close proximity between work and residence allows for greater interaction among family members when he is in town. This was an improvement for at least one woman in the focus group, who said:

Where we lived before, my husband would travel forty five minutes to an hour to work, usually in the dark and come home in the dark.... Now he is in Marina Square but that is still kind of convenient, and we can pop in and see him, or he'll say 'What are you doing for lunch, you want to come over?'

She liked having the opportunity to spend time with her husband spontaneously; she includes the children in their plans for spontaneous "us" time. Although fathers travel a great deal, when they are not traveling, they convey to their wives and children that they are willing to make time for them.

Challenge: Families of Orientation

Frequent relocation is another example of a conflict caused by work. Expatriates enjoy trips home and value their time with loved ones, but women in the focus group sessions (as well as other expatriate women I have met in Singapore) think that some of

the most stressful moments as expatriates are experienced away from Singapore--on trips back home¹⁴.

These stresses arise because Singapore is so far from many expatriate home countries (e.g., Europe or North America). Home visits often require a full day of travel. Travel can be stressful and exhausting for anyone, but it is especially difficult for these women who often have to get themselves, their families, sometimes with small children, and all of their belongings through airports, customs and immigration.

In addition to the social strains, it can be a financial strain to visit the home country, although some expatriate packages finance yearly trips home. Families must sometimes buy their own airline tickets. They also feel obligated to treat their hosts to meals. If they do not stay with family or friends, they also bear the expense of staying in hotels.

Once they arrive at their destination, they live from their suitcases and rely on the hospitality of family and friends for lodging and transportation. This usually means that they live in close quarters. Families must be sure to equitably divide visitations between maternal and paternal sides as well as any friends they wish to see during the visit. Expatriates have limited time in their home countries because of constraints caused by short school vacations, the employed spouse's vacation schedule, and other obligations in Singapore. Many people want to spend time with the visiting expatriate family, and their expectations create tension. Expatriates have a short window of time to see many people

¹⁴ My observation as an expatriate of two years is that many families try very hard to maintain ties with family and friends in their home countries.

and they don't want family members and friends to feel that they are being treated unfairly during the visit.

Women in my focus groups reported trying to accomplish many things during the home trip. Not only do they attempt to see family and friends, but also they shop for things unavailable in Singapore. One woman spoke of the competing demands that claimed her family's time when she was visiting her home country. She said:

As you mentioned, when you go back home, I think one of the things that's different when you are living as an expat is when you do go on home visits; everything is so concentrated - Isn't it? ... I find this sort of annual time of home leave when you go back, there is such a high expectation on yourself because you want, you know, only to do your shopping at Marks and Spencer's, things like that. Stock up on clothes over there, and you want to see so many people and they also want to see you. There is never enough time really to see the people you want to see and have those conversations. So it's all very very concentrated, and you end up sleeping on people's floors... Trying to cram into three weeks, a whole year or maybe even two years of the people you have not seen. It's exhausting!

For this woman, the time spent living in someone else's house was tiring. She reported trying to meet not only her own expectations for what she wanted to accomplish during the visit, but also the expectations of the many people she and her family were visiting. Women found home visits to be an intense time during which they tried to please not only themselves but also their extended families, their immediate families, and their friends.

Another source of stress is perceptions of friends and family in their home countries. Women in both groups reported that they were asked about their lives in

Singapore, but the questioners didn't seem to want to listen to their answers. One woman said this about the perception and reaction of people in her home country:

Yes, I think that goes without saying as your life goes on you change anyway, but definitely compared to my family or friends who have never left my home country, I am a very very different person. I would say that they are exactly the same as I left them fifteen years ago, but I am a different person. Obviously, I think a better person because of the experiences I've had. But it's very very hard to... what's the word? When you are asked by your friend or your family members – so what is it like living in Singapore?- And you start talking about it, and then suddenly you are looking at everybody kind of thinking, 'Oh God, I wish she would shut up'. And basically, we are just saying about the life here. We are not trying to make them jealous of that life or anything like that, but I definitely think they are very very jealous of that life and that I am boasting, and that I have got a maid...

This woman did not feel that her family and friends back home wanted to understand the life she had as an expatriate. She recognized that expatriate life had changed her, and she felt it was a change for the better. She perceived an awkwardness when telling others about life in Singapore when she tried to explain that difference in growth without sounding superior.

Other women agreed that they received the same sort of reaction when talking about life in Singapore. Living as an expatriate is a different experience than staying put, and it was very difficult for these women to be positive about their experience without appearing to boast about their new lives. Non-expatriates see material advantages to it and do not perceive the disadvantages. Exotic travel seems glamorous and gets romanticized, but the reality of being left to care for children without a spouse is not fully grasped.

These mothers seem to handle the stresses of going home and interacting with friends and family back home in various ways. One woman reported that she just tries to deemphasize their life in Singapore; she said, “I try to play it down.” In “playing it down” she diminishes her accomplishments as an expatriate and trivializes her experiences as a mother by not talking about it to friends and family at home.

In addition to staying in other people’s homes, constantly monitoring conversation about life in Singapore and having many extra expenses make it a chore to return home. One woman just said: “It’s difficult going home.”

Challenge: The Stereotype of the Trailing Spouse

The term “trailing spouse” refers to someone who becomes an expatriate because of the spouse’s career. This stereotype indicates work-family conflict because family life is dictated by someone’s work responsibilities. The image of the trailing spouse applies to the context of moving. Several of the expatriate mothers discussed becoming expatriates, changing expatriate locations, and the impacts of relocating on their lives as individuals and as a family. The “trailing spouse” is commonly referenced among expatriates, but it evokes a negative image of someone climbing up a corporate ladder behind her spouse, carrying children and belongings and trying to catch up.

Moving and adjusting to a new place becomes commonplace for expatriate women. However, arriving in the new location is difficult for them because most husbands spend long hours working and traveling when they are needed as partners and co-parents at home. These absences seemed especially burdensome during times when wives and children are adjusting to lives in a new country.

The women did not feel that they were part of the decision to move. One woman voiced past frustration when her husband would come home and “announce” that they were moving to a new country. She said that he would usually move first, leaving her to do the tough job of packing and transporting herself and their children to the new home. She said, “... I think we’ve all been left to the ‘okay darling, we are moving to wherever but I am going now, so you just pack up the house and I’ll see you.’” This woman felt that her husband did not include her in the decision and felt patronized. She perceived herself as the only one solely responsible for moving the household.

Although most of the focus group participants had expatriate experiences before moving to Singapore, it was clear from probing further that they had not expected to adopt the lifestyle on a long-term basis. One woman said:

It isn’t something you envisage. You just keep following your husband around to his different places, and you go in to school, and ‘it’s fine, it’s fine, it’s fine’, and you never think when they are eight, nine, or ten that at sixteen, you might have a problem. It’s bad enough that at eighteen, when he goes off to University somewhere, and we think; “oh are we staying here or are we going to stay somewhere else? And if we were to stay somewhere else and it will be somewhere my son has never lived with us as a family.” It’s very normal.

Her statement demonstrates that she perceived the expatriate assignments as “his places” and that she had become accustomed to “following” her husband. She characterized her lack of control or empowerment in this situation as having become “normal” to her.

Although women didn’t seem to mind the moving itself, some of them were frustrated

that their moves were made to promote their husband's career ambitions and the state of the corporation.

The term "trailing spouse" also describes the ambiguity expatriate women feel about themselves. A young woman in the focus group posed the following question to the others: "Do you find it difficult to be known as somebody's wife? In Malaysia, I've been known to be my own person, but here, I'm always Mrs. Somebody, or somebody's mother." The other women agreed with her experience; they found it difficult to create and maintain their own sense of identity when so many fundamental parts of their lives (e.g., where they lived, their standard of living, when they moved) were determined by their husband's employment.

Singapore law requires that non-Singaporeans hold an employment pass to live and work in Singapore. Foreign workers are issued employment passes, but spouses of foreign workers are issued a "dependent" pass. Individuals must have a certain type of employment pass and meet minimum income levels to be eligible for utilities, such as cell phones. Because of the large number of expatriates,¹⁵ most businesses have strict guidelines about who can use utilities.

These regulations were established partly to prevent low-income domestic workers and construction workers from accessing services (e.g., cell phones, cable television and long distance phoning); these services can allow someone to accumulate excessive debt. However, these legalities place expatriate wives in the same category as

¹⁵ One million out of four million residents in Singapore are expatriates.

domestic workers. Expatriate spouses are dependent on the expatriate employee to sign and approve applications for cell phones, cable television and computer access.

Dependent pass holders also face hurdles and outright restrictions for employment in Singapore. One woman experienced difficulty finding employment because some companies would only hire employment pass holders. Another woman mentioned that their teenage son also had difficulty finding part-time work. She reported that some companies had regulations against hiring non-Singaporeans.

The large number of expatriate women who own businesses is partly due to the difficulty of finding employment as a dependent pass holder in Singapore and partly due to the fact that most expatriate packages make it economically easier for one spouse to keep house. Difficulty in finding employment would be a greater problem for expatriate women if more of them, especially mothers (who are almost always dependent pass holders) wanted to work full-time. Many expatriate mothers in Singapore do volunteer work, are involved in women's organizations, and participate actively in their children's school functions. Some expatriate mothers work part-time or own companies.

The only focus group participant employed full-time believed that she often received a chilly reception from other women when she revealed that she had a job. She told of receiving calls while at work trying to arrange play groups or outings for children and having to tell other women that she was at work and could not attend. Her job conflicted with normative expectations of expatriate mothers in Singapore. According to her, non-working women reacted to her by asking her why she works when she 'doesn't

have to'. These women did not see any reason for women's employment except to supplement an inadequate income earned by one's husband.

Many expatriate organizations, such as the American Women's Society and the British Women's Association, hold their meetings and activities during the day when most employed women cannot attend. It is not possible for expatriate women to be active in these organizations and work full-time.

Expatriate women expressed concern about their image. One mother mentioned a recent article in *The Straits Times* (the major local newspaper of Singapore) that had been written about expatriate wives. She said:

Even though it was supposed to be an article in our favor, in the end, you kind of felt as if they were really having to try hard to do that. You know, even though they were saying we were having this charity event, it wasn't quite tongue in cheek, but it was almost as if they were still saying "Yeah, yeah, but we really know what they do." So even though they were trying to give us good press, really it wasn't.

The expatriate women reported spending time volunteering and contributing to their children's schools and other worthy pursuits, such as volunteer activities and social service groups. However, they thought that Singaporeans perceived their days as filled with superficial and frivolous activities, such as meeting for coffee, shopping and going to the gym¹⁶.

Most Singaporean families are two income families, most Singaporean mothers are employed full-time, and most of their children are either already in school or cared for

¹⁶I have found that the majority of expatriate women I have met are very active with volunteer work, school functions and other worthwhile activities.

by domestic helpers or family members. It's unusual to meet a Singaporean mother who stays at home just to be with her children. The colonial era in Singapore might explain why Singaporeans have misperceptions of expatriate women. During that time expatriate wives certainly would have lived luxuriously while in Singapore, and they would have had extensive household help. Singaporeans are dependent on dual incomes and do not have the luxury of choosing to stay at home with their children. Because stay-at-home motherhood is not typical among Singaporeans, they do not value that ideology of motherhood as highly; however, for expatriate mothers remaining unemployed makes them feel like they are better mothers.

Support: Climate, Crime Prevention and Cleanliness

Despite the challenges of expatriate life, most focus group participants felt that overall the advantages and supports outweigh the challenges.¹⁷ Advantages are offered by the climate and culture in Singapore. Only one degree north of the equator, Singapore has a very hot, tropical climate. Mothers liked living in a place where they did not have to bundle children into cold weather gear before going out and where children could play and swim outside year round. One mother said:

... and the weather determines that as well (going outside frequently) and I remember when I lived in Holland, and they were much smaller, trying to get out. Dressing them up with their caps and stocking gloves. I've got six of them, and by the time I had done with the last one, the first one has taken off all of his and somebody else's and it was a major ordeal.

¹⁷ It is rare to meet an expatriate in Singapore who does not enjoy life there. Only one couple I have met has not had a positive experience

It felt much easier for this mother to manage taking six children out of the house in Singapore. She found that she could have more frequent and more spontaneous outings without the added time of preparing children for cold weather.

Expatriates also experience Singapore as a very safe country. Singapore, in fact, has a very low crime rate. Although the police aren't often a visible presence, strict laws minimize crime and make it safe, particularly for children.¹⁸

Because of this safe environment, expatriate children gain freedom and experience independence earlier. One expatriate mother illustrated her children's freedom during our focus group session. She told this story about her children, who were eight and six years old at the time:

...at that time they were taking the public bus to school rather than the school bus, but it was a phase that they went through, and all of them, except my youngest, was doing it, and they are all back on the school bus now. But anyway, during that time my youngest was having swim lessons after school with her brother and the novelty for her was to go home on the public bus 'cause her brother will take her. And so they came in one day after school much earlier than they should have had they been on the public bus. My son is running in: "I need money! I need money!"

I said: "What do you need money for?"

And he said: "We were too tired. We walked down the drive from school and were too tired to cross the road to get the bus so we hailed a cab."

So that's the nature of my six year old, hailing a cab! Came home without a penny in their pocket and got home. I am glad I didn't

¹⁸ From a young age, Singapore children begin traveling around the city on their own. For example, a work colleague told me that she was encouraged to take public transportation to the local library at age ten.

know about it before. I think I would have been at the gate waiting for them, but where else in the world could that have happened?

These children felt they had the freedom to make their own choices about transportation, even a mode of transportation that is more costly and that their mother would suggest they avoid. This exemplifies the perceived safety of Singapore. These children hadn't been taught the danger of riding with strangers or the importance of their mother knowing how they were getting home from school.

Mothers aren't as confident about their children's safety beyond Singapore. Another woman mentioned how much more closely she watched over her children elsewhere. She doesn't feel worried about her children in the Singapore airport, but as soon as they leave Singapore she tries to hold the hands of all three children at once.

Perceiving that they live in a safe country eases anxieties about motherhood for these women. Living in a "safe" place was something expatriate mothers saw as a support in Singapore because it improved the quality of childhood, and, therefore, improved the quality of motherhood. Their children were more independent because they were less dependent on their mothers. Throughout the focus group sessions, women mentioned how living in Singapore's child-centered environment impacted their own lives. The mothers appreciated not having the worries for their children that they might experience in other countries.

Its safety, however, might have implications for children when they leave Singapore. One woman expressed concern that children who spend their formative years in Singapore might be naïve to dangers in other places. Another woman mentioned that

her son had just returned to Ireland to attend University, and he has had to learn how to live there safely.

Because of campaigns and strict laws against littering and a well-funded, well-staffed public works department, Singapore is also a very clean city. One woman voiced her appreciation of Singapore's cleanliness, saying that in Europe her children would be filthy at the end of the day from walking on the sidewalks and streets. She saw the sidewalks and streets in Singapore as clean. Cleanliness is another factor that improves quality of life for mothers because it relieves them from having to keep their children clean and so they see it as another advantage to living in Singapore.

Support: Expatriate Networks

One area of support available to expatriates in Singapore (as well as in other countries) is the expatriate community itself. Expatriates in Singapore rely heavily on their community for support that they would otherwise receive from parents, siblings or friends in their own countries.

Singapore's expatriate community is unique in some respects because of its sheer size; families living as expatriates create a strong support for one another. Because expatriates do not have extended family nearby, they realize the importance of being able to rely on one another for support that they would typically ask a family member to provide. Singapore has many expatriate organizations; there are expatriate organizations for Canadians, Americans, the British, Germans, the Swiss, the Irish, the Scots, and the French to name just some. Within each organization are sub-groups for distinct interests (e.g., working women, stay at home mothers, small business owners).

A woman who had lived as an expatriate in Cambodia said that expatriate communities differ outside Singapore, because other countries are not as safe and their expatriate communities are much smaller. In smaller communities, expatriates rely on one another more and the communities become closer knit. Despite the large expatriate community in Singapore, there are still strong support networks among expatriates because expatriates have formalized their support groups as expatriate organizations.

One focus group participant spoke about expatriate support systems, saying:

Well I think when you are away from your home country, and you don't have family support the expat community is really strong and really, you know I've got so many good friends here ... so many people that I know that you know, my husband travels. I guess that if something happened in the middle of the night, there are so many people that I can call on you know to come and help or whatever without them being really, really strong friends. But I know they are there to help and it just seems the expat community is really supportive, and everybody is out here to help each other because we don't have family support.

The people in this expatriate community rely on one another, and it is understood among these women that they would help other expatriates do whatever they could whenever needed--even without being especially close friends. Whether these families would be friendly in their home country or remain friends after moving away is irrelevant. They knew that they could rely on one another while in Singapore¹⁹.

¹⁹ An expatriate friend recently illustrated this point for me through this account: on a recent afternoon a man was taking his daughter home from school when he noticed a neighbor's daughter crying at the curb in front of her house. He knew her and her family, other British expatriates, so he stopped. The little girl's mother had experienced a diabetic episode and was immobile. Her young daughter did not know what to do. She had called an ambulance, but it was going to take half an hour to arrive. My friend had an expatriate friendship with the other family, so although the diabetic woman's children were frightened, they were comfortable going to my friend's house to wait while he transported their mother. He and his family cared for the children and stayed at the hospital with the woman until her husband returned from Hong Kong where he had traveled for business. Although these two families were not close friends by other standards, in a time of crisis they cared for one another because they were expatriates.

Support: Institutionalization of Domestic Help

Another support for expatriates in Singapore is full-time domestic help. In the United States, only wealthy people have live in domestic help, but domestic helpers are an important part of expatriate life in Singapore²⁰. Although expatriates might not be accustomed to having a helper who lives with them full-time, they soon see advantages to this type of arrangement (e.g., reliable 24 hour domestic help at a relatively low cost and a readily available babysitter). Most expatriates eventually employ a full-time, live in domestic helper. A clear majority of my expatriate respondents had one. It is less expensive to employ a domestic helper full-time than to hire one on a daily or weekly basis. My focus groups were divided based on whether they had domestic help; but in fact, this variable was not as important as I anticipated, because discussions from the two groups did not seem to differ. Even participants who did not have domestic helpers at the time of the focus groups had domestic help in the past.

Most domestic helpers in Singapore are from other countries, primarily the Philippines and Sri Lanka (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). These workers must meet particular requirements before relocating to Singapore for employment. The requirements include documenting that they are at least twenty-three years and passing English and math competency tests to prove they have basic skills for following instructions. Many of these women have children of their own in their home countries for whom spouses or family members care. They leave their home and children because

²⁰ Expatriate institutions in Singapore such as the American Club offer classes for domestic helpers. Local resorts offer special deals for a family of four plus maid.

the (low) wages they earn in Singapore as domestic help are higher than the low wages they would earn at home.

Domestic helping in Singapore is highly institutionalized. Agencies regulate hiring and employment of domestic helpers, and contracts must be consistent with government regulations. To be eligible for hiring a live in domestic helper in Singapore, families or individuals must meet certain criteria. Eligibility is based on family or individual income (proven ability to support the domestic helper), household demographics (e.g., a single man under the age of 50 is not allowed to employ a live in domestic helper), and a commitment to support the domestic helper. Once eligibility requirements have been met, potential employers must apply for a domestic help license, acquire insurance for their worker, and sign papers taking responsibility for the worker while employed by them. Alternatively, an agency can be employed to make these arrangements on behalf of the employer.

In addition to hiring through agencies, expatriates in Singapore may refer domestic helpers to other expatriates. Families moving away might recommend their domestic helper to others, and another family can assume the contract of the domestic helper. This enables the domestic helper to remain in Singapore; foreign domestic workers without employment have to leave the country immediately.

Once in Singapore, foreign domestic helpers are placed by agencies into homes. Employers contact agencies and provide a list of needs and preferences for their domestic helper. For example, employers may request that the helper not be supporting children in her home country, that the helper be experienced with children, or that the helper meets

an age requirement. The agency will then send several suitable candidates for interviews. Once a domestic helper is employed and the paper work completed, the employer (not the agency) is responsible for that domestic helper's behavior while in Singapore, including any debt she might accumulate. Because of this responsibility, many employers closely monitor their domestic helpers. Employers may have strict rules about when the domestic helper might have time off, where she may go, and with whom she may associate.

If a domestic helper is employed through an agency and does not follow the rules of her household, then the employer can call the agency and have the domestic helper called back to the agency. In many cases, the domestic helper is then deported back to her home country.²¹

Domestic helpers must follow the rules established by the employer as well as Singapore law. If helpers are delinquent, or associate with anyone who behaves delinquently, their employment passes in Singapore could be revoked and they could be sent home²². Employers place a premium on maintaining control over domestic helpers.

Replacing helpers typically takes at least a week. This places a strain on women who are not in the habit of juggling daily activities with household chores but are held

²¹ Domestic helpers who become pregnant are required first to be returned to the agency and then be returned to their countries.

²² I know of two employers whose domestic helpers' boyfriends have become angry at the employer's home. In one case the domestic worker had been with the family for five years. In both cases the employer sent the domestic helper back to the agency, because the employer was concerned for family safety and because employers are encouraged to enforce rules. If the employer has told the helper not to associate with certain people or groups and someone from that group threatens the helper in the presence of the employer, it is obvious that the helper has not obeyed the employer's rule

responsible for them anyway. Women are expected to interview domestic helpers and train them, even if they have employment responsibilities themselves.

Living space in Singapore is at a premium. Most Singaporeans, including expatriates, reside in apartments. Many apartments come equipped with a room referred to as the “maid’s room.” In some cases the maid’s room is a small utility room adjacent to the kitchen, but in some cases the maid’s room is actually separate from the residence. Some domestic helpers living in these detached rooms do not have access to hot water or air-conditioning. The maid’s room is comparable to a small walk-in closet in an American home. It does not typically have windows. Some rooms do not have space for a standard bed, so the maid must sleep on a cot or futon. However, some employers choose to give their domestic helper a regular bedroom with the family, instead of housing them in the maid’s room.²³ Expatriates tend to treat their domestic helpers differently than some native Singaporeans, who think that a small living space with few amenities is sufficient for domestic helpers.

Women commented on the unfamiliar experience of having a stranger living alongside them in their home. A family must adjust to a lack of privacy when the domestic helper moves in.²⁴ Although focus group participants agreed that they had to adapt to having a stranger living with their family, they also felt that the advantages of

²³ An American couple who recently hired a domestic helper for both housekeeping and childcare went to great lengths to make the helper’s living space comfortable--they installed air-conditioning and cable television.

²⁴ A co-worker who has live in domestic help joked about the helper knowing all of the family business, including when the family was disagreeing. The helper who lived with my co-worker frequently told stories about the fights between her previous employer and her husband. Another associate spoke of the first morning she and her husband experienced with their domestic helper. It was a strange experience for them to enter the kitchen early in the morning and have a stranger waiting for them to wake and wanting to know what they would like to eat for breakfast.

having full-time, live in help outweighed any discomfort. In her last expatriate assignment one mother of six had only a part-time helper who came once or twice a week to assist with household chores; in Singapore she is able to employ a helper full-time. Having live in help allows her to spend less time on housework and more time both with her children and pursuing personal interests, such as volunteer work.

Domestic help offers so much support that learning to live without it was a challenge emphasized in both focus group sessions²⁵. Families with live in domestic help sometimes have to do without it, such as when helpers leave Singapore for yearly home visits. Women felt they became dependent on their helpers for managing their households. The mother of six said this about the time each year when her domestic helper is away:

... I don't do anything else when she is gone except housework and laundry, but I am really glad I get a real buzz from it. I mean, I don't meet anybody for a drink or a cup of coffee or even lunch or anything. When the kids go to school, until they come home, I'm working; housework and then homework, and then it is cleaning up after dinner. But what I did find is that I really enjoyed it, and I knew how the work was done. But saying at the same time it was great to have her, but nobody does your work the way you do it and I was finding stuff that hadn't been cleaned properly, and I was personally scrubbing.

This mother saw her domestic helper's annual trip home as an opportunity to appreciate her domestic helper's support, because, in the helper's absence, she had to complete these chores herself. She also viewed the work she did during this time as very different from her regular activities. Her reference to "personally scrubbing" indicates how fully

²⁵ This was also emphasized in conversations I have had with other expatriate mothers in Singapore

responsible she feels for the upkeep of her home. Rather than do housework themselves, many expatriate mothers in Singapore actually hire part time help to clean house during the domestic helper's trip home.

Women in the focus group did not identify domestic helpers as filling a childcare support role, despite the fact that more than three out of every four (78%) of questionnaire respondents answered that they "managed childcare"²⁶ by having full-time live in domestic help. Instead, they stated that the domestic helper relieved them of housework so that they could concentrate on their children. During discussions of domestic support, focus group participants never referred to domestic helpers as sources of social support or as friends.²⁷

Overall, these women felt mostly positive about having full-time domestic help. Focus group participants commented that they were able to have a much more active social life in Singapore. They were not so tied to home because they did not do as many household chores, which allowed more opportunities for making friends more quickly. Someone commented: "I found that I think I've made stronger friendships much more quickly, and I think part of that is helped by people having a maid." The mothers felt that, by having domestic help, they had time to leave home, meet people and better maintain friendships because their housework was being done for them.

Domestic helpers provide families with more social time; because neither wives nor husbands nor children were responsible for household chores. Thus, they were able

²⁶ The question read: "Please briefly describe how you (and your spouse) get help with child care."

²⁷ In the previously referenced story about the expatriate mother who had to be transported by a neighbor to the hospital, the domestic helper was home during the event yet she was not consulted on the sick woman's care.

to leave housework behind. Friends living in other places who have no domestic help were more restricted and unable to spend as much time socializing. One mother said:

In England most of my friends would only really you know go out one night a month. Then there would be other nights where, you know, she would see a couple of girlfriends and he would go out with a couple of his friends, but the amount of time you spend with your friends is much less in the UK...

Likewise, respondents felt more at ease to invite friends to their homes for dinner parties because they had less preparatory work to do. Participants commented that having a dinner party in their own country would be more work for them: cleaning the house before guests arrive, shopping for groceries, preparing the meal, and cleaning afterwards. Participants appreciated being able to host a dinner party, go to bed and wake up the next day to a clean house--not something they could enjoy without live in domestic help.

Quality of time spent with children is perceived to be improved by having full-time help. One employed mother of two children, including a newborn baby, said:

I think the quality of life we live here is so fantastic. And evenings when I find I get home from work at six, spend two hours with family; and before I went to bed. And in England friends of mine get home from work and are trying to feed the kids while preparing their own dinner, while putting a load of laundry on, bathing their kids, getting them to bed, hanging up the laundry then eating their own dinner, then doing some ironing, doing some housework, even if they have a part time cleaner.

This mother appreciated being able to spend her time at home with her children instead of doing a myriad of chores, which she felt was time better spent.

Most women preferred to spend time supervising or playing with their children rather than on housework. Having live in domestic help allows expatriate mothers to spend time on pursuits that are less socially isolating, less physical, and more highly valued than housework--playing, reading books, and doing other activities with their children. The childcare aspects of housewifery were perceived as more desirable than the housekeeping aspects: cleaning and cooking were interpreted as menial and unappreciated, whereas child care was interpreted to be valued and important.

Although 78% of the survey respondents listed their domestic helpers as a source of childcare, women in the focus group sessions characterized their domestic helpers mostly as housekeepers and not caregivers for their children. Most focus group participants reported that they occasionally used domestic helpers for baby-sitting--but not as primary caregivers for their children. Several focus group participants had school-aged children and those who did not either cared for their children themselves or had other means of childcare.

At the time of the focus group sessions, it was important to a working mother of a newborn to have her child supervised by people with certification. She was researching childcare centers to use once she returned to work, and she had found some affordable and licensed childcare centers in Singapore. To her, domestic helpers were not sufficient for childcare. One mother said that domestic helpers in Singapore were not adequate

childcare providers. She reported that she missed being able to leave her children at daycare in her home country, knowing that trained professionals could care for them.²⁸

Although women in the focus group sessions expressed a lack of confidence in the childcare skills of their domestic helpers, they reported that their husbands were much more likely to leave children in the care of their domestic helper. Their husbands were either less concerned about the helper's childcare skills or simply more used to leaving their children in someone else's care. One mother said:

I did some studies last year. It was evening class and every time my husband was in town and I had my class, I would SMS him – like remember I'm not at home. Try to get home early to be with the children. Just because I'm not home he thought he could linger in the office and do whatever he has to do. I'm not home waiting for him. I think as a father he is not wrong, he thinks they are fine with the maid. 'Well I have things to do; my wife is not at home. I'll clear another hour of my job.'

This woman believed that her husband had lower standards about who cared for their children. It disturbed her that he did not distinguish between the care that she provided and the care that the helper provided. She perceived her husband as less scrutinizing of the difference, which she takes as an affront as a primary caregiver who believes herself to be not only better qualified to care for her children but also super competent at it.

Although she sees her full-time job of mother as very important, her husband equates it with the care of the domestic helper, marginalizing the value of mothering. This wife reveals her preoccupation with childcare and her greater sense of responsibility and

²⁸ Some other mothers I have met in Singapore use their domestic helpers as primary childcare givers. The American club offers classes to domestic helpers on how to care for children. The Ministry of Manpower in Singapore (i.e., the government agency in charge of employment) offers courses for both employers of foreign domestic workers and foreign domestic workers themselves. Many agencies providing domestic helpers also require employees to complete childcare courses before placing them with families.

concern for her children than her husband. She attributes more value to childcare because that's what she does exclusively; he attributes less value to it because it's work done by women—any women.

She also perceived that her studies were unimportant to him because he was not willing to care for their children himself. The fact that he does not step in as a caregiver, leaving that job to the domestic helper, further emphasizes her perception that he does not regard it as important.

Domestic help not only is a support for wives and mothers, but also is a support for husbands and fathers, because having a domestic helper removes them further from any responsibility for helping with household work. One woman said:

I think I've become more resourceful, possibly. That I now won't take no for an answer immediately and will find other ways around and whereas my husband has gone the other way because now, we live in a rented apartment and he has got a company car and now has total amnesia on how to do anything on the car, or how to repair anything in the house, because it is somebody else's problem.

In her opinion, her husband had even less household responsibility than in his own country. She felt that she had grown more independent and “resourceful,” while her husband had become less self-sufficient, more dependent. Although the women in the focus groups did not explicitly say they were upset by their husband's detachment from household responsibilities, comments such as hers showed their awareness of this detachment.

For expatriate families in Singapore, having a domestic helper is a perk. Because of their domestic helpers, both parents were able to suspend some housework and spend

time with children and friends instead. This domestic help support offered in Singapore allowed family members to spend more leisure time together. Women feel relieved of expectations to do less valued housework so that they can do more valued childcare work, and men feel relieved of expectations to help with housework or childcare while their wives handle childcare. Children may benefit by spending more time with one parent, which is important considering the amount of time their other parent spends traveling. What time fathers do spend at home is spent not on housework but on childcare.

These challenges and supports were the topics introduced most frequently and in-depth. These women were most interested in discussing what supported their children's happiness and what challenged it.

Summary Statement: Expatriate Motherhood

Seven women participated in two focus groups, contributing to our body of knowledge regarding expatriate motherhood in Singapore. Participants were forthcoming about both their difficult and helpful mothering experiences in Singapore, and discussion themes focused on two patterns, challenges and supports. Based on the information disclosed by focus group participants, most challenges faced were directly related to their status as women, while most supports related to their status as mothers.

Transition, turnover and travel challenge expatriate motherhood because women are put in a position of responsibility for organizing the move to a new home in a different country, managing international travel, and forming new social networks with only perfunctory support from husbands, and having little input into the decisions to

relocate in the first place. In addition, because of the frequent travel and long hours worked by expatriated employees, expatriate mothers must often parent as if single mothers. Finally, they must do so in the face of frequently dissolving friendships. Despite these hardships, expatriate mothers dismiss these challenges as the price to pay for the advantages offered in expatriate life.

Families of orientation challenge expatriate motherhood because women are forced to examine their life through the lens of family, and friends, in their home country. Often it is hard for family members to understand the reason expatriate families choose to live as expatriates. Expatriate women especially are caught in the difficult position of having to explain their husband's choice to live overseas away from both extended families and at the same time not glamorize expatriate life. Expatriate women then must reexamine the advantages and disadvantages of expatriation based on the opinions and reactions of friends and family. In addition, expatriate women must live up to often unreasonable expectations for visiting family and friends when they spend time in their home country.

The stereotype of the trailing spouse challenges expatriate women because it lessens control women have over their own situation. Challenge is created because of constraints in place due to policies about dependent pass holders. Opportunity for employment is often determined by regulations that vary by country.

The stereotype of the trailing spouse also limits a mother's ability to improve her professional skills and maintain her desirability as a viable employee. Like stay at home mothers, expatriate mothers remove themselves from the workforce, sometimes for many

years. The time spent caring for children full-time is perceived as “unemployed” on resumes, making it difficult for women who would like to rejoin the labor force later in life. Relocation is determined by corporate business needs, not by the needs of the expatriate mother. Despite these drawbacks, expatriate mothers perceive these limitations as necessary sacrifices to be “good” mothers.

Alternately, climate, crime prevention and cleanliness support expatriate motherhood because each of these elements in some way lightens physical or mental work for mothers in very practical ways, improving living conditions for mothers because living conditions for children are improved. A warm climate negates the need for winter wardrobes and worries over winter colds and flu, and it allows children to play outside year-round. Low crime rates alleviate parental worries over children’s physical safety, for which mothers are mostly held responsible. Clean living conditions absolve mothers of the need to scrub their children clean when returning home.

Expatriate networks support expatriate motherhood not only because they fill a support function left vacant by the absence of family, but also because they provide women with a quickly formed peer group in a new environment. Expatriate mothers can seek reassurance that they are living well from others in their expatriate network.

Institutionalization of domestic help supports expatriate motherhood because being able to easily hire domestic helpers allows mothers to relinquish housework and concentrate on intensive mothering, which expatriate mothers have come to perceive as desirable. Full-time mothering is an argument used by expatriate mothers to justify paying for full-time domestic help. However, despite this rationale, many expatriate

mothers frequently use domestic helpers for childcare. Additionally, having domestic help is a symbol of high status in Singapore and helps to reinforce for expatriate mothers that distance between family and friends, abandonment of personal career and constant need to create new social networks is not a great sacrifice.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Distributing questionnaires and conducting focus groups for expatriate mothers in Singapore was useful for gaining insights into the perceptions of expatriate mothers in Singapore. As I expected, domestic helpers were discussed in both focus group sessions. Domestic helpers impact on ideologies of motherhood and gender and the trailing spouse stereotype are two themes which emerged as important to life for Singapore expatriates.

Findings Unique to Expatriates in Singapore

Institutionalization of domestic help is unique to Singapore or at the very least, unique to Asia. Employing a domestic helper is affordable for middle class people in Singapore. Many factors support the institutionalization of domestic help, making it more accessible for people to arrange: homes are specifically designed to accommodate domestic helpers, agencies place and regulate domestic help, and Singapore is close to countries from which many domestic workers come, such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The close geographic proximity, the institutionalization of domestic help and the strong economy of Singapore, which provides salaries necessary to support domestic help, make Singapore not only an attractive place for domestic helpers to seek work, but also a place for residents to easily obtain domestic help.

Just as Anderson (2002) describes, hiring a domestic helper allows expatriate women to achieve a heightened status by delegating more menial work (i.e., cooking and cleaning) to someone else. Because Americans value mothering that maximizes time, energy and care spent on children, expatriate mothers take advantage of domestic helpers to outsource their housework so that they can more intensively mother.

This easy access and affordability of domestic help is not available in all countries. The expatriate mothers in my focus groups did not have this luxury in their expatriate assignments elsewhere.

Support networks are another important factor in Singapore expatriate life. Literature on success of expatriate assignments suggests that establishing a local support system is important. Families who rely heavily on telephone, email and home visits to maintain relationships from home as a primary support network do not often acclimate to their new country.

Socialization theory explains that children learn about values and norms from their social environment, so social networks are important not only in their fulfillment of social support, but also in their influence on expatriate children's development.

Both the data collected in questionnaires and the findings of focus group sessions support the importance of local support networks. Nearly all of the forty-six questionnaire respondents (91.3%) were involved with organizations in Singapore. These organizations ranged from volunteer work at their children's school to participation in a professional women's group. Focus group participants identified social support

networks, both friends who provide practical support and formal organizations which provide personal satisfaction.

Expatriates in Singapore rely on one another for support that might normally be provided by extended family. Expatriate mothers have a large number of expatriate acquaintances whom they can call on if they need assistance. They rely on these other women to help in times of crisis and in times of celebration.

My findings about the primacy of support networks among expatriates in Singapore support Unger and Powell's (1980) research that families more often turn to informal social support for help than to formal organizations established with the sole purpose of providing support. In times of need expatriates call on one another, not on their expatriate organizations. However, expatriate women in Singapore do rely on formal organizations to provide them with personal stimulation, especially if they are not employed. Women also join organizations to meet new people and to become involved in the expatriate community.

Because many of the expatriate organizations in Singapore are targeted to full-time mothers, it is sometimes difficult for employed women to find groups in which they can participate. Some organizations, such as the American Women's Association plan most of their activities during the workday, making it difficult for employed women to participate. Working women must seek alternative organizations, such as Primetime, the professional women's association.

Organizational structure can pose challenges for employed women (i.e., by scheduling activities in the middle of the day). Organizations tend to cater to either

employed women or stay at home mothers. Working mothers who wish to participate in an organization with other mothers might have difficulty finding an organization that accommodates both working and non-working mothers.

A moderate climate and low crime rates are also unique to Singapore. Not all expatriate assignments are made in countries with year round sunshine and minimal crime.

Generalizable Findings

Some other findings are not unique to Singapore. Women in the focus groups mentioned husband's frequent travel as something they experienced in other expatriate assignments, not only in Singapore. Because it is expensive for companies to expatriate employees, most companies only expatriate high-level employees who hold fairly specialized positions. It would not be cost effective for a company to expatriate an employee who didn't meet a critical company need; often these high-level positions require frequent travel. Many expatriates live where their regional office is located, sometimes having responsibility for an entire region, not only the city in which they reside. This business requires them to travel frequently, without their families.

Another theme not unique to Singapore is frequent transition among friends. A majority of expatriate assignments are interim, typically three to four years. Because expatriates tend to form friendships with other expatriates, frequent turnover of friends is common; families aren't always in the same stage of their expatriate experience²⁹. Both

²⁹ Many people tend to leave in June and start their new assignments in August.

expatriate parents and children get accustomed to frequently leaving friends behind or being left behind.

Although the number of expatriated couples with employed wives and stay at home husbands is growing, the reverse is still typical: men employees are more likely to be offered expatriate assignments, while their wives and children are expatriated along with them. As more women reach elevated levels within organizations, more couples will move in support of women's jobs. Until that time the stereotype of the trailing spouse will be borne by women, regardless of whether the assignment is in Singapore.

Theoretical Implications

Role identity theory and role conflict theory are widely used in the literature on motherhood, especially in relation to conflicting expectations women must meet as mothers and employees. These two theories have implications for expatriate motherhood, not because of more typical conflict (i.e., balancing the demands placed on employed mothers), but because of waiving their own careers to be full-time mothers and having little chance of reviving those careers given limited employment options abroad.

Role theory suggests that expatriate mothers forfeit the role of employee by not working, the roles of daughter and sister because they live too far from their extended families, and the role of homemaker by hiring domestic help. They are left only with being wife and mother, and being a wife is diminished because of husband's frequent travel. Thus, focus group participants mostly identify as mother, and their identification as such is intense.

Because expatriate women are not often employed and they are able to transfer some household responsibility to a domestic helper, they do not experience role conflict (i.e., juggling work and home life) to the same extent as employed mothers. Mothers are not forced to manage their own work-family conflict, although fathers still do. The long hours and frequent travel required by expatriate assignments keep fathers away from their family, intensifying the role conflict experience for them.

Like role theory and role conflict theory, attachment theory has implications for expatriate mothers. Most expatriate mothers conform to the role of mother prescribed by traditionalists (i.e., mothers are the best caregivers) by assuming primary caretaking for children. Attachment theory bolsters the viewpoints of intensive mothers, who believe that only they can provide the best care for their children; they believe that their children should spend the majority of their time with their mother because mothers should be the greatest influence on children's lives.

The Ideology of Motherhood

Traditional motherhood is supported by life in Singapore. Although women have affordable access to domestic help, they are still expected to manage their households. They feel pressure to mother intensively, as described by Hays (1996). Expatriate mothers forgo their potential to earn money and hire someone to keep their house while they concentrate their time, energy and money into their children.

Hays maintains that men take less responsibility for childrearing, and this division in parenting is magnified among expatriate couples because of the frequent travel demanded of fathers. Most expatriates are in Singapore because of fathers' employment,

and because most expatriate assignments require travel, it is not uncommon for men to spend many days each month traveling. In the father's absence, his wife must be responsible for family and household management and for discipline. Men have even less responsibility for childrearing because they travel and women are able to mother even more intensively because they do not have to spend time keeping house.

Expatriate Motherhood and Sociology of Gender

Work is sometimes perceived as feminine or masculine. Childcare provision, household management, and family nurturing are often considered women's responsibilities, whereas income provision is usually considered men's responsibility. Despite increasing participation in the workforce, women are still expected to complete the traditionally feminine jobs. In many cases, there is not equal sharing of household management and childcare between dual income earning spouses. However, employment does give women a chance to prove their competence beyond "women's" tasks, helping to eliminate stereotypes of 'women's work' and 'men's work'.

Expatriation in the majority of cases promotes strongly and unequivocally these traditional American gender-work roles. Not only does expatriation assume a traditional division of labor, but also it perpetuates gender stereotypes and imposes traditional expectations on women who might not otherwise believe that children require their mothers to be primary caregivers for them.

When expatriate husbands accept an expatriate assignment, their wives often sacrifice their own career ambitions to support their husband's expatriation, not improving skills or advancing employment capital during the assignment. These women

sacrifice their ambitions for their families, accepting it is better to promote husbands' careers than develop their own.

Another contribution to the father's marginalized involvement (and perpetuation of his distance from feminine tasks) is the expatriate package itself. In most cases, expatriates are provided financial assistance packages to lease or rent their homes, which means the landlord is responsible for home repairs--not the tenant. This arrangement contrasts with American middle class homeownership where men traditionally take care of home repair.

Not only are women held responsible for the bulk of household management during their expatriate assignment in Singapore, but also they are responsible for moving the household from one country to another when the employment assignment changes. Husbands often move to a new assignment in advance of their families, leaving wives on their own to organize the move and to travel with the children and their belongings. The traditional approach would not find fault with this arrangement, because household and childcare responsibilities are assigned to women, while the feminist school of thought would take objection if she did not choose those responsibilities herself.

Although domestic helpers allow expatriate women to relinquish the more physically demanding, less appealing aspects of housework (e.g., cleaning and cooking), women's overall responsibilities for running the home are not relinquished. The husbands may have some superficial involvement in hiring, in addition to paying the domestic helper, but wives carry the burden of hiring, training and supervising them.

Fathers are even relieved of their traditional role of secondary caregiver because domestic helpers can fill that role.

Stereotypes of femininity are perpetuated by Singapore lifestyles (both expatriate as well as native Singaporean) because all domestic helpers in Singapore are women, demonstrating to children that women should perform tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Children whose parents hire domestic helpers devalue housekeeping. Expatriate parents have to be deliberate in the lessons they teach children in order to not perpetuate the low prestige of housework. Expatriate children may learn that housework is not valued or desirable, and so later in life they may not value people (i.e., women) who perform the jobs normally associated with housekeeping (e.g., cooking and cleaning). In expatriate families especially there is a strong emphasis on mother as homemaker and father as financial provider. Restrictions on employment opportunities, social status, and easy access to domestic help perpetuate this situation.

The arrangements in place for expatriate families in Singapore reinforce ideas that mothers only care for children because employment restrictions discourage careers for expatriate spouses, and domestic helpers free more time for mothers to devote to children.

These expatriate women in Singapore perceived femininity to be achieved by supporting their husbands as he wins promotions, taking on full responsibility for managing the home or a domestic helper and being a primary caregiver to their children (sometimes nearly exclusively so). Womanhood as perceived by expatriate mothers in Singapore means concentrating on the needs of family and not personal needs.

Expatriate Motherhood and Sociology of Family

Expatriate spouses have marriages that offer many parallels to single income couples living in their home country. Husbands earn the only income and wives “keep house.” Baby sitters (in the form of domestic helpers) provide opportunities for spontaneous outings, allowing couples to spend time alone with one another and enhance their relationship. Expatriate marriages are also influenced by the bond strengthened when moving frequently and starting over in a new location. However, the expatriate life also strains marriages because of the husband’s frequent travel and stresses for women having to reestablish themselves and their children in new networks and communities.

Expatriates follow the traditional nuclear family model: nurturing mother, breadwinning father, and children, mirroring stereotypes of American family in the 1950s. While expatriate life is advantageous for families--offering opportunities to travel, financial packages which elevate the status and lifestyle of expatriate families, access to private schools, and exposure to other cultures--it can also cause considerable strain on families and have serious implications, especially for children.

Children are taught by the expatriate example to subscribe to traditional gender stereotypes. It is difficult for children to develop ties to their own country and extended family, and expatriate children ironically often live a somewhat socially sheltered life compared to their peers at home. The expectation that children will become self-sufficient by completing chores, learning the value of earning money, and gaining independence is lost on most expatriate children. Instead, they are taught that someone

else will clean up after and cook for them and that earning money is considerably more important if one is male, but considerably less important if one is female.

Despite these implications for children's socialization into affluence and traditional gender roles, there are many advantages to expatriation. Expatriate families are especially close and have strong bonds. Frequent moves and the constant need to reestablish social networks force families to rely on one another for support. This bond is especially prevalent between mothers and children. Fathers are less involved with their family due to long work hours and frequent travel, but they maintain their status as head of the household.

Expatriate fathers seem to have tenuous relationships with their children. Fathers step in when work schedules allow; they take less, even superficial responsibility for discipline, upbringing or daily care of their children. Despite frequent absences, most expatriate children still seemed to feel close to their fathers due to the bonds created by frequent moves.

Based on the comments made by these expatriate women, being a mother means spending as much time as possible with children, devoting oneself completely to motherhood and being a father means providing income and seizing opportunity based on career needs. Fathers spend less time with their families but more time earning money to support several people.

Living conditions in Singapore ease some of the concerns that many American parents face. Easy access to public transportation and high fees for driver's licenses lessen teenage driving and worries about accidents or traffic citations. Low crime rates

and strict laws also help to alleviate some other common worries of parents. Arguably, living in this environment allows greater trust among expatriate families because parents do not need to be as strict with their children's freedom.

Although my data collection was limited to expatriate mothers, many of the experiences faced by expatriate mothers would also be encountered by women in other family situations, such as wives of officers in the military as well domestic corporate wives. Both of these groups face frequent moves and the necessity to develop new support groups every few years. In fact, even some of the cultural adaptation experienced by expatriate mothers might also be necessary for corporate wives moving to a new part of the country or military wives moving to a new base. My findings are applicable to many families, not only expatriate families.

Focus group participants in Singapore made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of expatriate motherhood. Further research on the population of expatriate mothers could expand our knowledge about expatriate satisfaction, the global job market for women, and the trailing spouse stereotype. Possibilities for further research are plentiful, as this exploratory research has identified new research questions.

Recommendations for Further Study

Studying expatriate motherhood in Singapore has prompted many ideas for potential research in the field of expatriation. For example, because studies show that successful expatriate assignments are strongly influenced by family happiness, it is important to learn more answers to the question, what makes expatriates happy?

A longitudinal study of expatriate children would provide not only valuable information for parents of expatriate children, but also important information for companies that expatriate families. Frequent moving, having to leave friends and make new ones, and exposure to new countries and cultures are experiences that most children do not have. How might having these unique experiences while growing up impact expatriate children later in life? In addition to providing corporations with data, this type of study would be beneficial to sociologists wishing to study expatriation in relation to socialization theory. Living as an expatriate places children in a vastly different environment and would definitely impact social learning.

Most American children do not grow up with full-time domestic help living in their home. How does having had domestic help impact a child's dependency later in life? A study of children who grow up with live in, full-time domestic help would show how hiring out for house-keeping shapes children's development.

More husbands are expatriated because of their careers than wives; however, a growing number of families are expatriating because of women's careers. How would gender and the division of household labor in such a home be different?

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, my name is Jenni Maxson, and I'm a graduate student from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I'm doing thesis research about the experiences of mothers who are expatriates in Singapore, and I'm conducting a questionnaire to learn about expatriate households. You're being asked to help because you belong to an organization for expatriates.

Having a better understanding of the expatriate experience will ultimately benefit expatriates and their families as they adjust to life in a new place. Participating in this research will also have the short-term benefit of providing a forum by which expatriates can reflect on their experience and share their insights. Participating in this research should only take 5 minutes, and it poses no risks.

Returning the attached questionnaire completed, implies your consent in this research project. All of your answers will be strictly confidential--I will never link any of your responses with your identity, in research reporting or elsewhere. These data will be stored in a secured location.

Please complete the questionnaire on the next page and email it to me at: maxsonj@leaders.ccl.org, or you may send it via fax to 6835 6584. Do not be concerned with formatting within the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation with this project and don't forget to send your name and contact number in a separate email to be illegible to win one of the Border's gift cards.

EXPATRIATE HOUSEHOLDS SURVEY

Thank you for taking a few minutes of your time to complete this short questionnaire. The information that you provide will be confidential and used for research purposes only; your responses and identity will never be linked or revealed in any research reports. Please do not hesitate to contact me (6835 6577) should you have any questions or concerns about replying to this questionnaire or its purpose. You may also contact my thesis committee Chair at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Dr. Jill Fuller (jefuller@uncg.edu), for verification.

1. What is your country of origin? _____
 2. How long have you resided in Singapore? Years__ Months_____
 3. Please list all other countries where you were an expatriate, noting when and for how long:
Country: _____ from (yr):__ to_____
Country: _____ from (yr):__ to_____
Country: _____ from (yr):__ to_____
4. What formal as well as informal organizations were you active with in your home country?
 5. What formal as well as informal organizations are you active with in Singapore?
 6. Please list the age and country of birth for each child living with you.
Age:___ Country: _____
Age:___ Country: _____
Age:___ Country: _____
 7. Please briefly describe how you (and your spouse) get help with child care:

 8. What was your employment status in your home country? (please circle one)
Employed full-time
Employed part-time
Not employed
 9. If employed part-time, how many hours/wk did you work for pay away from home? Hrs:_____
 10. What is your current employment status? (please circle one)
Employed full-time
Employed part-time
Not employed
- If not employed skip to question
11. If employed part-time, how many hours/week do you work for pay away from home? Hrs:_____

Appendix A. Questionnaire

12. In your home country were you ever concurrently employed and raising children?

Yes: No:

If no skip to question
15

13. If yes, for how long did you do both?

Yrs:___ Months:___

14. If yes, how many hrs a week on average did you work for pay away from home during that time? Hrs:_____

15. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group session to discuss expatriate households in Singapore? If so, please list provide your name and contact information:

Name:

Primary Phone number: _____

Secondary phone number:_____

Thank you again for responding to this questionnaire. I will keep your information confidential.

APPENDIX B. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Schedule of Questions for EXPATRIATE FAMILIES FOCUS GROUPS

Thanks for taking this time to participate in the focus group. The information that you provide will be kept confidential by me and used for research purposes only; your responses and identity will never be linked or revealed in any research reports. For this research to be fully confidential, each of you will need to keep in this room what's said here today/tonight. If you feel that you can't do that, then please let me know right away and we'll make other arrangements.

1. What are all of the groups that you socialize with here (both formally and informally)?
2. How would you describe your transition to living in Singapore? What adjustments did you find yourself making after you'd moved here?
3. How would you characterize the differences between your life in Singapore and your life before moving here?
4. (If prompt needed) Do you feel like you're a different kind of spouse here than you were before?
5. (If prompt needed) Do you feel like you're a different kind of parent here than you were before?
6. (If prompt needed) How have your experiences seeking help with childcare (other than from your spouse) been different from where you lived before?

Thanks again for contributing to this discussion. Hearing about your experiences and insights has been very helpful!

APPENDIX C. IRB APPROVAL PAGE

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

01 REC'D 7/22/2004

IRB File NUM:

045001

AUG 03 REC'D

TITLE: Expatriate Motherhood in Singapore

PI: Maxson, Jennifer

DEPT: SOC

CO_PIS:

FACULTY SPONSOR: Fuller, Jill

Action Taken:

eXempt from Full Review

Expedited Review

Full IRB Review

Disposition of Application:

Approved

Disapproved

MODIFICATIONS AND COMMENTS:



IRB Chair/Designer

APPROVAL DATE*: 8/2/04

EXPIRATION DATE*: 8/2/05

*Approval of Research is for up to ONE year only. If your research extends beyond one year, the project must be reviewed before the expiration date prior to continuation.

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