

How the Other Half Lives

By Denise Yuen

“Women are better off making lives than saving lives.” This was the motion of the inaugural Medicine Debates, held at the Shaw Foundation Alumni House in the National University of Singapore (NUS) Kent Ridge Campus on 13 August 2011, and jointly organised by SMA, NUS Medical Society and Duke-NUS Student Council.

The debate was meant as a platform for students from both the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine (YLLSoM) and Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School to interact and form lasting friendships.

To encourage this interaction, the debate teams comprised of students from both schools. The Proposition consisted of Ivan Ogloblin (Duke-NUS), Joshua Hoe (YLLSoM) and Elizabeth Tan (YLLSoM), while the Opposition consisted of Ramasamy Ramakrishnan Pravin (YLLSoM), David Tainter (Duke-NUS) and Clarissa Tio (Duke-NUS).

Although the motion of the debate generated some controversy soon after it was announced, the organisers felt that it addressed a sensitive and important issue: the challenges faced by the modern woman in juggling work and family, particularly with a demanding career in the medical profession.

Prof Tan Chor Chuan, President of NUS and Guest of Honour of the debate, commented that while Duke-NUS and YLLSoM are different and distinctive in their own ways, they are both part of the NUS family, and their fates are inevitably intertwined as students from both schools enter the common pathway of clinical training. But he felt that thus far, collaboration between the two schools was limited to Camp Simba (a camp for the children of cancer patients), and therefore the organisation of this debate was timely to start developing the networks between the two schools, in preparation of their students' future careers. Other

than the utilitarian aspects, he also mentioned that it is a good thing to make many friends and an event like this provides students with the opportunities to do so.

In the tradition of similar debates, this debate was also filled with wit, irreverence, sharp repartee, tongue-in-cheek humour, and hand-and-foot-in-the-mouth disease.

The chairperson of the debate, Mr Adrian Tan, a partner at law firm Drew & Napier, explained the format of the debate, which was adapted from the World Debate Series. Each team had three speakers. The Proposition would speak first, followed by the Opposition, and so on. The twist was that the very last speaker would be from the Opposition, instead of the Proposition. Mr Tan noted that this was one of the few occasions where the Opposition was given the last word in Singapore.

The first Proposition speaker, Ivan, noted that a way to arrest the low birth rate in Singapore is to bring in increasing numbers of foreign talent, but Singaporeans would be unhappy about this. He stated that the Proposition is not about inequality and making men better off than women, but that the different sexes should stick to what they do best. For women, this would mean reproducing the population and bringing up children well, instead of spending long hours at the hospital.

The first Opposition speaker, Pravin, disagreed with the Proposition that women are “a limited non-renewable resource”, but said that they are instead “a precious entity not to be exploited for making babies”. He argued that gender plays vital role in doctor-patient relationships. Male doctors are insensitive whereas female doctors are more empathetic, and patients prefer sensuous female doctors to curt male ones.

Joshua, the next Proposition speaker, declared that they valued



L to R: Dr Craig R Stenberg, Dr Chong Yeh Woei, Prof Tan Chor Chuan, A/Prof Paul Ananth Tambyah, Dr Tan Chi Chiu, Dr Tan Li Feng and Dr Tina Tan

women more than the Opposition as they saw women in their true natural role, and it is at home where women find their true value. Joshua stated that they did not accept that women are equal with men in the workplace, due to the inherent differences between the two sexes. As evidence, he cited the fact that most of the chief executive officers in various countries are men. He then looked at various factors which created this situation, classified into endocrine, environment and social factors.

David, from the Opposition, contended that men should bear half the responsibility of the low birth rate. He claimed that this was because “Singaporean men wear tight pants” which “interfere with temperature-sensitive biochemical reactions and compress vital organs”. He also opined that male doctors needed female ones at the workplace, so that the former would not have to spend all their time around men and become socially awkward. Marriages between doctors would also produce genetically superior children. In addition, female doctors make up for the shortcomings of male doctors, and make them clean up their act, which all increases the standard of patient care.

Elizabeth, the last Proposition speaker, declared that everyone needed to see what is best for the children at home, the patients and the female (and male) doctors. She reiterated that women are irreplaceable as mothers and have social responsibilities, and it is unfair to the children or the patients if female doctors have to rush off work halfway to attend to the children’s needs. Women are perfectionists, and if they have to juggle too many balls, they “might develop carpal tunnel syndrome”. She concluded that it is not that women aren’t valuable, but that they are far more valuable at home than in the workplace.

The last Opposition speaker, Clarissa, asked if the invaluable job of procreation should preclude a professional career. She opined that women are inherently compatible with Medicine, as they possess “the power of cleavage”, which allows, for example, a voluptuous female doctor to sedate patients with her looks. Women have better concentration, which is good in case all the male doctors get distracted by hot girls. Singaporean women can also hire nannies to take care of their children and go back to work. She concluded that there is no point in stopping women from pursuing a medical career.

Mr Adrian Tan added to the general hilarity by giving short witty comments after each speaker had spoken their piece. After the last speaker had delivered her speech, the judges, alumni A/Prof Paul Ananth Tambyah, Dr Tan Chi Chiu, Dr Tan Li Feng and Dr Tina Tan, adjourned to another room to confer on the results. During this interval, two musical groups, A Bunch of People (Duke-NUS) and Joel & Friends (YLLSoM), took to the stage and entertained the audience with a few songs each, backed with live music.

After a conference of 15 minutes, the judges returned. A/Prof Tambyah, who had been appointed adjudicator, stated that the judges felt that the Proposition had laid out the case well, but the Opposition had been more entertaining. They also felt that it was a pity that none of the speakers had accepted any points of information, although it had not been compulsory to accept any. He then declared the Opposition the winner to loud applause. Joshua, the second speaker of the Proposition, was named Best Speaker.

After the debate, the audience mingled over a tea reception. The organisers thank all who contributed to make this event a success and hope to make this debate an annual tradition. **SMA**



The Proposition, L to R: Elizabeth, Joshua and Ivan



Debate chairperson Mr Adrian Tan



The Opposition, L to R: Clarissa, David and Pravin

We all felt we were in a disadvantaged position. In a way, every argument had to be well polished as we did not want to insult or offend anyone in the audience with our arguments. Although we tried to make the debate a little informal and in some ways humorous, we also had to be really careful about what kind of arguments to put forward. There might be established female doctors right there in the audience. Another reason why it was difficult to argue for the proposition statement is because personally I did not believe in it. I believe in equal rights for both males and females, so it was really difficult to argue for something that is not close to your heart.

– Proposition speaker Ivan Ogloblin

When I found out I was on the Opposition for this topic, I thought the outcome would be a no-brainer; surely my team would win. But the pressure mounted on us from our female classmates and the tough fight from the Proposition made me sweat. When A/Prof Tambyah delivered his critiques and announced the final results, I thought to myself, “The Proposition guys won’t be getting dates anytime soon, and neither will I if we lose.” I felt more relieved than elated when we won. Definitely a stressful moment, but overall, a very enjoyable experience that I would definitely repeat.

– Opposition speaker David Tainter

The inaugural Medicine Debates 2011 was the brainchild of Dr Toh Han Chong and A/Prof Tambyah. With this brilliant idea came an awesome collaboration between the NUS Medical Society and the Duke-NUS Student Council. Through the course of organising this debate, we received strong support from the SMA, as well as the venue coordinators from Shaw Foundation Alumni House.

Through the few months of preparation, I believe members from both schools involved had the rare opportunity to collaborate with each other to make this event a success. I’ll always vividly remember the day when the debaters from both schools met. It was a really unique experience to have students of such different backgrounds gathering together to share ideas on a humorous topic such as this. I believe that through the experience of organising this, I have indeed gained much valuable insight into the mindsets of people from different backgrounds, as well as friends with a unique sense of humour.

– Student organiser Kwek Lee Koon (YLLSoM)

Pulling off an event for the first time is always a challenging feat – no matter how many times you play out the event in your head and plan for contingencies, there will always be something that can be improved on. At the same time, this was a rather difficult event to publicise given the nature of the motion. We had to be very careful and deliberate in framing the event in a way that can best communicate the committee’s intentions to have a tongue-in-cheek debate designed to entertain and foster bonds between both medical schools. We had to ensure our students understood that debating on this motion did not mean that the medical field was questioning the cultural values behind gender equality. However, this event was a wonderful experience for me. I really enjoyed working with my YLLSoM colleagues, especially Lee Koon who was incredibly effective, understanding and fun to work with. It was also another opportunity to reconnect with the friendships I made from earlier interschool events.

– Student organiser Josh Chua (Duke-NUS)



Prof Tan Chor Chuan addressing the audience



Emcee Kenneth Goh (Duke-NUS)



Debate organisers Josh Chua (left) and Kwek Lee Koon



The audience is all ears

Reflections on the Inaugural Medicine Debates

Girls – You Run the World

By Ramasamy Ramakrishnan Pravin

Upon discovering that the motion of this year's debate was "Women are better off making lives than saving lives", a feeling of anxiety swept over me. It was not only an extremely intriguing topic but a sensitive one too, and I did not wish to risk losing all my female friends after the debate. After being placed in the Opposition, it was a daunting task because being the youngest debater among both teams, the challenge to impress and entertain seemed greater.

To prepare for the debate, the two teams met for mock debates to gather our points and to get a rough gauge of the impressive array of talents on both sides. Being the only YLLSoM student with two other Duke-NUS students in my team was an interesting experience, because they had different points of view which were equally fascinating. My teammates, David and Clarissa, were extremely dedicated to the task of supporting women and upholding women's rights. It was harder for David and me, as being on the Proposition would have allowed us to make our speeches more entertaining, yet we stood up to the challenge and did our best to oppose the motion.

Prior to the debate, preparation was rather intense as my team researched cases and statistics to ensure that our points were not only entertaining but also well substantiated. Opposing the motion did feel better eventually, considering the dangers of being single for a lifetime for the guys in my team. Supporting the fairer sex was indeed a new experience for me. Every word I uttered during the debate was to support the women in the audience and around the world. The debate was not specific to the audience but was for all the oppressed women worldwide who have dreams. As I took to the podium, it was definitely intimidating standing before an audience of established judges. After the first speaker of the Proposition, Ivan, delivered his stunning speech, I hoped to match up to him.

Opening my speech with my personal remake of Destiny's Child's "Independent Woman", I progressed on to do my impersonations of sensuous female doctors and curt male doctors, peppering my speech with feminist quotes. After all, only real men would overtly support the women. The Proposition deemed women to be "limited resources". However, for us, women are goddesses on this planet who need to be treated with respect. Devising a song and a poem for my debate and presenting it to the audience was a grand challenge.

Presenting an entertaining debate was a priority but when I was standing up there, I knew I was representing women who long to be both good mothers and good doctors. Nothing is impossible for women and I am glad the Opposition delivered their message that women do run the world. Though Joshua and Elizabeth did an excellent job presenting their stance of women becoming "domestic goddesses", I was equally proud of David and Clarissa who delivered stunningly entertaining speeches on why women are capable of becoming world class doctors.

The heated debate was indeed lighthearted and credit also goes to the chairperson Mr Adrian Tan, who was a hilarious host, labelling my conclusion a "flow of bad poetry", which was exceedingly funny. He was a great host and the debate would not have been such a resounding success without his help or the help of the other judges, including my medical school interviewer A/Prof Paul Ananth Tambyah.

Soon after, the results were announced. Joshua from the Proposition won the Best Speaker Award, which he absolutely deserved for his superb speech. However, since the purpose of this debate was entertainment, we, the Opposition, were the champions of the debate.

As one of my debut experiences in medical school, I was grateful for everyone who came down to support and I was overjoyed to hear the positive reception to the debate. Both teams comprised of such talented debaters who presented varied perspectives on women. Women of today have become more independent and this debate is an excellent illustration of how women, becoming the subjects of an intense debate, are no longer in the shadows. The debate did provide me with the chance of stepping out of my comfort zone, and hopefully will be the stepping stone for many debates to come in the future. To conclude, I am glad to have won and I hope this debate will inspire all women to be the best they can ever be. Girls, you run this world, our world! **SMA**

Pravin is a first year student at YLLSoM.

Chaotic Thoughts on Both Sexes

By Joshua Hoe

God created man, and then he created woman. Insofar as that part of the story goes, there is pretty much consensus. What is not so sure is why God only gave man a job. It wasn't a very glamorous job like a lawyer or doctor to be sure (after all divorce was not allowed, and the medical certificate [MC] had not yet been invented), but it was a job nonetheless. And it was good.

Until womankind, whilst sitting in her Neolithic cavern, or nomadic hut made of reindeer skin, decided one day that she had had enough of waiting around to give birth every nine cycles of the moon. She passed her children along to other single women for the day (they were not required to sing and dance, until Mary Poppins came along), and went to hunt wild animals herself (after all, how hard could it be?).

Eventually – and guys, I think we know deep down where this is going – the women, with better techniques, efficiency and planning, started to bring home more speared reindeer and rhinoceros. Also, they looked fabulous even with elephant blood on their faces. In fact, when the men came home at 6 in the evening, after tramping through the bush trying to prove their manhood (as the old adage goes, a man's livelihood is his man-hood), the women had already reached home by 4, prepared dinner by 4.30, and were having tea and gossip around the campfire by 5.30, with the diapers changed and goat milk all prepared.

That's when the debate started. And it wasn't pretty at all. Someone somewhere must have said, with as much gusto as he could: "So it's not enough for you to be IN labour, now you have to take over ours?" But the argument continued despite attempts at stand-up comedy. Centuries later, things are pretty much the same, except men get thrown in jail for saying women can't hunt as well.

If you're beginning to ask how this is relevant, then good, at least one of us is keeping track of where this is going, dear reader.

This is my perspective on why we still debate such a primitive motion, although I must confess I came up with it. And let's not deny it; it was a rather primal debate, conducted with much raw emotion and feeling.

While the Proposition built a fortress of logic on the hill of economics, surrounded by the valley of men-are-better-than-women-in-decision-making, this position was soon stormed rather viciously by the Opposition going over the bridge of empathy, over the moat of female ambition, and through the back gate of tight-fitting-pants-are-the-true-cause-of-low-birth-rates which was unfortunately left unlocked. The Proposition didn't realise that this gate would be used to get into the fortress of logic. Unfortunately, the castle was breached, and mighty was the fall of the Proposition's foundations.

Whilst I am still unable to decide who is better at hunting, I must say both sexes have proven that they are equal at argument (although some are more equal than others).

What we can be sure of is that in 21st century Singapore, the MC has been well and truly invented, and there is a huge demand for people who can write them. In that sense, both Duke-NUS and YLLSoM were created for the same purpose.

My hats off to my future colleagues from Duke-NUS for a great time, a great debate, some good fun, and hopefully when *SMA News* asks me to write an article next, it will be less damaging to my reputation as a sensible person.

Cheers! **SMA**

Joshua Hoe is a fourth year student at YLLSoM.



Pravin (first from left) with his Opposition teammates Clarissa and David, and Dr Chong Yeh Woei



Joshua (first from right) with his Proposition teammates Elizabeth and Ivan, and Dr Chong Yeh Woei