

**‘Mail-order brides’: are we seeing this
phenomenon in New Zealand?**

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Abstract

Cross country, cross cultural and cross religious partnerships are not new. While travel is the traditional way of facilitating transnational partnering, new technologies, notably the internet, are also now providing a means of meeting potential overseas partners. New Zealand census data provides some inference that mail order brides are immigrating to New Zealand and, given international trends, it is almost certain this phenomenon is taking place in New Zealand. Already the Immigration New Zealand partnership policy recognises that mail order brides are immigrating to New Zealand as it contains an avenue for women in this type of relationship to obtain residency when they would otherwise not meet the residency requirements. While the mail order bride phenomenon is currently generally seen in a negative light, there are some good social and economic reasons for such relationships to exist. Love may not be the main reason why some of these couples form, but that does not necessarily mean that the relationship is not ideal for both partners.

Key words: Mail-order brides, New Zealand

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Introduction

Cross country, cross cultural and cross religious partnerships are not new. Historically trade, migration and warfare all brought different groups of people in contact with each other with one inevitable result being intermarriage of various kinds.¹ Now there are even more significant flows of people around the world, through migration, both temporary and permanent, and through tourism. New Zealand hosts many visitors through tourism and also stands out as a country with a high proportion of its residents, nearly a quarter, being born overseas. In addition, a high proportion of New Zealanders are working or travelling in foreign countries at any one time. These flows provide opportunities for transnational and transcultural partnering. But some forms of transnational partnering can itself be a driver for migration. While travel is the traditional way of facilitating transnational partnering, new technologies, notably the internet, are also now providing a means of meeting potential overseas partners.

In this paper we explore one aspect of heterosexual transnational partnering, the phenomenon of ‘mail order brides’. We come to the topic for two reasons, one theory driven, the other prompted by trying to understand emerging trends within census data. We begin with the theory driver. First we set out some social and economic factors which together may have directly or indirectly supported the phenomenon. We then set out some reasons why some men in industrialised countries, such as New Zealand, might seek partners from other countries, and in particular women from regions such as Asia and Eastern Europe. But such partnerships require a supply of women seeking such relationships. Therefore we explore women’s reasons for seeking such relationships. While there is some evidence to suggest New Zealand men may be seeking mail order brides there is little evidence that New Zealand women are seeking ‘mail order husbands’. We therefore discuss possible reasons why this is so.

We then consider some New Zealand migration and transnational/trans-ethnic partnering data. These data give us no direct indication of how many partnerships may have been the result of New Zealand men seeking ‘mail order brides’. However, we examine these data because, at first sight and based on stereotypes, some of it suggests that the ‘mail order bride’ phenomenon may be at work in New Zealand. For example New Zealand intermarriage research, using 2001 census data, showed that Asian women, and particularly Thai and Filipino women, were far more likely to have a European partner than the reverse situation.² Other census based research has also shown that shows that the overall imbalance between Asian women and men living in New Zealand was especially pronounced in both 2001 and 2006, with in the latter census 26% more Asian women than Asian men in the broad 25–49 years age group, and 37% more in the 30–34 years age group.³

¹ Leroi (2005).

² Badkar, Callister, Krishnan, Didham & Bedford (2007).

³ Ibid.

In the next section we discuss the legal requirements for such women to gain permanent residency New Zealand, who do so under the current Immigration NZ partnership policy. In the final section we explore how the public, media and academics often respond negatively to marriages between New Zealand born men and non New Zealand born Asian or Eastern European women, including considering how appropriate or inappropriate the term 'mail order brides' is. In this section we explore why there is often a negative perception of these marriages and what this says about New Zealander's current attitudes towards transnational marriages, ethnicity and migration.

The term 'mail order bride'⁴ is used throughout this paper for ease of reference, not because we condone the description. 'Transnational relationship' is also used and it is important to note that it has a specific meaning in this paper and does not refer to all transnational relationships.⁵ In relation to our own attitudes, this research note does not in any way seek to generalise all relationships between New Zealand born men and non New Zealand born women, nor does it seek to criticise transnational relationships. Instead it aims to explore why this trend may be occurring and to better understand the some of the relationships between partnering and migration to New Zealand. As such it contributes to our wider 'missing men' research programme.⁶

The phenomenon of 'mail order brides'

While the mail order bride phenomenon has recently gained academic and popular attention, the concept of mail order brides is not new. For example, history shows us that European male settlers who were located in remote colonies or frontier lands greatly outweighed the number of female settlers.⁷ While these men often partnered with local women, some sought wives from their own home lands who were willing (or perhaps sent against their will), to relocate, settle, and start a family. They found these wives by expressing their interest in newspapers, and women would reply to the advertisements then correspond with the men by mail, and often agree to marry without meeting in person.⁸ Marriage agencies were also established to help facilitate these marriages. Amongst these early mail order brides were women from the UK who migrated to New Zealand during the 1700's and 1800's.⁹ These marriages were usually not cross-cultural marriages, which

⁴ For the purposes of this paper the term 'mail order bride' means a woman who is seeking a transnational marriage by using either a transnational internet dating website or an transnational marriage facilitating agency, or a woman who is in a cohabiting relationship, including marriage, with a man who she met through either of these two means.

⁵ For the purposes of this paper the term specifically means a partnership between a man from a developed country and a woman from a developing country who both deliberately sought a foreign partner through an internet dating website or a transnational marriage facilitating agency.

⁶ Institute of Policy Studies (2011).

⁷ Belich, (2009).

⁸ Enss (2005).

⁹ The film *The Piano* depicts the story of an early New Zealand mail order bride.

most mail order bride marriages are understood to be today, and occurred because of the largely out of balance within ethnic group gender ratios.

The cross-cultural mail order bride phenomenon began to emerge gradually in the 1960's then on a larger scale in the 1980's through 'mail order' catalogues containing profiles of women interested in marrying a man from abroad, hence the term 'mail order bride'. The catalogues predominantly contained women from developing countries in Asia and were targeted at men from developed countries, such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia and later New Zealand. Women from Eastern Europe were increasingly marketed from the 1990's onwards.

There were a number of factors which together sparked the 'mail order bride' phenomenon in the early-mid 1980's. Notably, increasing gender equality in developed countries started to impact some men and women's decisions relating to marriage. As Western women increasingly moved into tertiary education and paid employment, the number of Western women who wanted to fulfil a more traditional marriage role as a full time mother and housewife began to decrease. However, there remained some men who wanted a wife who would fulfil this role within traditional patriarchal marriage. Some of these men who wanted this type of marriage began to struggle to find a partner who wanted the same. Therefore, some began to look abroad for a wife who they thought might be more willing and suitable for this role, and the mail order bride market emerged to cater for these men. Women from developing countries were marketed in mail order catalogues and later on internet dating websites, as the ideal 'traditional' wife, playing on existing racial and gendered stereotypes which some men assumed were accurate and bought into.

In the 1980s and 1990s significant technological advances were made, particularly in the communications industry, which enabled individuals in developing and developed countries to become increasingly connected when they had not been previously. Increased trade and channels of migration expanded and international air travel became more affordable and accessible for both tourism and migration. These developments made it much easier for men and women who were otherwise isolated from each other to come into contact and form relationships. While the mail order bride phenomenon began before the age of the internet, internet dating websites have been instrumental in facilitating the growth of the phenomenon. Never before had people had such a quick, affordable and easy to use tool to search, evaluate and communicate with a wide range of potential international partners. While local geography traditionally, and still to a large extent does play an important role in the formation of partnerships, the internet has largely removed the geographic barriers which restricted people from meeting and forming a relationship with a partner who was not located nearby. The marriage market has effectively expanded from a domestic market to an international market.

Economic restructuring, changing income levels and standards of living across national boundaries during the 1980s and 1990s may have also supported the mail order bride phenomenon. Some academics have argued that there is a link between economic downturns and increased marriages involving mail order brides, and attribute the collapse of the Soviet Union and resulting economic downturn to the boom in the Russian mail order bride industry, which took off in the early 1990's.¹⁰ For women in low and unstable income earning countries, marriage to men in higher and more

¹⁰ For example see Chun (1996, p 1173).

stable income earning countries could provide financial security and a stable or higher standard of living for both themselves, and potentially their wider family. Women who would usually partner with local men during periods of economic stability or upturn may have become more likely to consider, or feel more compelled to enter, a transnational marriage than they had previously. Large differences in relative incomes, for example between Eastern and Western European countries may have also prompted women to look to Western Europe to find higher income earning partners. Western men began to be marketed (accurately and misleadingly) to women in developing countries as being able to provide more financial security and a higher standard of living. Economic downturns may have also affected relationship options for some men in developed countries, prompting them to look abroad for a partner. This is discussed in further detail in a later section of the paper.

Finally, the infiltration of western media and popular culture into developing countries on a larger scale during the 1980's, again due to increasing globalisation, may have also indirectly influenced the perceptions of Western men held by women from developing countries. Some women may have increasingly viewed Western men as attractive partners because of the modern and glamorous way the West and Western men were portrayed in television and movies. Similarly, Western men's perceptions of women from developing countries in Asia and Eastern Europe were also influenced by stereotypes portrayed in the media.

How New Zealand men meet 'mail order brides'

At present, there are two main options for New Zealand men seeking a mail order bride. Firstly, via internet dating websites which operate largely the same as domestic internet dating websites. The second are marriage facilitating agencies that organise 'romance tours'. Internet dating websites are a popular option for men to search for and evaluate a large range of potential partners.¹¹ Most websites also have matchmaking agents who can match men with women already registered and vice versa. For a fee or sometimes no cost, website members can post profiles of themselves, describing their looks, personality, occupation as well as the type of partner they are seeking. Members are then free to contact, or block contact, from any other members. Relationships develop through email and phone correspondence, and once the couple get to know each other better and the relationship becomes serious, one party will travel overseas to meet the other in person. Often, the male partner travels abroad to meet his potential partner so that her family can meet and approve of him before they get married, and couples often marry in the female partner's country of residence to ensure the marriage is guaranteed before she makes the move abroad and the sacrifices involved with migrating.

Another way for men to find a partner is via a marriage facilitating agency, which are usually based in the female partner's home country. There are hundreds of international agencies currently operating which potentially cater for New Zealand men. Women register with the agency in order to be introduced to men who travel to various parts of Asia or the former Soviet Union on a 'romance' or 'love tour' with the specific aim of finding a wife. A major agency in Russia offers such a tour for US \$3000-\$5000 which includes airfares, accommodation, social events, individual dates and ongoing introductions.¹² Some men propose to women after knowing them for a matter of days or

¹¹ See for example <http://www.mypartnerforever.com/russian-brides.asp> & <http://www.asiandating.com/>

¹² See foreignaffair.com

weeks, or return home and continue communicating via email and phone. Not only does the package provide the means for meeting a partner, it also includes what is described as an 'EZ-DO-IT Fiancée Visa Kit' to help the men apply for their new partner's immigration visa. 'New Applicants Visa Interview Sessions' are also included to prepare their partners for visa interviews. 'Kiwi Dating'¹³, a smaller Ukraine based agency which specifically markets to New Zealand men, provides 7 day tours for NZ\$1299 (excluding airfares) and charges men NZ\$25 for each woman they would like to meet. 'Endless Love'¹⁴, a New Zealand owned and operated agency, also provides romance tours for New Zealand men to Ukraine.

Reasons why men and women choose a transnational relationship

The majority of the literature on mail order brides focuses on evaluating, but most often criticising, the mail order bride industry. Ironically, the voices of men and women who are the subject of this literature often fail to resonate. When their reasons for choosing a transnational partner are discussed, academics often make assumptions based on prevailing stereotypes. As of early 2011, there are only two well known published studies in which academics have actually interviewed men and women who were seeking a transnational partner, or who were married to a transnational partner and their reasons for doing so.¹⁵ This section will draw on these two studies, as well as other material, to discuss the reasons why some women from Russia, China and the Philippines and men from the United States deliberately pursue transnational relationships. Some of the reasons given by the women from these countries could be presumed to be similar to the reasons why women from other Eastern European and Asian countries pursue the same relationships. However, this article does not seek to generalise, and it is important to note that each country has different country-specific economic and social conditions which may influence a woman's choice for seeking a transnational partner. As there is no published research on the reasons why New Zealand men seek mail order brides, this article will draw on reasons given by American men and adapt and discuss them, where possible, in a New Zealand context.

Mismatch in sex ratios

One simple reason why men and women seek would partners from overseas is that there is a significant mismatch between the numbers of men and women seeking partners in particular countries or areas. For example in Russia¹⁶ there is a significant excess of women in the prime couple forming age groups with approximately 3.3 million more women than men aged 15-64.¹⁷ This would provide a strong incentive for a female to seek a male partner from another country. In New Zealand (and Australia), at first sight, census data instead suggests a 'man drought' in these age groups.¹⁸

¹³ See <http://dating-nz.com/travel.shtml>

¹⁴ See <http://endlessloveagency.devhub.com/>

¹⁵ Constable (2003) & Jonson (2004).

¹⁶ See the 2002 Russia Census <http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=87>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Callister, Didham & Bedford (2006).

Therefore numbers of men and women alone would not suggest a need for New Zealand males to seek overseas partners. A more likely explanation for New Zealand men to seek overseas partners is that despite the apparent small excess of women, for a variety of reasons some New Zealand men may not be able to attract a local partner. However, these men may potentially be able to attract an overseas partner. Alternatively some men may pursue an overseas partner because they are able to attract a 'better' partner than they would be able to attract in New Zealand. The inability to attract a local partner, or the desire for a particular type of partner, are also driving factors for women to choose a transnational relationship.

Inability to attract a local partner

Due to a complex combination of changes in labour demand and labour supply, predominantly lower skilled males in countries such as New Zealand are less likely to be in paid work and, if they are working, their real incomes have declined over time.¹⁹ The significance of this in terms of partnering is that the rates of partnering amongst this group of males have declined substantially.²⁰ The relatively low rate of partnering amongst these men could partly be explained by research on the partnering reasons of New Zealand females. Historically women have tended to 'marry up' in terms of income earning potential and education level.²¹ Now there are more women than men with higher education. In addition, while there remains a pay gap, a group of women have dramatically increased their income earning potentials. Well educated women can increasingly choose to live alone, and even raise children on their own, while supporting themselves from the labour market. In addition, through welfare support women less able to support themselves through the labour market can raise children on their own. So overall, because partnering is no longer so vital for financial security, women now have more options in terms of choosing a partner, may choose not to partner at all, or may delay partnering. For a group of low skilled and low income earning men it has become more difficult to attract a partner. While these men may be less attractive to New Zealand women they may be attractive partners to some women from developing countries who regard them as having a relatively high income or education level compared to the average income and education level in their own country.

There are a variety of other reasons aside from income and education level which hinder some New Zealand men's ability to attract a partner. Lack of good physical appearance, personality and age may prompt some men to look abroad if they believe they have a better chance of attracting a partner from overseas. Media reports often claim the majority of men who want a mail order bride cannot attract a local partner because of their appearance or personality, and describe such men as:²²

Rejected, unrequited, casualties who have little currency in their own domestic currency markets, but who can be transformed into international desirable commodities.

¹⁹ Callister & Rea (2010).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Callister (1998).

²² Constable (2003, p 79).

Not surprisingly the men interviewed by Constable and Jonson did not express this reason as their motivation for pursuing a mail order bride. However, men who are unable to attract a local partner may pursue a transnational relationship because they see themselves as ranking higher in the international marriage market than the domestic marriage market. Those with a lack of appearance or personality or those of older age may have a relatively high income and education level which is an attractive quality to some women in developing countries but not for New Zealand women. These men may also believe they can attract not just an equal partner but in their subjective judgement, a 'better' (usually younger and more attractive) partner than they would otherwise be able to attract in New Zealand. Men who are able attract a local partner may also pursue a transnational relationship for this reason.

Other reasons men articulated in the studies by Constable and Jonson was that working in male dominated fields made it difficult to meet women in the workplace and living in remote rural areas also limited their ability to meet women. These areas may lack local women or it may be hard for men from these areas to convince their partners to relocate, for example farmers in Central Otago. Other men may be very shy, socially isolated and unwilling to get into the New Zealand dating game, especially if they have had bad experiences in the past. Meeting a partner over the internet may be an unconfrontational alternative to trying to meet women in bars or through friends.

Some women who choose to pursue a transnational relationship may have also had difficulty attracting a local partner, but for different reasons than New Zealand men. One of the common reasons which emerged Jonson's and Constable's studies was that women had become unattractive marriage material simply because of their age. Robinson uses the example of Natasha, one of her interviewees, to illustrate the point in relation to Russian women, who at the 'ripe old age of 23' was no longer attractive to local men. She remarks:²³

This surprised me at first, but as the year wore on I gradually realised it was true. Women in Russia, at least in the provincial town where I was studying, were expected to have been married by her age. There were not many men who would marry a 'devushka' as old as Natasha. She was constantly being approached by married men, but because she wanted more than a romantic affair, she thought an American husband might be a better solution.

Issues regarding age were also raised by Chinese and Filipino women in Constable's study who were fearful of becoming or had become unattractive marriage material because they had passed the average age of marriage in their own country. Many highly educated women faced this problem because by the time they had completed university they were past the average age most women had married. Older uneducated women who could not provide an 'excuse' for remaining unmarried due to university commitments were even more aware of the social stigma attached to their age, and felt they were perceived as having something wrong with them.

Other factors noted by women from all three countries which they regarded as inhibiting themselves from attracting a local partner was the fact they had been divorced, widowed or have children from a previous marriage (especially if out of wedlock). Russia in particular has a disproportionately large number of women who are single, divorced, or widowed and also has the largest proportion of

²³ Johnson (2007, p 8).

single mother households.²⁴ These women often find it hard to find a partner because there is such a surplus of women men can partner with. Constable noted that women's chances to marry (in the Philippines) or remarry (in China) were key factors in their decision to become mail order brides.²⁵ Compounding the problem of being unable to partner is that for many women, having a partner is the main means of obtaining financial security for themselves and their children if they were unable to obtain employment or welfare support. Women who had been divorced or were single mothers were often subject to ongoing criticism from their communities and wanted to escape the stigma which had become attached to them. One of the upsides of having a transnational partner often expressed by women was that they were happy to marry a woman who had already been married or had children, and often had an interest in having more children. Being married was very important to the majority of women in both studies who saw it as a central aspect of their lives, so if they were unable to find husband locally they would much rather look abroad for a husband than stay single for the rest of their lives.

Wanting a partner with specific characteristics

Men who may or may not be able to attract a partner in New Zealand may be looking for a partner with specific qualities and hope or assume that a mail order bride will be more likely to possess these qualities as opposed to a New Zealand partner. Women may similarly have a checklist of qualities in a partner which they hope or assume they will be more likely to find in a partner from abroad. There is a common assumption in academic literature and the media that men who want a mail order bride, specifically want a partner who will accept traditional gender roles in a marriage, in which the wife is a full time mother and housewife and does not enter into paid employment (or on a limited basis), and the husband engages in full time paid employment. In addition, these men want a 'non-feminist' wife who is docile and subservient. The general consensus in Johnson and Constable's studies was that men were hoping to, and assumed they could find, a 'non-feminist' partner who was more interested in being a wife and a mother than having a career. However, they disputed the assumption often made by the media and academics that they wanted to control, mistreat, or exploit their wives. Men's assumptions that a woman from a developing country would be more likely to possess these qualities were often based on prevailing racial and gender stereotypes which are perpetuated on many of the internet dating and agency websites.

While a traditional marriage may be regarded by many Western women as an unattractive and outdated arrangement, Constable and Jonson's studies revealed that the majority of the women were aware that the majority of men they contacted wanted a 'traditional' marriage and either regarded this as an acceptable arrangement, or in some cases, an attractive arrangement. For some working women, a traditional marriage was an attractive option because it was regarded as liberation from a lifetime of low paid work. As Constable points out:²⁶

Often lacking in the feminist critique of marriage and gender relations is an appreciation of the variety of ways in which women in different socio-cultural contexts define liberation. To

²⁴ Fodor (2002, p 380).

²⁵ Constable (2003, p 84).

²⁶ Constable (2003, p 65).

work for a wage might be liberating to a middle-class America woman, but not to a woman who has worked in fields or a factory for sustenance since childhood.

She goes on to say that:²⁷

To some women in Asia and the West at the turn of the millennium, liberation is equated with freedom to work outside the home and gain a degree of financial independence, but to others it is the freedom not to work outside the home.

Some working Chinese and Filipino women also expressed the view that the division of labour in which the husband is the primary breadwinner and the woman provides domestic and reproductive labour is considered a desirable and modern arrangement.

However, not all the women in Johnson and Constable's studies regarded being a 'traditional' wife as an attractive arrangement, although they recognised it may be expected in a marriage to a foreign husband, as it often is in a marriage to a local man. When one of Johnson's interview participants asked if she wouldn't mind being housewife she reiterated the sentiment of many Russian women in the study by answering:²⁸

That's what Russian men want too, so what's the difference? If I'm going to be a housekeeper, it is better to do it somewhere else than here.

Other, often more educated women who were looking at becoming a mail order bride did not want to give up their careers altogether, and wished to stay working full time or part time or perhaps do further tertiary education as well as being a 'traditional' wife. In addition, while many women in both studies did not regard themselves as feminists (especially the vast majority of Russian women who regarded being a labelled a feminist an insult) they did not regard themselves as docile, subservient slaves who would accept being exploited by their husbands. Like many women, they were looking for personality traits such as kindness, generosity and supportiveness.

Just as it is often argued in the literature that men seeking mail order brides predominantly do so because they want a traditional marriage, it is often assumed that women who become mail order brides do so because they are desperate, and are seeking financial security to escape a lifetime of poverty. In regards to Filipino women, Glodava and Onizuka suggest that:²⁹

Filipinas are eager to marry foreigners regardless of age, temperament, appearance or comparative penury. They are desperate to leave the country where their best prospects are unpaid drudgery as rural or slum wives-or the effervescent glitter of the red light district.

Financial security and the opportunity to immigrate to a new country was an important factor for women in both studies to varying extents, although Glodava and Onizuka's statement is an inaccurate reflection of the economic and social position of the Filipino women as well as the

²⁷ Constable (2003, p 66).

²⁸ Johnson (2007, p 91).

²⁹ Glodava & Onizuka (1994) in Constable (2003, p 85).

Chinese and Russian women in both studies. The women came from a variety of social and economic situations, and education levels. Some were still at high school or university, some were successfully employed, and others were struggling to make ends meet. Their current jobs ranged from lawyers, chemists, accountants, nurses, school teachers, office workers, shop workers, cleaners to unemployed. Constable came to the conclusion that although economics and politics, and imagined geographies of wealth and poverty constitute an important context in which these relationships take place, they do not provide enough of a reason for women to marry a foreigner.³⁰ It is important to note that financial security is also a contributing factor for many Western women when choosing a partner, so it is somewhat unfair that mail order brides are criticised for factoring in the same reason.

While there will inevitably be women who are desperate to leave their home country for a variety of reasons, Constable emphasised that the vast majority of women in her study were not desperate because they made informed decisions about who to contact or respond to, and who they agreed to meet with. None of them wanted to marry just any foreign man, and the 'right man' meant different things to each of them.³¹ She argues that many of the women in her study also preferred not to leave their homeland, given the choice, and women do not accept any offer of marriage in order to emigrate.³² Were 'getting out' their main objective, Constable argues that the women would not express a high degree of selectivity and choice. Russian women in Jonson's study were also selective and had criteria for the men they wanted to correspond with. Interviews revealed the detailed practises the women employed in order to make their applications and listings successful to the 'right' type of men.³³ They were also adamant about the importance of listing themselves on internet sites instead of the more traditional paper catalogues, the latter attracting 'worse' men and also put the balance of power in favour of the men who could choose to contact them rather than vice versa.

While both studies showed that the majority of potential mail order brides are not 'desperate' and willing to accept a partner of poor character, as often portrayed in the media, they were realistic about their potential partner and did show a willingness to accept 'imperfections' in men (usually a large age difference), especially if they had been looking for some time. A participant in Constable's study noted:³⁴

I have been doing this for 6 years now. When I first started, I thought it was going to be so easy. I would list the characteristics I wanted my husband to have, send off my photographs, and then the man who fit that description would write to me. I wasn't entirely naïve. I mean, I wasn't expecting a prince, just someone who would be my companion and friend. But it hasn't worked like that at all. I've come to realise that even with foreign men, I'm going to have to accept some imperfections.

³⁰ Constable (2003, p 84).

³¹ Constable (2003, p 28).

³² Constable (2003, p 84).

³³ Johnson (2007, p 17).

³⁴ Johnson (2007, p 87).

Another participant, a 21 year old soon to be divorced mother of one described one man she was corresponding with:³⁵

He's fifty. My perfect match would be someone who is 10 years older than me. But he seems nice, and he doesn't mind that I already have a child, even though his children are already grown up. Actually he already has a grandchild. He is older than I thought I would accept, but he has his own house and his own business, and he seems normal.

When Constable pointed out he was 30 years older she replied that none of the men who wrote to me were under forty but to her it didn't make much of a difference.

In addition to the reasons discussed above, one of the most often overlooked reasons why men and women pursue a transnational relationship is because they want a serious, loving, long term relationship. As Constable and Jonson's studies show, many men and women are often divorcees and have had bad marriages or negative experiences of partnering in their home country and simply want to partner with someone completely different in the hope of having a successful relationship. Constable noted that a lot of men she spoke with were bitter about their relationships with Western women and Johnson noted the same was true for many Russian women and their relationships with Russia men. This bitterness or dissatisfaction with Russian men was often linked to the high rate of domestic violence and alcoholism that occurs in Russia, and many women in the study argued the police and legal system did not actively try and reduce these problems.

Finally, in addition to seeking personality characteristics, a group of males may be seeking partners who have traditional religious beliefs. This may complicate stereotypes of European New Zealand males seeking Asian or Eastern European brides. It may in fact be Asian men born in New Zealand seeking more traditional Asian partners, or perhaps Jewish men seeking a traditional partner. These may not be cross-ethnic marriages but the women may still be seen as 'mail order brides'.

While the findings of studies such as Constable's are helpful and provide a different and perhaps more accurate representation of mail order brides and their husbands than in most of the literature, it is important to note that such studies have limitations. This is primarily because they tend to involve interviews with men and women who voluntarily shared their experiences. On the whole, sexist or racist men, or men of general bad character, are unlikely to participate in such studies. Their reasons for seeking a mail order bride are therefore not reflected in the overall findings. In addition, women who were vulnerable and desperate, financially or otherwise, may have been unwilling to participate along with women who were 'gold diggers', or pursuing a husband solely to get a visa. It would be naïve to argue that men and women do not pursue transnational relationships for the common negative 'stereotypical' reasons. It is likely that some women pursue transnational partnerships due to a desperate need to obtain money and permanent residency in a Western country to escape a life of extreme poverty or prostitution. Similarly, it is likely that some men pursue transnational partnerships due to the desire for a young, attractive, sexually submissive housewife. However, we wish to emphasise that there are many reasons why men and women choose are increasingly choosing these relationships, and usually for a complex combination of reasons as opposed to simplified stereotypical reasons.

³⁵ Johnson (2007, p 93).

'Mail order grooms'

While the 'mail order bride' phenomenon is well known and well documented, there appears to be a very small emerging 'mail order groom' phenomenon. There are several websites³⁶ which cater for women who are seeking a foreign husband from various countries in the former Soviet Union. In addition, there is a growing sex tourism industry for women seeking sex tourism holidays which could also result in relationships between Western women and men from developing countries. The question therefore arises whether the mail order groom industry will grow as large as the mail order bride industry. While there will most likely always be a group of women who for a variety of reasons will struggle to attract a local partner and may therefore look overseas, there is one major reason why New Zealand women are unlikely to increasingly look abroad for a mail order groom. As discussed in previous sections of the paper, New Zealand women have a strong tendency to 'marry up' in terms of education, income level and to some extent age. Many potential mail order grooms from developing countries may have a lower education level and income than New Zealand men. While many New Zealand women are well educated and have high incomes themselves, the tendency to marry up demonstrates that many women still want a partner who can also provide financial security as opposed to being the partner who solely provides financial security, which may be the case for a New Zealand woman married to a mail order husband.

New Zealand, along with other western societies, is still struggling to come to terms with some of the new relationships women are pursuing as they perhaps confuse traditional gender, religious or ethnic roles and go against common relationship conventions. Examples include Muslim women marrying outside their faith and same sex partnerships. Another example is women in relationships with younger men, given the arguably derogatory label 'cougar'³⁷. If New Zealand society still attaches social stigma to women who date younger men, there will arguably be some social stigma attached to women who have mail order husbands as this is another uncommon and unconventional type of relationship. Conforming to social norms may deter some women from pursuing a mail order husband. However, the possibility of a potential small mail order phenomenon should not be entirely dismissed as there are signs it is slowly creeping into popular culture. In the New Zealand edition of the most popular young women's magazine worldwide, with a global readership of over 78 million, one columnist concludes an article by suggesting to readers not to waste their time pursuing an unenthusiastic partner because they will:³⁸

Save money on [txts] which can then be spent on a Russian male order groom if things don't work out.

In addition to a potential mail order groom market for heterosexual women, there is an emerging trans-gender mail order partner market, especially in Thailand and Indonesia, as well as an emerging homosexual mail order partner market. It will be interesting to observe whether the 'mail order'

³⁶ See for example www.alovinghusband.com, www.mailorderhusband.net & <http://nicesingles.com/findahusband.html>

³⁷ Lawton & Callister (2010).

³⁸ Foster (2011).

phenomenon will grow across a wide range of people of different genders, sexual orientation and ethnicity, not solely amongst Western heterosexual men.

New Zealand data on transnational partnering

To date, there has been no empirical work on ‘mail order brides’ in New Zealand. Traditional data sources, such as the census, do not have information available that would allow the identification of such partnerships. But census data does provide some possible backdrop to this issue. It can indicate some characteristics of partnerships, for example is it more common for overseas born Asian women to be with New Zealand born European males than the other way around. Possibly connected with this, are there overall more Asian women than men living in New Zealand.

Drawing on two published New Zealand studies, this brief section focuses on Asian and European ethnic groups, and those born in New Zealand and overseas. These studies miss out other possible ‘mail order brides’ such as ‘Russian’ brides with New Zealand European males, or perhaps Asian brides with Maori men. This is because if they recorded Russian in surveys they would have been reported in most census output as being a ‘European’. However, some basic data on those born in Russia and Ukraine are provided.

A feature of both the 2001 and 2006 censuses was the imbalance between Asian women and Asian men. Table 1 draws on just 2006 data to show the overall sex ratios of New Zealand residents, as well as the ratios for the main level 1 ethnic groups, Table 1 shows that the ratio is highest among the Asian group in the over-30 age group. In particular, in the 35–39 age group, these census data indicate 37% more Asian women than men living in New Zealand. Comparing 2001 and 2006 Census data shows that the Asian population in the 20–49 age group grew by around 59%, or just over 70,000, in this five-year period. This increase is primarily due to migration suggesting a strongly gendered migration flow in some age groups.

Table 1: Ratio of Women to Men in Each Age and Ethnic Group, and Total Ethnic Counts, 2006

Age	Ethnic Group						Total ²
	European	Māori	Pasifika	Asian	MELAA ¹	Other	
<i>Ratio</i>							
20–24	1.05	1.10	1.07	1.01	0.91	0.84	1.01
25–29	1.11	1.17	1.12	1.10	1.03	0.89	1.07
30–34	1.16	1.18	1.09	1.29	0.98	0.89	1.11
35–39	1.14	1.17	1.11	1.37	0.83	0.89	1.11
40–44	1.11	1.15	1.08	1.25	0.89	0.93	1.08
45–49	1.07	1.13	1.07	1.19	0.87	0.92	1.05

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings

Research has shown that the extreme ratios for Asians seen in the 30–34 and 35–39 age groups are primarily driven by overseas-born Asians.

Table 2 is also based on 2006 Census data, but switches from ethnicity to country of birth data.³⁹ Table 2 shows ratios for those born overseas in the Asian region and living in New Zealand for less than five years for the main Asian source countries. It also shows those born in Russia and the Ukraine. This table gives some indication of the recent net migration flows from the various countries

In most age groups, for those who have come from the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Japan there are significantly more women than men. For several of the other Asian countries there are more women than men in many age groups. India and Pakistan stand out in most (but not all) age groups in having more men than women living in New Zealand. Data are also provided for Russians and Ukrainians. Again, there are significantly more women than men.

Table 2: Ratio of Women to Men, by Main Country of Birth, for Those Born Overseas in Asia (and Russia and Ukraine) and living in New Zealand Less than Five Years, 2006

Country	Age Groups						Total men and women 20–49
	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49	
India	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8	16,101
Pakistan	1.0	1.2	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6	651
Sri Lanka	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.0	0.9	1,257
Cambodia	1.5	0.8	0.9	0.7	1.2	1.4	852
Thailand	1.5	2.1	3.4	3.1	2.7	3.4	1,260
Vietnam	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.9	1.4	1.7	891
Indonesia	1.5	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.6	1.1	951
Malaysia	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.4	1.7	1.3	2,709
Philippines	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.5	1.2	1.3	3,900
Singapore	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.2	642
China	1.0	1.1	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.1	31,218
Hong Kong	1.0	1.8	1.5	2.0	1.3	1.2	459
Japan	1.7	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.1	2.0	3,144
Korea	1.4	1.2	1.9	2.4	1.9	1.0	7,350
Taiwan	1.3	2.0	1.9	2.8	2.8	1.2	957
Russia	1.6	2.4	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.7	1,167
Ukraine	1.9	1.5	2.0	1.7	3.2	1.1	294

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings

There are a variety of drivers of gendered migration. Historically, men have dominated flows into New Zealand, but a range of international studies suggests that, for a variety of reasons, women have now become critical players in the migration process. There may be more Asian (or Eastern European) women than men coming into New Zealand, or staying, because:

- the growth of particular occupations tends to attracting Asian women rather than Asian men. Examples include nurses and caregivers. Women from developing countries are increasingly migrating temporarily or permanently to work in specific low skill employment streams, e.g. paid domestic workers but also filling high skill jobs (e.g. doctors);

³⁹ There is some overlap between Asian country of birth and Asian ethnicity, but not all of those from Asian countries record Asian ethnicity.

- those seeking to study in New Zealand being more likely to be female than male;
- males and females do come in as couples, but the male goes back to Asia to work (astronaut families);
- New Zealand males have met Asian partners while on holiday or working overseas. For example New Zealand soldiers working in Singapore; and
- some Asian women may be 'mail order brides'.

Again while not determining how people formed relationships, data on ethnic intermarriage can also provide some backdrop to our investigations. The following are based on 2001 census data. The patterns of ethnic intermarriage for Asian women and men are complex. For some groups, such as Korean men and women, there is a high likelihood they will have a partner who is also Korean. However, amongst Asian women there are some groups that are highly unlikely to have a partner from the same level 3 ethnic group (notably Thai, Asians not further defined and Filipinos). In contrast, Filipino men are highly likely to have a Filipino partner. For Asian men, marriage with a European varies from under 1 percent to over 9 percent (for Indians not further defined).

Much of the complexities within the Asian data reflect differences in timing of migration to New Zealand. For example, Thai, Filipinos and Koreans tend to be relatively recent migrants. Some of these groups will have already partnered in their country of origin and migrated as a couple.

Based simply on rates of intermarriage with Europeans (and Maori) if there are Asian 'mail order brides' they are potentially most likely to be found amongst the Japanese, Filipino, Asian not further defined and Thai group. As already noted, these type of data do not identify the partnerships such as New Zealand born European male and Russian born partner who could also be a 'mail order bride'.

Table 3: Partners of Asian women – Ranked by whether their partner is from the same level 3 ethnic group, opposite sex couples, Total counts, 2001

	Total number of couples	Same ethnic group#	European	Maori	Pacific Peoples	Asian	Other
Korean	3,483	89.8	4.7	0.3	0.2	91.1	0.1
Sri Lankan nfd	1,389	86.0	6.0	0.4	0.4	89.0	0.2
Indian nfd	13,416	84.5	11.1	1.5	0.9	85.8	0.2
Khmer/ Kampuchean/ Cambodian	873	83.2	7.2	0.7	0.3	91.4	0.0
Chinese nfd	20,259	77.3	14.5	1.9	1.6	78.8	0.3
Taiwanese Chinese	570	75.3	4.7	0.0	0.5	82.6	0.5
Vietnamese	588	71.9	16.3	0.5	1.0	81.6	0.0
Japanese	1,968	30.6	56.7	3.7	1.4	37.0	0.9
Filipino	3,561	30.2	62.6	2.2	1.0	32.5	0.9
Asian nfd	753	27.1	59.0	4.0	0.8	34.7	2.0
Thai/Tai/Siamese	1,239	19.1	65.1	4.1	1.0	29.1	1.0

But the partner may have also recorded other ethnic groups as well

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings

Table 4: Partners of Asian men – Ranked by whether their partner is from the same level 3 ethnic group, opposite sex couples, Total counts, 2001

	Total number of couples	Same ethnic group#	European	Maori	Pacific Peoples	Asian	Other
Korean	3,246	96.3	0.7	0.1	0.1	97.5	0.0
Filipino	1,224	87.7	7.1	2.0	0.7	90.7	0.0
Sri Lankan nfd	1,377	86.7	5.4	0.2	0.4	91.7	0.0
Khmer/Kampuchean/Cambodian	840	86.4	4.3	0.4	0.0	94.6	0.0
Chinese nfd	18,276	85.7	8.7	1.9	1.7	87.8	0.1
Taiwanese Chinese	501	85.6	1.2	0.0	0.0	94.0	0.0
Indian nfd	13,248	85.6	9.4	2.0	2.0	87.2	0.2
Vietnamese	540	78.3	6.1	0.6	0.0	92.2	0.6
Japanese	825	73.1	16.7	2.5	1.1	79.3	0.0

But the partner may have also recorded other ethnic groups as well

Source: Statistics New Zealand, Census of Population and Dwellings

Legal requirements for ‘mail order brides’ to gain permanent residency in New Zealand

A final contributing factor to the growth of the phenomenon is changing nature of immigration policies in many countries, including New Zealand. Previously, stricter immigration policies may have discouraged some men from seeking a mail order bride as there was no guarantee their new partner would be able to obtain residency, and the process of applying for residency was much more costly and time consuming. Women may also have been reluctant to uproot themselves and their children without knowing whether they could obtain residency in a new country. However, partnership immigration policies have become less strict over time, allowing partners of New Zealand residents to gain residency without necessarily being married or in a relationship for a considerable period of time. In addition, new residents are then able to sponsor residency applications for their family members which could provide an extra incentive for a woman to pursue a transnational marriage.

Normally, if a non New Zealand born partner wishes to apply for permanent residency in order to live with their New Zealand born partner, they must apply for residency under the Immigration New Zealand partnership policy and be sponsored by their New Zealand partner.⁴⁰ The main requirement to obtain residence on the basis of a partnership is that the applicant must have lived with their New Zealand citizen or resident partner for at least 12 months. This ensures that residence is only offered to partners in relationships that are ‘genuine and stable’. However, couples who have met through international dating websites and have had ‘correspondence’ relationships, or couples who have met through agencies and have only know each other for a matter of weeks or months will not be able to fulfil this requirement. Even if the couple is married, the requirement that the couple must have been living together will not be waived.

In a situation where the couple has not lived together for 12 months, there is an alternative way for the non New Zealand born partner to obtain residence. He or she can apply for a New Zealand work visa or extended visitor visa, which will allow them to live in New Zealand with their partner for 12 months to ‘build’ their eligibility for residence on the basis of partnership. If the couple is still in a ‘genuine and stable’ relationship after 12 months, the non New Zealand born partner is eligible to

⁴⁰ Immigration New Zealand (2011).

apply for residency on the basis of partnership. There are also requirements of the New Zealand born partner, who must be eligible to support their partner's application in order for it to be successful. To be eligible the New Zealand born partner must not have previously supported more than one other successful applicant. In addition, if they have supported a successful applicant in the last 5 years, they are not eligible to support another applicant until 5 years between the applications have passed. The New Zealand partner is also required to undergo a police check and must not have been convicted, in the seven years prior to the application, of any offence involving domestic violence, or any offence of a sexual nature. In the seven years prior to the date the application is made, the New Zealand partner must also not have been the perpetrator of an incident of domestic violence which has resulted in the grant of a residence permit to their former partner under the policy for victims of domestic violence. However, these character requirements may be waived by an immigration officer if certain requirements are met.

If the couple separate during the 12 month period while the non New Zealand born partner is on a temporary working visa they are not eligible to apply for residency under the partnership policy. They are free to apply for residency under a different policy but will be assessed against the normal eligibility criteria for that policy, and will not be any more likely to get residency simply because they were in a relationship with a New Zealander. If the relationship has broken down as a result of domestic violence perpetrated against the non New Zealand born partner or their dependent child by their New Zealand born partner or a family member of their partner, and the non New Zealand born partner was not able to return home because of the impacts of stigma, or because they would have no means of independent financial support from employment or other means, they could apply for a work permit then residence under the Victims of Domestic Violence category.

One of the major concerns expressed in a lot of the literature on mail order brides is the vulnerable position women find themselves in when they immigrate to their partner's country of residence and the likelihood of domestic abuse.⁴¹ Currently there is no conclusive evidence that mail order brides are more likely to be victims of domestic abuse than partnered women in general as there is currently very little data and research in this area.⁴² Despite a lack of conclusive evidence, there is a strong argument that mail order brides are more vulnerable to abuse than most New Zealand women in relationships with New Zealand men. These women are in a foreign country with a man they perhaps have not known for a long period of time or have ever lived with, may speak little English and not have the immediate support of friends and family, be unaware of their legal rights, or be unable to leave the relationship easily - physically or financially if it turns sour.

Some academics also argue that a significant number of mail-order bride agencies are connected to commercial sex trafficking operations.⁴³ Again, while there is a lack of evidence to indicate instances of human trafficking in mail order brides in New Zealand, there is potential for this to occur, with

⁴¹ Epstein (2011).

⁴² The United States, which has the largest number of mail order bride immigrants, does not collect data on the number of mail order brides who immigrate and marry US citizens. New Zealand also does not collect similar data so it is hard to make a correlation between marriages involving mail order brides and domestic violence.

⁴³ Ibid.

marriage to a New Zealander used as a vehicle to bring victims undetected into New Zealand. Women may also be trafficked under temporary work visas and then forced to marry a New Zealander under the fear of police involvement or deportation. More research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to identify trends and issues.

As Lindee⁴⁴ discusses, it is very difficult to regulate the mail order bride 'industry' to prevent instances of trafficking and abusive men from marrying mail order brides. Subclinical psychotics or sociopathic men are unlikely to be detected through the public personae they present. New Zealand has adopted some similar immigration restrictions to the United States on sponsoring partners to prevent men who have a history of physical or sexual violence from supporting applicants under the partnership policy. Additional information, ongoing support and follow up interviews could be provided by Immigration New Zealand or other government and non government agencies to mail order brides who immigrate to New Zealand in order to better understand the problems these women face, and to provide them with protection should they need it.

The media and academics negative portrayal of transnational relationships and the public's response

While there is a range of discourse on the mail order bride phenomenon, media coverage and academic analysis has been predominantly negative. Early literature that emerged in the mid 1990's was very critical and argued that mail order brides were desperate victims of sex tourism or human trafficking. Literature focused on legal mechanisms to regulate the mail order bride 'industry' and the need to protect mail order brides from almost inevitable domestic violence at the hands of their spouses. This trend continued until Constable published one of the first studies that challenged the prevailing assumption that mail order brides were helpless victims forced into loveless marriages to less than desirable western men. Instead she argued that many women were choosing to marry transnational partners for a variety of complex reasons, including, surprise surprise, for love. There have been a number of other studies published which seek to provide a more balanced view on the topic, although the majority of the literature, remains negative.

The Western media also continues to criticise the mail order bride phenomenon and fuel negative stereotypes. The most extreme stereotype is that the men married to mail order brides are sociopaths who will control and abuse their wives, while the women are gold diggers desperate to escape poverty at any cost in the hope of getting a visa before separating from their partner. These negative stereotypes and perceptions fuelled by the Western media are also evident in New Zealand. For example stuff.co.nz published a story in 2009 providing advice on how to protect your finances from gold digging mail order brides.⁴⁵ Documentaries such as Dawn Porter's *Extreme Wife: To Russia with Love* and Louis Theroux's *Thai Brides*, both produced by the BBC and screened in New Zealand, depict men on sleazy romance tours, which make for good television, but are arguably not the most accurate portrayal of the men and women who enter into transnational relationships. There have

⁴⁴ Lindee (2007).

⁴⁵ Morrall (2009).

also been several high profile murders of mail order brides by their husbands in the United States which received vast amounts of media attention.⁴⁶

Despite the predominantly negative portrayal of the mail order bride phenomenon in academia and the media, it is likely the New Zealand public holds a wide range of views on the topic, with not all being negative. However, there are several historical, political and socio-economic reasons why New Zealanders may be critical of transnational relationships.

In many countries throughout history, cross cultural relationships have been frowned upon, or even banned. While cross cultural relationships have become much more common, the predominantly negative reaction to the mail order bride phenomenon from the media, academics, and perhaps the public may in part be a hangover from historical views on cross cultural relationships. However, it is interesting that there has been a switch in attitudes towards the makeup of cross cultural relationships. Historically, partnerships between Western male settlers and indigenous women (in countries such as New Zealand), were more socially acceptable than partnerships between Western women and indigenous men. Nowadays the situation is perhaps in reverse, with partnerships between Western men and women from developing countries receiving more attention and criticism than partnerships between western women and men from developing countries. One reason why this is occurring is that some people may assume that if a western man is partnered with a woman of Asian or eastern European descent (especially if there is a large age difference) his partner is likely to be a mail order bride. In reality, both partners may be New Zealand born and met in New Zealand or overseas through friends or work, not through international dating websites or agencies. Even after establishing that the female partner is not a mail order bride, some people may still transpose negative stereotypes and reasons why they are critical of partnerships between a mail order bride and a Western man onto other cross-cultural couples.

Constable argues that many of the negative assumptions and associations regarding transnational relationships between Asian women and American (or New Zealand) men are based on prior assumptions about power and inequality between developed and developing countries.⁴⁷ A husband of a mail order bride may be perceived as having more 'theoretical' or abstract power due to his nationality, which is then perhaps reinforced by other possible more concrete forms of power over his partner. This could include power in terms of physical size, control over the couples finances, the fact he is in his familiar surroundings in his own country while she is isolated from her home country and support networks of family and friends. In addition mail order brides may not speak English fluently which limits communication with others and access to resources in their new country. This imagined or real power imbalance may lead people to assume that the abuse of power is inevitable, and that mail order brides are highly likely to be controlled mentally and/or physically by their husbands through verbal and physical abuse. In addition, there may also be an assumption that controlling, aggressive or potentially violent men are drawn to mail order brides. In the very least, some people may be of the opinion that even if there isn't a blatant abuse of power the relationship is still unhealthy because of the perceived power imbalance.

⁴⁶ For example the murder of Russian mail order bride Anastasia Solovieva by her husband in 2001.

⁴⁷ Constable (2003, p 224).

Another possible reason why some people may be uncomfortable with transnational relationships is the perception that transnational marriages are commodified, loveless and fake. The term mail order bride undoubtedly contributes to this perception, as the term inaccurately implies that the bride has been 'bought' in a literal sense by her husband. The main reason why transnational partnerships are perceived as commodified may be because of the way the couples meet. Marriage agencies are still a somewhat unusual way for New Zealanders to meet a future spouse and appear impersonal and commodified because of the perception (and often the promise of the agency), to provide a 'one stop shop' for finding a partner. However, men and women who use agencies may be seeking just as 'genuine' a relationship as those who meet on internet dating websites or in person. Agencies provide an effective and quick way for people to meet potential partners and instead of being regarded as sleazy and fake, they could be regarded as a more developed version of speed dating, which is regarded as socially acceptable and quite popular in New Zealand. Another reason why some people may be critical of marriage agencies is that the concept of marriage arrangement is a foreign to most New Zealanders. If we had a culture of arranged marriages in New Zealand the use of agencies may not seem so unusual.

The use of international dating websites to meet a partner may also lead people to assume that transnational relationships are commodified because people who use them are also 'shopping' for a potential partner and market themselves perhaps superficially in order to attract potential partners. However, many New Zealanders already market themselves in a similar way on internet dating sites to seek partners locally,⁴⁸ and the social stigma of internet dating, particularly for the older generation, has disappeared. Even so, there is still a major difference between international and local internet dating. Transnational couples who engage in international internet dating develop their relationship predominantly or solely via email and phone correspondence as opposed to in person. Similarly, couples who meet via agencies may have had very little contact in person before getting married. This is regarded as quite unconventional in New Zealand as nowadays, a couple would usually date in person for some time and often then live together before getting married if they choose to. Because there has not been a conventional development of the relationship there may be an assumption that each partner does not have an accurate perception of each other, or do not care that they haven't spent much time together in person because they are happy to marry anyone who ticks the right boxes in terms of age, attractiveness or income.

There are a wide range of women and men who enter transnational partnerships because they have found a partner with whom they are compatible and similar in terms of age, education and relative income level, physical attractiveness and personality. However, partnerships which attract the most attention and perhaps criticism are those between a young, attractive and possibly poor and poorly educated woman and a much older, less attractive, divorced wealthy man. This may be because there is an assumption the couple did not marry for love, which could be regarded by some as immoral. A mail order bride may be regarded as exchanging her youth, beauty and perhaps willingness to be a full time housewife and her husband exchanges financial security and the opportunity for a new life in a country with a higher standard of living. This may appear more like a business deal rather than a 'legitimate' love match, which is an unusual arrangement to most New

⁴⁸ As at January 29, 2011 New Zealand's main online dating website www.findsomeone.co.nz had 322,243 members.

Zealanders. With couples such as these, and even with couples who are regarded as much more 'compatible' because they have similar socio-economic characteristics, there may still be assumption that transnational partnerships are destined to fail because of the perceived linguistic, cultural and social differences between the partners.

Contemporary views on marriage migration may also influence some people's opinions on transnational marriages. Marrying in order to migrate was very common in New Zealand in the 1700's and 1800's and regarded as socially acceptable and useful due to the shortage of female settlers at the time. Nowadays there are much tighter restrictions on people who wish to migrate for marriage and using marriage solely as a tool to migrate is now regarded as immoral and fraudulent. Obtaining permanent residency in a new country is a driving factor for many women to enter a transnational relationship. While this is very often not the sole reason why many mail order brides marry, the fact that it is a large contributing factor may be looked down upon.

A final overarching reason why some people may be critical of transnational partnerships is because in New Zealand and other Western countries there are culture-bound assumptions about what constitutes a healthy, modern, ideal partnership. It may be hard for some people to have an open mind about transnational partnerships because they are looking at these partnerships from a Western perspective. New Zealand men in transnational relationships may be criticised because they don't conform to conventional relationship norms and similarly, mail order brides may be criticised for not conforming to the modern Western (often Feminist) role of a woman within a marriage. Constantly analysing transnational partnerships through a western lens may have resulted in some of the more positive aspects of transnational partnerships being overlooked.

The Rock Radio Station 'Mail Order Bride' Competition

Research for this working paper began in 2010, and shortly before publication New Zealand radio station 'The Rock' ran a mail order bride competition.⁴⁹ The radio station offered the male winner return flights to Ukraine, 12 nights accommodation, \$2000 spending money and the opportunity to meet a potential partner on a 'romance tour' provided by the New Zealand based agency Endless Love. The competition does not provide the winner with a pre-arranged bride who will be forced into marriage, and airfares for a potential bride to travel to New Zealand are not included in the prize.

There has been a wide range of opinion on the competition which reflects the wide range of views towards the mail order bride phenomenon. As Ordonez notes:⁵⁰

The mail order bride phenomenon can be viewed from several perspectives. It can be seen as a tributary of the ever widening stream of overseas migration...It can be interpreted as a form of commodification and sexual exploitation...as a source of marriage fraud and a way for the women to cheat the immigration restrictions. Still it can be viewed as a natural way for people seeking friends and life partners to get together across national borders.

⁴⁹ The Rock FM (2011).

⁵⁰ Ordonez (1997).

A mail order bride may be an ideal and well suited partner for a 40 year old farmer in rural Southern Otago who cannot attract a New Zealand partner because of the lifestyle change that would need to be made. Or perhaps a 35 year old shy, high school educated factory worker who cannot attract a partner due to a relatively low income and lack of confidence. Or the stereotypical divorced middle aged business man who has children and doesn't want to re-enter the tough New Zealand dating scene. For different reasons, all these types of men, and many others, may be ideally partnered with a mail order bride. Similarly, a New Zealand partner may be ideal for a middle aged well educated Asian woman who doesn't necessarily want to relocate but is 'too old' to find a partner in her home country. Or a divorced mother from Russia with young children who wants financial security and a loving long term partner who she is unable to obtain back home due to the surplus of women in the local marriage market. Or finally, a young woman looking for a new 'modern' life in a foreign country.

Conclusion

So do we have 'mail-order brides' in New Zealand? Our initial analysis of census data provides some inference that mail order brides are immigrating to New Zealand, although there are many limitations with these data. Yet, while we do not have direct evidence, it is almost certain this phenomenon is taking place in New Zealand. Already the Immigration New Zealand partnership policy recognises that mail order brides are immigrating to New Zealand as it contains an avenue for women in this type of relationship to obtain residency when they would otherwise not meet the residency requirements.

Our brief canvassing of theories on transnational relationships suggests there are social and economic reasons for such relationships to exist. The literature also suggests there could be a further expansion of this type of partnering arrangement, both overseas and in New Zealand. For different reasons, the number transnational relationships between 'mail order husbands' and New Zealand women are unlikely to grow, at least to the same extent as relationships between New Zealand men and mail order brides. However, some international websites have also expanded into same-sex international matchmaking, and there could be further growth of this type of partnership. While there has been a lot of international literature written on the mail order bride phenomenon, very little research has been undertaken in New Zealand, and, indeed, further research is warranted. Regardless of the size of the phenomenon it is a useful topic to explore as it highlights many changes going on in New Zealand society related to migration, globalisation, as well as attitudes towards inter-ethnic partnering.

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