

How faith informs : the attitudes and perspectives of relationships and marriages among Catholic young women

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



**How faith informs: The attitudes and perspectives of
relationships and marriages among Catholic young women**

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Abstract

The Singapore government has deemed the current family trends to be detrimental to the nation's development. These trends include: ultra-low fertility rates, the delayed age of marriage and increasing divorce percentages, which threaten the stability of families and have harmful impacts on society. The Church is a social institution that shapes individuals' attitudes through its teachings on marriage and relationships. Thus, this paper seeks to uncover the attitudes and perspectives that young Catholic women have while being socialized in a society that is increasingly exposed to Western patterns, which may perpetuate these trends in the Singapore society. Through the research findings, it is observed that the respondents have attitudes and beliefs that are in line with the Churches' teachings and supports the governments' ideals of promoting family life.

Keywords: Marriage, Catholic, Religion, Individualization, Relationships, Fertility.

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But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
2 Corinthians 12:9

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	6
2.1 The Role of Religion in Society	6
2.2 Individualization Theory	7
2.3 Marital Horizon Theory	8
3. Research Methodology	8
4. Research Findings	10
4.1 Value of Chastity in Relationships	10
4.2 Dating Purposefully	14
4.3 Marriage as a Commitment	17
4.4 Marriage for Motherhood	19
5. Discussion	22
6. Conclusion and Limitations of Research	24
7. References	27
8. Appendix	30

1. Introduction

Across traditional Asian societies, marriage is an important social institution that governs social order, and it has been given significant value in Singapore due to the state's belief that the family unit is a key institution that must be protected and upheld for the future of the nation (Straughan 2009:31). The contemporary understanding of marriage is based on emotional bonds between two individuals, while in the traditional Asian culture, marriage and childbearing bring about merits such as an elevation of social status, social capital, and generational continuity (Sampson and Madigan 2018, Straughan 2009). The realm of marriage and the family has been plagued by societal trends that threaten this longstanding unit of stability in society. Such trends include the delayed age of marriage, low fertility rates, a growing proportion of singles and increasing divorce percentages in Singapore (Straughan 2009:2). Cherlin (2004) contends that the deinstitutionalization of marriage is underway, as an individualized form of marriage supersedes, raising a cause for alarm in Singapore (Lauer and Yodanis 2010; Straughan 2009).

The increasing median age of marriage for both men and women over the years (Department of Statistics Singapore 2019) has consequences such as a lower fertility rate and an aging population due to biological factors and psychosocial factors. The factors that have contributed to delayed marriage in Singapore often involves the younger generation prioritising economic and educational interests over marriage which is justified by the correlation of the nation's socio-economic development and current singlehood patterns (Quah 2003). Furthermore, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of Singapore is at a dangerous low of 1.15 as of 2017 (Department of Statistics Singapore 2018). On a political level, Quah (2003) highlights the distressing consequences of decreasing fertility levels for the government which includes issues of "defence, tax revenue and labour force supply." Given that human resources are Singapore's main advantage over other economies, this draws the direct link between fertility rates and Singapore's economic competitiveness. Therefore, many policies, including the Marriage and Parenthood Package, have been put in place by the government, signalling the importance of marriage and family and the severity of the trends that threatens society (Jones 2012).

The Singapore government is an important social institution that develops and implements policies to effectively regulate society. The local government holds the traditional nuclear family in high regard and greatly encourages only having children within the confines of a marriage as seen through its current policies. As the family is the "bedrock of society"

(Matthews 2015), much emphasis has been given to promoting marriage and family life, including match-making efforts, fiscal incentives for young couples and prenatal and postnatal policies (Jones 2012). The government contends that the family is where values are most powerfully conveyed and inculcated to the next generation, and thus is an important institution for a child's socialization. These policies have been key in addressing the cultural shift of attitudes towards marriage and family since the industrialization of Singapore, where women now have access to education and are actively part of the workforce (Jones 2012). However, in recent years, the effectiveness of these policies has been questioned in the face of statistics that have not been ideal for the government (Jones 2012). In the Singapore context, changing the mindset of the population in favour of marriage and childbearing is necessary, especially with values of meritocracy and success that places a great emphasis on education, career and wealth above the importance of the family.

The history of Singapore includes a myriad of religions that followed as migrants settled down before the state's independence. Although the government is a secular state, they have encouraged religion as a means of promoting social order and morality. The Catholic Church is a social institution that has played a large role in the initiation of education in the early years of the state's development. Furthermore, the number of Catholic schools remains the second largest after government schools from the 19th Century till date. Even though only 7.1% of the population in Singapore are Catholic (CIA World Factbook 2018), the outreach and spread of the Catholic tradition and teachings are also felt by those who have been through the Catholic education system. By looking specifically at the Church's viewpoint of marriage and relationships which are often regarded as traditional and conservative, we are able to witness its contribution in shaping the attitudes and perspectives of Catholic young women in Singapore our society that is increasingly exposed to social revolutions and liberal perspectives.

Thus, this paper seeks to uncover the attitudes and perspectives on marriage and relationships among young Catholic women to gather insight into how religious teachings withstand the changing social trends of marriage and family. Research has shown that these attitudes and perspectives towards marriage and family play a large role in the trajectory of the individual's life, consequently affecting the future of families in Singapore (Carroll et al. 2007). The observations of the interactions of the various social institutions in Singapore; marriage, the government and the Church, thus sheds light on the attitudes and perceptions towards marriage and relationships among young Catholic women.

2. Literature review

2.1 The Role of Religion in Society

In essence, there are three generic aspects of religion: belonging, behaviour and beliefs (Bellah 1964). Emile Durkheim argues that religion's primary social function is to maintain and assure the 'equilibrium of society' (Wallwork 1985) where shared beliefs, norms and laws are necessary to restrain certain destructive consequences of society. The idea of 'prescriptive function', where religion prescribes how people should behave and believe, leads to a kind of harmony in society with fewer conflicts as moral behaviour is supported by sanctions. Thus, in enforcing shared beliefs and practices, religion contributes largely in maintaining a kind of morality and law, which is what the Singapore government also sees as a benefit of religion in our society.

Durkheim was a functionalist, which is defined as one who assumed that society has a system equilibrium, considers how social order is to be achieved, views institutions as contributors of social development and lastly perceives "consensus as the ultimate basis of social order" (Pope 1975). Using the functionalist theory, it gives us a sociological perspective on the functions that religion serves in society, and in our daily lives (Emerson, Monahan and Mirola 2011; Pope 1975). Firstly, religion reinforces social unity and stability as it gives the people a common set of beliefs which aids in the process of socialization. Religion also sets the stage for communal practices which brings people together, strengthening their social bonds. Religion thus reduces the anomic condition in society. Furthermore, religion is a key social institution that helps to maintain social order in society (Emerson, Monahan and Mirola 2011). For instance, the Catholic faith has many dogmas and theological teachings where Catholics are taught what is acceptable and what is not acceptable within the scope of the Church. The concept of 'sin' creates a moral barrier that shapes the behaviour of individuals. In the process, this also allows them to contribute positively to society as morally upright individuals (Emerson, Monahan and Mirola 2011).

Specifically, in the Catholic Church, it is clear that the teachings are in favour of the desired goals of marriage and family. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1643 (2012), the nature of marriage is that "it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*." This shows that the Church is not supportive of marital dissolution, believes in the permanency of marriage and the married couple must be open to having children.

This is supported by the Church's firm stand on the non-use of contraceptives. Furthermore, these values are also emphasized in Pope John Paul II's series of the *Theology of the Body*¹ where teachings about the dignity of the human person, human sexuality, marriage, chastity² and the vocation to love are widely discussed (Kalb 2012). Such teachings shape the attitudes of young Catholic women, illustrating the possible functionality of the Catholic religion in Singapore.

2.2 Individualization Theory

Ulrich Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) individualization theory parallels the social trends of marriage and family that is happening in Singapore. They define individualization as "more self-orientation and a corresponding decline in community and traditional family obligation" (Burgess 2018). The breakdown of the primacy of social institutions and the individual's social bonds has allowed for greater liberty for an individual to pursue his or her own interests without any emotional attachment or obligation to the society, such as the family. In traditional Asian families, the emphasis on getting married and continuing the generations of the family is largely felt, especially by people who are within the typical marrying age range. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) theses stem from the Western society and their observations of the shift in Western families, especially with the rise of dual-income families, single-parent households, and the increase of education opportunities and career prospects, which is the direction that the Singapore society is moving towards as well (Jones 2012).

In Singapore, there is an increase in labour force participation rate for women from 54.3% in 2006 to 60.4% in 2016 (Tai 2017). More women are entering the workforce and given equal access to education due to Singapore's value of meritocracy. Marriage has tended to take a back seat amidst the array of other achievements that society deems good to have instead, which may also explain the persistence of the trend of well-educated unmarried women in Singapore (Straughan 2009; Jones 2012). Modernization has thus led to an expansion of an individual's freedom from social structures, allowing liberty to make choices that meet their self-interests (Jones 2012). The individualization of society has thus given women greater freedom to decide

¹ Theology of the Body is the topic of a series of 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II during his Wednesday audiences between September 5, 1979 and November 28, 1984.

² The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behaviour that would impair it.

for themselves the trajectory of their life especially in the realm of marriage and relationships, resulting in the various social trends observed.

2.3 Marital Horizon Theory

Much of what shapes one's attitudes and perspectives of a particular issue depends on how we have been socialized. The marital horizon theory suggests that young people's perceptions of marriage are key factors in determining the differences of specific behaviours in emerging adulthood (Carroll et al. 2007). Emerging adulthood refers to a timeframe between secondary school and whenever they have considered themselves to have assumed the responsibilities of an adult. Carroll et al.'s (2007) research posit that emerging adulthood is a critical time of which individuals experience many opportunities that help to lay a foundation which would greatly impact their future such as the areas of work, education and romantic relationships. Furthermore, Cunningham and Thornton (2006) found that parental marital quality would moderate the "intergenerational transmission of attitudes between parents and children", where parents with higher marital quality led to the child having a more positive attitude towards marriage. Coupled with marital horizon theory, it can be observed that the trajectories through emerging adulthood are influenced by the individual's beliefs, perspectives and ideals towards marriage which is greatly determined their own parents' marital quality.

Expounding on this, the marital horizon theory consists of three dimensions: marital timing, the importance of marriage in one's life and one's determinant of marriage readiness (Carroll et al. 2007). Their research showed that marital timing was the most important determinant of adult behaviour as those who placed the event of marriage later in their expected life course were more prone to deviant behaviour and non-traditional family attitudes (Carroll et al. 2007). These three dimensions interact with one another to formulate the young adult's attitudes towards marriage and family, which is the key objective of this research paper.

3. Research Methodology

Using a qualitative approach for this research paper, in-depth semi-structured interviews were done which allowed for the fluidity of the interview. These open-ended interviews were done in an informal setting, ensuring the comfort of the respondents during the interview. This enabled the conversation to flow smoothly, with deep insights into their own attitudes and perspectives of marriage and relationship. The interview required respondents to think about

their own perspectives of marriage and relationships in their own lives and their perspectives of certain social trends that are revolving in modern society in the realm of marriage and relationships as well. Having approached certain topics that called for vulnerability and honesty, I found it especially crucial to establish the confidentiality and voluntary nature of the interview. Profound insights were given as to why individuals formed certain perspectives and there were many narratives of their own lives that helped to authenticate their viewpoints.

The research focuses on the attitudes and perspectives of marriage and relationships among young Catholic women. In contemporary society, women are seen to be the revolutionary factor of society with more women entering the workforce and the effects of that on the modern family. The transformation of the value of women in the family and the growth of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) in society has also changed, and thus the attitude of women towards marriage would play a large role for the future of families in Singapore. The exclusion of men is intentional as the focus of women would give a detailed account of where women stand in terms of their personal desires for marriage and how their religion has played a role in shaping their perspectives and attitudes.

Purposive sampling was used in gathering respondents that fit the criteria of being a woman, aged between 22-35 years old. This age range was specifically chosen in line with the official definition of youth as individuals aged between 15 and 35 (Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth 2019), and with the consideration that women tend to begin thinking of relationships and marriage seriously around the age of 21. I found that the age range of 22 to 35 was appropriate given the stages of life they were currently in. Furthermore, in this range, there is a spectrum of those who are currently single, those who are dating, those who are engaged and those who are married. This is a great advantage to the research as this presents a variety of opinions and viewpoints on marriage and relationships. For the sake of confidentiality of the respondents' identities, pseudonyms will be used in this paper.

I conducted pilot interviews with two individuals before beginning the interview process. This assisted in the rectification of the structural issues of the interview schedule and flow, and their insights opened pathways of thought that were fundamental in the research process. 21 interviews were done thereafter between 4th December 2018 to 6th January 2019, each ranging between forty minutes to one and a half hours long. These respondents were sourced through my personal social networks whom I know are Catholic and are within the age range, and a few are snowball samples where respondents recommended their friends to me. Most of the

respondents are university or diploma graduates who now have full time jobs, and the rest are currently pursuing their degree. 4 of my respondents are married, 7 of them are in a relationship or are engaged and the remaining 10 are currently single.

The interview was organized into three sections. Firstly, their attitudes and perspectives of the dating process were explored through their opinion on the use of dating applications, revealing the fundamental importance of friendship before dating and the sanctity of relationships. Secondly, the respondents' attitudes towards marriage are explored with their desire and fears of marriage. The sanctity of the institution of marriage is seen through their opinion of premarital sex marriage and cohabitation. Lastly, within the realm of marriage, the sanctity of the body is explored through the inspiration of Pope John Paul II's theology of the body, where he justifies the principles that need to be followed, as opposed to the normalizing of sexual behaviour with aid of the media in our society. The interview concludes with questions regarding their faith practices as Catholics and the role that these play in their daily life.

4. Research Findings

The research findings are organised into four main sections. The findings are summarized according to what values and perceptions are held towards marriage and relationships for these young Catholic women. While there are several variations in the responses towards each value, I have found that the prevailing overall stand remains unanimous for each section. Drawing from several factors that have led to the conclusions, the wealth of information resulting from the interviews was sufficient to proficiently show the attitudes and perceptions that these young women have towards marriage and relationships for themselves.

4.1 Value of Chastity in Relationships

Chastity is a moral virtue that falls under the cardinal virtue of temperance, where self-mastery over one's own sexual appetite is moderated or excluded out of love and respect for the self and for the other through God's grace (Catholic Church 2012). Through the discussion of behaviour of premarital sex and the growing practice of cohabitation, the virtue of chastity as something that the respondents valued greatly was apparent.

It was interesting to uncover that the trend of premarital sex is present among the respondents' social circles even though there is a distinction between "Catholic friends" and "non-Catholic

friends”. The occurrence of premarital sex is not restricted to those who are not Catholic as 76% of them acknowledge that some Catholics are also partaking in the sexual act prematurely. Respondents were asked if the trend of premarital sex was prevalent among their social circles and how they felt about it. Grace, Emma and Gladys give us some insight to whether premarital sex is happening around them.

Grace: It depends hmm. Among my non-religious friends, yes, it’s prevalent. Among some of my religious friends, also yes. Hahaha ... but I guess the rest of them no, or I don’t know.

Emma: Yeah, actually I was super shocked leh. Especially when I just entered uni and sex for me is like a no so I don’t really hear about it but when I started hearing my school friends talk about it, having sex and “banging” people and all that and taking showers together it’s just...oh my goodness, I can’t. But I guess some of them are not Catholic la.

Gladys: Surprisingly yes, on the surface we would think that Singaporeans don’t do it, but wah beneath the surface I can tell you that a lot of people are engaging in premarital sex! Even among us! I feel very torn just because I believe that we shouldn’t engage in that, but so many people around me are doing it and by choosing not to do it, people think like “oh you’re so holy” “you’re such a staunch Catholic.” But I feel like that’s not the case, it’s just that as Catholics we really treasure this gift that God has given us.

Through their response, it can also be seen that they do not agree with premarital sex and will not engage in it. All but one respondent agreed that premarital sex for themselves and for fellow Catholics is unacceptable. However, there was no negativity expressed towards those who are non-religious who are engaging in it. The discrepancy between the standards held for Catholics and non-Catholics can be seen through Grace and Therese’s responses.

Grace: If people don’t know the real meaning and reason of why we have to maintain chaste then they would just do it, and it will be very hard to justify to them why it’s wrong. Obviously in the church teachings it’s wrong but a lot of them don’t understand why so I guess if they don’t know then it’s okay. I just know that I won’t.

Therese: I realize that all my friends who have done it, at that time they didn't know that they were made for something more, and they go with what people say is okay. As long as you don't get pregnant then it's okay. So I guess if they go with the flow and are unaware, there's nothing much that we can say.

Sarah: When people start talking about it, I realize that I freeze up and start freaking out. Hahaha... I cannot relate and I don't want to judge them or anything and say, "no that's bad!" So, I feel like I rather avoid the topic. ... I understand that I'm a minority and I guess I'm lucky that my friends around me are accepting of my own views.

Joey and Sarah highlight also the struggle they face as Catholics as they broach the topic with other people of divergent views.

Joey: I just really hate it. Sometimes that's all they talk about at the table and I feel so alienated because I made a choice and this is a choice that I will never back down from. Nothing can sway or convince me. And these friends are Catholic, and I don't know how to be a part of them, not appear like a prude, still maintain my Catholic values, still be friends with them and for them to not treat me like an outsider because I'm not doing something that is socially approved. So it's really hard for me.

Sarah: It's hard for me to justify besides a faith perspective why it's not right, so I really don't know how to talk to people who believe that it is okay.

The virtue of chastity can also be seen to be upheld through the discourse of cohabitation in the interview. Cohabitation is the phenomenon of a couple in an intimate relationship living together before the process of being legally married (Nazio 2007). Respondents were asked their opinion on cohabiting and the impact that it has. Cayla and Louisa highlight that cohabiting leads to a potential compromise of their chastity, thus contending that it should not be done.

Cayla: My opinion lies very much with what the Church teaches, that couples should not cohabit. But I do understand why couples would want to. I mean if they really want to live together I can understand that feeling. At the same time, I know that cohabitation gives rise to a lot of temptation which I need to fight with so I can just prevent it by not cohabitating at all.

Louisa: I think cohabitation is dangerous also cause a lot of things can happen, when you're with the person all the time. I guess it would also consequently lead to things like premarital sex and what not.

Gladys: I think it's fine. If the couple can stay true and not engage in premarital sex then it's fine. But then again living together will always give this temptation to do it. But yeah if the couple can stay chaste while living together then it's okay.

Although the virtue of chastity is valued by the respondents, about half of them also admit that the virtue is not easy to uphold. A God encounter was also often mentioned as the transition of their perception and attitude towards chastity. Kiera and Erin give us an idea of the struggle they experience in choosing to be chaste.

Kiera: I think being chaste is very important, but I cannot say that I'm fully chaste, yeah, because there are many temptations from what I've experienced in my past relationships. Before I encountered Jesus, I was a lot more liberal and they told me that many things were okay... but after I encountered Jesus, I realized, whoa that many things that whatever was okay, was actually the opposite, it's really wrong. So, from there it's just been a rollercoaster of okay fall, okay confession, okay Jesus thank you! So the season that I'm in right now, its super important to be chaste but I cannot say that this has always been my stance for all my life.

Erin: I feel like it's an ideal and it's something that I want to actively work towards but for myself it's a great struggle, like its one of the crosses that I'm carrying unfortunately... It's really so tough. It has been very important for me especially now but it really is tough nonetheless.

In this light, we can observe that the virtue of chastity is of value to these young women where they would not have premarital sex and would draw important boundaries that guard their chastity against temptations even though it may be challenging. However, their lack of opposition to these happenings around them speak of their acceptance of the widespread normalization and acceptance of premarital sex in our society. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's individualization theory posits that one's obligations to society is weakening (2002), which possibly explains this phenomenon.

4.2 Dating Purposefully

Through the interview, it can be assumed that the respondents perceive that the phase of dating ought to be one that is an intentional process. It is understood from their responses that they believe in entering into a committed relationship and do not believe in casual dating³. There are two main factors that have led to this finding and that is their thoughts on entering into a relationship without marriage as an end goal, as well as their opinion on the use of online dating applications and platforms.

Firstly, respondents were asked to give their honest opinion on entering a relationship without marriage as an end goal. There are two main schools of thought. 90% of the respondents expressed that this was a waste of time and an inefficient way of going about dating. Kiera, Tabitha, Megan, Lauren and Nicole's responses summarize this view point.

Kiera: I wouldn't even enter eh honestly, I feel like waste of time eh.

Tabitha: I will not get together with someone I don't see myself marrying.

Megan: Then the relationship is useless. You don't start something without the intention of finishing it right. Not saying that it will definitely work out, but if you don't enter into a relationship with an intention of marrying then you're not even really trying properly, you know?

Lauren: I think that just shouldn't happen because for myself, entering into a relationship always needs to have marriage as a goal or at least a thought in the future. Because if not then what's the point of just the casual dating, and if you don't have this objective of possibly starting a family together then there's no point dating someone for just the sake of it la.

Nicole: I feel like if you are someone who needs to have a purpose in your life, then you should have a purpose in your relationship especially when it gets serious.

³ Casual dating in this paper refers to the attitude of not planning to commit to a long-term relationship.

Especially when the relationship is fairly committed and long term, yeah, I think anything that is long term needs to have a goal, if not it becomes very pointless.

On the other hand, the other two respondents thought this to be an acceptable way of dating. Principally, Jacy and Cayla see dating as a process of getting to know the other person better before deciding to move into marriage.

Jacy: I can understand why people would not want to have marriage on the cards if marriage to them is something that is more of a burden, more of something that restricts their freedom to discover. I guess some people just don't want to settle down so fast or they want to experience different types of people I guess before they know which is "the one" for them. I don't think it's a hard and fast rule that you must go into a relationship knowing that you will marry the person, because even in the relationship for me, it's also like a discerning phase where you discover more and more about the person and you see whether or not you want to marry the person.

Cayla: Last time I didn't have marriage as an end goal and I took it as experience, like I need to gather some experience before I find the right one so that I'll be the best for the one. That was what I thought last time when I was younger, it's not my priority, like if I do get married to him then very good but I feel like you can only figure this out during the relationship and not before you start the relationship.

Furthermore, Amelia also cited age as a determinant of their attitudes towards getting into a relationship with marriage as an end goal.

For me personally if I were to enter a relationship now, because I'm 24 so it makes sense for me to have my relationship directed towards marriage. If it's not I would feel like that's very sad and not purposeful, and there's no point in being in that relationship, because marriage is supposed to be the end goal of a relationship what.

Secondly, respondents offered their view on the phenomenon of the use of online dating applications and platforms in seeking a partner. Many respondents expressed their desire to have a friendship with their future partner before dating them, thus asserting their stand against the use of such platforms for themselves. Below are two responses illustrating this.

Megan: I won't personally use the app... hmm because I feel like that is not how I want to know my future spouse, not through a dating platform.

Erin: It's not for me hahaha... I've had friends who have been on it, and I just don't get it. Maybe I'm a bit of a traditionalist... I rather get to know someone, be friends, and explore from there, rather than just date someone I find on the app.

Majority of the respondents cited the casual nature of these platforms and how it promotes informal dating due to the sheer number of choices that one has on the platforms. They thus perceive dating to be a sacred process of deepening the relationship with the other and the means of getting to know the person is also important to them.

Therese: These things sometimes become a one-off thing or a sleeping around thing and obviously it doesn't benefit anyone.

Grace: I feel like it can be abused, like shopping because there's so many, it's hard to draw a line. So I won't and preferably I'd like to meet someone from the same religion, but maybe if I'm thirty and I'm single I'll try it hahaha...

Rachel: Two people come to know each other with a disposition that cannot be predicted. If I am in a very comfortable circle of Catholic friends and I meet a guy there, it feels very natural. But this one would feel more orchestrated. So I look at certain qualities of the person to see whether or not I want to pursue them and place a very silent initial judgement.

Charlotte: There's an inertia to getting started right, like wanting to put yourself out there, and I think it requires you to be vulnerable as well. If I am still not attached and married now maybe I would use these apps hmm.

It can be seen here that the stage of life the respondents are in play a role in their attitude towards online dating which speak of the sanctity of the process of dating that they hold. We can observe how some respondents added the comment of using the dating platforms only if they were older and still unattached. Carroll et al's (2007) research showed that marital timing is a factor which may determine one's behaviour where later marriage is prone to "non-traditional family

attitudes.” This may be due to the social pressure of getting married by a certain time especially in Asian cultures (Straughan 2009).

4.3 Marriage as a Commitment

The interviews were fruitful in allowing me to understand the value that these young Catholic women give to marriage. They view marriage not simply as a milestone in life but as a serious commitment. In this section, there are three factors that led to my conclusion of this perspective that they hold - their views on cohabiting, their fears of divorce as well as their perspectives of marriage as a sacrament.

As aforementioned, the respondents were invited to give their opinion on the phenomenon of cohabitation. All the responses communicate that the respondents think that cohabitation indicates a lack of commitment and the deinstitutionalization of marriage which is undesirable for these women.

Erin: I think I would question what that would mean because I need to know clearly what the status of the relationship is. Like we should just settle the marriage and all that first and know that we are committed fully to each other before we live together.

Louisa: The truth is, marriage is never really about yourself. So if cohabitation is a result of individualism then it's just going to add to the issues of people getting married later, people having poor perceptions of marriage. I mean cause then people would think: this is no different from marriage what, why do I even need marriage? So I think that it destroys the view of marriage which is dangerous because it shows a lack of commitment.

Kiera: Oh I feel like they're just settling for something easy. If you don't get married, you're not telling yourself internally and intentionally that you're making an effort to be with this person. You don't want to commit to having this status that you're married but you want to stay together, so I feel like they're settling on the fence. This half dating zone, kinda half 'family-ish' zone, I don't really get it.

Rachel views cohabiting as a lazy alternative to marriage, which also highlights the sanctity of marriage and what it symbolizes.

Cohabiting is an excuse for people to suddenly bail on each other. If it were a permissible marriage between man and woman, there's no reason to stay together first if you want to be together forever so you should just get married. I mean that's the ultimate sign, or gift, that this is how I love you, that I want to spend my life with you so let's get married.

Next, the value of marriage as a commitment can also be seen through the respondents' expression of the fears they have when they think of marriage. There were two main fears that surfaced among the respondents, the first being the fear of being cheated on and the second, the fear of ending up in a divorce. Amelia and Audrey are just two out of the many who expressed the same fear.

Amelia: Just this fear that oh maybe he would find someone who is better than me... My friends around me who confide in me with their problems, and share this with me and it becomes a real fear, being cheated on. But I guess it also comes from my own struggle with not being enough.

Audrey: I guess being cheated on? Because it's very real to me, cause it happened to a lot of my... like my mum, my sister and many of my family members. So I think cheating is a very big fear, and I guess getting divorced, I mean cause like if you get married in a church and it's a sacrament, getting a divorce is breaking the covenant and so yeah I'm really afraid of that.

Through Emily and Joey's vulnerable sharing, it can also be observed that most of these fears stem from witnessing the brokenness of their own family, or by witnessing it happen to the lives of the people around them.

Emily: A fear that I have would be that somehow or rather someone would walk out of the relationship, not wanting to give anymore to the relationship... for me it's rooted a lot in my own parent's marriage. I mean my parents are divorced, and I don't want that to happen to me too.

Joey: I think because I have a previous history in my family where my parents are divorced, I fear that it (marriage) will not be something that is long term. So as a young person now I try to take all sorts of precautions that this will not happen.

Inferring from the responses, it is plausible to assume that the fears that these young women hold are indicative of the value of long-term commitment that they treasure and expect from a marriage. Furthermore, the word ‘sacrament’⁴ was used multiple times when relating to marriage. The reference of marriage as a sacrament signifies the higher calling of marriage, where Jesus Christ is revealed through the couple and grace prevails within their relationship (Catholic Church 2012). It is thus a marriage not between two people but between God, man and woman. Jacy mentions the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage in relation to cohabiting.

My views are obviously strongly influenced by my own beliefs of the sanctity and sacredness of marriage as a sacrament. So to me, cohabiting is like opening the present before it’s Christmas, or boxing day.

Therefore, it is clear that marriage as a commitment is an ingrained understanding for these young Catholic women. Cherlin’s (2004) deinstitutionalization of marriage may not be applicable to them where the social norms of the casualness of a relationship do not hold true. The escalating percentage marriage dissolution (Jones 2012) can thus be curbed if more individuals hold this same attitude towards marriage. Furthermore, Rosenfeld and Roesler’s research (2019) explores the association between cohabitation and marriage dissolution, concluding that there are “short-term benefits but long-term costs” for marital stability.

4.4 Marriage for Motherhood

The theme of motherhood was extremely apparent throughout the interviews as respondents discussed their desire for marriage and their openness to having children. This was a particularly striking finding as the topic of motherhood was not specifically introduced.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1084: The sacraments are perceptible signs accessible to our human nature. Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate His grace.

When questioned if they desired to be married or have had the desire for marriage, Sarah and Jacy enthusiastically articulated their desire for marriage and their desire for children in the boundary of marriage. Jacy's thoughts echoed many of the respondents that I interviewed, where motherhood was what attracted them to marriage instead of the idea of having a spouse.

Sarah: Yes! I would love to be married! And like married have lots and lots and lots of kids! It's been my dream since young.

Jacy: Yes. Marriage seemed like a very ideal fairy-tale-like concept, like you get married you have kids. And for me I always wanted to be like a mom. Growing up I was the youngest but I had many baby nieces and nephews around me. So I think it was just like a natural instinct to always play with them, to take care of them. And I think my mind as a five-year-old, I guess that was what motherhood was – to be like the mother duck you know and take care of the ducklings, and I guess the only way to reach that was to get married. You know? Because my parents taught me that you cannot get pregnant before you get married, and so you have to get married before you can be a mum. But I think for me, it was never so much about the spousal relationship than it was the mother-children relationship. So, I think marriage is attractive to me because of motherhood rather than “oh I have someone to spend the rest of my life with.”

Furthermore, the respondents were asked to reflect on where their desire for marriage came from. Again, the responses revolved around the topic of family and motherhood. Gladys and Rachel attributed their desire for marriage to that of their own family.

Gladys: I think it comes from seeing my parents and seeing how loving they are, and seeing how having three kids in the house makes such a joyful family; where you have people to look after you and experiences to share. I feel that having a family and children would be such a wonderful thing compared to being a single person.

Rachel: It's been brought to my attention recently that deep inside me is a desire to get married and to start a family and to be able to raise a household of people who are committed to the faith, and to be able to give my kids a loving home and a place where they will come to know Jesus and know that they are loved.

What was amusing in the course of the interviews was the lack of interest in the spousal aspect of a marriage for a good percentage of the respondents. Rachel and Emma described their lack of interest in the husband when thinking about marriage in their younger years.

Rachel: I suppose I'm more interested in the girly things. Like I will plan what my ring will possibly look like, what my dress will look like. But growing up you don't really think about your partner, who he's going to be, what kind of person he is. So, it's more the fabricated idea of what a perfect marriage will look like because we like pretty things I suppose.

Emma: Something that has come up for me recently is my desire to have kids. It's scary because I'm not even thinking about who my husband will be, I'm just thinking about the kids part. But I think because I've been feeling so called to have kids, then I think that that means I'm probably not going to be a nun or single because of my desire for family, and that means getting married.

However, this was not the case for all the respondents as five of them mentioned explicitly the desire for a companionship as a factor of their desire for marriage. Kelly, who is single, expresses her desire for marriage:

I think it comes from wanting to have someone special, someone important, wanting to have someone living your life intimately with. I think it's different when you have a community of people who love you and when you have someone who loves you in that special way.

Even though the question asked about their desire for marriage, their responses shed light on their desire for a family as well. Therefore, I would like to highlight that their desire for a family and to be a mother seemed intuitively associated with marriage. There seemed to be no divide between the link of marriage and motherhood, where the prerequisite of motherhood is marriage. This could be a socialized thought process that they grew up with, especially in the Catholic faith as Jacy mentions explicitly that this was what was taught to her. The Catholic

faith holds the view that childbearing is meant to be kept in the boundary of marriage, and that marriage must always bear fruit since love always bears fruit⁵ (John. 15:5).

Additionally, it is noteworthy that every single respondent I interviewed expressed that they were open to having children. When asked their ideal age of marriage among those who were not married, the answers all ranged within that of 25 to 30, or as some mentioned “before thirty” or “late-twenties.” Since motherhood is an important aspect of marriage to these young women, the biological aspect of child-bearing is pertinent to them, thus their desire to be married in the near future. Contrary to the statistics of fertility (Jones 2012), the young Catholic women are open and enthusiastic about childbearing which would consequently contribute to the nation’s TFR.

5. Discussion

Cunningham and Thornton’s (2006) research posits that the parent’s marital quality would have an impact on the child’s attitudes and perspectives of marriage. This proves to be true since respondents cited their own family or parental circumstances to be a source of concern in their own lives. Although it is not explicitly discussed, this fear would thus greatly impact the way that they make decisions within the realm of marriage and relationships during emerging adulthood (Carroll et al. 2007). This finding thus supports Carroll et al.’s thesis where parental marital quality impacts one’s view of marriage, affecting their marital horizon. However, the degree to which one parent’s marital quality influences their desire to be married is questionable. With marital timing as a key indicator of one’s marital horizon, this research shows that young Catholic women desire to be married around the current median age of marriage in Singapore which is 28.4 years old for women in 2017, which is considerably late given that it was 26.1 in 2000 (Department of Statistics Singapore 2019). Within my pool of respondents, there are four who are currently married, of which they got married between the ages of 23 and 27. This is slightly lower than the median age of marriage in Singapore now. Since these women desire to be married at a lower age, it is plausible that their marital horizon is not simply affected by their parent’s marital quality but also by the teachings of the Catholic faith and their desire for motherhood which is intrinsically linked. The research also highlights

⁵ John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.” The ‘I’ in this verse is Jesus Christ referring to Himself in the gospel of John.

their natural assumption that motherhood is only permitted after marriage. In essence, it is their desire for children that influence their attitude towards marital timing, thus defining their marital horizon.

Through the research findings, it can be observed that Durkheim's functionalist theory of the role of religion in society holds true for the respondents. He contends that religion helps to maintain morality and social order (Emerson, Monahan and Mirola 2011). In light of their opinions of social trends such as premarital sex and cohabiting, it is clear that these young women hold views that are in line with the Church's teaching on the value of remaining chaste before marriage. The effectiveness of the Church's teachings is evident among those who were interviewed, where their attitudes and perspectives lie in accordance to what is taught, thus upholding a certain level of morality and social order, even when society has been socialized otherwise. For example, the growing number of births to unwedded or single mothers (Ministry of Social and Family Development 2018) would cause instability in society as the children of these mothers do not have access to both a mother and father figure at home. Mueller and Cooper's (1986) research indicates that children from single-parent families tend to have lower educational, economic and occupational attainment which puts them at a higher risk of deviant behaviour. Durkheim's role of religion in society is made evident through the respondent's responses.

While these young women have attitudes and perspectives that are in line with what the Church teaches, it is interesting to note that some of their attitudes were redefined by 'a conversion experience' or a 'God encounter.' Some respondents expressed frequently that their views of premarital sex and dating purposefully were different before they began to take the Catholic faith seriously. Extending Durkheim's functionalist theory of religion where religion presents the laity a set of common beliefs (Pope 1975), I contend that its role is only tangible when the individuals buy into the common beliefs given to them. All but two of the respondents interviewed are cradle Catholics⁶, with the remaining two baptised at ages 6 and 10. However, it was only around the ages 16 to 26 when the respondents began to grow in their knowledge of the faith and their personal relationship with God. Thus, their attitudes and perspectives of marriage and relationships before the pivotal point on their faith journey may be understandably different from what these currently are. Having been socialized into a society that is increasingly influenced by Western ethos, with aid of the media, the liberal views of marriage

⁶The term 'Cradle Catholic' is used to describe someone who was baptised as an infant.

and relationships would have pervaded and shaped their beliefs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). However, this also illustrates the authority and influence of the Church in reshaping one's beliefs should the individual allow it.

What was most striking throughout the interview process was the discrepancy of moral standards expected from one's self versus those expected of others. The issue of premarital sex and cohabitation is a good illustration of this. While deeply convicted of their non-participation in these acts, the struggle expressed in expecting non-believers to do the same is observed, where they fail to find a reason for these acts to be considered immoral without a faith perspective. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) theory of individualization is useful in observing this phenomenon where they posit that individualization gives rise to individuals' freedom to do as they desire without social and familial obligations. This also leads to the mindset that individuals should have the freedom to do as they wish, thus the tendency to refrain from imposing their own views onto others. Coupled with Putnam's concept of social capital, the risks of social exclusion by means of disagreeing with another person's actions or behaviour (Stanley, Stanley and Hensher 2012) may be another reason for this discrepancy of moral standards held for themselves versus the other.

6. Conclusion and Limitations of Research

Given that the stability of the family in Singapore is being threatened by the many social trends such as the delayed age of marriage, low TFR, and a growing proportion of singles and divorced individuals, this research paper seeks to uncover the attitudes and perspectives of marriage and relationships of young Catholic women given that the Catholic Church stands as an influential institution in Singapore. The existing literature not only expounds on the effects of such social trends in society but also speak of the relevance and role of religion. Furthermore, theorists also underline the invisible hand of society that could possibly explain these social phenomena. The individualization of society is something that is relevant to the Singapore society since her process of modernization models that of the happenings of Western societies, and the marital horizon theory is eminent in our understanding of how parental marital quality affects one's own attitudes towards marriage. This research goes one step further to explore how faith plays a role in shaping the attitudes and perspectives of these women amidst the backdrop of a society that they are socialized into.

In sum, there are four main attitudes and perspectives that these young Catholic women have. Firstly, they value the virtue of chastity, which can be seen through their accounts and opinions of premarital sex and cohabiting. While it is a struggle, they view chastity as something to be upheld and protected. This ties in with reducing the number of premarital pregnancies and births to single-parent families which may in the long run cause instability within the society. Respondents also desire to date purposefully which supports the governments' effort in promoting marriages. This attitude towards dating is significant as it goes against the rising trend of casual dating, as with the aid of dating platforms and applications that are widely utilised. While age is a determinant of the acceptance of the use of these applications among the interviewees, it can be seen that the ultimate purpose of a relationship is marriage, thus also reducing the prevalence of deviant behaviour during emerging adulthood.

Furthermore, the research shows that marriage as a long-term commitment is something that is understood, through their belief in the dissolubility of marriage and their negative views on cohabitation. This has a direct impact on the state's divorce rates in the future since these Catholic women believe that marriage is a permanent venture and a lifetime commitment. While this may not be the case in society, I contend that these women would go against what is learnt of individualization to strive to maintain their vows for as long as they can. Lastly, motherhood and family life has proven to be extremely important to the respondents. Their enthusiasm while speaking about having children draws a direct contradiction to the trends of low fertility rates that are observed. The Church's stand on the non-usage of contraceptives also promotes family life and childbearing. These two points in particular direct us to the observation that the Catholic Church teachings are in line with the goals of the government to improve fertility rates and promote family life.

Admirably, most of the respondents' attitudes and perspectives were in line with the Church teachings with a few exceptions. Given that they have been socialized into a society that is increasingly liberal and swayed by the Western society, this proves that the Church's influence on the attitudes towards marriage and relationships of its believers is still significant. However, this leads to the limitations of this research. Firstly, the number of Catholics in this research who are not practising their faith are outweighed by those who are actively practising and involved in a faith community. This affects the findings in that it presents a conservative perspective towards marriage and relationships since these women take seriously the importance of the Church's teachings. Additionally, the perspective of men was excluded from this research. While this was done intentionally, a male perspective would be valuable in this

field of study since the attitudes of both genders have a part to play in marriage and a family. Conceivably, the attitudes and perspectives of men towards marriage and relationship would be distinct from that of the women. Moreover, this research studied only the Catholic perspective. To grasp a more comprehensive idea of the role of religion in society with regards to the stability of the family unit, individuals from other religions could also be studied to strengthen this research. Lastly, the sample size of this research is small, thus the need for further research in this field of study.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church is thus seen to be an important social institution that has the power to shape ones' beliefs, attitudes and perspectives, and these values and morals are in line with what the government promotes which is that of the importance of family life (Matthews 2015). The state has invested millions of dollars and manpower into developing policies that will ultimately boost the nation's fertility rate. Given that these policies have been in place for a while, its effectiveness is being called into question (Jones 2012) since there is no visible improvement of the TFR in recent years. This could again be the effect of individualization, as supported by Burgess (2018), of which policies which are currently posed to target problems such as finding a partner, promoting motherhood and solving financial and housing issues will not be enough (Strategy Group Singapore 2013). Therefore, social policies will need to be able to adapt to the changing dynamics and attitudes of these young people to address the social issues that threaten the stability of the nation.

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8. Appendix

Respondents' Profiles at the time of the interview

Name	Age	Race	Relationship Status	Educational Attainment
Cayla	26	Chinese	Attached	University Graduate
Sarah	26	Eurasian	Attached	University Graduate
Grace	27	Indian-Chinese	Engaged	University Graduate
Joey	25	Indian	Single	University Graduate
Emma	21	Eurasian	Single	Undergraduate
Megan	21	Chinese	Single	Undergraduate
Louisa	27	Chinese	Married	University Graduate
Gladys	24	Chinese	Single	University Graduate
Nicole	29	Chinese	Married	University Graduate
Amelia	24	Chinese	Single	Undergraduate
Kiera	24	Chinese	Attached	University Graduate
Rachel	22	Indian-Chinese	Attached	Undergraduate
Jacy	22	Chinese	Single	Undergraduate
Therese	21	Chinese	Single	Polytechnic Graduate
Lauren	23	Chinese	Single	University Graduate
Erin	27	Chinese	Single	University Graduate
Audrey	23	Chinese	Attached	University Graduate
Charlotte	30	Chinese	Married	University Graduate
Emily	23	Chinese	Attached	University Graduate
Kelly	23	Chinese	Single	University Graduate
Tabitha	27	Chinese	Married	University Graduate