

Empirically-Informed Sexual Ethics of Solidarity: Interdisciplinary Ethical Reflections on Pre- Marital Sex / Sexual Debut among the Youth

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Abstract: To better understand the young's pre-marital/non-marital sexual experiences, this article enlists some underlying sociological factors that either act as triggers of misbehavior or shapers of appropriate behavior. The quantitative/experiential aspect of the article, including some cross-cultural examples, will lend support to its arguments and toward the adoption of a form of sexual ethics of solidarity. Thus, it discusses how immersion in varied socio-cultural contexts could explain or shape moral agency; that wholesome environments and spaces could raise the ethical principles of solidarity, and; that norms may be derived from the lessons of stories and spaces. The overall method of this article shows a more respectful, well-researched, and well-contextualized arguments that can actually help teachers, parents, and the youth in dealing concretely with sexual intimacy issues like those that trouble and destabilize the most vulnerable.

Keywords: Premarital / Non-marital Sex • Sex and Society • Behavior Trigger • *Persona Humana* • Agency • Solidarity Ethics

Introduction

The Vatican document *Persona humana (PH)* laments over today's "concepts and modes of behavior" which allegedly are signs of a moral disorder and falsehood—a disorder and falsehood that oppose *PH*'s brand of "true morals".¹ The document adds that the

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2 • Empirically-Informed Sexual Ethics of Solidarity

Catholic Church's "true moral" ground is threatened by the opposing "morals of the world" exemplified by the three modes of sexual behavior that no longer keep the "true moral exigencies of the human person": premarital sex, homosexuality, and masturbation.

For *PH*, the "morals of the world" (*PH IX*) bring about disorder and falsehood. It mentions "contemporary scientific research" (*PH I*) to back up this claim, but it does not cite those scientific studies that illustrate the nature or character of the alleged "disorder and falsehood." *PH* merely mentions that "sexual matters...today constitute a theme frequently and openly dealt with in books, reviews, magazines and other means of social communication" (*PH I*). It does not, however, cite any books, articles, or conference papers; one could only guess what *PH* is referring to when it further adds that "sociological surveys are able to show" the prevalence of a moral disorder (*PH IX*). By the mere mention of "contemporary scientific research" without proper references to sources, we could presume that *PH* has no intention to enter into the rigors of research and scholarship. It seems enough for *PH*, as a hortatory document filled with axiomatic "immutable principles," to refer to an alleged bulk of research on the "morals of the world" and then impose upon such morals the Catholic Church's "true" moral standards.

Communities: An Evaluation of the Implementation of PCP II in Ten Parishes was released in 2015.

¹ "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," issued in 1975 by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith.

Using *Persona humana* to illustrate a conservative teaching regarding sexual matters does not mean to claim that *PH* represents the whole teaching of the Catholic Church regarding sexual matters. Nevertheless, *Persona humana* is a direct descendant of Pope Paul VI's *Humanae vitae* (1968) that follows a certain interpretation of natural law theory in explaining the official Church's position regarding marriage and artificial contraceptives.

As a magisterial and hortatory document, *PH* assumes an inflexible doctrinal stance rooted in its espousal of the natural law principle. It has entered into an ethical argumentation which is grounded in what it calls as “precepts of the natural law as having an absolute and immutable value, and in their transgression she [the Church] has seen a contradiction of the teaching and spirit of the Gospel” (*PH* IV). In its exercise of ethical reflection it merely mentions the unspecified scientific data to show the presence of moral deviations and proceeds immediately in its task as a judge. *PH*, thus, clearly states its magisterial position as it lays down the purpose of the document:

It is not the purpose of the present Declaration to deal with all the abuses of the sexual faculty, nor with all the elements involved in the practice of chastity. Its object is rather to repeat the Church's doctrine on certain particular points, in view of the urgent need to oppose serious errors and widespread aberrant modes of behavior. (*PH* VI)

PH further insists that it possesses the only true and acceptable position. “But all evolution of morals and every type of life must be kept within the limits imposed by the immutable principles based upon every human person's constitutive elements and essential relations—elements and relations which transcend historical contingency” (*PH* III). With this categorical claim, *PH* speaks authoritatively (presumably because it claims to keep “immutable principles”) from a high moral ground which is, seemingly, beyond challenge.

Since *PH* is not interested in studying the details of “contemporary scientific research,” it does not deliver a *sociologically-informed ethical argumentation*. It merely judges a world supposedly littered with moral deviations. In *PH* there is no concern for cases, notwithstanding their

variations and complexities—that every case may be different and thus needing special attention. It also does not show some understanding about “serious errors and widespread aberrant modes of behavior” as indicators (or effects) of the presence of a menacing malaise in society (deeper causes). It even assumes that readers would know what it is talking about when it refers to deviations and disorder. It does not bother to show what would constitute those alleged deviations. The primary interest of *PH* is in repeating “the Church's doctrine”.

Viewed from the perspective of academic/scholarly discussion, *PH* is a problematic document. It can be observed that *PH* delivers generalizations, oversimplification of issues, and a sweeping deductive judgment—its ethical reflection is a “once-and-for-all” sentence which is unable to respect specific scenarios/cases or narratives with their distinctive socio-cultural frames and the special issues that these may raise against pre-established doctrines. In other words, *PH* assumes an axiomatic and doctrinaire stance which cannot entertain a process of dialogue or open discussion—principles considered as foundations of academic institutions.

This paper distances itself from the way *PH* applies pre-established principles to judge the so-called observable moral deviations. It will not be armed with an axiomatic morality but will try to undergo a process of analysis which hopes to generate a different kind of reflection/argumentation—one which listens to contexts and perspectives or journeys and narratives.

This study also construes the word “sexual” not just coming from a genital-biological-physiological perspective but from an understanding about every person's fundamental dispositional desire to complete and fulfill oneself through relationships and other forms of connection with the world. This is a recognition of every person's

deep-seated need to find unity and wholeness in a sexual relationship—involving scenarios of encounters that reflect longing to be united with one's soulmate.² While this shows the basic need for human affection, touch, and intimacy, it is also understood as a way to complete one's partner. In sexual matters, the give-and-take process cannot be avoided—something true in every search and journey toward human fulfillment; and as a “search and journey” process, a more gradualist approach to ethics is appropriate.³

Thus, “sexual” should be broadly understood to express this shared desire for wholeness through erotic, emotional, physical, social, or spiritual feelings and behaviors. Of course, there are sexual pursuits and journeys that may cause disappointment, frustration, and pain; but it is also disappointing and frustrating when one would simply call PMS as a sign of “moral disorder.” It would be difficult to find some hint of concern for the vulnerable youth in this kind of approach.

In its process of analysis, this study will rely on some data made available through several behavioral/sociological sciences. It will make sense of such data against the background of themes which have kept ethical theories busy for centuries: 1) the edifying virtues that people must acquire [or vices to avoid], 2) the

² In *Symposium*, Plato has Aristophanes present a story about soulmates. “This is the origin of our desire for other human beings. Those of us who desire members of the opposite sex were previously androgynous, whereas men who desire men and women who desire women were previously male or female. When we find our other half, we are ‘lost in an amazement of love and friendship and intimacy’ that cannot be accounted for by a simple appetite for sex, but rather by a desire to be whole again, and restored to our original nature.,” “Platonic myths: The Myth of Aristophanes,” <https://neelburton.com/2010/09/25/platonic-myths-the-myth-of-aristophanes/>

³ Ronald D. Francis, *Ethics for Psychologists*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: BPS Blackwell, 2009), 49ff.

appropriate and humanizing norms that societies should promote [or oppressive customs and traditions to condemn], and 3) the best state of affairs that people should foster [or dehumanizing situations to abandon]. With these themes that inform data gathering, this paper will not only look into some cases of “deviations” but also cases that illustrate “exemplary” behavior, appropriate norms, and ideal settings which, if present, would hope to bring into surface some principles for ethical argumentation.

A basic stance of this study is respect 1) for the autonomy of sociological research (and other disciplines) and 2) for a reflection process which allows persons and contexts to contribute toward a search for life’s flourishing or fulfillment. This posture hopes to allow Others to shed light on the complex nature of reality and acknowledge the contributions of well-meaning moral agents in paving the way toward the common good. We will limit this exercise of analysis to studies dealing with premarital or non-marital sex (NMS) among the youth. Premarital sex, along with the “concepts” used by people to justify it, is one of the modes of sexual behavior lambasted by *PH*.

Morals and Moral Disorder

The use of the word “morals” attributed to the superior position of *PH* and to its sets of standards is a source of confusion. In the first instance, *PH* uses the word morals to speak of a “preserved” moral criteria (natural law principle) and modes of living (chastity, continence, self-control) which it attributes to itself. It claims it has in its possession the “true morals” when it refers to the increasing “corruption” and “relaxation” of morals by “concepts and modes of behavior which are contrary to the true moral exigencies of the human

person.” Second, *PH* also refers to “opinions and morals of the world” (*PHV*) which it claims are false and opposed to its “true morals.” *PH*, in raising itself to an elevated position, calls the opposing morals of the world as sources of corruption and threat to its own brand of morality. It does not say that the “opposing morals” could also be expressions of other people’s alternative morals.

It would be helpful to bring into our discussion the distinction between morals and ethics. For precision, the term morals refers to what is deemed as acceptable behavior or custom while ethics refers to the process of reflection or to a reflexivity evoked by the imagination being informed by some sets of standards of behavior. When *PH* speaks of morals or true morality it refers to 1) modes of living and 2) teachings or moral criteria which are also the standards of modes of living or behavior. This is morals—it refers to the acceptable behavior *and* to the standards that measure, validate, or reinforce it. These two elements are correlates and function seamlessly within a particular community whose members are glued together by a common culture with shared practices and morals. In other words, *PH* is paying attention to a certain Catholic mode of living and the standards that support or affirm such a mode of living. If *PH* reflects on other morals or alternative modes of living and judges these *with its own standards* then it is in the realm of a one-sided ethical reflection—being guided by its own “preserved” and “true” moral principles as it reflects upon modes of behavior which are presumably “outside” its own alleged Christian community. In that instance, there is no assurance that *PH* will be able to deliver an appropriate dialogue-driven and context-sensitive ethical reflection.

Let us give flesh to the so-called “deviations” raised by *PH*. Let us begin with some data—indispensable to any process of reflection.

Sociological Studies of Premarital Sex in the Philippines

Persona humana condemns the practice of PMS, even in cases where PMS is really pre-ceremonial sex (PCS), that is, sexual intercourse before the wedding ceremony is formalized.

Today there are many who vindicate the right to sexual union before marriage, at least in those cases where a firm intention to marry and an affection which is already in some way conjugal in the psychology of the subjects require this completion, which they judge to be connatural. This is especially the case when the celebration of the marriage is impeded by circumstances or when this intimate relationship seems necessary in order for love to be preserved.

This opinion is contrary to Christian doctrine, which states that every genital act must be within the framework of marriage. (*PH VII*)

PH is clear: all kinds of PMS or NMS are “contrary to Christian doctrine,” pre-ceremonial sex included.

The problem with this position is that it is not facing the differences between PMS engaged by partners who have no intention to marry and pre-ceremonial sex done by those who have decided to tie the knot. We may assume that there is something wrong with PMS but for sure, PCS (celebrated by two mature, independent, in their 30s or 40s, educated individuals), when analyzed may be different from the PMS committed by, say, fifteen-year olds under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If *PH* condemns PCS the same way it condemns other kinds of PMS, including adolescents PMS, then we might lose the meaning of “evil” in the kinds of PMS that really deserved to be rebuked.

PH could no longer stop partners who engage in PCS; this is a practice by couples who already intend to marry

(as reported by Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study II, 1994).⁴ *PH*, however, could still help and prevent youngsters from engaging in risky behaviors including early entry into sexual debut. For *PH* to fix on doctrinal purity may be fine for an institutional position's "integrity," but this is missing its real mission in shepherding its flock. Those who engage in PCS are old enough to face the obligations and responsibility of married life—they need less tending in sexual matters or in facing the consequences of their behavior; but not adolescents who are still blind to the consequences that affect their overall health, their loved ones, their own future, and society as a whole—they need shepherds who could feed, tend, and carry especially the vulnerable or straying sheep.

PH does not seem to reflect the thoughts of a pastor who "smells like sheep." When the writer/s refers to people, including his flock, he brands them as people carrying falsehood and morally disordered behavior—and yet the falsehood and moral disorder he is referring to does not seem to represent what is out there in reality. The statement about falsehood and morally disordered behavior implicate people and yet it does not refer to or mention individuals who have their own stories to tell. The reader may even feel that the writer has not been among his sheep. He is too far away, talking about abstract things seemingly from the inside of an isolated villa. In the first place, is he up to the shepherd's task? If yes, then why does he not smell like those whom he castigates? Meaning, why does he not come across like

⁴ See, P. Xenos, "Survey sheds new light on marriage and sexuality in the Philippines," <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12292761/> (accessed 11 Dec 2020); see also, Corazon M., Raymundo, Peter Xenos, and Lita J. Domingo, *Adolescent Sexuality in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Population Institute, University of the Philippines, 1999).

someone who has been with and among his flock? The writer of *PH* may not even have handled a sheep before; he may not have carried, tended, and fed one. That is the reason why *PH* carries a judgment coming from someone far from the noise, sight, touch, and “smell of sheep”.⁵ Or, the author may have thought that a sheep’s narrative (following a narrative arc) does not have a place in an axiomatic “once-and-for-all” kind of moral judgment. We may need this as a reminder: Explicit ethical norms written, printed, and disseminated by the academe, state, or ecclesiastical office may not be appropriate when directly applied to the narratives on the ground.

Let me now turn to the flock of sheep, young ones, also branded as deviants by *PH*.

Demographics: Prevalence/Incidence

The most recent 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS 4)⁶ conducted by the University

⁵ The following are the words of Pope Francis: “This I ask you: Be shepherds, with the ‘odour of the sheep,’ make it real, as shepherds among your flock, fishers of men.” March 28, 2013 homily at St. Peter’s Basilica (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130328_messa-crismale_en.html) (accessed 17 March 2014).

⁶ *The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Demographic Research and Development Foundation Inc. and University of the Philippines Population Institute, 2016).

“The Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study is a series of national surveys on the Filipino youth, conducted since 1982 by the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) and the Demographic Research and Development Foundation. Gathering data from Filipino youth aged 15 to 24 year-olds, YAFS is one of the primary sources of information on sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors and its determinants in the Philippines, at the national and regional levels. YAFS covers a wide range of topics that are relevant to this age group such as education trajectories, labor force participation, relationships and roles in society, values and attitudes,

of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) and the Demographic Research and Development Foundation, Inc. (DRDF) shows that:

one in every three youth aged 15 to 24 years old has engaged in premarital sex, the number increasing by more than 14 percent from almost 20 years ago, when the second YAFS was conducted. This translates to about 6.2 million youth who have engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage...

The table below compares year 2013 with year 1994.⁷

Year	15-24 Population	Male incidence	Female incidence	Total	Difference between 2013 and 1994
2013	19,338,000 million M= 9,840,000 F = 9,449,000	35.8 % or 3,522,720	28.7% or 2,711,863	6,234,583	
					3,673,747
1994	14,076,000 million	26.1% or 1,846,836	10.2% or 714,000	2,560,836	

In 2013 we have about 19.338 million youth from the 15-24 age bracket; 9,840,000 males and 9,499,000 females. 3,522,720 males have engaged in PMS (35.8%) and 2,711,863 females (28.7%)—a total of 6,234,583.

in addition to the risk behaviors. Findings from the YAFS series have been widely used in education and health and had provided the evidence base for health programs for young people by government and non-government organizations nationwide.” <http://www.drdf.org.ph/yafs4/> (accessed 12 March 2014).

“There were 19,178 respondents, with each one interviewed by researchers for at least an hour. Each of the 17 regions had about 1,000 respondents. 78 provinces, 681 cities and municipalities, and more than 18,000 households were covered from the period of December 2012 to March 2013.” <http://www.interaksyon.com/article/80226/1-in-3-filipino-youth-aged-15-24-has-engaged-in-premarital-sex---survey/> (accessed 10 March 2014).

⁷ *The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study in the Philippines*, 12.

While in 1994 26.1% males of the 15-24 years old population (around 68% of youth population from 15-30 years old) engaged in PMS and 10.2% to females (15.9% more males), in 2013 the gap is narrowed down to 35.8% males and 28.7% females—only 7.1% more males.

In a matter of 19 years we have about 2,711,863 million females who have entered into the PMS activity. This data is quite confusing; if in 1994 26.1% males within the 15-24 years old bracket engaged in PMS, we expect an equivalent figure since males would need partners to engage in PMS—thus, logically, we should also have 26.1% females engaged in PMS. There are a few possible ways to explain these confusing figures. One is to assume that several of the partners of the 26.1% males did not come from the 15-24 years old females—they could have had 25 years old or older female partners or 14 years old or younger partners. Another assumption is that some males have engaged in homosexual PMS; or we resort to the infidelity assumption, that is, some of those in the 26.1% males have 2 or 3 partners coming from the 10.2% females; or in “baptism” rituals where 2 or more males share one “baptizer” or a commercial sex worker; the reticence of females to report their sexual activity is still another factor. This discrepancy in the higher figure for males and lower figures for females is not explained in the YAFS reports and we could simply resort to the most likely scenarios.

One significant insight that we could gain from this is that as time goes by, more and more females from the 15-24 years old bracket become engaged in PMS because of the following reasons: they have become more exposed to settings where PMS becomes possible or inevitable, like more 15-24 years old females go to bars, date more frequently, seduced quicker because of the cellphone or through the internet’s social networking or dating sites, or more youngsters have become less-supervised by

elders. YAFS has pointed to the new media as one of the culprits that spiked up the trend among the female in engaging into PMS activity.⁸

The National Capital Region (NCR) and Central Luzon have the highest prevalence of premarital sex among youth with 41 percent and 39 percent respectively. The Autonomous Region in Muslim

⁸ *The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study in the Philippines*, 8-10.

See also, Al Cooper, ed. *Sex and the Internet: A Guide Book for Clinicians* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis, 2013); K.R. Hanson, "Becoming a (Gendered) Dating App User: An Analysis of How Heterosexual College Students Navigate Deception and Interactional Ambiguity on Dating Apps," *Sexuality & Culture* 25 (2021): 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09758-w>; Laurie Penny, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on the Internet* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013); Jochen, Peter, Valkenburg, Patti M., "The Influence of Sexually Explicit Internet Material on Sexual Risk Behavior: A Comparison of Adolescents and Adults," *Journal of Health Communication* 16/7 (2011), DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2011.551996; Lo, Ven-hwei, So, Clement Y.K., Zhang, Guoliang, "The Influence of Individualism and Collectivism on Internet Pornography Exposure, Sexual Attitudes, and Sexual Behavior Among College Students," *Chinese Journal of Communication* 3/1 (2010), DOI: 10.1080/17544750903528724; Dew, Brian, Michael Brubaker, Danica Hays, "From the Altar to the Internet: Married Men and their Online Sexual Behavior," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 13/2-3 (2006), DOI: 10.1080/10720160600870752; Adebayo, D.O.; Udegbe, I.B.; Sunmola, A.M., "Gender, Internet Use, and Sexual Behavior Orientation among Young Nigerians," *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 9/6 (2006), DOI: 10.1089/cpb.2006.9.742; DeLonga, Kathryn; Torres, Hector L.; Kamen, Charles; Evans, Stephanie N.; Lee, Susanne; Koopman, Cheryl; Gore-Felton, Cheryl, "Loneliness, Internalized Homophobia, and Compulsive Internet Use: Factors Associated with Sexual Risk Behavior among a Sample of Adolescent Males Seeking Services at a Community LGBT Center," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 18/2 (2011), DOI: 10.1080/10720162.2011.581897; Doornwaard, Suzan M.; Bickham, David S.; Rich, Michael; ter Bogt, Tom F. M.; van den Eijnden, Regina J. J. M., "Adolescents' Use of Sexually Explicit Internet Material and their Sexual Attitudes and Behavior: Parallel Development and Directional Effects," *Developmental Psychology* 51/10 (2015), DOI: 10.1037/dev0000040.

Mindanao (ARMM), meanwhile, has the lowest prevalence with 6.7 percent. In ARMM, only 1 out of 2 youths own a cellular phone compared to the 9 out of 10 in CALABARZON (or in the NCR).⁹

Region	Prevalence
NCR	41%
Central Luzon	39%
ARMM	6.7%

In a traditional society like ARMM, one rationale given by parents for encouraging a daughter’s early marriage is to preserve her virginity before the wedding date. The longer the interval between the onset of menstruation and first union, the more time a young woman has in which she may bring “dishonor” to the family name. Indeed, in settings where arranged marriage is still common, parental involvement in spouse selection is justified by a concern that premarital sex is more likely to occur when the young woman is free to select potential partners for herself.¹⁰

⁹ *The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study in the Philippines*, 8.

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], *Early Marriage: Child Spouses. Innocenti Digest 7* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2001).

Some Reasons why 15-24 Youth Engage in PMS and their Associated Social and Cultural Triggers

Need for intimacy, affection, or affirmation

The search to gain affection and affirmation is more complex than what it seems to most of us. Children naturally cling to parents for approval and affection. As they grow older, this need is expressed through other people. Many teenagers, especially girls, express their need for affection through friends (boys do seek affection from friends but they are not as expressive in this area—one could find them exchanging warm and affectionate expressions while playing and competing with friends; thus, winning in competitions is *one* of the male's sources of affirmation and a way to his heart). At times, this particular need is conveyed through the boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and may lead to early sexual debut or awakening. However, we do not say that this need will always lead to PMS or will always be expressed through PMS.

Females may be more vulnerable because males are more open to PMS.¹¹ Males, it must be said, are driven by testosterone—a hormone that drives adventure or propels aggressiveness which, in turn, further increases testosterone levels. In many PMS cases, therefore, male

¹¹ I am aware that some readers may view this reiteration of “men as promiscuous and of women as submissive” as perpetuating stereotypes or misogynistic misconceptions. This is not the case if we look at cases as observable data which are not presented in this article to promote stereotyping but to mention how behaviors could *also* tend toward the paths sensitized by internal factors (instincts [despite being culturally conditioned], hormones, genetic dispositions, epigenetics, etc.) and external factors (beliefs, rituals, roles, social organizations, patterned practices, technologies, etc.).

For a more nuanced presentation of female and male sexuality, see, Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 37ff.

initiative and aggressiveness or male–female sex roles¹² may have to be taken for granted. In many PMS encounters, the desire of the male to win the female could not be denied.¹³ Against this background, PMS may be viewed as *generally* male-driven and the female’s participation could be based on her preference for a competitive and dominant male; or it is a reaction response, taking a more receptive mode of behavior compared to the male’s more aggressive and compulsive moves.¹⁴ When male compulsion (desiring agent) is thus taken into account, PMS from the female perspective is a participation of a stimulated partner (desired agent) who may only have brought into the scene her need for affection or curiosity or flirtations. In this sense, the need for affection is therefore not an agent’s *chosen* path for sexual union—PMS merely follows as a next scenario. This confession from a female comes from a 1958 US data: “What motivated me was what I thought was love. Also curiosity and desire were runner-ups. After two and

¹² See, Edward K. Sadalla, Douglas T. Kenrick, and Beth Vershur, “Dominance and Heterosexual Attraction,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52/4 (1987): 730-738. See also, Arlene Stein, “Three Models of Sexuality: Drives, Identities and Practices,” *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (Spring 1989): 1-13.

¹³ See, Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, California: Stanford California Press, 2001); John H. Gagnon, and William Simon, *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*, second edition (London/New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2005); Michael Gurian, *The Wonder of Girls: Understanding the Hidden Nature of Our Daughters* (New York: Pocket Books, 2002); Michael Gurian, *The Wonder of Boys: What Parents, Mentors and Educators Can Do to Shape Boys into Exceptional Men* (New York: Penguin Group, 1997); David M. Buss and Neil Malamuth, eds., *Sex, Power, Conflict: Evolutionary and Feminist Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

See also, Ishaq Tijani, *Male Domination, Female Revolt: Race, Class, and Gender in Kuwaiti Women’s Fiction* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009).

¹⁴ See, Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, 115ff.

a half years, your steady gets sick and tired of hearing you say no, and you get kind of tired of refusing.”

In a sexual activity, the female’s receptive or pressured posture may really be the more traditional script; or it could be her more exciting role to take. Her body being explored and caressed by the male may respond openly to the male’s assertiveness. An appreciative female would thus embrace this male initiative and hold on to his grip, taking the role of an active receptive participant in the intimate drama of sexual exchange. The search for affection and warmth, which are many times external to PMS (meaning=one can experience these from family bonding or friends’ reunion, etc.), is thus submerged in the most complex act of love-making or PMS which cannot always compensate for any affection deficit. It thus could be stated that search for affection is *the mere jump* into the ocean of intimacy where PMS lurks as a whale that swallows individuals searching for themselves in affection-seeking. Once partners are inside the PMS whale, the broader contours and connections of life are somehow lost from one’s sight and forgotten so that PMS would become a real intimate or private experience. Reason and judgment about social norms or responsibilities become momentarily external to the actual PMS act which could be regarded as a consequence of “search for affection or affirmation” (not to mention desire for pleasure and release of sexual tension).

If partners thought of getting something from PMS, like affection and affirmation, they could have experienced this from other sources like parents, siblings, and friends. But if PMS offers the additional erotic pleasure dividends, the less dramatic and less exciting sources of affection and affirmation may be momentarily forgotten.

PMS, however, could not solve the need for affection; it provides excitement and experience of extraordinary sensations but not necessarily a warmth that consistently stays and lingers for a long time like the heat given off by a natural hot spring or the mother's care for her child. For a while, the PMS experience may afford an amount of affection, but it will naturally dissipate in the midst of life and chores, and will have to be renewed through more re-enactments of PMS. Every now and then, in order to recapture those familiar sensations that captivate sexual beings, PMS must be played again and again just like a beautiful poem or music that sweetly caresses the sensitive senses of lovers—until the ears are fed up with the sounds that have become predictable. In this case, another partner could be the answer to a newer and another kind of exciting PMS. PMS is thus a trap for those who seek affection and affirmation. Many of the 15-24 years old PMS partners could not have predicted this since every PMS act provide moments of tenderness or measures of passion that excite instincts and cloud reason. PMS, while being enjoyed, could not be immediately assessed as to its fulfilling quality. It is only after some time that PMS is seen for its significance in the longer life narratives of partners.

Interestingly, geographical instability or mobility is also seen to bring about early entry into PMS.

Data from almost 5,000 adolescent respondents to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)¹⁵ are used to examine the mechanisms that transmit the facilitative effect of residential mobility on the timing of the transition to first premarital sexual intercourse. Adolescents who have recently moved are

¹⁵ This is the United States' 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, or the "Add Health Study," funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; <https://addhealth.cpc.unc.edu> (accessed 19 December 2020).

approximately one third more likely than non-mobile adolescents to experience first premarital intercourse between the first two waves of Add Health. We find that much of the difference between adolescent movers and stayers in the onset of sexual activity is attributable to the greater propensity for delinquency and the weaker academic performance among members of movers' school-based friendship networks. Adolescents' own delinquent behavior and academic performance also help to mediate the association between residential mobility and the transition to first intercourse.¹⁶

What this tells us, among other things, is about young people's vulnerability to new and strange surroundings where familiarity and intimacy could be scarce. Parents, in all their efforts to improve their lives, could not keep up with their children's emotional needs because, in most probability, they are very busy with other concerns or priorities. New neighborhood and school would put great strain on children's sense of integration and belongingness. Adolescents, suffering from some degree of breakdown in their family, neighborhood, and friendly networks, are less capable of easy adjustment toward newer social settings. In this particular study, one of the links of entrance into early sexual activity by movers is their entry into networks of low performing peers who would fill the void left by lost friends. Moreover, their overall unsupervised conduct (less parental presence, contact, communication, and availability during key times of the day) would also bring them nearer and freer to get involved in what is considered as a prevalent practice

¹⁶ Scott J. South, Dana L. Haynie and Sunita Bose, "Residential Mobility and the Onset of Adolescent Sexual Activity," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (May, 2005): 499-514; see also, Élise Marsicano, et al., "Gender and Migration: The Sexual Debut of Sub-Saharan African Migrants in France," *Population-E* 66/2 (April-June 2011): 275-301.

among delinquent American youth.¹⁷ In more likelihood, moving adolescents would readily grab available sources of affection, identity-affirming or stimulating relations in their new network. This is when PMS would become one of those routes to escape the burden (of loneliness, depression, anxiety, etc.)¹⁸ brought about by mobility or separations.¹⁹

Afraid that she/he will lose the relationship

It may be likely that some males also hesitate to give in to the aggressiveness of a female, but eventually surrender for fear of losing her. This is actually a more usual reaction for a girl who is pushed by her partner to agree to a sexual debut. The guy may be an extremely rare catch or he is such a gorgeous hunk who deserves every pampering including a PMS. However, it could be a female's expression of commitment and the fear of losing her partner is another way of saying that she has already bound herself for him—the fear must give in to a committed surrender, no matter how premature it is. True, she could be exploited by the male if she easily gives in. But even in the midst of apprehensions, PMS becomes necessary for the girl to give her committed self-giving.²⁰

¹⁷ See also, M.MM. Mintogbé, Amadou Sanni, M., Ahoussinou, C., et al. "First Early Pregnancy and Associated Factors Among Adolescent Girls in Benin," *Sexuality & Culture* 25 (2021): 117–139. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-020-09761-1>.

¹⁸ See also, Elizabeth Rink, Ray Tricker, and S. Marie Harvey, "Onset of Sexual Intercourse among Female Adolescents: The Influence of Perceptions, Depression, and Ecological Factors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 41 (2007): 398–406.

¹⁹ See, Nanlesta A. Pilgrim, et al., "Family Structure Effects on Early Sexual Debut among Adolescent Girls in Rakai, Uganda," *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies* 9/3 (2014): 193–205.

²⁰ See, Eva Elmerstig, Barbro Wijma, and Carina Berterö, "Why Do Young Women Continue to Have Sexual Intercourse Despite Pain?," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 43 (2008): 357–363.

Thinks that he/she “owes” it to the person

Bonds between young lovers are also experiments or journeys in love. The problem with love experiments, like deep kissing and PMS, is that these are sources of agitating and troubling sensations which even the more emotionally mature individuals would find difficult to “manage.” Giving one’s whole body and soul may be a logical move after a sizzling exchange of kisses and fondling; it could be logical but not necessarily sound and wholesome. The problem, again, is that the adolescent partners are alone and could not (may not) consult anybody about the propriety of their behavior. They simply are operating in their own narrow context of deeply “disturbing” sexual exchange (a privacy that necessarily forgets the broader demands of life and relations)—a scenario which does not provide a proper context for making a sound judgment which is possible only, in the case of adolescents, if they are in the presence of a supervising elder. But then how can PMS be consummated if elders are present?²¹ This is precisely the root of the problem: youngsters beyond the supervision of elders could really fall into a trap—using reasons like PMS is an obligation that one owes to one’s partner or that it is the next step in the relationship.

Need to keep up with peers or Does not want to appear old-fashioned

If the Philippine 2013 statistics on PMS only matches, more or less, the 1960’s US statistics on PMS, then

²¹ See however, Amy T. Schalet, *Not Under My Roof: Parents, Teens, and the Culture of Sex* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), where the author shows the difference between the American and Dutch parents’ approach to sexual debut. Based on interviews conducted, the author documents the Dutch family’s approach in allowing and “supervising” their children’s sexual debut at home.

adolescents and young adults in the Philippines are still “old-fashioned” as regards their sexual attitudes and behavior. But then, even if this old-fashioned scenario could be the up-to-date benchmark for Filipino teenagers, especially in the NCR, CALABARZON, and Eastern Visayas which registered the higher incidence of 15-24 PMS. Being pressured to appear in-fashion and eventually succumb to it may indicate several things: greater weight may be given by the teenagers to their peers’ opinion; a decrease of parental influence on sexual matters; lack of personal strength to go against the tide; being surrounded by a milieu of liberal ideas or permissive attitudes/behavior; unsupervised exposure to media/new media; absence of traditional institutions; absence of elders/authorities; decrease in religiosity, or; all of the above.²²

Some other factors that further qualify this “standardized” behavior are the male’s status-seeking behavior and a female’s need for approval through PMS.²³ It may be more difficult to reject PMS in the US (where most students would have engaged in PMS after graduating in high school than in the Philippines because of the normative nature of PMS (in the US)).²⁴ When “everyone is doing it,” PMS would take the appearance of a pervasive “true value” system among the young. PMS

²² See, Pilgrim, et al., “Family Structure Effects on Early Sexual Debut among Adolescent Girls in Rakai, Uganda”; see also, Yeshalem Mulugeta and Yemane Berhane, “Factors Associated with Pre-marital Sexual Debut among Unmarried High School Female Students in Bahir Dar Town, Ethiopia: Cross-sectional Study,” *Reproductive Health* 11:40 (2014): 1-6.

²³ See, Craig B. Little and Andrea Rankin, “Why Do They Start It? Explaining Reported Early-Teen Sexual Activity,” *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Dec. 2001): 703-729.

²⁴ Susheela Singh and Jacqueline E. Darroch, “Trends in Sexual Activity among Adolescent American Women: 1982-1995,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 31/5 (1999): 212-19.

in the United States has become a normative behavior and has become a power by itself if considered in its collective dimension.²⁵ This would mean not to have engaged in PMS is a deviation that disturbs youngsters and drives them to enter into the collective.²⁶

The need for belongingness especially among friends²⁷ / Feels pressured or intimidated

“Parental absenteeism and the diminishing influence of parental authority on the youth was noted in the McCann-Erikson report along with the significant drop in Family Life satisfaction vs. 1987 data. The report concluded that the lessening family authority, the search for identity, independence, intimate relations and tangible role models make the youth vulnerable to the influence of their peer groups and the mass media.”²⁸ When premarital sex becomes a “highly normative

²⁵ See, Sharon Thompson, “Putting a Big Thing into a Little Hole: Teenage Girls' Accounts of Sexual Initiation,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 27/3, Feminist Perspectives on Sexuality, Part 2 (Aug., 1990): 341-361; see also, Laura M. Carpenter, *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 101ff.

²⁶ See, Schalet, *Not Under My Roof*, where the author shows that the behaviors of teenagers in the US and Netherlands regarding sexual debut are quite similar. As an example, American and Dutch teenagers start sexual debut at around the same age. The author also documents the Dutch family's approach as being consistent with the cultural values of self-control, respect, gender equality, and family togetherness, while that of the US family's follow the more adversarial and individualist dynamics.

²⁷ Renee E. Sieving, Marla E. Eisenberg, Sandra Pettingell and Carol Skay, “Friends' Influence on Adolescents' First Sexual Intercourse,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Mar., 2006): 13-19.

²⁸ Nimfa B. Ogena, “How are the Filipino Youth Changing?,” *Philippine Social Science Review* 56/1-4 (Jan-Dec 1999): 93.

behaviour”, what can the young do but follow the “order” or “call”.²⁹

Curiosity

Experimentation—idle youth are more prone to experiments in sexual activities and thus more disposed to early sexual initiation—especially when this is prompted by triggers from the new media and video streaming.³⁰

Several insights may be derived from the above cases: decisions to enter into PMS are done without parental presence (something logical for PMS to be consummated); prevalence of personal-normative frames being generated within the narrow PMS scenarios; vulnerability of agents—male’s weakness surrenders to pressure

²⁹ The following study provides relevant resources dealing with theoretical frameworks and employing empirical data: Patricia Goodson, Alexandra Evans, and Elizabeth Edmundson, “Female Adolescents and Onset of Sexual Intercourse: A Theory-Based Review of Research From 1984 to 1994,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 21 (1997): 147-15.

³⁰ See, Ross E. O’Hara, et al., “Greater Exposure to Sexual Content in Popular Movies Predicts Earlier Sexual Debut and Increased Sexual Risk Taking,” *Psychological Science* 23(9) (2012): 984–993; Catherine Cubbin, John Santelli, Claire D. Brindis and Paula Braveman, “Neighborhood Context and Sexual Behaviors Among Adolescents: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37/3 (Sep., 2005): 125-134; see also, Milly Marston, Donatien Beguy, Caroline Kabiru and John Cleland, “Predictors of Sexual Debut Among Young Adolescents In Nairobi’s Informal Settlements,” *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 39/1 (March 2013): 22-31.

See also, Travis Gayles, Robert Garofalo, Lisa Kuhns, Soyang Kwon, and Brian Mustanski, “Idleness as a Risk Factor for Increased HIV Infection in Young Men Who Have Sex With Men (YMSM),” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 54/2 (2014): S3–S4.

of hormones or social circle or female's surrender to male's drive or friends' acceptance.

What *PH* calls as indicators of moral disorder are actually indicators of weaker family support systems; decreasing parent/children solidarity; breakdown of neighborhood solidarities; lack of alternative activities which are more meaningful than PMS; prevalence of technologies which assist in bringing together young individuals or help in fostering a "popular" image of PMS; and the inappropriateness and impracticality of the Catholic Church's norms (which, incidentally, have been formulated by celibate males who may share some amount of sexual hang-ups)—also triggers of inappropriate behavior.

Also, hidden in every PMS scenario is the power dynamics between the male and female partners. This could be reinforced by the culture's sexual division of labor as well as society's primary regard for the public realm (which is male dominated) and secondary regard for the private realm (the woman's domain). Apart from her feminine physical constitution, the female would also be in a disadvantageous position to resist male advances because of the social scripts that inscribe male dominance which tends to pressure every woman to submission. If this is beyond the conscious regard of *PH*, then it is also blind to some disorders which it could unwittingly reinforce by virtue of its masculine-dominated hierarchy. Viewed this way, PMS also implicates some authorities in the Vatican.

We now move to a more positive side of encounters and decisions among the young: postponement of early sexual debut.

Some Reasons why 15-24 Youth Postpone Early Sexual Debut and some of the Associated External Shapers of Postponement

There are scenarios or contexts that make PMS plausible or implausible; possible or not possible. Meaning, there are various conditions that make PMS significant, less significant, or not significant part of one's life; or conditions that make PMS possible or not possible.

Plausibility refers more to the favorable meaning of the act if seen against a certain cultural context or normative frame. If in some areas of the world PMS is considered as a rite of initiation for males, then PMS (at least among males) is plausible—that is, PMS is made “reasonable” by the male's cultural background; if among girls, *hiya* (shame, embarrassment, or propriety) is the primary reason to refrain from early sexual debut, this is because PMS has been made a “shameless act” by the culture.³¹

Possibility refers more to the presence of various factors that favor or induce people to engage in PMS, whether this is reasonable or unreasonable. If, for instance, a teenager visits his young girlfriend who happens to be alone at the latter's home, this could bring about a behavior that takes advantage of the absence of supervision, leading to actual PMS. Other conditions for possibility or non-possibility may be the past histories of actors or their broader environments like their

³¹ The Shangaans of Africa have a long history of permissiveness with regard to premarital sex. Thus, young people who gather together are expected to have engaged in youngsters' sexual activities. Society and culture have not treated it as taboo, thereby offering some plausibility for PMS. See, T. Dunbar Moodie, Vivienne Ndatshe and British Sibuyi, “Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14/2, Special Issue on Culture and Consciousness in Southern Africa (Jan., 1988): 228-256.

neighborhood, school, religion, State's health programs, or availability or non-availability of new media.

A community-based study done in Cebu, involving the data provided by the *Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey*, has reported that *young men* whose parents make more household decisions together would delay first sex; and that the mothers' higher marital status (high degree of power in household decision-making, higher education, works outside the home, contributes more or less 50 percent of household income, husband turns over all income to wife) would similarly work regarding the daughter's decision to postpone sexual debut. This study explains that the "boys who come from families in which greater joint decision-making occurs may be better able than others to transfer the equitable relationship values they see at home to their own relationships."³² Brought up within a more cooperative upbringing, males may construe PMS with their partners as another thing to be mutually negotiated and thus they are less persistent in asking for sex in their relationships if the girl does not agree or is less ready for the act. If the initiator of sex is the girl, the PMS scenario may be consummated since the boy is no longer in a position to negotiate—and probably because males, in many societies/cultures, are biologically wired for erotic unions. Nevertheless, even if the boy is the initiator who is also ready for negotiation, a PMS scenario could still take place if the girl offers no initial resistance. The study suggests that a boy could expect some resistance from the girl if she comes from a family whose mother possesses a high status. "A mother's high status as measured by her having attained more education than her counterparts,

³² Ushma D. Upadhyay and Michelle J. Hindin, "The Influence of Parents' Marital Relationship and Women's Status on Children's Age at First Sex in Cebu," *Studies in Family Planning* 38/3 (Sep., 2007): 181.

by her husband's turning over all of his income to her, and by the rating the interviewer gave her as a measure of her higher status—was found to be protective against her daughter's experiencing first sex at a young age.”³³ The authors speculate that this may indicate a better-developed self-esteem or sense of personal worth; thus, they are in possession of power (defined as having self-confidence when interacting with members of the opposite sex, popularity, opposite-sex friends, and egalitarian gender-role attitudes) which enables them to avoid sexual behaviors, including participation in unwanted sex. They claim that those who are less dependent upon and feel less discomfort with their physical appearance have less need for physical or emotional gratification in sex. These young girls, therefore, do not fear to reject the sexual advances of their partners. The ability to resist, if valued for its wholesomeness/soundness, must therefore start from one's relationship with a mother who possesses a high status in the family. This could be fostered not only by the mother but also through the respectful regard of the husband. Norms, no matter how punitive, could be less powerful than this path offered via the attachment to the mother's influence.

Another instance where PMS is less reported is membership in a religion which strictly prohibits it. In the ARMM region in the Philippines, where PMS incidence is 6.7%, religiosity may be one of the factors for less report on PMS. This is corroborated by other studies about Islam's influence on early sexual debut.³⁴ This is

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Amy Adameczyk and Brittany E. Hayes, “Religion and Sexual Behaviors: Understanding the Influence of Islamic Cultures and Religious Affiliation for Explaining Sex Outside of Marriage,” *American Sociological Review* 77(5) (2012): 723–746; Amy Adameczyk, “The Indirect Result of Religious Norms and Practices: Explaining

especially true for adult cases since among the youth various factors, like attachment to parents, poverty, and strict parental supervision, could work together to make PMS dip lowest in ARMM. Poverty in ARMM is a factor for non PMS because of people's low access to technology and new media. The poor of ARMM are also known for their closer ties and they become more glued together to ensure survival.³⁵ This greater solidarity among themselves also covers closer mutual supervision of sexual behaviors of the young.

Peer pressure in ARMM could be the inverse version of the USA experience where virginity may be considered an "unendurable stigma"³⁶—the pervasiveness of PMS abstinence/prevention is actually also contagious. Culture in that part of the Philippines, where virginity is valued and the honor of the family is at stake in the case of its loss, would expect elders/parents to see to it that their daughters' marriages are arranged and done at an early age. This would ensure that there are lesser time and opportunity for them to enter into PMS.³⁷

Children who grew up in a more stable family environment—that is, where parents are intact and available, where caregivers (parents or guardian) are

Islam's Role in Limiting the Spread of HIV/AIDS," pp. 15–31 in *Religion and Social Problems*, edited by T. Hjelm (New York: Routledge, 2010); see also, Lemessa Oljira, Yemane Berhane and Alemayehu Worku, "Pre-marital Sexual Debut and its Associated Factors Among In-school Adolescents in Eastern Ethiopia," *BMC Public Health* 12:375 (2012): 1-5.

³⁵ See, however, a different effect of poverty on American youth's PMS behavior. Veronique Dupéré, Éric Lacourse, Tama Leventhal, J. Douglas Willms and Richard E. Tremblay, "Neighborhood Poverty and Early Transition to Sexual Activity in Young Adolescents: A Developmental Ecological Approach," *Child Development* 79/5 (Sep. - Oct., 2008): 1463-1476.

³⁶ Carpenter, *Virginity Lost*, 101ff.

³⁷ See, "Philippines: Early marriage puts girls at risk," <http://www.irinnews.org/printreport.aspx?reportid=87873>.

consistently present and not regularly missing from their children because of waged work, and where supervision is closely tied to one's work or where children also share in the work of their elders—have lower levels of premarital sexual intercourse and older age at first intercourse.³⁸ The absence of both parents because of work increases the opportunity of adolescents for more private-autonomous and less-restrictive forms of sexual behavior and further expands their inner space for individualistic/customized attitudes that could lead them to more risky situations.

Mothers who are more permissive produce in their daughters a more permissive attitude toward sexual intercourse.³⁹ (But who are those mothers that would tend to be more permissive?) Mothers who were pregnant before marriage are more likely to produce daughters who are sexually experienced as well. Factors, such as mothers' sexual practices, their jobs, their religious affiliations, which inhere in their character and everyday projection to others, are significant in the formation of sexual attitudes and behavior in children. In single-parent households, the frequency of dating among single mothers is related to less restrictive sexual attitudes and behavior of their children. The sexual activity of parents may directly influence the sexual behavior of children. Cohabitation by parents may encourage children to

³⁸ D.P. Hogan and E.M. Kitagawa, "The Impact of Social Status, Family Structure, and Neighborhood on the Fertility of Black Adolescents," *American Journal of Sociology* 90 (1985): 825-855; M. Zelnik, J.F. Kantner and K. Ford, *Sex and Pregnancy in Adolescents* (Beverly Hill: Sage, 1981).

³⁹ Alan Thornton and Donald Camburn, "The Influence of the Family on Premarital Sexual Attitudes and Behavior," *Demography* 24/3 (August 1987): 323-340.

engage actively in sexual intercourse, which may lead to unwanted pregnancies or abortions.⁴⁰

How great is the influence of peer group over that of the family on the sexual activity of adolescents? The adolescents' sustained exposure to places (school) and to sources (media) where their parents are less prominent exert great influence on their attitudes and behavior toward sexuality.⁴¹ If these places and sources bombard children with less-restrictive sexual attitudes and behavior, then the tendency of transmission and influence of similar attitudes or behavior is more likely to occur.⁴² Many parents today can no longer compete with peer influence in school and the permissive culture projected in media/new media. The effective presence of parents in the other areas of adolescents' activities and interests is, however, an enormous balancing factor in creating more parent-favorable—that is, more restrictive—sexual attitudes and behavior. This “effective presence” is, however, compromised by the 8-5 or 9-6 work schedules, 5-6 times (sometimes 7 times) a week (excluding travel time and rest time). The “quality time” argument may have to qualify its claimed “quality” against the work-travel-rest cycles.

The frequency of attendance in religious functions⁴³ and the influence of highly educated parents on the

⁴⁰ J.K. Inazu and G.L. Fox, “Maternal Influence on the Sexual Behavior of Teenage Daughters,” *Journal of Family Issues* 1 (1980): 81-102.

⁴¹ See Erin Calhoun Davis and Lisa V. Friel, “Adolescent Sexuality: Disentangling the Effects of Family Structure and Family Context,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63/3 (Aug., 2001): 669-681.

⁴² Meg Meeker, *Epidemic: How Teen Sex is Killing our Kids* (Washington, D.C.: Lifeline Press, 2002), 143ff.

⁴³ M.J. Donahue and P.L. Benson, “Religion and the Well Being of Adolescents,” *Journal of Social Issues* 51/2 (1995):145-160; J. DeLamater and P. MacCorquodale, *Premarital Sexuality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979).

development of their children's high educational aspirations⁴⁴ are some approaches to an upbringing far from the risks of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Attendance in religious rituals does not assure a greater obedience to traditional norms, but it places children in environments where there is greater exposure to restrictive values.⁴⁵

Children with high educational aspirations are less experienced in sexual matters, and their parents who are usually highly educated have greater skills and resources in supervising their children. Thus, the focus on building and enhancing broader and more opportunity-promoting contexts of education, especially for higher academic goals, could be more effective in the long run in preventing teenage pregnancy than prescriptions against premarital sex. More educational opportunities offered to the laboring class will probably pull them out of a situation where early marriage is the only option. This strategy could in effect prevent more cases of early entry into adult sexual behavior. A similar conclusion is found in a study: "...public health interventions should consider the broader determinants of premarital sexual debut, including the ecological factors in which the behavior occurs."⁴⁶

Empirically-Informed Sexual Ethics of Solidarity

The promotion of wholesome environments, nourishing activities and life-styles that foster or do not hinder the presence of parents plus other relatives and concerned neighbors will necessarily (1) promote virtues or capacities that do not just focus on the development of cognitive or academic powers but primarily on capacities

⁴⁴ Zelnik, Kantner and Ford, 1981.

⁴⁵ Thornton and Camburn, 324.

⁴⁶ Oljira, et al., 1.

for doing and expressing care, respect, kindness, mutual support, and the like; (2) shape a more capacity-heightened moral agents, in terms of having a more enhanced sensitivity to shared norms that promote humanizing responsibilities and the common good; and (3) forge or dovetail with ethical principles that have broad environmental or communitarian dimensions, like a solidarity ethics founded on care and mutual support, especially directed toward the most vulnerable.

Every situation in which decisions are marked by harm and injury to oneself or to others does not only speak about non-compliance to norms, but also about the context's tendency to act as trigger to unwholesome behavior. Every behavior takes its cue from what is suggested, encouraged, or allowed by the social setting. If ethics provides the direction and impulse toward building a setting or conditions favorable for the shaping of wholesome habits and the formation of responsible persons, then such an ethics must be sound. The sociological sciences (plus other disciplines) may help verify the attainability of this communitarian and person-building project.

Pre-marital sex has been a sensitive issue that frequently divides the elders and the youth. While it is true that the practice of PMS has reached an alarming percentage among the younger population (cf. teen pregnancies), some reasons or factors behind the practice should also be unearthed. As the youth becomes increasingly exposed to the new media and its more extravagantly-streamed permissive content, together with the presence of unstable family conditions and other negative factors, the younger generation is usually inclined to seek intimacy and validation from other sources, like friends or intimate partners or providers for sensation-seeking consumers. This occurrence leads to a higher probability to engage in PMS, which could result

in early pregnancy. The best way to address this is not through the strict imposition of rules, but through the improvement of the basic units of society—the family, neighborhood, and the workplace. But even addressing the problems within these spaces, such as insufficient income, lack of neighborly solidarity, and excessive work hours that foster more alienation than mutuality, the issue of PMS will instead direct us to deal with the deeper ills of our societal and cultural structures and contexts. In other words, PMS, especially among the young, is not to be immediately judged as a sign of deviation from doctrines but one that should challenge adults to action—mainly because they are also implicated in the surfacing of conditions that have triggered the youth's early entry into sexual encounters.

If we take the Biblical community values of sharing and service (cf. Acts 4: 32-37) as paradigmatic, the appropriation of these values is thus paramount. But, we know this cannot be done without the practices (and other conditions like rituals of solidarity and memories of narratives of service) that assure internalization and imprinting of such values in people's hearts and minds. The process of appropriation of biblical values and the assurance of internalization and imprinting actually require the "re-production" of the "form and content" of the Biblical community—the concrete platform of practice and the condition for the feasibility and possibility of internalization of values. The flourishing of the Basic Ecclesial Communities could be, after all, also sexual ethics' concern.

Thus, promotion of settings that foster and encourage exposure to social awareness, cooperation, and altruism should be a greater focus of an ethics that promotes the dignity of individuals and groups. We certainly are exposed to the individualistic and competitive spirit of

the liberal-capitalist setup.⁴⁷ To be critical against this spirit; to be emancipated from its ambit of influence, is to be more attuned to the sources of enlightened and altruistic orientation. This may also mean taking up another form of spirituality emphasizing spaces; that is, a conscious effort to pursue the development of spaces that promote more noble and higher end—transcending survival, necessity, utility, or individualistic fulfillment.

Ethical reflections on sexual behavior may have to bear in mind the nature of choice and action as reflecting embodied reactions to relationships, social contexts, and spaces. This way, choices and action may no longer be excessively viewed as stuff to be isolated and placed in compartments designed to repair or rehabilitate behavior toward better use or function. They may also be regarded as choices and actions which reveal context-bound longings, interests, and loyalties. PMS encounters may happen to be conditioned by factors that precisely need to be criticized and opened up toward other conditions of possibility for a better life. To bring about such social conditions will demand a resolute social engagement in solidarity-work.

Solidarity should happen when people get together to lessen the effects of lack of money and lack of skills, and loss of employment because they band together for sharing or cooperative work. Then solidarity enables people to find more ways to lessen troubles and thus avoid the causes (alienating waged work; monetarized consumption; profit-making transactions; absence at home and the neighborhood brought about by adult priorities) of breakdown of solidarities and partaking of unwholesome sexual encounters.

A distinguishing character of an ethics constitutive of

⁴⁷ See, Ferdinand D. Dagmang, *The Predicaments of Intimacy and Solidarity: Capitalism and Impingements* (Quezon City: Central Books, 2010).

solidarity is its praxis-rooted and anticipatory nature. It will decisively put hope on projects that are not just correct but, in the short run, feasible and, in the long run, realizable as well as fruitful and fulfilling in many positive senses other than instrumental or productivity sense.

A sexual ethics of solidarity is hoped to bring about background coordinates pregnant with opportunities (or contexts) that would make people in sync with their lifeworlds and not just with the formal requirements of the market or ambitions based on narrow market principles. It invites to put one's stakes on practices that promise remote but undeniable positive effects even if their exact shapes are still something uncertain and hidden in a pack of manifold gifts.⁴⁸ We do not have to be so worried about the exact outcome of our otherwise wholesome project of promoting solidarity, when in fact this project could also produce preponderance of greater intimacy and mutual help. In this regard, it would be pointless to raise questions about the Good Samaritan's helping behavior (about his overly-generous acts of compassion toward someone who was foolish enough to travel alone through an isolated road full of robbers). Questioning the constricting conditions that push many people to steal or seek refuge in sex is more relevant.

Solidarity will have to be the ground of a sexual ethics that has its primary concern in the promotion of nurturing environments and mature persons. Thus, the soundness of ethics will have to be judged according to how it contributes to community building, virtue formation, and formulation of socially-appropriate norms even if these norms are not contemplated by *PH*.

⁴⁸ See, Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, # 222-225.

Conclusion

As young people seek for greater meaning and control in their lives, we may observe the acceleration of traditionalist's imposition of norms which are not necessarily appropriate in dealing with the youth's narratives that exhibit varying degrees of moral capacity and development. One person's ideal of abstinence may not be welcome to another's practice of physical intimacy as means of coping from a lack of belongingness and other neglected personal needs. However, when the latter is heavily adopted along with the widespread permissive culture in media, the vulnerable individuals risk being dehumanized through health dangers or trauma. Sometimes, they become danger to themselves and to others. This should invite us toward a more empirically-guided reflection on their behavior. Some of us may be more enlightened than those who cling to the past, but that also gives us a great responsibility to be care-giving in our intentions and actions.

Today's youth need adults who could dine with them, listen to their stories, heal their traumas, exorcise their demons, and forgive their failings. Jesus of Nazareth's stance of solidarity with the outcasts of his time—a stance toward redemption from alienating situations and dispositions that distort the image of human persons—is our foundational ethical stance.

In our moral evaluation of behavior, we have long been dictated by some abstract moral principles—and the historical journeys of individuals did not seem to matter as sources of grounded ethical principles. In this study, we have learned to notice that every person's immersion in varied socio-cultural contexts could explain or shape moral agency; that wholesome environments and spaces could raise the principles of solidarity, and; that norms may be derived from the lessons of stories and spaces.

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