

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Community-Based Sexual Ethics for Teens: Addressing Premarital Sex Using a Sociotheological Approach

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Abstract Premarital sex (PMS) is a worldwide issue that calls for a holistic treatment instead of looking at it exclusively as an immoral and sinful act based from the traditional Catholic teaching. The perspectives of cultural, sociological, philosophical, and progressive Catholic are essentially considered for its moral evaluation. As a result, a multifaceted approach called *sociotheological* is used to take into consideration these different aspects from the teens' worldview. This research highlights the voices of teens regarding sexuality in general and compared them to the different perspectives that resulted to the crafting of a sexual ethic that is relevant and appropriate for them. Thus, the formation of a moral community that is characterized by virtues of *kabutihang-loob*, freedom, temperance, prudence, and *malikhaing pagtitis* or creative patience serves as an antidote against the widespread of this sexual practice.

Keywords premarital sex, perspectives, *sociotheological*, community, virtues

Sir it happened already and I can't do anything about it. My parents were so mad and they told me that it is a big shame. They hated me up to the point of almost not allowing me to continue my studies since my tummy will soon get bigger. My cousin in the US suffered the same fate but why is it that her parents made no big deal about it... Anyway, I know it's my fault... and I just hope that God has forgiven me.

These remarks coming from my pregnant student triggered some thoughts about premarital sex (PMS): its consequences, the perceptions of teens, and most

especially the difference in perspectives. It seems that my student did not get that same treatment from her parents in comparison to what was given by the parents of her US-based cousin who also got pregnant at a young age. Thus, it dawned on me that PMS should be viewed and evaluated from different perspectives before its formal ethical evaluation.

From the perspective of a traditional Catholic moral theology, one may conclude that PMS is unacceptable and sinful since sexual intercourse is only allowed within the context of marriage (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine and Faith, 1975, par. VII). That is the reason why my student was so remorseful and even

made a confession to a priest because she belongs to a practicing Catholic family and has been educated in Catholic schools. In short, she was informally and formally influenced and taught about the Catholic moral standards. The Church's teaching on different values, most especially that of chastity, was always a part of the curriculum for values formation. On the other hand, one may ask why her cousin in the US did not get that exaggerated reaction from her own parents given the fact that they both got pregnant? Is it because of the kind of cultural standards that they have in the US where PMS is more widespread? Lastly, the reaction of the parents of my student enabled me to reflect on the sociological aspects of PMS. I understand their reaction of being disappointed with their daughter's fate. Coupled with it is the notion of a sullied honor and shame over PMS's immoral nature which brought disgrace to the family.

With the various perspectives and stakeholders' interests in PMS practice/behavior taken from selected available literature, coupled with the obtained perceptions of teens regarding sexuality, I hope to arrive at a more ecological, integrative, and inclusive treatment of the nature of PMS. Issues and problems may arise based on these stakeholders' perspectives and it is the aim of this paper to evaluate PMS accordingly, in order to construct a more suitable approach and propose a theological content that will hopefully be effective for teens.

Methods

To formulate an integral approach in the treatment of PMS and propose an appropriate content of sexual ethics for teens, this research uses a method of textual analysis. Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world (McKee, 2003, p. 1). It is a methodology for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of different cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and look at the different issues that they are confronted with based from their own perspectives. The gathering

of data to be analyzed is composed of two essential parts: the perceptions of teens regarding sex and sexuality in general and the different perspectives on PMS. The perceptions of teens are obtained from four social media accounts and the reflection papers submitted to the researcher in his classes. There were 919 respondents in total, ages 16-21 years old, from four Metro Manila universities for academic year 2015-2016 (Term 1). The respondents were my previous and present theology students. The social media account names and breakdown of respondents are as follows:

Facebook: *Sir Mac's 3Ts – Teens' Think and Talk* (476)

Twitter: @SirMac15, #yourviewonpremaritalsex (61)

Youtube: *Sir Mac's Moral Mileu* (55)

Blog: *SirMac3Ts* (112)

Reflection Papers (215)

On the other data, the different perspectives on PMS are based from selected literatures and principles with their respective proponents worldwide. The data include the perspectives of the traditional Catholic, cultural-anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and the progressive Catholic. After the data were gathered, textual analysis was done by determining the number of same concepts that were shared by the respondents. These common concepts was then categorized according to the three related general topics about sexuality wherein they will share their views regarding the sexual act, the practice of PMS, and the official teaching of the Church based from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) about fornication. These data on the perceptions of teens will then be compared to the different perspectives on PMS to see if there are connections and linkages. This comparison resulted to the discovery that many of these perceptions were actually caused by the influences of the perspectives themselves. The comparison also exposed various problems and issues regarding moral evaluation of PMS. Lastly, part of the analysis was also the identification of common positive elements in the perceptions of teens which will be used in formulating the content of sexual ethics.

Results

Voices of Teens: Teens’ Perceptions on Sex

Table 1 below presents selected transcript of comments and reactions of teens regarding the sexual act, premarital sex, and the teaching of the Church taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

(CCC), which states: “Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children... (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, par. 2353)

Table 1

Sample Transcript of Comments about the Perceptions of Teens on Sexuality

Sex	PMS	CCC # 2353
<p>Teen #1: Sex is sacred. Unity of husband and wife with the purpose of having offspring of course. In my opinion, it shouldn't be done outside marriage because doing so would be against God's will.</p>	<p>Teen #12: Based on how I was raised, I was taught in our Christian church that sex is something that's supposed to be a sacred and exclusive thing for married couples. To me, marriage is supposed to be honored by maintaining a pure relationship with one's partner prior to the marriage. Personally, I would not engage in the given subject matter.</p>	<p>Teen #21: Premarital sex has been viewed negatively for a long time by the church, as it goes against the teachings of the church on the essence of sex. However, society today has become more open to the idea of it, as people are more liberal today. In my opinion, if people do decide to engage in premarital sex, they should be responsible enough to be accountable of their actions and face the consequences that come along with it...</p>
<p>Teen #2: Sex is good. It's a gift from God and it should only be done in the bounds of marriage.</p>	<p>Teen #13: Premarital sex is okay and people practicing this need not to be condemned because we all have different views and values.</p>	<p>Teen #22: Fornication has become a common ground to teenagers today. It's become typical to the point there are shows of "16 and pregnant" where either a boy/girl take care of their child. From where I stand, I believe that if both parties are responsible enough and know the consequences of their action it's their decision. However, religion does have a say in all this, and that's where many either cross the line or stay behind the line. All in all, I think the times have changed and premarital sex will happen with or without religious beliefs.</p>
<p>Teen #3: I see sex as a form of communication between two people. It is a medium to develop intimacy between the two people engaging in the act. I believe this act is reserved for those who are already married. I firmly believe in this, not just as a Christian, but also as a conservative romantic who believes that sharing this with the right person, makes it that much more special.</p>	<p>Teen #14: I think that sex before marriage greatly violates the virtue of chastity for we are expected to keep ourselves pure and virgin before we say our marriage vows as a sign of our deep love for our future husband or wife. Thus, it just saddens me to know that today, these teachings that were instilled to us were gradually being forgotten for most of us are being alienated by the liberating ideas regarding the topic of premarital sex.</p>	<p>Teen #23: Even with the complete knowledge that fornication is a sin, many still engage in premarital sex. This generation no longer views it as a sacred union between a married</p>
<p>Teen #4: Sex is giving the entirety of your being to someone you truly love.</p>	<p>Teen # 15: Sex is something that should not be taken as a joke. I believe that sex can be done even before marriage (forgive me!) as long as the couple can handle and know the risk of what they are entering.</p>	
<p>Teen #5: Sexual intercourse is an act done due to love. It is mandatory to be married first before engaging in this activity.</p>		
<p>Teen #6: Sex is a fundamental need and a fundamental right of each individual. Marriage and love is not a prerequisite as long as it's enjoyable and a safe sex. It can be considered a fundamental vice! Hahaha...</p>		

Sex	PMS	CCC # 2353
<p>Teen #7: <i>Sex for me, is an expression. An expression of love and affection truly disguised as lust and an escape but for me it's an art of expression of the true nature of human beings.</i></p>	<p>Teen #16: <i>Sex is a serious and private matter among each individual especially women. Nowadays, if a couple is really in love and wants to have sex then let them be as long as they are good citizens of the world and honor God with all their heart...</i></p>	<p><i>couple but rather as something used to pass time. Personally, I think people should take it more seriously but if sexual desires are too strong to overcome should at least use contraceptives with full acceptance of the possible consequences.</i></p>
<p>Teen #8: <i>Sex has no meaning if there is no love involved; but sex should also never be the foundation of any relationship.</i></p>	<p>Teen #17: <i>I believe sex can be practiced outside the confines of marriage and love, and it is best done by teenagers who are emotionally mature and mature enough to research on and practice safe sex. It's not something I believe to be immoral in itself/immoral outside the confines of marriage and love but just like every amoral act it is possible to be something destructive and unhealthy with the wrong motives, wrong practice...</i></p>	<p>Teen #24: <i>For me, premarital sex is morally acceptable. Since morals are a person's standards of behavior or beliefs concerning what is and is not acceptable for them to do. Meaning it is subjective or personal. Because of personal experience and a liberal-minded family it made me believe that there is nothing immanently wrong with premarital sex considering that both parties are of legal age and are responsible for the effects or the consequences that comes along with it...</i></p>
<p>Teen #9: <i>I think it's an experience between two people who feel strongly about each other. I don't really think it's that sacred to be honest but that's just experience talking. Personally I think more people should talk about it, not in a perverted way but to educate more people.</i></p>	<p>Teen #18: <i>Premarital sex is morally wrong. One must wait for the right time and for the right person that you will marry.</i></p>	<p>Teen #25: <i>Fornication has been widely known as a sin according to the teachings of the Catholic Church. However, society today does not give it as much importance as it had many years back. Nowadays, people have become more open to premarital sex as it has become a norm in today's society... In my opinion, society should be encouraged to practice chastity as well as recognize the value and importance of marriage...</i></p>
<p>Teen # 10: <i>As far as I know, sex is one of the highly needs of a person, one of what we called hierarchy of needs. Sex is form only by two persons who are both in love with each other. Sex is mostly called making love, without love we can never call it sex.</i></p>	<p>Teen #19: <i>There's a right time for everything. It doesn't make it right just because everybody seems to do it.</i></p>	
<p>Teen # 11: <i>I believe sex isn't talked about enough in this country, it is such a taboo subject. If it is brought up, it's usually the media and entertainment either scandalizing it or glorifying it. I think this is the reason why we're so confused about it and even get hypocritical about it. What I believe about sex (whether you do engage in sexual intercourse or not) is that like everything we do, we should think about both the responsibilities and consequences tied to it. I know different religions and cultures will have different rules and opinions about sex, but I believe the common ground we all share about it is the responsibilities and consequences. These (responsibilities and consequences) should be something parents, educators and peers should discuss freely and comfortably without being judged. And I'm talking about consent, conception, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.</i></p>	<p>Teen #20: <i>If you make a decision just be sure you will be accountable for it. Many teens are being carried away by their wrong decision just to make others happy. Premarital sex is a serious issue for teens today and many are engaging in it because they lack the proper sex education. Before one does it, he or she should be ready emotionally and with maturity.</i></p>	

Various Perspectives on PMS

PMS is commonly defined as sex before marriage. It is referred to as a sexual-genital intercourse before marriage and done in teen period and early adulthood. Other terms that can describe it are *youthful sex*, *adolescent sex*, or *young-adult sex* (Wiederman, 2010, p. 664). It is a worldwide moral issue involving the young and considered by many cultures and religious institutions as problematic. It is thus clear that the PMS practices, along with their associated ideas and values, are implicated in the ways they are viewed and assessed by socio-cultural traditions, modern views, and the Roman Catholic institutional church, including the so-called progressive moral theological school of thought. Oftentimes, these “stakeholders” intersect and interact along moral issues but they may offer non-identical or even contradictory sets of standards, norms, practical interventions, or ethical ends. Some, indeed, would present overlapping principles that handle and evaluate PMS; others would cross paths and engage in more critical exchange of opinions. It is in this view of PMS and the presence of these “interested parties” that this study would like to formulate its questions, methods of investigation, and propositions. Consider the distinctive positions of the traditional Catholic, cultural-anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and progressive Catholic perspectives.

The traditional perspective on PMS is greatly influenced by the teachings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas whose views resound in various official teachings. Augustine’s views influenced to a great extent how later Christian thinkers thought about sex. He posited that sexual intercourse can only be without sin only within marriage. As explained by Mackin (1982), it is in fact sinless when it is motivated only by the desire of conceiving a child and provided that consent is given to no other pleasure than to a possible conception (p. 130). Therefore, since PMS is first and foremost a sexual act outside of marriage and most especially it is sometimes motivated by sexual passion or lust, it is considered immoral and sinful. St. Thomas Aquinas’ concept of the natural law is another major standard argument against PMS. Natural law is a theory in ethics that claims the existence of a law whose content is set by nature and that therefore applicable

everywhere. According to St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* (1485), the natural law explains that the “rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others...and this law is participation of the eternal law in the rational creature.” (par. 1). This technical definition simply emphasizes that the natural law is the human beings participation in the law of God, which is the greatest law of all. PMS is opposed to the natural purpose of sexual intercourse, which is the generation and education of a child. Fornication, according to Dedek (1980), is always sinful because it is an “intrinsically evil act, an act so deformed in itself that it never can be good in any circumstances” (p. 644). The *bonum prolis* argument (the good of procreating and educating a child) is directed to the thinking of using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy which is absolutely against the natural law and a possible threat to the education of the child which may arise from unprepared parents (Genovesi, 1996, p. 169). In short, St. Thomas firmly emphasized that God created everything in this world to play a specific purpose, and that purpose will be the one to determine the morality of the action, whether right or wrong. Thus, the traditional teaching on sexual morality based from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) is derived from the principle that “sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes” (par. 2351). With its emphasis on the sexual act treated as moral only in the context of marriage, PMS is consistently taught as immoral and sinful.

In the cultural-anthropological perspective, PMS has always been an issue in various traditional societies. The value system in a particular culture is always considered as one of the factors for the acceptability or non-acceptability of behaviors. The practice of referencing behavior to values is widely used by social scientists to explain the emergence and prevalence of variety of behaviors like PMS. Values are recognized as cognitive representations of universal human requirements: biological needs, social interactional requirements, and social institutional demands on the individual (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, p. 550). Thus, norms or standards do not just communicate commands

or prohibitions, they also highlight the importance of values dear to individuals and groups. Individuals capable of entering into PMS are subjected to warnings, discipline, supervision, scrutiny, or judgment by elders who embody traditional cultural standards and norms. Women, especially, are object of strict compliance to standards and norms of purity; waywardness or transgressions are punished, sometimes violently and deadly. On top of strict elder supervision, the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in some traditional Muslim countries indicate the heavy burden imposed on women. Purity is allegedly preserved by the FGM's consequent preventative effect of disquiet or disinterest in the practice of early sexual initiation. Other traditional societies do not resort to this very strict physicalized "numbing or closure" of feminine desire; they would impose a more social form of preventative "closure" or strict elder supervision of women.

Another aspect of the cultural-anthropological perspective is religious beliefs. The Pew Research Center provides a clear data about significance of the religious beliefs of the people with how they view PMS. This center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis and other empirical social science research. In the *2014 Global Attitudes Survey* conducted by the center headed by Margaret Vice, 40,117 respondents from 40 countries were asked regarding the acceptability and non-acceptability of PMS. In predominantly Muslim countries, PMS is unacceptable while it is more acceptable in Germany, France, Spain, Greece, Czech Republic, and even in Italy where Christianity is the major religion (See Figure 1). This does not mean that official Christian teachings encourage PMS/NMS. Other factors, like secular beliefs or breakdown of traditions, may explain the difference.

Figure 1 shows that people in predominantly Muslim nations overwhelmingly agree that engaging in sex before marriage is unacceptable, with nine in 10 or more in Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, the Palestinian territories, Turkey, and Egypt believing this. Meanwhile, people in Western Europe are more accepting. Roughly 10% or fewer in Germany, France,

Spain, Greece, Czech Republic, and even Italy say premarital sex is morally unacceptable.

Islam forbids sex outside of marriage, both premarital sex and sex outside marriage which is called *zina*. Aside from being a crime, it is also a sin that leads to chastisement in after-life. The Islamic law or *sharia* considers PMS as a crime against the laws of Allah (Smartt, 2006) and there is a corresponding punishment for it which is up to 100 lashes in public (p. 5). In Judaism, the Torah does not consider PMS a crime, unless with someone who was already betrothed or by someone already betrothed (Bridge, 2009). But traditionally, according to Wiener (2012), PMS is not approved, "the negative attitude toward premarital sex, to a large degree, reflects the overwhelmingly positive attitude toward sex within marriage" (par. 2). Sex and conceiving a child are considered sacred acts which one can imitate God, "The Creator", and in order to preserve its sacredness there are many guidelines to its followers. In India, PMS is not allowed and there is a strict observance given to family values like chastity (Subaiya, 2008, p. 54). One major guideline in the society is that the purity or virginity in women is the utmost importance prior to marriage (Graham & Hall, 2013, p. 171). With this emphasis on sexual purity, there is however one controversial ritual in Central India that permits PMS. The *Muria* tribe in Madhya Pradesh had a system called *ghotul* — sex youth dormitories in which girls and boys are expected to engage in sex (Wiederman, 2010, p. 665). As Shankar (1997) described it, there is "a long night of revelry and wanton love-making, with partners being periodically changed" (par. 3). They considered this as a ritual that binds their tribe together. Hinduism and Buddhism both condemn PMS. However, sexual matters are usually kept private in the various Hindu communities. But if PMS engagement is known, the man should marry the woman according to *Nāradaśmṛiti*, one of many legal texts of Hindu communities in ancient India. It states in verse 13.72 that "If a man has intercourse with an unmarried woman, who consents to it, it is no offense, but he shall deck her with ornaments, worship her, and thus bring her to his house as his bride" (Jolly, 1876, p. 87). In Buddhism, its precepts denounce fornication, thieving, lying, murdering and other acts (Yoshinori, 2003, p. 169). It is thought that "all

Do you personally believe that **sex between unmarried adults** is morally acceptable, morally unacceptable, or is it not a moral issue?

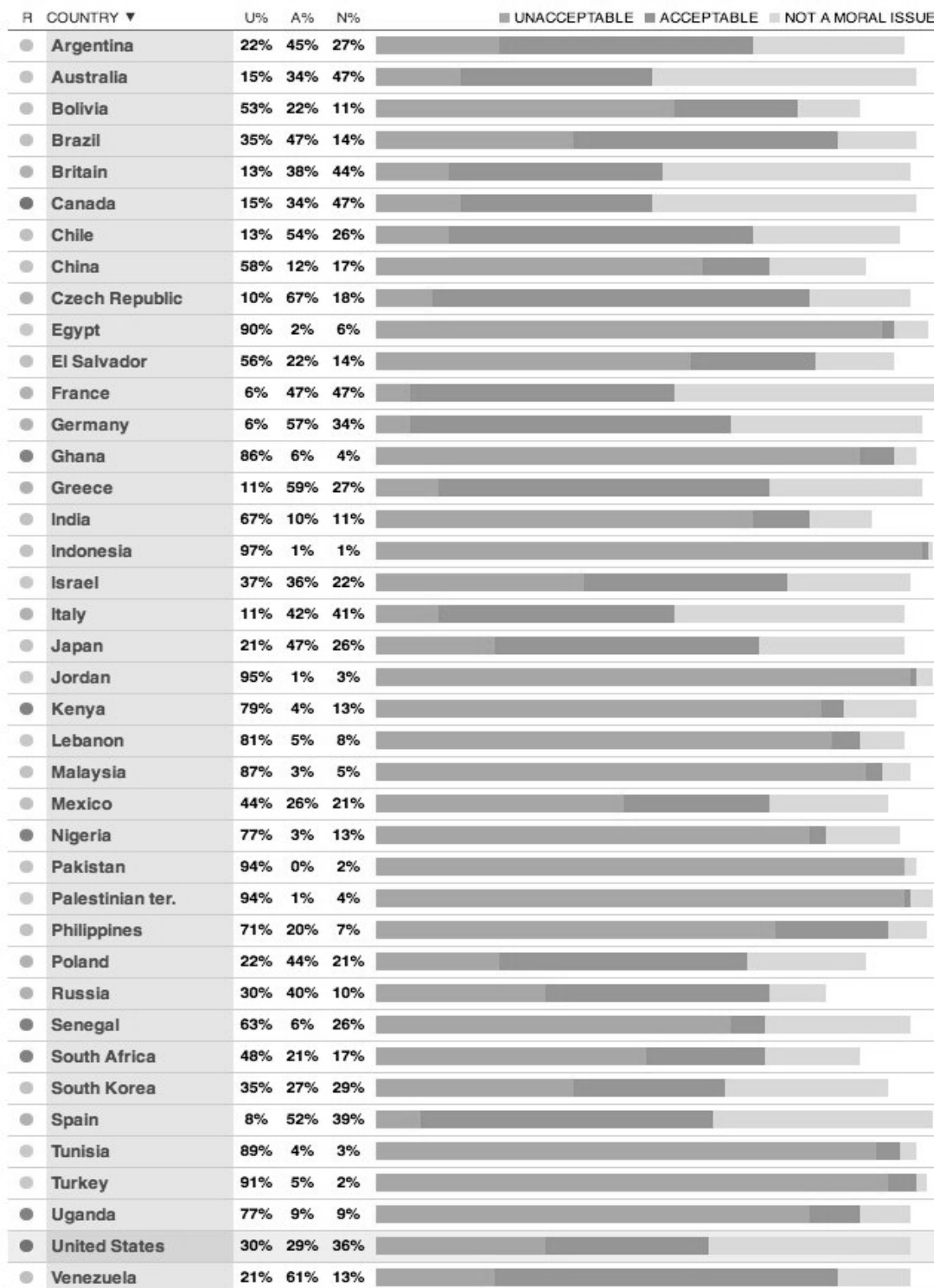


Figure 1. Detailed median percentages of 40 countries' acceptability of premarital sex.

Buddhists, particularly people of both sexes in love and contemplating marriage, should adhere to the age-old traditional concept that they maintain chastity until the nuptial date” (Dhammananda, 2012). To the Buddhist, sexual desire is a major expression of “craving” or the so-called *tanha* or which brings “suffering” or *dukkha* that is why self-control is necessary to avoid it.

It is, however, already a different story in the more complex, modern, and secularized societies and cultures where traditional standards and norms of yesteryears are being challenged and even transgressed by more current ideas and practices. Modern societies also identify, promote, and defend distinctively modern values which would accordingly shape different or non-traditional practices, habits, and virtues. With the onset of modernity, traditions have collapsed in many places and in many aspects of human life.

The sociological perspective treats PMS and sexuality in relation to the human social behavior, especially the study of the origins, institutions, organization, and development of human society as presented by selected theories. These theories are seen in the light of social science that uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis. (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005, 3–5, 38–40). One major sociological theory is *social construction*. It highlights the social forces that influence the expression of sexuality by positing that it is not something natural or biological but socially and historically constructed (Seidman, 2003, p. 13). Another one is the *sexual repression theory* of Sigmund Freud. Sexual repression is part of *psychoanalysis* which is a set of theories that is used in curing depression, anxiety, and mental disorders. According to Hey (2003), Freud claimed that many people now believe that they are merely victims of the subconscious mind, which is shaped by past events and relationships over which they have no control (par. 10). They are prevented from expressing their own sexuality. As the individual passes through these different stages in life, there was an accumulation of experiences, including sexual ones, that are hidden in the subconscious. As the person matures, there was a manifestation of symptoms that are considered disturbances like unresolved issues and trauma. To treat this, one must bring the repressed conflict into the consciousness state where the person

can deal with it in reality. To repress one’s expression of sexual behaviors like PMS often leads to anxiety, fear, worry, and even unhealthy. Dagmang (2006) presented a philosophically-oriented contextual view of sexuality and sexual ethics. He started his argument by pointing out that there is at present observable conflict between the prescribed norms in the society and the behavior of the individual, since the latter’s link with the family, neighborhood, friends, and so forth and one’s regular connection to work/labor produce a more reflexive attitude to values and norms (p. 60). Today’s decision-making in sexual matters like PMS, the “close” opinions of peers or friends, in the absence of elders, could be more influential or weighs a lot more than traditional cultural norms or morals in one’s decision-making process. The actual face-to-face interaction has become more significant than the weight of official norms or traditional morals which are more distant.

In the philosophical perspective, there are three notable positions or approaches in evaluating sexual issues like PMS— deontological, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. The deontological approach or deontology (from Greek *δέον*, *deon*, “obligation, duty”) is an ethical position that judges the morality of an action based on the action’s adherence to rules. This approach focuses on the rightness or wrongness of actions themselves based on what the moral norm states and not the quality of the effects or consequences of those actions. As explained by Denis (1999), any sexual activity, as in PMS, is degrading to human dignity and humans have the duty to avoid maxims that harm or degrade ourselves, including suicide, sexual degradation, and drunkenness (p. 225).

Consequentialism on the other hand is considered to be a contrasting philosophical principle of the deontological approach. It holds that the action’s consequences or effects are the ultimate basis for evaluating whether it is right or wrong, good or bad. Thus, from a consequentialist standpoint, a morally right act is one that will produce a good outcome, or consequence. With this kind of principle, PMS or any sexual activity, as long as it is consensual, could be very beneficial to mankind if it result to good consequences of greater happiness or strengthening the relationship between the partners.

Lastly, virtue ethics emphasizes the role of the virtues or moral character of the agent (Hursthouse, 2012) in contrast to the approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). A virtue ethicist is likely to give this kind of moral advice: “Act as a virtuous person would act in a given situation” (Athanasoulis, n.d.). In relation to sexual ethics, virtue ethicists focus on the conditions in which the act of PMS is committed, thus the particular virtues that the agents manifest. For them, sex is about giving and sharing of love, unity, and friendship. For PMS to be moral, the partners should both believe that they have these characteristics and they should not engage in it for the purpose of sexual gratification. It is only by developing sexual intimacy and investing in another person where in one become more virtuous. Whether teens engage in sex before marriage has more to do with their morals and how they value the act of sex.

Lastly, the progressive Catholic perspective treats PMS in a holistic and integral way that is continuously evolving. Selected moral theologians are associated with this kind of treatment like Bernard Haring, Charles Curran and Anthony Kosnik. Haring (1966) introduced his view of sex in *The Law of Christ* as basically good since it is a part of the creative pattern of God. Man’s acceptance and approval of sex in his life and activity is morally good, and is also the profound gratification of marital love, provided only that it does not violate the order which governs man in his love which is manifested in marriage. Even the sexual act is naturally expressed under the physical aspect of man it should be evaluated and mastered only in the totality of the human context. Haring simply emphasized that in the evaluation of any sexual activity, the historical development and contemporary approaches to sexual morality should not be neglected. Another significant personality with regard to sexual ethics is Charles Curran. On January 15, 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith officially released *Persona Humana* or the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics. It was an official statement that was meant to clarify the Church teaching on a variety of sexual matters. The authors, Franjo Cardinal Seper and Bishop Jerome Hamer, contended that this acts diminish the proper ends of human sexuality

because they are “intrinsically disordered.” Curran (1976) pointed out the salient points of the Declaration:

The true meaning and value of human sexuality is to be found in revelation and in the essential order of nature where one finds the immutable principles of the divine law by which God directs the universe. These absolute norms are not changed by historical and cultural circumstances, since they are based on the function and nature of the sexual faculty and act (n.1-n.5). The Declaration does not intend to deal with all the abuses of the sexual faculty but to repeat the church’s teaching on some particular points. Every genital act must be within the framework of marriage so premarital sex, even when there is a firm intention to marry, is morally wrong (n.7). (pp. 147-148).

The Declaration directly reiterated that the sexual act is acceptable only within the contract bound by marriage. Curran (1976) claimed that the Church focuses more on the judicial notion of the contract rather than the more personalistic and relational concept of marital covenant. Ordinarily the couple should be willing to witness to the permanent covenant of their love by a public and societal proclamation to others. However, Curran (1978) added that at times there might be some even legitimate reasons why the ceremony is impeded. He explained this when he said that “if there is a true covenant of marital love, there does not seem to be much of a problem from a moral viewpoint...” (p. 46). With this, he is contending on the possibility of impermanent characteristic of the sexual act, that within marriage, there is always the possibility of exploiting one’s partner and therefore a lifetime commitment is not that necessary. The full ideal meaning of human sexuality is the permanent commitment of love between a man and a woman and not the permanent union which is bound by marital contract.

Lastly, Kosnik, Carroll, Cunningham, Modras, and Schulte released in 1977 a controversial book entitled *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*. The book hanged all moral judgment on sexual issues like homosexuality, sodomy, and bestiality, and was taught to seminaries in the

1970s but later on was condemned by the bishops. Kosnik et al. (1977) found the norms given in *Casti Connubii*, *Humanae Vitae* and the *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics* to be too exaggerated and also oppressive. According to Habiger (n.d.), instead of considering the overall intentions indicated by a whole spectrum of choices and acts, Kosnik et al. (1977) thought that the Magisterium focuses too much on the concrete individual human acts. They also argued that it would be rash to presume that a clear and unambiguous norm will provide a simple resolution of the problem, so that nothing more need be said (1977, p. 164). The traditional moral code regarding premarital sex for him is inadequate, particularly in its lack of distinction between the ages, attitudes, and intentions of the people involved. Kosnik et al. proposed a fundamental principle in all sexual activity called *creative growth toward integration*. Instead of using *Humanae Vitae's* right purpose for the sexual act which should be unitive and procreative, they replaced this with a more acceptable norm which is creative growth and integrative (Healy, 1977, p. 506). This principle should not neglect the social and communal implications of sexual behavior and it is realized in the following values: self-liberating, other-enriching, honest, faithful, socially responsible, life-serving, and joyous (Curran, 1978, p. 92-95). If these values are present and practiced, then any sexual relationship such as PMS is considered wholesome and moral.

Discussion

In synthesis, the perceptions of teens regarding sex can be summed up as:

1. Sex is sacred since it is a gift from God.
2. Sex is a sacrament, thus should be practiced within the context of marriage.
3. Sex is part of one's personal freedom and so nobody should be restricted of doing it as long as it is consensual and those involved are responsible.
4. Sex is acceptable if it is done out of pure love and intimacy.
5. Sex must be at the right time in relation to the virtues of chastity, patience, and temperance.

As the teens' present culture is gradually being shaped by various influences, their perceptions did not set aside what was customarily a big part of them. As they see sex as supposed to be an act of freedom and consensuality, many of them also believed, in the first place, that it is sacred and should be practiced with responsibility and in the proper context or time which is within the sacrament of marriage, a manifestation of their religiosity. Another significant characteristic of their culture in relation to sex is the expression of their love or intimacy with the beloved which serves as a justification to sexual engagement. For them, as long as they love each other, then to have sex is an essential part of this love. Based from the different perceptions of the Filipino teens on sexuality, their position can be considered as distinctively hybridized, ambiguous, selective, and relatively confusing just as it appears provisional. Nevertheless, this formation of hybrid attitude and behavior could also reflect creative choice to produce a medley of personalized standards.

Issues/Problems Raised by the Different Perspectives on Premarital Sex

The different perspectives on the issue of PMS create an array of issues or problems in terms of how it should be morally evaluated. Because of this, it follows that there is also a difficulty in formulating a solution to address this moral issue because of the numerous perceptions. There is an uncertainty of which perspective should be considered and given attention to since they all have different claims which are rationally argued.

First, the different perspectives create some confusion. There is a lack of understanding on how people should treat PMS as a phenomenon in the society especially in the context of a pluralistic, secular, and open society. The confusion lies in the variety of focal points of each of the perspective that makes it different from the other. The traditional perspective is informed by a certain classical philosophical anthropology and the natural law; the sociological is anchored on the historical, political, economical, psychological, and family settings; the religious beliefs and different value systems highlight the cultural dimension; the modern philosophical-ethical is centered on three approaches

—the deontological’s adherence to rules or norms as an obligation; consequentialism’s emphasis on the outcome of an act; and virtue ethics’ focus on the characteristics or good qualities of the agent; lastly, progressive Catholic moral theology presented an alternative approach by acknowledging the gradualist and developmental changes and personalistic aspect in sexuality that involves responsibility, conviction, and commitment. With this scenario, perplexity may arise and the individual may remain confused; but, for many, perspectives may become helpful as sources of suitable arguments.

Second, in each of the discussed perspective, there is a multiplicity and lack of constancy of grounds in reference to the norms or laws that it observes and prescribes. For example in the traditional perspective, St. Augustine viewed the sexual act with suspicion because it is associated with the material world (as influenced by Manicheism or Neo-Platonism via Plotinus), for self-gratification and, therefore, sinful. But after many years, the Catholic Church justified the morality of the sexual act as long as it is unitive and procreative which is possible only within the bounds of marriage. John Paul II’s phenomenological approach to the sexual act sees it as not purely biological but as a component of the innermost being of the human person which reaches its true and full meaning when it expresses itself in the intimate communion of persons through marriage (Burke-Sivers, 2015). Some documents of the Church present her stance in sexual issues without any attempt to illustrate findings on the nature of the issue to validate its claim. As Dagmang (n.d.) pointed out, the Church document *Persona Humana* “does not deliver a sociologically-informed ethical argumentation. It merely judges a world supposedly littered with moral deviations. Its sole interest is 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.”(p. 2). If the issue contradicts the teaching on natural law, then it is judged as immoral and sinful. Family relationship in relation to its economic condition is one of the major aspects in the sociological perspective that also brings unstable ground. Family norms collapse because of modernity; the passing of time and changes in the economic condition would

further erode traditions. In the Philippines, some parents need both to work to provide sufficiently for their families unlike before wherein it is usually the father who is the lone breadwinner. If a particular family is intact and well-off, the less incidence of PMS occurs because of close supervision of the elders, while teens whose parents are both working because of low-economic conditions increases their chance to engage in risky sexual behaviors. (Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985, p. 851). This implies that the passing of time affects the observance of family norms; poverty or affluence also adds to change. In the cultural perspective, the religious beliefs and values of the individual seriously matter. A study by Noroozi, Taleghani, Merghati-Khoei, Tavakoli, and Gholami (2014) concluded that a weaker religious belief among youths is one cause of the formation of sexual relations before marriage (p. 424). They also believed that fading behavioral beliefs such as honor, personal modesty, chastity, and not respecting the boundaries of relationship with opposite sex lead to premarital sexual relationships. The term “fading” here signifies that time influences the beliefs and values of teens. As modernity continue to unfold, new trends and advancement in technology go with it that lead to a stronger influence on how teens expressed their beliefs and values. Philosophically, the norms and laws of concepts posited by every philosopher in relation to sexual ethics also lack this stable ground as new developments and thoughts arise. The three main traditional approaches in moral evaluation — deontological, consequentialism, and virtue ethics, result to more complex theories and principles under each umbrella. *The Basics of Philosophy* summarized these theories and principles as follows:

Deontological ethics regards numerous formulations such as *Kantianism*, *moral absolutism*, *Divine command theory*, *natural rights theory*, *contractarian ethics*, and *pluralistic deontology*. Consequentialism or *teleological ethics* include theories of utilitarianism, hedonism, epicureanism, egoism, asceticism, altruism, rule consequentialism, and negative consequentialism. Virtue ethics has three main strands namely *Eudaimonism*, ethics of care, and agent-based theories. (Mastin, 2008, par. 13-16).

With these various formulations, the teachings of each philosophical approach evolve. The evolution can either be in a form of addition, redirection, or revision of each respective principle.

Lastly, the different perspectives on PMS also lack specificity in terms of involvement in the formation of teens. First and foremost, the different perspectives that are represented by various institutions do not all have significant participation aside from the church and state. Of course, on the traditional approach represented by the church, it is one of its primary roles, that is, to preserve and protect the morality of teens through education and evangelization. The curriculum in Catholic schools, especially in the tertiary level, usually contains subjects in relation to Christian ethics and morality. The homily, sacrament of reconciliation, and counseling sessions are ways of the clergy in discussing the moral teachings of the church. In the sociological and cultural perspectives, the state or government which carry these aspects also has its own formation programs for teens through its health department through the health care programs, the education department through sex education, and the promotion of cultural values through socio-civic projects like festivals and foundation celebrations. But on the other perspectives, the philosophical and progressive types have very minimal involvement. The principles and theories of the moral thinkers behind these realms are usually stocked in books and remained therein as unapplied ideas. Regarding the overlapping or even contradiction of programs, the conflict is usually exemplified between the church and the state. Some programs of the state contradict the doctrines and principles that are preached by the church. The best example of this is the disagreement on the use of birth control methods. The state recommends the artificial types like condoms and pills while the church of course opposes this because it is against the natural law. As what the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith teaches, contraception deprives the sexual act of its procreative meaning, thereby causing the sexual act to be gravely immoral. It also reiterates that when a man and woman choose to deprive the sexual act of its procreative meaning, they are choosing to reject one of the inherent meanings of sexuality in the plan of God (Conte, 2010). For the state, it is a matter of

pro-choice and their emphasis is more on the sexual health of the person and not much on the moral aspect. The church considers the other possible misuse of these contraceptives like the encouragement of PMS and even conjugal infidelity. The state promotes it to avoid pregnancy for it increases population and thus, can contribute to the poverty problem.

The Need for a Sociotheological Approach to PMS

Based from the comparison of the data on the different perspectives on PMS and the perceptions of teens regarding sexuality in general, the approach that is appropriate in the treatment of this moral issue should be integrative and inclusive — that is, *sociotheological*. It would be exclusive and discriminating to some teens if the approach is simply tied to the traditional Catholic perspective since not all of them are also open to the influence of modernity.

This is an approach that has a wider scope, one that will include the various aspects of the teen's world. It is a correspondence between the sociological, philosophical, and religious thinking — an alternative to a monochromatic approach to sourcing of principles and practices. It also means incorporating into social analysis the reality of a particular theological or religious worldview and at the same time takes the humanistic perspective and social context of a religious thinking seriously.

In this paper, the *symbolic interaction theory* in sociology by the American sociologist George Herbert Mead responds to the issue on PMS by making an argument that it is a product of social interaction. According to DeLamater and Hasday (2007), every reality is socially constructed (p. 255). This is the starting premise of the approach which Mead pointed out. PMS should not be seen as the individual's direct or outright disobedience of a moral law or God's commandment but one has to consider how it happened. Having this in mind, since it was born out of social interaction, there is a need to identify the different elements surrounding the specific situation which point to the involved institutions in the community that are considered as sources from which the behavior is formed, and the major role being played by the teens' identity, behavior, and moral character.

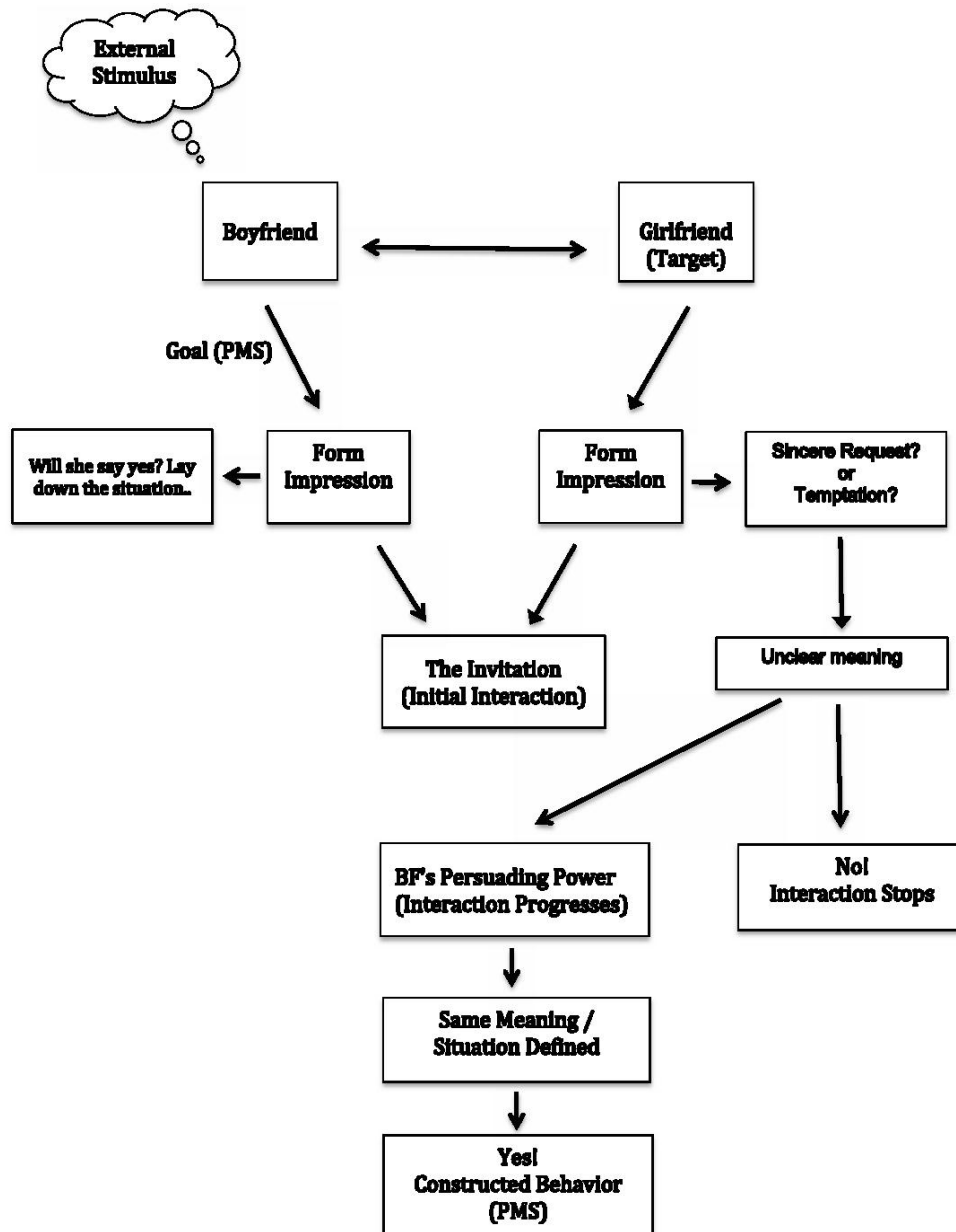


Figure 2. Social interaction cycle of premarital sex engagement.

As what happens in the event of PMS, the presence of an external stimulus enables for instance a male teen to invite his girlfriend to their house late night and his parents are not around, what does the invitation means? Does he want to only have a more personal conversation or engage in sexual intercourse? This stimulus can be, for example, after having watched a pornographic video clip, which prompted him to initiate a malicious plan. Take note that the boyfriend

pursues this plan to achieve a goal and that is to engage in PMS for he was under the spell of what he just watched. To achieve his goal, the initial step is to form an impression through questions that will be based on his invitation. Given the situation that his parents are not around and it is late night, will she be interested? Is it possible for her to say “yes”? In that situation, the element of time matters which is “late night.” The time conveys a meaning to both parties. The meaning is clear

to the boyfriend. For him, many unavoidable incidents happen in this period most especially given the place which is private and of course the given time which is late night. Therefore, there is the possibility to achieve his goal. On the other hand, the girlfriend also forms an impression upon receiving the request of her boyfriend. This is the initial phase of their interaction. She may or may not have that same meaning as that of her BF. She has an unclear impression. For her, it can either be a matter of sincere request or there is a “hidden agenda” behind it, a tempting one. If the girlfriend sees that she is entering into a difficult situation, she would decline the invitation at once. She can just reason out that she does not feel well or they can just meet tomorrow morning or when her boyfriend’s parents are already around. But as the interaction progresses and the boyfriend is so persistent through the use of his persuading strategies, the girlfriend is blown away and forms in her consciousness a similar meaning as that of her boyfriend. Assuming that she had agreed to go with him at that moment, she then has accepted the possibility of engaging in the sexual act for they have both defined the situation. And so the boyfriend achieves his goal, no more hindrances, for both of them agreed.

After pointing out that PMS is a socially constructed behavior, the theological aspect of the approach comes in with the extracted common perception from teens that sex is a gift from God, thus considered as sacred and that the practice of PMS is a violation of the virtue of chastity and of the sacrament of marriage. In addressing the need to define what constitutes a Christian moral agent and a flourishing community, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s (1982) concept of *communitarian discipleship* is applicable. Whatever is identified and earmarked for ethical integration and inclusion will pass through this principle of Christian moral agency inspired by the values of the Reign of God and the moral community.

*Moral Community with the Revival of Values:
A Proposed Sexual Ethic*

Murphy-O’Connor (1982) believed in the existence of oppressive structures that bring different forms of immorality. This challenge is not a battle of the

individual only but that of the whole community. Basing it to the writings of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” This text emphasizes Paul’s theology of unity or moral union, among members of the church, the Body of Christ. Murphy-O’Connor (1982) contended that St. Paul’s analysis of the contemporary situation that he had to deal with could be an analysis of our own society today. This is indeed a reality and one of which is the issue of PMS which is a result of a disordered societal structure. It is also evident to St. Paul, according to Murphy-O’Connor (1982), that an individual alone is not that strong to face this power in society because he or she is deeply conditioned by its orientation. This brings us to the role of the community in addressing any disordered societal structures. For him, the community is the basic Christian reality that we can commit ourselves totally to bring the power of lasting change for modifying societal structures. In a detailed explanation, Murphy-O’Connor (1982) said:

In order to be free, we must be detached from the grip of a society that molds us despite ourselves to its own image...It is a question of some form of protection that could be provided by the setting up of a new environment in which we would be subject to inspiration supportive of our quest for authenticity. This is the local Christian community that is a critical instrument for change in the world. For Christians to exist in such a way, they too must be empowered. (p. 12)

These remarks from Murphy-O’Connor (1982) reflects the special place of a “community” as a venue for changing sinful structures in the society. But there are requirements for it. He highlighted the necessity of three virtues, namely: freedom, unity, and transformation. The virtue of freedom will be discussed below as it is one of the essential virtues of the proposed sexual ethics. Unity on the other hand points to the interdependence of the members in the community as one body. The essence of a Christian community demands that we belong to one another because we are one body that participates in creating life which all the members share. Murphy-O’Connor referred this to what St. Paul said in 1 Cor.

12:27 which says, “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” There is diversity within the body because of its many parts but that diversity is rooted in its unity and exists to promote unity. Lastly, transformation is understood as conversion or having a renewed mind and heart. Oppressive structures will not be successfully modified until hearts are changed. It is true that human beings change as new structures emerge, but the consistent lesson of history is that without genuine conversion the new structures will prove to be no less oppressive. Transformation can only happen if there is discernment in the community of what will really be beneficial and not hurtful to them but the one that will intensify their unity for an authentic existence.

A Fusion of Sexual Virtues for the Moral Community

Primary virtues can be identified from the perspectives of teens and that which can be an essential component in the formation of a moral community pertains to something that is good internally. This goodness is manifested in their relationship with God and to others. Teens consider their relationship with God as precious by treating sex as His gift and with sacredness. They also keep a harmonious connection with others by not hurting the other and not taking advantage of them until the right time comes, and that is, until marriage. It is presupposed that marriage is for those who are prepared psychologically, emotionally, and materially. This characteristic is clearly what the Filipino missionary Dionisio Miranda (1989) pointed out—the virtue of *kabutihang-loob*. The concept of *loob* is the “totality of self, a consciousness of the self and also awareness of the meaning of the self. It is the interiority, the inner principle of affection, disposition, feelings, attitudes, thought, decision, and responsibility” (Miranda, 1989, p. 45). *Kabutihang-loob* is one of the core values of Filipino culture. It is mainly defined by reason or *katuwiran*. A reasonable person is one who has that sense of justice and caring to the other. Justice is basically giving one the other truly deserves and that sense of respect by acknowledging one’s right. As Miranda (2003) explained, it is one who is “*may puso at damdamin; hindi makaatim na may*

mangyaring masama. It always seeks the good of the other (p. 137). This is what some teens appropriately treats the rationale behind PMS, that, they do not want their partner feel incomplete and unchaste but rather confident and deserving to face the altar dignified and whole.

The second essential virtue that is evident in the perceptions of teens is *freedom*. This can possibly be another significant virtue that must be promoted in the community. For Murphy-O’Connor (1982), freedom refers to the condition wherein individuals are in their true selves and not pressured by the environment (p. 161). They are no longer subject to bad example but they are inspired and encouraged by the examples of authenticity that they see among the other members of the community. But again, this freedom is not something that they possess for themselves as individual but something which they share as members of the whole community.

The classic moral virtues of *temperance* and *prudence* are also evident in the perceptions of teens and thus, equally essential in the formation of this moral community. The virtue of temperance is equated with self-control during the first century. The word “temperance” literally means “self-control”. Temperance is primarily concerned about desires or pleasures from the most natural operations in man (McManaman, 2006). A teen who possesses this virtue is able to resist oneself from engaging in any sexual pleasure with the realization that this will not suffice a certain kind of “end” that will really contribute to one’s happiness as human being. On the other hand, prudence is considered as the “mother” of all virtues (Saunders, 1996). It is the virtue by which a person recognizes his moral duty and the good means to accomplish it. A prudent teen looks at the specific reality of a situation with pure objectivity and applies the moral truths based on what God has commanded; makes a moral judgment; and then commands an action. A prudent teen also seeks to accomplish the action in a good way.

The last component of a moral community is the researcher’s so-called *malikhaing pagtitiis* or creative patience. There are instances wherein we become unmindful, bored, and even forgetful about the value of the gift of sexuality that was given to us. That is why there is the possibility of it to be destroyed or even

lost. Just like in our sexuality, after the bewildering stages of exploration and being hooked to its pleasures, sometimes one gets disappointed by its limitations. But no matter what, we still get excited by the delights it offers (especially to males) and we become oblivious of the strong tendency in human nature for concupiscence. As lust lurks, unmindfulness and negative consequences leap out which compromises the value of our sexuality. This is where the value of *tiiis* or patience should manifest. Is this possible? A gradual process is needed and the practice of *tiiis* should be habitually exercised. A teen may have to learn this virtue patiently (learning patience through the practice of patience), wait until marital commitment before engaging in sexual intercourse. As the waiting happens, the last qualifying virtue is needed to make the waiting productive and not trifling or utilitarian — this is where creative patience (*malikhaing pagtitiis*) comes in. It is a reflection of Paul's address to the Corinthians, "Love is patient and kind... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7). In verses 1-3 of this letter, Paul made a point that love is a necessary ingredient in all ministry and then he began to describe love as patient and enduring. Some teens get bored when they wait. That is why they have to be creative in facing this boredom. God created sex with a purpose and designed it appropriately, and so teens could expect that there is goodness in it. To be creative in waiting is to prevent oneself from entering into a damaged relationship. A damaged relationship is reaping the physical consequences of PMS like unwanted pregnancy, acquisition of STDs, abortion, and so forth and at the same time relational consequences such as lost of respect to one's partner, breach of trust, infidelity, and so forth. Creatively waiting is also strengthening the fortress of your relationship to God and to one's beloved.

Conclusion

The practice of PMS is a simple and one-sided issue for teens if it is based only from the Christian perspective that it is an immoral or sinful act. If this is the sole treatment then some teens who are not Christians and open-minded with the influences of modernity will feel indifferent and a possibility of

distancing away from the Church. There is a dire need to acknowledge a variety of perspectives that can be taken into consideration in order to determine the proper treatment and thus formulate a kind of sexual ethic that will be appropriate for them. Aside from the traditional Catholic, one has to consider the cultural-anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and progressive Catholic perspectives. In this way, an inclusive and integrative treatment can be formulated and this is what was pointed out in this research — a sociotheological approach. This is an approach that combined the sociological, philosophical, and theological views on PMS. With this, since the formulated tool is a combined and integrated one, there is a higher possibility of acceptability and effectiveness since it is multifaceted and wider in scope. From this, it turned out that PMS is a socially constructed behavior that needs to be addressed not in the context of simply individual or personal effort but within the community. The establishment of a moral community, as patterned after Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's communitarian discipleship, which is characterized by essential virtues, the possibility of an effective theological sexual content can be used to address the issue. This moral community, comprising of the different institutions — family, church, school, and the state, will cooperatively foster and promote the identified virtues of *kabutihang-loob*, freedom, temperance, prudence, and *malikhaing-pagtitiis* or creative patience. These selected virtues are also the reflections of the teens' perceptions on sexuality and so they are relevant. It is indeed a laborious task for this moral community since it requires a lot of preparation and the willingness to create programs that will promote these virtues but it is a fulfilling one. There is no other greater fulfillment than to see teens tracking the right path because the community had supported and redirected them towards it.

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